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## **BEYOND EXPERIENCE: PRAGMATISM AND NATURE'S GOD**

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John E. Smith, in his essay, "Experience, God, and Classical American Philosophy," continues his life-long struggle to transform the classical sources of American thought in order to strengthen the epistemological and ontological claims of what Lindbeck calls the "liberal experiential-expressivist" form of theological reflection. He does this in full knowledge of the augmenting traditions of German idealism and protestant dogmatics, not to mention the vigorous forms of panentheism continuing to multiply from their progenitive wellsprings in Whitehead and Hartshorne. At the same time, he defends the classical American tradition against some of its neopragmatic distortions, particularly the current and fashionable bias against metaphysics and any conceptually bold articulation of the divine natures.

As a student of Paul Tillich, Smith also understands the need to correlate the powers of an autonomous philosophy with a theology emergent from the momentums and struggles of secular culture. This correlation creates what could be called a "theonomous philosophy" whose primary concern is with deepening the scope and integrity of our theories of experience so that they can become truly commensurate with the depth structures of a self-transforming nature. As Smith hints at the end of his paper, the next step in the current transformation of pragmatism is that of showing the relation between experience and an evolutionary nature.

In my reflections, I wish to make some suggestions as to what this step may look like in the light of what Smith has helped us to see concerning the nature of the religious quality of experience. At the same time, I wish to strengthen Smith's insights into both Peirce and Royce by showing a latent and unspoken aspect of pragmatism<sup>1</sup> that promises, when made manifest, to open up an abyss within the classical tradition that has heretofore been only dimly sensed.

Neopragmatism, whether in the guise of Cornel West's "prophetic pragmatism,"<sup>2</sup> or of William Dean's "naturalistic historicism,"<sup>3</sup> tends to rethink the classical tradition through the lens of postmodernism with its own

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1. The term "pragmatism" was coined by Peirce to emphasize his divergence from William James who was popularizing the concept of "pragmatism" along lines that Peirce rejected.
  2. Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
  3. William Dean, *American Religious Empiricism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), and *History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988).

commitments to semiotic contextualism and relativism, the privileging of history over nature, and the belief in the ability of philosophy to advance its claims without a supporting and self-confident metaphysics. At the same time, neopragmatism wishes to appeal to the classical sources to lend authority to its critique of foundationalism and Cartesian or transcendental structures of intelligibility. Smith rightly challenges these readings of the classical tradition precisely where they have implications for a reconstruction of the religious quality of all forms of experience. There is a clear and distinctive tension between neopragmatic attempts to align historicism and pluralism with a new religiosity, and pragmatic attempts to broaden the nature of experience so that it becomes commensurate with the unbounded nature within which all forms of experience obtain. Can neopragmatism support a generic and compelling conception of the religious dimension of experience or does it remain in the antechamber of nature, hoping to find its way toward something that transcends the human process and its innate forms of signification?

I side with Smith when he argues that neopragmatism, in spite of its superiority to most of the alternatives on the philosophical scene, remains unfaithful to the more profound metaphysical insights of the classical tradition. After all, it is one thing to broaden our account of experience and to rescue it from the empiricists; it is quite another to show how experience relates to a realm that it neither created nor controls. If neopragmatism overemphasizes the sheerly manipulative dimension of experience, it is time to remind ourselves of the much more basic drift and assimilative momentum of the human process. A more somber and profound tone was sounded by Santayana when he challenged the hubris he saw in Deweyan instrumentalism. Two years before he attacked Dewey in the pages of *The Journal of Philosophy*, he made his conception of the prospects of the self clear:

The self is a fountain of joy, folly, and sorrow, a waxing and waning, stupid and dreaming creature, in the midst of a vast natural world, of which it catches but a few transient and odd perspectives . . . and the life of the self, if I accept its endeavors as significant, implies an equally substantial, dynamic, ill-reported world around it, in whose movements it is implicated.<sup>4</sup>

This portrayal makes it clear that the human process is but one of innumerable others and that whatever distinct features it has are features

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4. George Santayana, *Skepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Scribner, 1923), 149, 187.

derived from an unlimited domain that has neither origin nor goal. We will return to the problem of origins and goals when we examine Smith's evocative claim about God and the concept of divine intention. At this point it is pertinent to note that the neopragmatic focus on semiotic possibility and historical/contextual pluralism assumes that the self has more hermeneutic maneuvering room than it actually has. At the same time, it makes human history (and temporality) the genus of which nature is a mere species. As we will see, the correlation between nature and history is the exact opposite of this (and comes close to what Santayana, with his limited ontological equipment, saw intuitively).

The issue between neopragmatism and pragmatism can also be seen in terms of the basic question: what actually serves to broaden experience other than our theories of what experience ought to be? Smith makes it clear in his analyses of Peirce that experience involves what we could call a "double secondness." On the most basic level, experience as a whole, regardless of the complexes encountered "within" it, is compulsive.<sup>5</sup> Peirce saw the human process as an assimilative one in which the self is grooved and shaped by antecedent structures of great power and scope. The relation between the self and its world is one of brute secondness (dyadic interaction). Put differently, experience is not something that can be entered into by an act of will, but an enabling condition for the human process that obtains as a hidden background of all backgrounds. On the second level, experience is constituted by innumerable seconds, that is, by impactions that have a specific vector directionality and inner momentum that the self must honor if it is to survive.<sup>6</sup>

For Peirce, of course, the latter form of secondness, that found in the finite (or ontic) dyads that shape each moment of experience in a particular way, stems from independently real dynamic objects which lie beneath the immediate objects of perception. Smith is quite clear that Peirce's idealism is at the same time fully committed to the ontological status of things outside of the field of awareness,<sup>7</sup> and that these objects partake of generality (which may be quite vague in manifestation).<sup>8</sup> Objects and generals are real, even in the context of an objective idealism that privileges mentality (the doctrine of panpsychism). While some Peirce scholars mute this dimension

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5. John Smith, *America's Philosophical Vision* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21.
  6. Sandra B. Rosenthal, *Speculative Pragmatism* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).
  7. John E. Smith, *Purpose and Thought: The Meaning of Pragmatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 13-22.
  8. Smith, *America's Philosophical Vision*, 96.

of secondness,<sup>9</sup> Smith makes it central to his own understanding of how experience finds itself embedded in nature. Of the two forms of secondness, the former is the more interesting in the present context.

Borrowing a strategy from Schleiermacher's phenomenology of consciousness, we can call the first form of secondness an "absolute secondness." I prefer to use the commensurate phrase "sheer secondness" because it avoids some of the un-Peircean implications of the term "absolute." Sheer secondness is more basic than the ontic form that is manifest in particular dyadic impactions. It lives on the other side of an ontological divide, a pragmatic version of Heidegger's "ontological difference," from the forces and objects "within" experience. Sheer secondness is elusive and vague, yet it is the ultimate enabling condition for the experiences of the sign-using self.

It is clear that finite and particular forms of secondness, tied to the inner vector directionalities of dynamic objects, open out experience beyond its internal structures. Peirce insisted that the self, if such a term survives in pragmatistic semiotics, is found writ large on the objective field of its relations.<sup>10</sup> The internal and reflexive self is a product of dialogue with external realities and with past and future aspects of the present self. The present self is actually quite elusive and can only be "grasped" by a series of inferences (of the abductive type).<sup>11</sup> The hoped-for self of the future is constituted out of the interpretants that "would be" manifest when the self attains a higher form of self-control and participates in the *summum bonum*, thereby leaving the so-called "primitive" self behind.<sup>12</sup>

What of the correlation of human experience and sheer secondness, a secondness that does not manifest itself in seconds? Is there a dimension of this relation that remains unspoken in both neopragmatism and classical pragmatism? If so, can this unsaid aspect, as the hidden side of the ontological difference, be rendered intelligible in terms of thirdness and law? These vexing questions point to the heart of the issue of where experience receives its inner momentum. By looking more closely at sheer secondness,

9. See, for example, Karl-Otto Apel, *Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1981).

10. The designation CP abbreviates *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vols. I-VI, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-1935), Vols. VII-VIII, ed. Arthur W. Burks, (same publisher, 1958). The designation W followed by volume and page numbers abbreviates the ongoing *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, ed. Max H. Fisch, Vols. I-IV (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982-1986). Cf. W 2:207.

11. Cf. CP 7:420.

12. CP 5:511.

we can begin to understand how experience is actually broadened beyond its antecedent states.

The "sum" of all experienced seconds enters into awareness and constitutes the realm of percepts, part of the more inclusive domain that Peirce called the "percipuum." The second part of the percipuum is the domain of perceptual judgments which are unconscious inferences (representing the minimal vanishing point of abductions).<sup>13</sup> A great deal of excellent scholarship has been devoted to the ontology of the percipuum and its two subaltern components of percepts and perceptual judgments, but little energy has been devoted to probing into the reality prior to the "sum" of all seconds within experience. It is as if only one side of the ontological difference has been examined. The nether side, that of sheer secondness, remains the haunting presence within pragmatism that points both to the depths of experience, and, in a very different way, beyond experience to the depth structure of nature itself.

At this point we move into unexplored territory. I agree fully with Smith that pragmatism rescues experience from the inept posturing of orthodox empiricism. Further, I agree with him that experience is deeply intentional and fully embedded in a world of objects and relations that are not human products. I am compelled to move in a different direction when an abyss becomes dynamically manifest, separating sheer secondness from all seconds within awareness. Neopragmatism is in an even more isolated position because it fails to grapple with the true scope and dynamism of the ontic form of secondness, let alone sheer secondness. In accepting ontic secondness, we are compelled to look at *its* enabling condition.

Sheer secondness is the background of all backgrounds for human experience. It is never the object of an intentional act nor can it be brought into the sign/object/interpretant triad. It cannot be a sign because it does not point to an object or interpretant beyond itself. It cannot be an object because it is not a field of directed energy and power. It cannot be an interpretant because it is not a product of a sign/object correlation. The mystery of sheer secondness eluded Peirce largely because of his commitment to the principle, enunciated in his *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* articles of 1868-1869, that there can exist nothing that is not cognizable in some respect, however vague. The conditions of cognizability are developed in his semiotic theory which tends to privilege mentality and the conscious assimilation and manipulation of interpretants (although this is not the whole story). Sheer secondness lies beyond any cognitive act, insofar as such acts are held to be limited to the stated features of semiosis.

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13. Cf. CP 7:630.

We noted that experience is what is forced upon us. The dynamism of this force points toward sheer secondness that is ontologically distinct from ontic secondness, which is always manifest in particular dyadic impactions. What makes the first form of secondness "sheer"? How does this elusive presence/absence empower experience and open it up to the depth rhythms of nature? Finally, how does sheer secondness illuminate the divine itself, which seems to occupy a distinctive ontological position within nature?

Sheer secondness has no semiotic density. In this sense it is akin to the Peircean concept of ground. One can understand the ground as the domain of the spirit.<sup>14</sup> In this sense of ground, and there are other senses, of course, the spirit is the enabling condition for the assignment of any meaning to an object. The ground/spirit makes communication possible although it has no internal content of its own to be communicated. Sheer secondness is thus the spirit or ground for ontic secondness. If each actual second is a communicated object, remembering that communication need not be conscious or symmetrical, the background that opens out true betweenness is that of sheer secondness. Put in terms more familiar to some, the presence-in-withdrawal of the ground, as the spirit, as betweenness proper, makes it possible for beings to become manifest and efficacious within the domain of the human process and its inherited forms of semiosis.

The ground/spirit of sheer secondness is self-effacing and, in its dynamic aspect, self-othering. It is self-effacing in that it refuses to intrude on its enabled products. It is self-othering in the sense that it moves outward, like Plato's *chora*, into the world of signs, objects, and interpretants. Peirce probed into the nature of betweenness, often correlating it with his theories of continuity and thirdness, but failed to probe into the deeper logic opened out in sheer secondness. The ontological difference between sheer and ontic secondness remains one of the unspoken truths of pragmatism. Yet it contains an even deeper logic which points toward the ultimate divide within nature itself.

Before making this next step, perhaps a leap, toward the abyss within the heart of a self-transforming nature, I want to look at Smith's conception of Royce. As is well known, Smith, along with Oppenheim, has been instrumental in bringing the mature Royce into the center of debate on matters semiotic, theological, and hermeneutic.<sup>15</sup> His analyses of Royce's

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14. A hint given to us by Peirce as early as 1866 in his Lowell Lectures; cf. W 1:503.

15. Cf. John E. Smith, *Royce's Social Infinite*, (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1950), and Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J., *Royce's Mature Philosophy of Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

1913 *The Problem of Christianity* have guided many of us toward a renewed understanding of an autochthonous American hermeneutics. I have long been persuaded that *The Problem of Christianity* is one of the true *Ur*-texts of hermeneutics, and that Continental thinkers could learn a great deal from Royce's judicious combination of the semiotics of the early Peirce and his own theory of the community of interpretation. Royce moved Peirce's semiotics in directions that Peirce failed to explore and thereby gave sign theory a kind of thickness and relevance that remains binding for thought. In doing so, he also transformed his earlier notion of the actual infinite, as a self-representative sign series, into an open matrix of growing interpretants which represent the true embodied core of infinite semiosis.

Like Peirce, Royce takes the concept of the spirit very seriously. Unlike Peirce, he fleshes out an understanding of the spirit that goes to the heart of the issue of the human process and its communal forms of interaction. He does so in the context of a semiotic metaphysics of nature that also points toward the great unsaid within the classical tradition. The spirit is not so much a repository of attained wisdom as it is a goad to more open hermeneutic acts within the community. It lives between interpreters and interpretees, insuring that there is a growth of embodied meaning in the world.

More basic than the structures of community are the structures of nature. Smith correctly points out that Royce did not always approach nature on its own terms: ". . . while I do not say that Royce left nature out of account, the fact that he frequently understood it exclusively in terms of what it would have to be in order to be known or to be the expression of divine knowledge and will led to the neglect of other features."<sup>16</sup> There is a sense in which nature gets limited to the external world of description and lacks the atemporal richness of the internal and divine world of appreciation. Even in the so-called later Royce, nature is filtered through the needs of the spirit-filled community. However, Royce does break through on occasion and envisions a fully semiotic universe that has its own autonomy:

In sum, if we view the world as everywhere and always recording its own history, by processes of aging and weathering, or of evolution, or of stellar and nebular clusterings and streamings, we can simply define the time order, and its three regions—past, present, future—as an order of possible interpretation. That is, we can define the present as, potentially, the interpretation of the past to the future. The triadic structure of our interpretations is strictly

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16. Smith, *America's Philosophical Vision*, 155.

analogous, both to the psychological and the metaphysical structure of the world of time.<sup>17</sup>

Nature is an unlimited self-recording system of signs and objects that can be decoded by the community of interpreters whenever it is aided by the ultimate spirit-interpreter. Unlike the absolute of the pre-1912 Royce, the spirit-interpreter enters into the time process and shares in its travails.

My sense is that Royce intuitively understood the nature of betweenness as it pertains to the spirit. Not only does the spirit make it possible to find thirds or mediating and bridging signs, it also, and more importantly, provides the goad that keeps hermeneutics open and loyal to the growth of semiotic centers of power and meaning. Does the spirit have semiotic content, or, to use religious terms, a semiotic body? Clearly, the community, especially in its grace-filled beloved form, is the body of Christ. Christ is thus semiotically dense, perhaps the most semiotically dense complex within the innumerable orders of the world. But the spirit seems to have a different relation to the orders of attained meaning than does the Christ.

I am persuaded that the unsaid in Royce is directly analogous to the unsaid in Peirce. If Peirce points toward, but fails to name, sheer secondness, then Royce points toward, and evokes, the emptiness of the spirit-interpreter who is neither a sign nor an object. The spirit is the enabling condition for the communication between interpreter and interpretee. It cannot be a semiotic code or a specific channel of transmission (which would be the case if the spirit were a string of interpretants). Like sheer secondness, which is prior to any and all seconds "within" experience, the spirit-interpreter comforts, enables, and guides, but is not a providential or linear structure of intelligibility. Of course, Royce shies away from this depth dimension of the spirit and often falls back on more traditional eschatological language. But the inner logic of the unsaid dimension within the classical American tradition is precisely this refusal, this reticence, to appear before the bar of intelligible thirdness. The step beyond the received tradition and its equally received interpretations requires a denial of the sovereignty of thirdness.

Where do we go from here? We have opened up a clearing underneath both Peirce and Royce, a clearing that each sensed yet each shied away from. This clearing lives on the boundary between the most basic enabling structures of the human process and the innumerable orders of an

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17. Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan Company). Citations are from the 1968 edition, ed. John E. Smith (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1913), 289.

unbounded nature. Santayana reminded us that the self has only limited prospects within nature as a whole, and that we must be cautious about reading human need or purpose on the face of an indifferent world. Yet we are not left with a bare descriptive naturalism that reduces the human process to a mere sequence of meaningless semiotic transactions.

The final transformation of the classical tradition requires us to leap past the progressivist and melioristic dimensions of pragmatism with its faith in thirdness and cosmic habit. The nexus point connecting the depth dimension of the self with a self-transforming nature is, as Smith has persuasively argued, the religious quality of experience. This qualitative transformation of awareness is itself a gift of nature and its divine orders. It is now time to sketch an initial portrayal of what it means to go beyond experience, however broadly conceived, toward nature's god.

The ontological difference is manifest in a variety of guises. We have disclosed one manifestation of the difference in the distinction between sheer and ontic secondness. Another manifestation of the difference is located in the distinction between the spirit-interpreter and the body of signs that constitute the body of Christ (qua beloved community). In probing into these two locations of the ultimate ontological abyss we gain access into the true depth dimension within nature itself. What marks can we see of the inner momentum of the unsaid and unspoken within classical American thought? Several of these marks should by now be clear.

The nether side of the ontological difference, namely, the elusive side hidden from view, lies outside of thirdness/intelligibility/cosmic habit. Sheer secondness, the personal form of the difference, is presemiotic and ejective of seconds that take on the rich texture of meaning (via thirds). The spirit-interpreter, the communal form of the difference, is presemiotic and evocative of enhanced meanings within interpretive communities. When the individual turns toward the hidden background of all backgrounds,<sup>18</sup> he or she experiences the shock of that which cannot be delimited by any form of methodic probing. Even interpretive musement, the capstone of the edifice of abduction, fails to become permeable to the inner being of sheer secondness. When the individual turns toward the spirit-interpreter, he or she experiences a depth-transformation in which antecedent signs, tied to the community of memory, enter into the rhythms of the future directed spirit that locates and transfigures every sign in the light of the community of hope. What is the most basic religious attitude of the self? Clearly, it must be that of a hope that transcends the sum of beliefs. Peirce edges toward a more radical conception of hope when he senses the inadequacy of his own belief in the "would be." Yet, he fails to enter into the logic of hope and returns to

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18. Sometimes referred to as feeling by Peirce; cf. CP 8:294.

the comfort of the infinite long run. Put in different terms, the road toward the ontological difference is that of hope, the only human attitude that can become shriven by the difference and open to its dark cleft.

What underlies both sheer secondness and the spirit-interpreter? What is the ejective core of the human process in its personal and communal dimensions? We cannot answer these questions by a formula or by adding yet one more distinction to the list already created. However, a judicious use of our categories can at least point away from the ubiquity of the human process toward its animating ground. Both Peirce and Royce affirmed anthropomorphic and anthropocentric principles. In doing so they broadened our understanding of the scope and prospects of the self, yet they paid a price in diminishing the role of nature.

Earlier we noted that neopragmatism makes history the genus of which nature is the species. At this point we must reverse this correlation and see how history actually obtains. Nature has no essential features nor does it endure a supernatural order that somehow obtains "outside" of it. All orders, whether divine or not, obtain within nature. History is one order among others. Not all orders need be temporal (*contra* process metaphysics) nor need temporality function in only one way (e.g., epochal self-definition). Time and history can prevail in a bewildering variety of ways. Many orders of nature are non-historical and non-temporal. Any given order may be temporal, pretemporal, and post-temporal at the same "time." Time is not a metaphysically ultimate category. Nature, on the other hand, is the most basic category of thought, although, strictly speaking, "nature" is a precategory. It is a precategory in that it does not admit of its opposite, and hence cannot obtain in a polarity. There is no such thing as the non-natural.

Nature reveals its own depth dimension in the oft stated but rarely understood divide between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. This divide underlies and empowers the domains of sheer secondness and the spirit-interpreter. Nature naturing is the presemiotic enabling, yet self-effacing source, for all of the manifest orders of the world, the dimension of nature natured. When *natura naturans* encounters the human process it is manifest as sheer secondness and *through* the spirit-interpreter. *Natura naturata* is manifest to the human process as the "sum" of all seconds, thirds, and interpretants. Put differently, nature naturing has no content or *telos*, while nature natured locates all content and final causes.

Let us look, then, at Smith's evocative conclusion to his paper. In pointing to the divine Smith argues:

God is then seen as the transcending center of intention *vis à vis* ourselves and the world. This allows us to say, among other

things, that God *intends* the world, that all that is in it was *meant to be* and that it did not just "happen."<sup>19</sup>

God is seen as, in some sense, an extra-natural creator who, in analogy to the human process, has a center of intention,<sup>20</sup> which can shape the direction of the world. On this account, both God and nature are purposive, that is, manifest telic structures that are congenial to the human process and its needs. Nature has an origin and a goal and both can be fathomed by the self in its quest for stable purposes within an evolutionary universe. How does the distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* transform this conception of origins and goals, and, in turn, compel us to rethink the divine natures?

Peirce developed a philosophical theology that is profoundly ambivalent on the nature of the divine life within an evolutionary cosmos. His texts can be read in a process or panentheistic way,<sup>21</sup> or in more orthodox or even Thomistic terms.<sup>22</sup> As is to be expected, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. My own growing conviction is that Peirce worked out of an orthodox trinitarian position, but edged toward a robust panentheism which itself pointed toward the unsaid lying at the foundation of his general perspective. The case of Peirce is compelling precisely because he fleshed out many of the options latent or manifest within pragmatism and thus pointed toward its possible transfiguration. I believe that Smith and Peirce are in the same boat concerning the prospects of the divine life in the face of an unbounded nature.

Is God located on one side of the ontological difference between nature naturing and nature natured, or is God unique among the orders of the world in living in a special way between the energized poles of the difference? Put differently, and in terms congenial to Smith: is God the ground of Being or a being within the world? I am persuaded that the unsaid within pragmatism points toward a conception of God that is both *sui generis* and compelling. But it is possible to enter into this conception only when the full force of the ontological difference pulls the human process beyond the domain of experience proper toward its hidden source in a self-transforming nature.

Religious experience, more properly, the religious quality within experience, remains open to the ontological difference whenever it is

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19. John E. Smith, "Experience, God, and Classical American Philosophy," 142.

20. Cf. Smith, *America's Philosophical Vision*, 185.

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

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

gathered up into hope. The attitude of hope is not a human stance that can be chosen, but an enabling condition that comes to the self from what can be called "natural grace." Hope is the gift of nature's God to the self so that it can come into the vicinity of the ontological difference. Hope lives on the edges of experience and represents the self-overcoming of experience. Put differently, hope is the *topos* where finite and intentional human experience gives way to the powers of nature naturing. What, in conclusion, can we say about nature's God as manifest in the hope that transfigures all experience?

God intends to become manifest through sheer secondness and the spirit-interpreter. Sheer secondness reveals that its own inner depth is grounded in what we could call the "firstness of firstness." Since Peirce denied that firstness can have a degenerate case (unlike the other two primal ontological categories), we need only speak of firstness proper, or, perhaps, "sheer firstness" prior to cosmogenesis and the irruption of qualities. Be that as it may, insofar as God participates in nature naturing, which is presemiotic and prepositional, God partakes of pure or sheer firstness. This dimension of God cannot be defined in any traditional trinitarian terms and is more akin to Meister Eckhart's *die Gottheit*, or the God beyond the God of theism. Yet, there is another sense in which God is fully embedded in the orders of the world, that is, in the domain of nature natured. This dimension of God (which has several subaltern dimensions) is finite and time-bound. Peirce pointed to this dimension when he spoke of the manifestation of secondness at the end of history.<sup>23</sup> God is thus both the ground of sheer secondness and the spirit-interpreter, *and* a complex within nature that experiences the finite firsts, seconds, and thirds that impact on its evolving life. The dimension of God correlated with nature naturing cannot be intentional or a "center of intention." God, *qua natura naturans*, is pre-purposive and has no interest in the needs of the orders of the world, especially the human process. God as an order *within* the world can have finite purposes for orders of relevance, but does not, so I would argue, have a purpose *for* the world as a whole. Can the "analogy of experience" bridge *this* abyss within *God*, or is it also shattered on the difference?

Without an understanding of the ontological difference between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, it would be impossible to enter into the space that reveals how God lives on both sides of the great divide within nature. At the same time, and more importantly, God lives between the sheer firstness of nature naturing and the obtained orders of nature natured, holding both dimensions of nature together in mutuality. The move beyond experience, made possible by the hope that is opened out *by* the ontological difference, is fulfilled when the human process encounters nature's God.

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23. CP 1:362.

The mystery of the ontological difference is the protective shelter within which the divine natures become manifest and transform the self and its communities.

What are the limits of experience, even when the concept of experience is dramatically redefined? The discussants all concur that the empirical concept of experience is unempirical and that a more radical conception must be shaped that can include inference, feeling, the shock of immediacy, and the forces manifest in generals. Neopragmatism errs in attempting to base its reconstructed empiricism on language. The reason for this is clear. Language becomes devalued to an intra-psychic sign system (in which the signified and the signifier are both contained within language and the mind of the language user). Robbins evokes a pluralism that has its sole ontological support in the shifting signifying structures of human language. The semiotician Thomas A. Sebeok refers to such positions as forms of "glottocentrism," namely, as positions that remain anthropocentric and tied to the images and metaphors of one particular, and highly idiosyncratic, sign-using organism. Neopragmatism is a metaphysical dead end, and in this sense, a hidden cousin of the postmodernist left (Derrida *et al.*) The postmodernist right, expressed in some process thinkers (e.g., David Griffin), at least struggles to find a place for the human process within the vast orders of nature. Robbins leaves us with neither nature nor a self. "Experience" becomes little more than the eliding and self-erasing momentums of signs, whose referential powers are muted or effaced.

Roth correctly points us to the lack of an adequate sense of evil in the classical pragmatic tradition. The shock of the Holocaust (and the *anus mundi*) cannot be transformed into a developmental teleological structure. In Peircean terms, the Holocaust represents a kind of ultimate and demonic secondness, forever bereft of the liberating power of thirdness. There is no solution to the problem of evil. However, we can enter into its provenance if we let the mystery of the ontological difference propel us toward the depth structures of nature, where the indifference of *natura naturans* gives birth to both good and evil within the domains of *natura naturata*. Only by entering into the full force of the demonic in history is it possible to become open to an ecstatic naturalism that feels the power of evil while struggling toward the transfiguring rhythms of a self-transforming nature. Pragmatism, in spite of a certain metaphysical blindness, brings us close to the ontological difference, provided we do not get waylaid by neopragmatic confusions.

Anderson rightly brings out many of the rich ambiguities in the tradition represented by Smith and Dewey. Is the divine to be more than the sum of all positive communal values? Is the divine personal or the "carrier" of values? What, if anything, is left over once we have exhausted the values of what Dewey calls the "Great Community"? My sense is that both Smith and Dewey remain just shy of the divine majesty, perhaps for reasonably

compelling reasons. Yet the move toward the divine seems implicit in Dewey's enterprise. Why not acknowledge that "quality" is actually a trait often rooted in an evolving God, a God who furthers the instantiation of emancipatory quality within the innumerable orders of the world? Experience is the gateway, not the source. Or, as Tillich argued, experience is a medium for theological reflection. Do pragmatists sometimes confuse the medium with the source, a source that can come only from the encompassing nature that empowers all experience, human or otherwise?