STRIVING TO SPEAK IN A HUMAN VOICE: A PEIRCEAN CONTRIBUTION TO METAPHYSICAL DISCOURSE*

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I

A. N. WHITEHEAD SUGGESTS philosophy is akin to poetry.[1] Let me count the ways or, more exactly, identify four facets of this kinship. After touching upon these facets, I will in the second part of this paper focus directly on the relationship between being and articulation, regardless of the form in which being comes to expression (or expresses itself).[2] Then, in the third section, I offer Charles S. Peirce's

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[1] *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1938): "Language halts behind intuition. The difficulty of philosophy is the expression of what is self-evident. Our understanding outruns the ordinary usages of words. Philosophy is akin to poetry. Philosophy is the endeavor to find a conventional phraseology for the vivid suggestiveness of the poet. It is the endeavor to reduce Milton's 'Lycidas' to prose; and thereby to produce a verbal symbolism manageable for use in other connections of thought" (49–50). "Philosophy is akin to poetry, and both of them seek to express that ultimate good sense we seek which we term civilization. In each case there is reference to form beyond the direct meaning of words. Poetry allies itself to metre, philosophy to mathematical pattern" (ibid., 174).

[2] This expression is not quite accurate, though for the purposes of this paper it is more appropriate than asserting, "the form in which being comes to be expressed." The crucial point is that articulation is neither something to which being is subjected by forces utterly alien to it nor a process in which being plays the role of a ventriloquist and we that of dummies. Today one often hears warnings about how the demand for intelligibility does violence to what is encountered. We are instructed that alterity or otherness needs to be defended against the claims of reason or the demands for intelligibility. This can serve as an extremely helpful corrective to what is arguably the dominant tendency in Western philosophy, but our impulse to make sense out of what we encounter is one we can hardly eradicate without destroying ourselves (however much particular genres of interpretation or modes of explanation are justifiably criticized). Moreover, this impulse does not

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categoreal scheme as a compelling articulation of what are, arguably, the most ubiquitous and indeed basic features (or traits) of being. Finally, the last section of this paper considers human beings precisely in their ongoing efforts to give adequate expression to human experience in its broadest reach and deepest import. Philosophers and poets alike struggle to speak in an intelligible, arresting, and acute voice: they would have their utterances stop us, so that we might discern more sharply and attentively the meanings in which we are enmeshed. On the part of both, one observes countless "attempts to escape our humanness,"[3] but one also hears deliberate endeavors "[t]o speak humanly from the height or from the depth"[4] of experience. The philosophical no less than the poetic voice has been a distinctively human voice in which a finite, fallible, and mortal animal has given arresting expression to the most telling disclosures of human experience. It is, accordingly, to the kinship between poetry and philosophy that I now turn.

One aspect of this kinship concerns the sustained effort to articulate what has not yet been said and indeed what may be in principle unsayable. The language of philosophy is very rarely that of poetry; but the use of language by philosophers, no less than that by poets, characteristically involves what (at least) in effect involves an interrogation of the limits and resources of language.[5] Frequently, some insight, discovery, or experience demands nothing less, and this is nowhere more evident in philosophy than in the writings of metaphysicians. 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

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solely originate in us but is called forth by some aspect of what is encountered. Being invites articulation, solicits it in some respects, and almost always resists and even frustrates it in other respects. To suppose otherwise is to lapse into some form of nihilism (John E. Smith, "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation," *Review of Metaphysics* 24, no. 4 (June 1971): 593, 613).

[3] Stanley Cavell, *The New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989), 87.

[4] Wallace Stevens, "Chocorua to Its Neighbors," in *The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 244.

[5] This is, in addition, almost always an interrogation of the limits and resources of our experience as a medium of disclosure and an interrogation of the nature and forms of being, especially as intimated by language and experience.

fuller sense court the risk of lapsing into nonsense.[6] But the traditional and secure modes of description, explanation, and critique are, for most poets and many philosophers, unduly restrictive and mostly sterile. Like the poetic imagination, then, the philosophical imagination by its own inherent restlessness tends to explode the bounds of established usage and traditional tropes. This is the first sense of kinship. The philosophical imagination can engage in this unending struggle simply in the spirit of irresponsible iconoclasm,[7] but just as often does so in the spirit of deep fidelity to the animating sources of linguistic utterance.[8]

Whatever spirit informs and guides this imagination, the outcome tends toward violating established usage and thereby generating novel conceptions. "Metaphor," as Justus Buchler notes, "cannot be avoided if philosophy is to be more than the formal prescription of symbols."[9] Some metaphors are more apt than others; and (what might amount to the same point) some are more fruitful and illuminating than others. Regarding this, Buchler helpfully suggests: "In large measure, what makes the difference between good and bad metaphor, as indeed the difference between satisfactory and unsatisfactory concepts generally speaking, is the relative power of the perspective with which they function."[10] Like concepts, metaphors prove themselves by their

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[6] John E. Smith concludes "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation," his 1971 Presidential Address to the Metaphysical Society of America, by stressing: "If we are to avoid the nihilistic retreat to immediacy, we must advance again to philosophical articulation, something for which neither ordinary language nor the language of science is adequate" (613). In a sense, I take his conclusion as my point of departure, though with a slightly different emphasis: for the various purposes we engage in the demanding task of philosophical articulation, no language is adequate. What most importantly invites or demands expression entails linguistic innovation and thus experimentation.

[7] But, such iconoclasm is not completely to be disparaged, for (as William James stresses) "[h]ow good it is sometimes simply to *break away* from all old categories, deny old worn-out beliefs, and restate things *ab initio*, making the lines of division fall into entirely new places"; Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), 606.

[8] In this regard, it is illuminating to consider how the stance of the poet or the philosopher vis-à-vis language is analogous to the stance of the conscientious objector or civil disobedient to instituted law and the coercive means used to insure compliance with such law.

[9] *Nature and Judgment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 189. "The philosopher who thinks there is an ideal of literalness and an ideal of clarity to which philosophy should conform, and that 'metaphor' is the instrument peculiar to poetry is deceived" (ibid., 184).

[10] Ibid., 189–90.

contribution to opening a perspective in which fruitful questions can be posed and unanticipated discoveries can be made. The meaning of metaphors is, to quote Buchler yet again, "determined by their role in the perspective consequent upon their articulation"; hence, "their full value in most instances cannot be antecedently determined or gratuitously assigned."[11] In other words, their meaning is inseparable from their force and, in turn, their force is of a piece with their role in advancing articulation.[12]

A second respect in which philosophy is akin to poetry concerns the importance (at times, even the authority) granted seemingly remote or even implausible likenesses and connections, also to finely shaded and often elusive differences and distinctions.[13] It is the case not only that philosophers craft metaphors, but also that they make these the controlling images of an ongoing discourse. The works of philosophers as much as those of poets are sites wherein the reverberations of these likeness and differences, these connections and distinctions, are allowed to sound far beyond the immediate occasion of their initial articulation. Think here of A. N. Whitehead's characterization of the self as a route of inheritance.[14] Or think of Aristotle's use of ὕλη as the word to be used to designate that out of which a nat-

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[11] Ibid., 190.

[12] Whereas poets tend to be alive to the extent to which meaning is in the making, thus, to the extent to which meaning cannot be antecedently established but is only eventually—and precariously—achieved, philosophers tend to be excessively anxious about securing criteria for establishing clear concepts and literal clarity. "The poet is," as Buchler observes, "less impatient with and less inclined to dismiss 'obscurity' than the philosopher is. What the philosopher may regard as inarticulate the poet may regard as a stimulus to articulation, as the beginning and not the end. An influential deterrent to the progress of mutual understanding among philosophers is the assumption that there is some one proper way to articulate another's perspective, on the analogy of the code to which there is a key" (ibid., 182).

[13] In the context of exploring the analogy between the bonds conjoining chemical substances and those linking the terms in prepositional forms, Peirce suggests, "any analogy, however fanciful, which serves to focus attention upon matters which might otherwise escape observation is valuable" (*The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* [hereafter, "*CP*"], ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934], vol. 3, par. 470. Hereafter cited in accord with established practice, for example, 3.470, where the first number refers to the volume and the second to the numbered paragraph.)

[14] In *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Free Press, 1978), for example, Whitehead suggests that the "life of man is a historic route of actual occasions which in a marked degree . . . inherit from each other" (89).

ural substance is made, a use about which Whitehead remarks, "how differently would Aristotle's metaphysical reflections read if we persisted in translating one of his metaphysical key words by the English term *wood*."[15] In connection with the first aspect of the kinship between philosophy and poetry, we have already underscored the role of metaphor in philosophy. The drive to say what has not yet been said and indeed what may be in principle unsayable might take various forms. The exploitation of hitherto unexpressed likenesses and differences is as vital to philosophy as poetry, precisely in their striving to transcend the bounds of established usage and traditional thought. This second facet of kinship, in which the remote or even unlikely provides keys to the familiar and commonplace, is a consequence of the first.

Yet a third respect in which philosophy is akin to poetry pertains to the relationship between the sayer and the said, between the person struggling to give articulate form to some actually encountered or merely imagined other and this other in its irreducible otherness. Part of this otherness can be—indeed, often is—resistance to articulation. The sayer is engaged in a struggle to say what resists being said, but the relationship between sayer and said is an agonistic one of a complex character. To adapt a line here from Robert Frost, the poet is engaged in a lover's quarrel with the world.[16] This metaphor illuminates the character of the struggle between sayer and said, as I envision it. The attachment to what one is struggling to articulate is deep and complex, shot through with conflict, but the kind of disconcerting conflict characteristic of our most intense attachments.[17] The inadequacy of our most precise and nuanced articulations brings home to us an invincible feature of human striving, as exhibited in such undertakings as philosophical reflection, scientific investigation, artistic performance, and countless other pursuits: we ineluctably fall

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[15] *Modes of Thought*, 40. The sentence, however, continues: how differently would Aristotle's metaphysical reflections read if we translated ὕλη as wood "and also insisted on giving the most literal meaning to that word." But Aristotle's usage here is irreducibly metaphorical.

[16] Concluding line of "The Lesson for Today" ("I had a lover's quarrel with the world") in *Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays*, ed. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 322.

[17] What Jonathan Lear claims in the concluding chapter ("Radical Evaluation") of *Love and Its Place in Nature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) about the precarious career of our erotic attachment to the experiential world is helpful for coming to a deeper understanding of the point at which I am driving here.

somewhat short of expressing what animates us. In our definitive strivings, something always exceeds our capacities, often contravenes and frustrates them, but it is hardly ever anything from which we can completely sever ourselves.

The fourth and final facet concerns the relationship between language and self. It is not uncommon to depict this relationship in an inverse manner from that of our commonplace understanding. Think here of the later Martin Heidegger's claim regarding our relationship to language: while it is correct to say that humans speak, it is so superficial as to be misleading. For language speaks and humans only speak in response to having been addressed by language.[18] Whatever sort of instrument language might be, it is not the sort of instrument we can pick up and put down. It is so intimately a part of our selves that Charles S. Peirce's assertion is, when properly qualified, more plausible than not: "my language is the sum total of myself."[19] My language, however, is never simply mine; it overwhelmingly belongs to us, that is, some historically evolved and evolving community. My language is, at once, "there," existing apart from me in the habits and artifacts of others, and "mine," something existing as a part of me.[20] What make human experiences the rich, varied, flexible, and potentially transformative encounters they are is, as much as anything else, the symbolic resources we bring to our experiential encounters. Just as the task of articulation involves a struggle between the sayer and the said (that is, just as it involves an *agon* between our symbol-making psyches and the innumerable intimations of symbolic articulation flowing from our experience of the world), so it involves a struggle between us and the symbols on which we so massively and intimately rely. Poetry is one site of these struggles, philosophy is another.

The kinship between philosophy and poetry is, however, as likely to generate rivalry and antipathy between the practitioners of these different forms of symbolic articulation as this kinship is to invite affection and sympathy.[21] Let us, in what is virtually a ritual of recollection among philosophers, note that Plato refers to the quarrel between philosophy and poetry as being, in his own time, one of long

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[18] *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 193; 206–10.

[19] *CP*, 5.314. Also in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 1:54.

[20] See my "The Reconstruction of Institutions," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* [new series] 4, no. 3 (1990): 240.

standing.[22] The kinship between philosophy and poetry derives partly from the common drive to give lasting expression to even our most transient experience, partly from that of sounding the depths of being (being in its immediacy and undeniable fleetingness as well in its remoteness and apparent invariance). Philosophy no less than poetry is a mode of articulation in which we make raids on the unsayable, at least the heretofore unsaid. Poetry no less than philosophy is one in which humans strive to delineate in minute detail the defining nexus of ordinary things, actions, and events.[23]

It is ironic that some of the most poetic philosophers are among those who seemingly make articulation alien to being.[24] William James and Henri Bergson are examples of such authors. In the name of immediacy, they denigrate articulation. In the name of experience, they degrade expression. In that of intuition, they disparage argumentation and even conceptualization. Experience, however, drives toward expression;[25] and it does so because experience is itself always already an inchoate and incipient mode of articulating some facet of being. In driving toward expression, experience drives toward its fuller realization and this more robust realization is one with its more adequate articulation. While violence, disfigurement, loss, and other unfortunate effects often result from our efforts, in a particular case, to articulate our experience of being, articulation in itself is not

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[21] For an excellent recent treatment of this relationship, see Mark Edmundson's *Literature Against Philosophy, Plato to Derrida: A Defense of Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See also Stanley Rosen, *The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry: Studies in Ancient Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

[22] *Republic* 607b.

[23] In *Reason in Art* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), George Santayana suggests: "A real thing, when all its pertinent natural associates are discerned, touches, wonder, pathos, and beauty on every side; the rational poet is one who, without feigning anything unreal, perceives these momentous ties, and presents his subject loaded with its whole fate, missing no source of worth which is in it, no ideal influence it may have. Homer remains, perhaps, the great master in this art" (81).

[24] This expression and, indeed, much else are borrowed from John E. Smith's "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation" and his other writings.

[25] In *Experience and God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1995), John E. Smith compelling asserts: "Experience . . . needs to be rescued not only from the charge of subjectivity, but also from the restrictive force of approaching it only through expression, that is, only through language" (13, emphasis added).

necessarily a violent, disfiguring, impoverishing, or in some other way untoward response to being.[26]

II

How being manifests itself to us in our perceptual experience or, more generally, in our experiential encounters cannot be neatly or entirely separated from how we are disposed (perhaps driven) to articulate these manifestations. That is, how being discloses itself cannot be severed from how these disclosures not only come to be articulated but also have been expressed in language and, indeed, in other modes of symbolization.[27] Thus, phenomena cannot be limited to the data of perception or experience: what is perceptually or experientially given is so intimately connected with what is linguistically and symbolically expressible that at least some of our utterances or expressions attain the status of phenomena. In effect, Aristotle's insistence upon attending to the ways in which we speak about being, as a source of clues for what being truly is, grants certain *logoi* the status of phenomena.[28] That is, his procedure effectively attributes to certain utterances the function of manifestation.

Accordingly, being shows itself in a wider range of phenomena than we have traditionally acknowledged, at least explicitly. The testimony of the senses or experience is itself a metaphor paying homage to the discursive context in which even our most direct experiences or immediate cognitions are accorded their authoritative status and critical role. A too narrowly perceptual model of phenomena occludes both the extent to which the appeal to experience is a symbolically mediated affair and the extent to which certain modes of speak-

[26] Smith, "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation," 594.

[27] For an orientation toward the various modes of human symbolization, the works of Ernst Cassirer and Susanne K. Langer are still of great value. In particular, the now four volumes of Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (trans. Ralph Manheim, 4 vols. [New Haven: Yale, 1953–96]) and all of Langer's major works, including the relatively early *Philosophy in a New Key* (3d ed. [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979]) are useful in this regard.

[28] Though more than a few interpreters of Aristotle have either stated or implied that this is the case, my approach to him in this light has been shaped above all by G. E. R. Lloyd's *Aristotle: The Growth and Structure of His Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) and especially John Herman Randall, Jr.'s *Aristotle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

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ing, from everyday locutions to poetic compositions and philosophical texts, can be ontologically relevant phenomena. *Logoi* are among the phenomena to which anyone interested in giving an account of being must painstakingly attend. The example of Aristotle, that seemingly most prosaic of philosophers, makes this much clear.

John E. Smith stresses the asymmetry between experience and expression, an emphasis relevant to the suggestion just made. He insists:

> Instead of trying to fit all experience into a pre-existent language, we must attend to the more difficult matter of finding the proper language in which to express all that we experience. Experience drives toward expression, which is why the finding of adequate language is a genuinely creative task; but there is no corresponding drive in the opposite direction. When our language proves inadequate, we return to experience, but we do so in order to criticize our language and improve it, not to force our experience into conformity with a pre-established language.[29]

While experience drives toward expression, there is (Smith insists) no corresponding drive of expression toward experience.[30] This is the asymmetry upon which he places so much stress. Our habitual modes of linguistic expression tend to dull the cutting edge of lived experience, so much so that our very facility in naming or describing what we encounter in experience tends to impoverish the range and depths of our encounters. Moreover, our antecedently established modes of expression are inadequate to convey the force or delineate the texture of especially our more arresting and disruptive experiences, the ones most insistently driving toward expression. The function of poetry and, more generally, of art is, especially in their distinctively modern and contemporary forms, to heighten and deepen our attention to the ordinary and the everyday,[31] to enable us to discern more finely and fully the disclosures of our own experience.[32] Here,

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[29] *Experience and God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1995), 13.

[30] Ibid.

[31] For how philosophy performs an analogous function, the writings of Stanley Cavell are very important. Also see Stanley Rosen, *Metaphysics in Ordinary Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[32] In "Art" R. W. Emerson claims, "historically viewed, it has been the function of art to educate our perception of beauty. We are immersed in beauty, but our eyes have no clear vision. It needs, by the exhibition of single traits, to assist and lead the dormant taste. We carve and paint, or we behold what is carved and painted, as students of the mystery of Form. The virtue of art lies in detachment, in sequestering one object from the embarrassing variety"; *Emerson's Essays: First and Second Series*, ed. Irwin Edman (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 248.

too, we can see a kinship between poetry and philosophy, for the task of philosophy is also that of symbolically transposing the ordinary and the everyday in such a way as to feel more fully their force and to trace more intricately the weave of the patterns in which we are enveloped and to which we contribute.

It is possible to grant the asymmetry between experience and expression upon which Smith insists but also to accord certain modes of expression the status of phenomena. Experience is disclosive of being in such a manner as to call forth various experiments in symbolic articulation, including ones in linguistic expression. This is to say, in explicit reference to our ontological focus, only what Smith asserts in his insistence that experience drives toward expression. But, in this drive, being as disclosed in experience has come to be expressed not only in memorable but also in monumental ways. These historical utterances are of critical importance in our ongoing struggle to come to terms with being, more fully, to come to adequate terms with being as encountered in the quite different contexts of human experience.[33] Such historical utterances have attained, in rare cases, monumental status. They not only invite our attention but also demand a degree of respect bordering on, if not spilling over into, reverence. Certainly, Plato's dialogues, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, Hegel's *Logic*, many of Charles Peirce's manuscripts, Josiah Royce's *The World and the Individual*, George Santayana's *Realms of Being*, John Dewey's *Experience and Nature*, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, A. N. Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, John Herman Randall, Jr.'s *Nature and Historical Experience*, and Justus Buchler's *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*, to name but the works most influential in my own career, deserve such respect.

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[33] In "Philosophical Interpretation and the Religious Dimension of Experience," *Logos* 2 (1981), Smith notes, "In addition to all the *contents* of experience – persons, objects, situations, events, thoughts, relations – it is essential to notice that experience embraces *contexts* as well in the form of purposes and standpoints through which reality [or being] is received and interpreted. For these purposes and standpoints [might be identified by] . . . the term dimensions, meaning thereby to indicate the major frames of meaning" in and through which reality or being is encountered and articulated (9; compare *Experience and God*, 36–42). Given the actual history of Western metaphysics, what above all else must be underscored is that the differential perspective of the theoretical inquirer, especially when this perspective is taken to be that of an aloof spectator, is but one perspective among various other frames or dimensions.

Being has come to be articulated in these works in singularly arresting and seemingly inexhaustible ways, such that virtually every generation can profit from reading these texts anew. In our inexorable drive to go beyond our intellectual ancestors, we are paradoxically always engaged in the frustrating and exhilarating task of simply catching up to them. This is nowhere more evident and inescapable than in our efforts to plumb the depths of being.

III

Philosophy is akin to poetry, not least of all in its perennial struggle to give human voice to what so effectively resists anything remotely approximating adequate articulation.[34] In this struggle, however, monumental utterances have taken persuasive shape and exerted immense influence. They are among the most important ways in which being has manifested and yet manifests itself to us. The more directly experiential, less symbolically dependent forms of phenomena need as much to be squared with these textual monuments as these symbolic utterances need to be squared with the most forceful disclosures of our direct experience.

One of the more recent experiments in ontology deserving to be seen as such a monument is not so much a single work or even a clearly unified doctrine as it is, in truth, a series of experiments connected by a sustained commitment to offering a compelling articulation of a categoreal scheme of deep-cutting and far-reaching significance. For those of you who know my work, it will come as no surprise that I am here referring to the efforts of Charles S. Peirce to formulate such a scheme.[35]

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[34] To anticipate the conclusion of my paper, let me note here that the expression "human voice" in this immediate context is being deliberately used as an echo of famous lines in Wallace Stevens's "Chocorua to its Neighbors." The title of this poem refers to the mountain where William James had his summer home (the one described in a letter to his sister Alice: "Oh, it's the most delightful house you ever saw; has 14 doors, all opening outside"). It was here that James died. Chocorua is, especially for one as interested in American philosophy and poetry as I am, a place with "momentous ties"; George Santayana, *Reason in Art*, vol. 4 of *The Life of Reason*, (New York: Collier, 1962).

[35] Since this essay was given as the Presidential Address to the Metaphysical Society of America, and since such an occasion allows a personal remark such as this, I have not deleted this and similar remarks in the published version of my address.

Indeed, I know of no better first step toward an adequate account of the most pervasive features of reality than Peirce's doctrine of categories. In one place, Peirce describes this doctrine as "the vestibule of the labyrinth."[36] Yet I take the function of Peirce's categories to be mainly heuristic: over the long course of his intellectual life (1839–1914), they were designed and modified, above all else, as guides and goads to investigation.[37] While they owe their origin (at least) partly to phenomenology, they owe their value mostly to the fecundity resulting from their deployment in quite diverse fields of empirical inquiry.[38] Two of the fields in which one can discern this function are cosmology and metaphysics. It should be recalled that metaphysics no less than cosmology is, for Peirce, a distinct field of empirical inquiry: metaphysical investigation is not the work of transcendent reason but that of experimental intelligence in its continuously renewed efforts to do justice to the disclosures of our experience. Regarding this or any other branch of investigation, Peirce's categories were designed to direct and animate the work of experimental intelligence. But, in stressing the heuristic and methodological role of Peirce's categories, I am not in the least precluding their cosmological or ontological status. There can be no question that, in his writings, Peirce's categories appear in cosmological and ontological (not merely heuristic) guise. Indeed, Peirce's guess at the riddle of the cosmos encompasses his insistence upon acknowledging absolute chance, brute actuality, and evolving lawfulness as the defining features of the empirical universe.[39] But, logically prior to this cosmological conjecture regarding the most fundamental constituents of the universe,[40] there is Peirce's ontological doctrine concerning the most pervasive features of reality

[36] *CP*, 2.79.

[37] For an elaboration of this thesis see my "A lantern for the feet of inquirers: The heuristic function of the Peircean categories," *Semiotica* 136, no. 1 (2001): 201–16.

[38] "There is," as Richard J. Bernstein notes in *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), "a descriptive, empirical, pragmatic temper in Peirce's use of the categories. The 'proof' or, more accurately, the adequacy of the categories is to be found in the ways in which Peirce uses them to illuminate fundamental similiarities and differences in everything we encounter" (178).

[39] See, for example, Peirce's "A Guess at the Riddle," in *CP*, 1.354–416 (esp. 1.400–14). The critical edition of this text can be found in *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, vol. 6 (1886–1890), ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 166–210; also in *The Essential Peirce* 1:245–79.

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(that is, the Peircean categories in their distinctly ontological guise). These categories are allegedly applicable not only to the actual universe disclosed in the diverse modes of human experience but also to any imaginable order, at least insofar as such an order might be identified and described by us.[41]

By attributing this scope to his categories, Peirce is in effect providing the means by which we can delineate differences and likeness between what is and what might be. This is, however, misleading insofar as it suggests what is must be defined in opposition to, rather than inclusive of, what might be. To pursue this at present would force us to jump ahead of our story. Hence, allow me at this juncture to focus on Peirce's categories precisely as categories of being, where the elaboration of them in this guise drives us ultimately to consider such topics as the relationship between possibility and actuality, though it initially forces us to attend somewhat minutely to the traits of whatever might be accorded being, in virtually any of its intelligible senses.

Whatever is, in whatever way, must be discriminable from whatever else does or might exist. Given that existence is not the sole

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[40] It is instructive to recall that, in Peirce's own mind, his philosophy was intimately connected with his cosmology, so much so that he went so far as to assert: "my philosophy may be described as the attempt of a physicist to make such conjecture as to the constitution of the universe as the methods of science may permit, with the aid of all that has been done by previous philosophers. . . . The best that can be done is to supply a hypothesis [a guess at the riddle of the universe], not devoid of all likelihood, in the general line of growth of scientific ideas, and capable of being verified or refuted by future observers" (*CP*, 1.7). The ideas of absolute or objective chance, primordial or thoroughgoing evolution, and genuine or irreducible continuity seemed to him especially ones "in the general line of growth of scientific ideas." Hence, *tychism* (his doctrine of absolute chance), *synechism* (his doctrine of irreducible continuity), and evolutionism were central to his vision of the cosmos.

[41] In "Charles S. Peirce: Community and Reality," (*Themes in American Philosophy: Purpose, Experience and Community* [New York, Harper & Row, 1970], 80–108) John E. Smith has criticized Peirce for not wresting himself free enough of "that modern tradition in philosophy according to which the key to *being* is found through *being known*" (104). That is, "Peirce seems to have underestimated the differential character of the controlled, theoretical inquiry that is to issue in the real truth about things" (108). This is hardly an unjust charge. But, just as Peirce's theory of signs, while crafted to offer the indispensable means for articulating a normative account of objective inquiry, offers the tools for investigating virtually all other human uses of signs, so his approach to being, while unnecessarily limited by his dominant preoccupations (especially his interest in science), overspills the restrictive confines of his predominant concerns.

mode of being, it would be more exact to say whatever is, in whatever way, must be discriminable from whatever else is or might be, in whatever mode or manner of being these others possess. Whatever is stands in relation to what it is not (what is other than it) and does so in a manner bearing upon what it actually is. Peirce's most abstract name for this mode of being is secondness. Peirce explains his use of this term in this way: secondness categorizes a being in reference to otherness or alterity, a one (or first) in relation to another (or second).[42] One of his most felicitous neologisms for this mode of being is "obsistence." The paradigm of obsistence is the emphatic manner in which physical objects forcefully react to one another, the brute collisions of material forces. At the heart of our experience is "a sense of compulsion, of a struggle between something within and something without."[43] Experience is, in its most rudimentary form, a phenomenon in which secondness or obsistence is predominant. It is a two-sided affair, involving the exertion of one thing upon another and the resistance by that other to this resistance.[44] In this form, experience is a direct, dyadic, and dynamic encounter of self and other. Again, in this form, the experiential encounter of sentient organism and encountered other approximates the existential relationship in its pure secondness, the brute actuality of one thing colliding with another. The encroachment of the other and the resistance to such encroachment lie at the center of experience.

Upon sustained, phenomenological reflection, experience not only is but also must be more than this, since it is a medium of disclosure and thus a site of intelligibility.[45] Moreover, experience must be more than either an encounter with otherness or a medium of disclo-

[42] There is good evidence that among Peirce's earliest efforts to articulate a doctrine of categories there are ones in which the threefold distinction among firstness, secondness, and thirdness is derived from the grammatical distinction of first, second, and third person pronouns (for example, "I," "you," and "it"). See, for example, Joseph Esposito, *Evolutionary Metaphysics: The Development of Peirce's Theory of Categories* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), 12.

[43] *CP*, 2.22.

[44] Peirce insists: "We can make no effort where we experience no resistance, no reaction" (*CP*, 2.84). The reverse is true, a point about which Peirce is explicit: "Effort supposes resistance. Where there is no effort there is no resistance, where there is no resistance there is no effort either in this world or any of the worlds of possibility" (*CP*, 1.320; compare 332).

[45] In *Experience and God* (in particular, in chapter 1, "The Recovery of Experience") Smith offers an especially accessible and useful account of experience conceived precisely as a medium of disclosure.

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[47] *CP*, 8.291.

sure, since it reveals itself to involve in every concrete instance a utterly unique assemblage of immediate qualities. The assemblage of such qualities has its own qualitative immediacy (or ineffable uniqueness).[46] Peirce's category of thirdness is designed to highlight whatever makes our experiences and indeed their disclosures sites of intelligibility. In contrast, his category of firstness is designed to call attention to the qualitatively immediate aspects of our experiential encounters and their diverse disclosures. Even in its most rudimentary form, intelligibility involves how this can be related to that in relation to yet other matters (including laws or regularities). For instance, how the event of a spark can be related to that of an explosion in reference to the properties of the materials involved and the dispositions inherent in such materials. But, whatever is, in whatever way it might be, is not a mere exemplification of a type or embodiment of qualities to be found elsewhere: it is something in itself, apart from all else (apart from not only the actual relationships in which it asserts its obsistent presence but also those complex relationships through which it can be interpreted, explained, or in some other way rendered intelligible).

The immediate object of direct experience has a paradoxical character in being the most concrete and a quite abstract affair. Any existent, as it is actually encountered in experience, is a this-here-now; in effect, it insists upon being acknowledged. It aggressively forces itself upon our attention. Indeed, the mode of being characteristic of the existent is inseparable from this insistence, this forcefulness. As experienced by us, however, this insistence is markedly an obsistence, "the active oppugnancy"[47] of what resists our exertions and, not infrequently, contravenes our expectations. Insistence and obsistence hence name the same phenomenon, but from opposite

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[46] Both as an interpreter of Peirce and as a philosopher in its own right, John Dewey throws much light on the qualitative dimensions partly constitutive of any human experience and, more broadly, of whatever is disclosed in such experience. See especially "Peirce's Theory of Quality" and "Qualitative Thought." The latter originally appeared in *Journal of Philosophy* 32 (December 1935): 701–8. It can also be found in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 11, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 86–94. "Qualitative Thought" first appeared in *Symposium* 1 (January 1930): 5–32. It can also be found in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 5, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 243–62.

[47] *CP*, 8.291.

sides of a dyadic relationship. The jagged edges and irresistible compulsions of our experiential encounters drive home to us the *hecceity*,[48] the sheer thisness, of what envelopes or inhabits us. In a sense, the experience of *hecceity* underwrites our conception of concreteness: our ideas and fancies, expectations and desires, seem to be ethereal and even inconsequential in their inability to hold their ground against the puncture of such edges or the pressure of such compulsions. However we define concrete reality, our definition should accord a prominent place to obsistent otherness (or active oppugnancy).

If we take, however, the immediate object of direct experience to be simply the sheer thisness of an obsistent other—that is, if we take some this-here-now in utter abstraction from all else—we have mistaken an abstract, because abstracted, existent for the most concrete of realities. We have committed what Whitehead calls "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness."[49] The dyadic relations between this and that, here and there, now and then, are not the only and often not the most important relations in and through which others are encountered in our experience. Immediately dyadic relations are, in themselves, irreducibly singular ones providing no basis for prediction or, of at least equal weight, retrodiction.[50] To take a very simple example, this chair here and now is, for virtually all practical purposes, the same as the one perceived in another place at an earlier time. In general, some notion of continuity must be invoked in order to make sense out of both the process of experience itself and what is encountered in this process, out of the tangled course of our experiential processes and also what these processes reveals about our world and our selves. Indeed, experience is itself a continuum disclosive of myriad forms of continuity. The disjointed, ruptured, and fragmentary character of so much of our experience is itself only possible on the supposition that, to some extent, experience is a continuum.

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[48] Peirce's use of this term signals his indebtedness to John Duns Scotus. In general, he thought that philosophers had much to learn by opening "the dusty folios of the scholastic doctors" (*CP*, 1.15). In particular, he supposed the subtle doctor to be an exemplary practitioner of philosophical investigation. One of the reasons prompting this assessment directly concerns the nature of our own inquiry: "The great object of the metaphysics of Duns Scotus is so to state the results of ordinary experience, that it shall not close any positive experimental inquiry, or pronounce anything positively observable to be *a priori* impossible" (*CP*, 7.395).

[49] See especially *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), chap. 3, esp. 50–1; also *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 18.

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The very course of experience is propelled in no small measure by the activity of signs (what Pierce called "semiosis").[51] This can be readily seen, typically this is related to that only in reference to something other than either this or that, and since what serves to conjoin otherwise disparate affairs functions as a sign. Whatever functions as a sign, however, is one. Accordingly, the very structure of experience might arguably be identified with that of semiosis, since this structure results from the complex interplay of past, present, and future wherein the variable relationships among these temporal dimensions ineluctably take the form of object, sign, and interpretant.[52] For example, the present interprets the past to the future. In addition, the future emerges in such a way as to demand at present a reinterpretation

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[50] What William James, in *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), calls "retroactive legislation" (107) pertains to this point. So too does what Abraham Drassinower, in *Freud's Theory of Culture: Eros, Loss, and Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), calls "retrospective resignification" (see, for example, 79; also 93). Finally, Michael S. Roth, in *Psycho-Analysis as History: Negation and Freedom in Freud* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), uses "retrodiction" in the sense to which I am calling attention here. The capacity to predict what will take place is undeniably an extremely important human achievement. The capacity, however, to make sense of the present by narrating the ways this present encompasses the significance of the past—in a word, the capacity of retrodiction—is an equally important human achievement. The challenge of doing so convincingly is no less than that of making reliable predictions. The history of philosophy and, in particular, that of metaphysics is, in my judgment, inseparable from our continuously renewed efforts to make convincing sense of our philosophical present by narrating the historical emergence of this particular present from a long history. It is not incidental or insignificant that one of the greatest contributions to first philosophy, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, contains a narration of the history leading up to his own endeavors.

[51] *CP*, 5.473, 484, 488–9. For the critically edited form of this text, see chap. 28 ("Pragmatism") of *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 2 (1893–1913), ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

[52] In his major contribution to metaphysics, *Experience and Nature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), John Dewey offers an intriguing suggestion bearing directly upon this matter. There he intriguingly suggests: "Qualitative individuality and constant relations, contingency and need, movement and arrest are common traits of all existence. This fact is source both of values and their precariousness; both of immediate possession which is causal and of reflection which is a precondition of secure attainment and appropriation. Any theory that detects and defines these traits [and Dewey identifies metaphysics with such a theory] is therefore but a ground-map of the province of criticism, establishing base lines to be employed in more intricate triangulations" (308–9). The intricate triangulations among the three dimensions of temporal flux are, I suggest, a specific example of what Dewey has in mind in making this suggestion.

of the past. That is, the conflict between our prior and eventual understanding generates what is most likely the characteristic form of human learning, a form memorably articulated by G. W. F. Hegel: "We learn by experience that we meant something other than we meant to mean; and this correction compels us to go back . . . and understanding it [our prior take] in some other way."[53]

Though one might quarrel with aspects of these suggestions regarding how to conceive experience itself as a process of semiosis, this much seems certain: in our experience, the dyadic relation of obsistent confrontation is interwoven with triadic relations of immanent intelligibility. The direct, dyadic, and dynamic aspect of experience is, in the concrete actuality of our lived experience, inseparable from the mediated, triadic, and transuasive dimensions of this continuum. In brief, experience is a direct yet mediated encounter with, for the most part, those salient features of our proximate environment we are, by virtue of our histories, disposed to discern.

To conceptualize the flux of our experience is, according to thinkers such as William James and Henri Bergson, to render discrete and static what is inherently continuous and fluid (or dynamic). Conceptual mediation appears on their overlapping accounts to disfigure, perhaps beyond recognition, the seamless continuity of immediate experience. In contrast to such an evaluation of mediation, conceptual and otherwise, Hegel and Peirce contend articulation is a bid for, not a lapse from, concreteness. Concreteness is not so much given in immediate perception as it is won by the diverse forms of symbolic mediation to which our lived experience does more than passively lend itself.[54] Our lived experience drives toward diverse articulation in different media (compare Smith). There is, however, a sense in which concreteness is given, ordinarily a vivid yet vague sense. Thus, it is helpful to distinguish especially between concreteness in its firstness (in its qualitative immediacy) and in its thirdness (the form it takes as a result of our ongoing efforts to render what we have encountered in experience more fully related and adequately mediated than our initial characterizations of immediate experience even remotely intimate). Concreteness is both a gift and a task, something from which we commence by the graciousness of forces other than us and some-

[53] *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 31.

[54] See, for example, James's *Pragmatism*, 121; also his *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 211.

thing toward which we move by our own exertion, imagination, and persistence.

In "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation," John E. Smith argues "articulation is not alien to Being" or, stated positively, "articulation is integral to Being."[55] In the sense intended by him, articulation is conjoined to a primordial, pervasive feature of being itself, what Smith calls "expression."[56] After identifying being with power, he connects power with insistence, persistence, and expression.[57] My inclination is to take up this suggestion, but in a way more closely allied to Peirce's attempt to delineate, in light of his categories, the features of being as power. This involves adding to Smith's list in one respect but subtracting from it in another. There is a sense in which firstness is absent from his list, though a sensitivity to this category of being informs and indeed animates the whole of his discussion. Hence, I am inclined to add firstness as a mark of being. Moreover, there is a sense in which both persistence and expression, precisely as Smith defines these terms, are exemplifications of thirdness. For persistence and expression are both instances of continuity. Accordingly, what I propose as the marks of being are ipseity, alterity, and continuity. In their own firstness, these terms are being used to evoke phenomenologically ubiquitous features of whatever is, in whatever way. But, in their thirdness (in their open-ended significance), these terms are best seen as rubrics under which a continuously widening array of discriminable traits are properly subsumed (for example, the traits of persistence and expression under the rubric of continuity). Despite my alteration of Smith's categoreal distinctions, my aim is the same as his—above all, to render somewhat plausible the claim regarding expression as integral to being.

Firstness, the most elusive of Peirce's categories,[58] is in several important respects, especially in this context, the most important.

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[55] Smith, "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation," 595, 605.

[56] Compare *Modes of Thought*, chap. 2 ("Expression").

[57] Ibid., 597.

[58] In "A Guess at the Riddle," he notes, "the conception of the absolutely first eludes every attempt to grasp it" (*CP*, 1.362). He also notes here: "The idea of second must be reckoned as an easy one to comprehend": it is "eminently hard and tangible." The category of secondness is indeed "very familiar" since "it is forced upon us daily; it is the main lesson of life." Whereas in youth everything seems absolutely fresh and we ourselves feel boundlessly free, "limitation, conflict, constraint, and secondness generally, make up the teaching of experience." In contrast the ease with which this category can be comprehended, that of firstness "is so tender that you cannot touch it without spoiling it" (*CP*, 1.358).

This category designates what anything is in itself, apart from all else (hence, my proposal to use "ipseity" as a name for firstness in its role as a category of being). Peirce's categories in both their separateness and interconnection might be described as central to his efforts to counteract the forms of reductionism seemingly underwritten by the dramatic successes of the physical sciences (and this from a thinker who identified himself as having physicistic prejudices[59]). Consequently, firstness might be seen as a protest against the tendency to reduce any being whatsoever to a nexus of relationships such that the being in question is not anything in itself apart from these relationships. Whatever we encounter in experience or merely conjure in imagination is akin to a dream, insofar as it exhibits a qualitative immediacy and ineffable uniqueness inviting recognition but resisting articulation. In "Experience," R. W. Emerson identifies the most unhandsome part of the human condition in terms perhaps relevant to our understanding of this category. "I take," he writes there, "this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition."[60] Being is always in some respect mercury in the mind's hands: the more pressure our conceptual fingers expend in their efforts to hold being firmly in their clutch, the more lubricious it proves to be. The haunting sense of "ever not quite"[61] and "ever not yet" upon which William James insists points to the lubricity of being,

[59] *CP*, 6.322.

[60] This is a text from Emerson's "Experience," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 288. See Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[61] One of the many places in which James uses this expression is "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" (1898), the essay so important for calling Peirce to the attention of the philosophical world and, beyond this, for effectively launching the pragmatic movement. It is appropriate to note here that, in this paper, James asserted: "Philosophers are after all like poets. They are pathfinders. What every one can feel, what every one can know in the bone and marrow of him, they sometimes find words for and express. The words and thoughts of the philosophers are not exactly the words and thoughts of the poets – worse luck. But both alike have the same function. They are, if I may use a simile, so many spots, or blazes – blazes made by the axe of the human intellect on the trees of the otherwise trackless forest of human experience"; *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 346–7.

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the quality so tender as to be destroyed by our touch. One irony here is that one of the traditional concepts used for articulating the most concrete and basic of realities (being in itself) is employed by Peirce to designate the most evanescent and elusive aspect of any being whatsoever.

As a category of being, alterity or secondness is (as already noted) "not mere twoness but active oppugnancy."[62] It is the mark of a being insofar as that being stands in opposition to beings other than itself. As a mark of being, then, alterity is appropriately designated as opposition or obsistence.

As a category of being, continuity or thirdness brings into focus the field of relations in which anything whatsoever is either always already implicated or ever open to participation. This field of enfolded but also outreaching relations, many of which are more complex than dyadic relations of action and reaction, effort and resistance, offers the means by which to evaluate the reliability of at least some of our predictive and retrodictive signs. The irreducibly triadic relationship illustrated in the seemingly simple act of human giving (an act not analyzable into anything simpler than a giver, gift, and recipient in conjunction with each other) is observable in some of the more complex forms of natural processes, such that these processes are in effect instances of semiosis (or sign-activity), quite apart from any conscious utterer or even any actual interpreter.

Insofar as substance is a way of calling attention to some temporally thick and causally efficacious continuum, there may be nothing problematic about our recourse to the category of substance.[63] While the natural world is not one continuous whole in which all things are intimately connected with (much less internally related to) one another, it is (to use David Weissman's illuminating terms) an incredibly complex affair of nested and overlapping continua.[64] Substantial identity as a uniquely identifiable temporal continuum is but one of the

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[62] *CP*, 8.291.

[63] See Vincent Potter, *Peirce's Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), chap. 7 ("Peirce on 'Substance' and 'Foundations'"). Also, my *Peirce's Approach to the Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 81–2, 86; Kory Spencer Sorrell, *Representative Practices: Peirce, Pragmatism and Feminist Epistemology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004). Finally, Andrew Reck's Presidential Address to the MSA, "Being and Substance," *Review of Metaphysics* 31, no. 4 (June 1978), is a helpful treatment of this thorny topic.

[64] Though he uses this terminology in a number of places, my own thinking has been influenced by how he employs it in *Social Ontology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) to elaborate these important features of dynamic systems.

more salient forms of the overlapping and nested continua disclosed in our experience and designated by various modes of expression.

In his *Autobiography*, Charles Darwin recalls "Professor Sedgwick, etc.":

> This tour was of decided use in teaching me how to make out the geology of a country. Sedgwick often sent me on a line parallel to his, telling me to bring back specimens of the rocks and to mark the stratification on a map. I have little doubt that he did this for my own good, as I was too ignorant to have aided him. On this tour I had a striking instance on how easy it is to overlook phenomena, however conspicuous, before they have been observed by any one. We spent many hours in C'wm Idwal, examining all the rocks with extreme care, as Sedgwick was anxious to find fossils in them. But neither of us saw a trace of the wonderful glacial phenomena all around us; we did not notice the plainly scored rocks, the perched boulders, the lateral and terminal moraines. Yet these phenomena are so conspicuous that, as I declared in a paper published many years long afterwards in the *Philosophical Magazine* [1842], a house burnt down by fire did not tell its story more plainly than did this valley.[65]

Glacial formations and fossilized remains of individuals representing extinct species tell a story no less than a house burnt down by fire or the clues unwittingly left by the burglar. Each one of these tells its story by virtue of the enfolded and outreaching relations, some of which are already in place and many of which remain to be instituted or established, constituting some distinctive field within the natural world (that is, some nested and overlapping network of continua, events, and qualia).

Emerson describes language as "fossil poetry."[66] But, conversely, we might describe fossils as lithic poems. The stories told by rock formations no less than those told by burnt houses, clearly apart from any intent on the part of either these sedimented structures or ruined

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[65] Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography and Selected Letters*, ed. Francis Darwin (New York: Dover, 1958), 25–6. I am indebted to Robert Frodeman for not only reminding me of this wonderful passage in Darwin's *Autobiography* but also connecting it explicitly with the Peircean understanding of semiosis extending to the telltale signs unintentionally formed in natural processes far removed from animal communication. He did so in a talk entitled "The Philosophy of (Field) Science" (The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, 29 February 2003). In *The Problem of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), Josiah Royce makes (as John Smith reminded me) a similar claim regarding the Grand Canyon: "Its walls record, in their stratification, a vast series of long-past changes" (2:146).

[66] "The Poet," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays*, 271.

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[68] See ibid.

edifices to provide the pieces of any narrative, are more than ungrounded projections of the human imagination. The preserved forms of primeval speech (any human language precisely insofar as it still is fossil poetry) no less than the lithic poems of fossilized remains are also more than such projections. They are truly inscriptions in a field of articulation in whose movements and rhythms we are, apart from awareness or intention, caught up.[67] Their intelligibility, at least, as often outstrips our intelligence as does our intelligence grasp their significance. But the grasp of the meaning of these inscriptions intimates that we are always already caught up in the hearing and indeed the enactment of stories and poems having their origin in processes antedating our lives and exertions, our awareness and contrivances (including the means by which we contrive to wrest meaning from these inscriptions). There is unquestionably a crucial sense in which our minds and the meanings on which they sustain themselves are achievements. There is, however, an equally important sense in which minds and meanings are parts of an inheritance, initially having the status of a gift rather than an accomplishment. The categories of Peirce help us to see that all of the meanings we make are part of processes of articulation having origins and outcomes far transcending human comprehension or purpose.[68] If experience is to be trusted at all, ours is a world of luminous qualities in all their infinite richness and one of brute actualities in all their ubiquitous pressure. But ours is also a world of enveloping—and indeed evolving—intelligibility. At the very least, then, Peirce's categories are resources for bringing just these three facets of our world into clear, steady focus.

The human animal is, at once, a unique site of such evolving intelligibility (in our physiological structure, for example, a long history is inscribed) and a self-conscious, self-directed agent for whom such processes as the interpretation of signs, the narration of events, and the conduct of inquiry can be undertaken in a self-critical, self-controlled manner. In light of this, any account of any scheme of

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[67] See my "Marking Distinctions and Making Differences: Being *As* Dialectic," in *Being and Dialectic: Metaphysics as a Cultural Presence*, ed. William Desmond and Joseph Grange (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 37.

[68] See ibid.

categories aiming at the degree and kind of intelligibility historically associated with metaphysics must include a portrait, however sketchy, of the being offering such an account. Indeed, the only humanly adequate form of metaphysics is one in which the portrait of the metaphysician (the being who is able not only to undertake the questioning of being but also to be ceaselessly subjected itself to the interrogations of being and indeed the other forms of address so deeply woven into the fabric of our experience) makes sense within the account of the universe being articulated. As Naomi Scheman suggests, there is in philosophy the demand that the "the world is my world, that it makes sense to me," but also "that I make sense in it, that I inhabit it with others who are intelligible to me and to whom I am intelligible."[69] Striving to speak in a human voice entails speaking about the world in such a way that speech and other forms of articulation are not effectively rendered impossible, in such a way that whatever is claimed to be the ultimate constitution of the empirical world is hospitable to the emergence of sign-using and eventually symbol-making beings. On my account, at least, our modes of articulation count heavily against supposing the muteness of being. Put posi-

[69] "Forms of life: mapping the rough ground," in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. Hans Sluga and David G. Stern (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 401. Some of the essays in William James's *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, especially "The Sentiment of Rationality," in effect argue just this point: we demand a world in which our energies and exertions, our actions and struggles, have an intelligible place. Finally, the all too ignored American philosopher John William Miller in *The Midworld of Symbols* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982) makes this point with characteristic force when he asserts: "[T]here is no escaping an account of the world that can include the utterances, the affirmations, and denials that permit any world to be intelligible" (129). "The person, utterance, and the world become," for him, "inseparable" (70). What he is "unwilling to say is, 'There is the world, and here are the signs'" and symbols by which we articulate the world (191). No wedge is to be driven between articulation and being. But, as Miller notes in *The Paradox of Cause* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), "what we must have is then to be not only our own, but also a world" (118). What manifests itself in our various modes of articulation is an enveloping, (to some extent) sustaining, and hazardous order transcending anything yet articulated. In *The Fateful Shapes of Human Freedom: John William Miller and the Crises of Modernity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), I explore these points in detail.

tively, we are articulate animals for the most part because our histories have adapted us to be such creatively responsive beings: our capacity for articulation can itself be read as a sign of nothing less than the eloquence of being.[70] To speak in a human voice, then, involves accrediting human utterance with ontological weight and, in turn, acknowledging the possibility that whatever we encounter is expressive in ways we are able only crudely to discern. In brief, it involves speaking in such a way that human speakers are not ontological anomalies: they make sense in the world as it is being articulated by them.

IV

Against such an ontological backdrop as the one just present, hence, allow me to sketch very briefly my understanding of the psyche, of the being who is ineluctably caught up in the work of articulation, because of the psyche's being so creatively responsive to what is astir around and inside it. At the conclusion of the chapter in *Modes of Thought* devoted to "Expression," a chapter to which this address owes a great deal, Whitehead states: "the mentality of mankind and the language of mankind created each other. If we like to assume the rise of language as a given fact, then it is not going too far to say that the souls of men are the gift from language to mankind."[71] He adds, "The account of the sixth day [of creation] should be written, He [God] gave them speech, and they became souls."[72] On this account, we become souls by virtue of our acquisition of and reliance on language. We might even say that ψυχή is the offspring of βίος and λόγος, though the terms λόγος and *language* must be taken in a much broader sense than is customary. The sense in which λόγος is used in opposition to μῦθος is not in the least the most appropriate one in this context, for there is an encompassing sense in which λόγος includes μῦθος as one of its irreducible forms and it is just this inclusive sense which is most relevant to my claim regarding ψυχή. Aristotle's most

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[70] For a development and defense of this, see my "Expression: A tentative formulation of an ontological category," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 53, no. 4 (1997): 515–27.

[71] *Modes of Thought*, (New York: Free Press, 1968), 40–1.

[72] Ibid., 41.

systematic account of being, at least as we have inherited it, very early assumes the form of a narrative in which the views of his predecessors are recollected. It would certainly be an exaggeration to say that Aristotle's account of being opens with a story of what his predecessors said about being, but not too much of one, since he so quickly turns to their experiments in articulation as a way of orienting his own discussion. In general, λόγος appears at critical junctures to assume the form of μῦθος. Humans are not only story-telling animals; also our psyches are a nexus of narratively inherited, modified, and renegotiated roles, in all their nested and overlapping complexity.

If ψυχή is indeed the offspring of βίος and λόγος (as Whitehead's suggestion might be taken to imply), the meaning of λόγος must be taken in a broad, metaphorical sense, though that of βίος might be taken in a more restricted, literal meaning. That is, it is imperative either to take λόγος, as (for example) Peirce, Cassirer, and Langer do, as a term covering the entire range of human symbolization (art and ritual as much as language and, more narrowly still, argumentation) or to find another term by which to designate this range. The explanatory and evidential uses of language, narrowly conceived, covers only a small segment of a vast spectrum. The articulation of being is undertaken not only with diverse motives but also in different media, though the dominant bias of Western philosophy has tended to be one of privileging linguistic articulation in its theoretical forms.

Martin Heidegger, John Dewey, John Herman Randall, Jr., and others have alerted us to the ways and the extent to which this bias distorts our understanding. They have helped us to see how insistently the question of being has been addressed principally in reference to the differential perspective of the theoretical inquirer and, thus, how compulsively this question has been considered mainly in terms of being known.[73] The distinct yet overlapping contexts in which our encounters with and articulations of being, however, take place are not, in their broad outlines much less than in their defining features, reducible to the highly specialized context of controlled inquiry. Moreover, too often our conception of articulation has been

[73] I intend the psychoanalytic connotations associated with compulsion, for what I observe in Western ontology in this particular respect is something approximating a repetition compulsion.

uncritically restricted to the forms of articulation made possible by language in a somewhat narrow sense. Accordingly, ritual and arts other than literary ones are unfairly slighted in their ontological bearing.

Being is not exhausted by what can be known from the sophisticated perspective of the theoretical investigator, nor is articulation limited to what can be expressed in language. Ours is not only a sign-using but also a symbol-making mind (Susanne Langer thus refers to the mind of humans as "symbolific");[74] and this capacity points to a complex inheritance by which a quite unique form of animal life transforms itself into an expressive power of unlimited reach.[75] There are, however, countless (manifest as well as hidden) continuities between this expressive power and the incipient expressions manifest virtually at every scale of observation and in every more or less distinct frame of encounter and articulation.[76] The expressiveness integral to being is only one facet of being,[77] along with the lubricity and obsistence of being. Emphasis upon and indeed celebration of this expressiveness in no way eliminate the ineffable and irrational aspects of whatever we encounter, in whatever manner and context. The qualitatively

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[74] One place where this is found in her writings is in *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 51.

[75] This recalls the trope used by Whitehead, noted at the outset of this paper. Recall that, for him, the self is a route of inheritance. The human self in its present actuality is, at once, an inheritor of a determinate past and a benefactor of an indeterminate future.

[76] Once again, the insights of John E. Smith are extremely useful for delineating the most crucial features of human experience. In "Philosophical Interpretation and the Religious Dimension of Experience," *Logos* 2 (1981), he notes: "In addition to all the *contents* of experience – persons, objects, situations, events, thoughts, relations – it is essential to notice that experience embraces *contexts* as well in the form of purposes and standpoints through which reality is received and interpreted. For these purposes and standpoints I use the term dimension, meaning thereby to indicate the major frames of meaning in which reality comes to us" (9). In the history of metaphysics, theoria has been accorded undue and, often, undetected privilege as the most authoritative frame of meaning. Following Dewey, John Herman Randall, Jr., Smith and others, I am trying here to counteract this tendency.

[77] See my "Expression: A tentative formulation of an ontological category."

unique and brutally oppositional aspects of whatever manifests itself to and through us are as integral to it as is the vast network of evolving connections on which prediction and retrodiction so utterly depend. The haunting elusiveness of firstness and the rude shocks of secondness are one with the always unfinished mediations of thirdness. Lubricity, obsistence, and intelligibility are marks of being, at least when we take the disclosures of our experience in their diverse contexts with the cultivated naiveté these disclosures deserve,[78] and also when we accord our experiments in articulation, in all of their variety, the ontological relevance these diverse experiments likewise deserve. The marks of being are nothing other than those traits (especially the ubiquitous or, at least, the most general traits) by which any being we encounter in experience can be identified or described (ranging from our simplest ostensive designations—"*This* chair *here*!"—to our most elaborate theoretical articulations). Expression is among these traits, for being is inherently, irrepressibly, ceaselessly expressive. Human speech is, on this telling, not the only articulate sound in a senseless universe. It is rather the prolongation and intensification of energies and processes far outrunning human awareness or control. It is far less a bounded locus than a self-transcending history interesting with other such histories (for example, that of the human species and also that of the particular culture in which any human animal is inevitably reared).

We are no more imprisoned in language or our other modes of symbolization than we are imprisoned in our bodies. The biological inheritance of the body not only makes possible the gift of speech and

[78] In *Experience and Nature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), John Dewey writes: "An empirical philosophy is . . . a kind of intellectual disrobing. We cannot permanently divest ourselves of the intellectual habits we take on and wear when we assimilate the culture of our time and place. But intelligent furthering of culture demands that we take some of them off [that is, they we critically distance ourselves from some of our modes of experience and articulation], that we inspect them critically to see what they are made of and what wearing them does to us. We cannot achieve recovery of primitive naïveté. But there is attainable a cultivated naïveté of eye, ear and thought, one that can be acquired only through the discipline of severe thought" (40).

other forms of symbolization but also is itself (quite apart from intention or consciousness) a medium of expression. The complex play of acquisition and expenditure, of inheritance and investment, involved in the distinctively human forms of symbolization shows how relatively stable forms and seemingly evanescent occurrences are the warp and woof of natural processes. If we take language as our paradigm in this one respect, then relatively stable forms are historically emergent though far from inherently immutable forms; moreover, seemingly inconsequential events can carry momentous consequences, for they can be critical points in generative processes at which radical transformations are initiated. The massive stability of linguistic forms is the largely unintended consequence of countless employments of these enduring forms; the iteration of the forms, however, always holds the possibility (however remote at a particular time) of far-reaching alterations. The processes in and through which forms acquire their identifying features and functions *are* ones in which the ceaselessly repeated iteration of relatively secure forms drives by its own force toward the transformation and not infrequently even the annihilation of these forms. One account of such processes (for example, that of Whitehead) invokes the ingression of eternal forms. Another story, however, rests content with the emergence of mutable forms, from the ground up, as it were. The generative processes observable in the natural world are, for those committed to this more or less Darwinian story of alterable forms, *Urphänomene* in a sense Ernst Cassirer borrowed from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.[79] They are phenomena behind which we cannot go; hence, Cassirer refers to them as *Basisphänomene.*[80] To appeal to principles of explanation that go behind these phenomena is to take fanciful flight from the experiential arenas in which our words and utterances alone convey meaning. The *Urphänomene* most relevant to this discussion are those vital processes in which symbolic factors play a transformative and indeed transfigurative role. It is by

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[79] *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 4, *The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

[80] Ibid., xviii.

appealing to these processes that we render them and all else explicable, insofar as they or anything else can be explained.

Stanley Cavell notes "the human effort to escape our humanness."[81] This is not necessarily an effort to be disparaged or ridiculed. It is a persistent drive, taking protean forms. This effort is, however, a drive about which one of the most forceful voices in American poetry has, in effect, written sternly:

> To say more than human things with human voice,
> That cannot be; to say human things with more
> Than human voice, that, also, cannot be;
> To speak humanly from the height or from the depth
> Of human things, that is acutest speech.[82]

Philosophical utterances can be instances of "acutest speech," but only if they tirelessly counteract our human effort to escape our humanness and effectively resist our desperate temptation to speak in more than human voice.[83] Herein lies yet another important respect in which the best of philosophy is akin to the best of poetry.[84] It provides us with this crucial reminder: like poetry, metaphysics at its best is never anything more than a continuous striving to speak in a human

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[81] *The New Yet Unapproachable America*, 87.

[82] Wallace Stevens, "Chocorua to Its Neighbors."

[83] Perhaps the most characteristic way in which philosophers have tried to speak in more than human voice is to attain absolute precision and apodictic certainty even in metaphysical discourse. Here Peirce offers a number of crucial correctives. Approximation is, he insists, the only fabric out of which philosophy can be woven (*CP*, 1.404). Even more pointedly, he claims: "The demonstrations of the metaphysician are all moonshine. The best that can be done is to supply a hypothesis" (*CP*, 1.7). In a letter to William James quoted in Ralph Barton Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. 2 (Boston: Boston, Little, & Brown, 1935), Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., confessed: "I think none of the philosophers sufficiently humble" (462). This lack of humility has all too often made the philosophical voice in human culture an all too inhuman voice. But one can, in a knowing, inhumane tone, denounce or, worse, ridicule those who struggle to escape their humanness, especially their finitude, historicity, and mortality. And, as James notes in "The Social Value of the College-Bred," in *Essays, Comments, and Reviews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), "By their tone are all things human either lost or saved" (111). Perhaps more than anything else, the human voice is lost or achieved by the tone in which it articulates its criticisms and affirmations.

voice about what is most intimately yet elusively familiar, everyday experience in its broadest reach and deepest import.[85] Neither ordinary language nor any extant technical vocabulary is adequate to the articulation of such experience, for such experience is itself (whether acknowledged as such or not) an articulation of nothing less than

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[84] Though Whitehead stresses this kinship, it might not seem appropriate for me to do so in a paper drawing so heavily on Peirce. But it is, in fact, quite appropriate. Because this side of Peirce is insufficiently noted, however, it is reasonable for readers (even ones familiar with Peirce's writings) to suppose otherwise. But I would strenuously argue that, even in the context of metaphysics (perhaps especially in this context), speaking in a Peircean voice does not preclude speaking in a poetic voice. Indeed, in response to the naturalist Georges Cuvier's claim that "Metaphysics is another name for Metaphor," he insists: "if Cuvier was only using a metaphor himself, and meant by metaphor broad comparison on the ground of characters of a formal and highly abstract kind," then metaphysics professes to be metaphor – that is just its merit – as it was Cuvier's own merit in Zoology" (*CP*, 7.590). Moreover, Peirce emphatically asserts: "[N]othing is truer than true poetry. And let me tell the scientific men that the artists are much finer and more accurate observers than they are, except of the special minutiae that the scientific man is looking for" (*CP*, 1.315). Artists no less than scientists draw distinctions and construct syntheses "in the interest of intelligibility." Herein lies a deep affinity between art (including poetry) and science (including philosophy), an affinity explicitly underscored by Peirce: "The work of the poet or novelist is not so utterly different from that of the scientific man. The artist introduces a fiction; but it is not [at least in the best art] an arbitrary one; it exhibits affinities to which the mind accords a certain approval in pronouncing them beautiful, which if it is not exactly the same as saying that the synthesis is true, is something of the same general kind" (*CP*, 1.383). The affinity between art and science is that both are engaged in modes of articulation ordained to exhibiting affinities and discerning differences. In the work of scientists, Peirce also appreciates the ineliminable role of metaphor in an irreducible sense (metaphor as a mode of utterance that cannot, without loss, be translated into a literal paraphrase). "The Universe as a argument is," according to him, "necessarily a great work of art, a great poem – for every fine argument is a poem and a symphony – just as every true poem is a sound argument" (*CP*, 5.119). On this topic, see Michael Raposa, *Peirce's Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); also Christopher Hookway, chap. 11 ("On Reading God's Great Poem") of *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism: Themes from Peirce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Finally, for a deep sensitivity to the aesthetic dimensions of Peirce's philosophical project, see Douglas R. Anderson, *Creativity and the Philosophy of C. S. Peirce* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987).

[85] According to Peirce, metaphysics as part of philosophy "limits itself to so much of truth as can be inferred from common experience" (*CP*, 1.184).

being. But, as such an articulation, our experience is inescapably truncated, inchoate, and unelaborated.[86] For the purpose of articulating more fully the disclosures of such experience, clues derived from extant philosophical vocabularies (for example, Peirce's categoreal scheme) can be illuminating. But these inherited terms are adequate only insofar as they are continuously reinterpreted and thereby creatively appropriated. In this way, they become integral parts of an ongoing effort to speak in a truly human voice—hence, an inescapably poetic voice—of that to which human experience gives its more primordial expression.[87]

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[86] There is inherent in human experience what Cassirer calls "symbolic pregnance" (*Prägnanz*), that which according to him gives, as John Michael Krois notes, in *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), form and fecundity to human expression in its irreducibly different modes (53). For Krois's illuminating exposition of this central notion in Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms, see pp. 52–62 of this study. But, above all, see chap. 5 ("Symbolic Pregnance") of part 2 of Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

[87] The original title of this address was "Mutable Forms and Generative Processes." But this is, in truth, the title of a paper yet to be written, one toward which this essay only gestures in its concluding section. A more accurate title is thus required. For this and other important suggestions, I am indebted to Kory Spencer Sorrell, who took pains to help me put this address into a form worthy of the journal founded by Paul Weiss, also the person most responsible for there being a Metaphysical Society of America! I am also indebted to comments on earlier draft offered by Douglas Anderson, Wes DeMarco, Brian Martine, Jorge Nobo, David Weissman, and above all John E. Smith.