
Andrew Reynolds's book is an important contribution to Peirce scholarship since it is devoted to understanding Peirce's metaphysical writings which have not yet had the same kind of approval as his work on symbolic logic and semiotics. Reynolds has tried to bring together as much of Peirce's work to cover the themes of irreversibility and evolution in cosmology. Reynolds has also attempted to dispel some of the technical details of the physics and statistics relevant to Peirce's metaphysics. Peirce's cosmology is possibly the most difficult feature of his philosophy since many concepts were not properly explained in Peirce's original writings. Reynolds' book explicates such concepts eloquently.

Peirce's evolutionary cosmology was his contribution to the outdated and ineffective metaphysical systems of Aristotle, Kant, Schelling, and Hegel. Most of the other metaphysical systems of the past were too abstract and nonexperimental for the antimetaphysical point of view that was prevalent in his time. The most important type of explanation was an evolutionary one. Lawful behavior is the result of a gradual tendency toward increasingly regular behavior displayed by nature. In Peirce's early cosmology, he believed that final causes are exhibited by the blind action of chance, of which the law of large numbers is an example. The laws of nature could not yield exact principles with exact necessity. This was Peirce's criticism of necessitarianism.

Habit plays a fundamental role in Peirce's conception of the world since all regularities in the world are construed as habits acquired by the principle of universal evolution. Peirce believed that chance was an important part of the world. This point of view diverged from Darwin's which considered the notion of chance a mere façon de parler. Peirce's theory of evolutionary cosmology insists that the universe starts off as an unruly chaos of feeling that gradually becomes more orderly and regulated. Peirce needed some evidence that the universe would develop in a certain direction. The ultimate goal of inquiry and evolution is to develop a state of perfect harmony, regularity, order, and rationality which urges the mind forward in its struggle; thus, cosmic evolution is also
progressive and reversible. For Peirce, the universe should continue to become increasingly complex as a result of the law of habit until it becomes an absolutely perfect, rational, and symmetrical system.

Reynolds believes that there has been a dispute within Peircian scholarship between those who believe that his philosophy as a whole is inconsistent and those who argue that Peirce’s system is systematic and coherent. Reynolds is sympathetic with both groups of Peircian scholars, which gives him an opportunity to develop a middle ground among those scholars. Reynolds believes that Peirce’s philosophy is systematic although there are some tensions in his cosmological theory. There are two incompatible facets of Peirce’s philosophy: namely, his naturalism and transcendentalism. Peirce’s naturalistic tendency is part of the pragmatic and positivistic part of his doctrine since it is concerned with the clarification of ideas that ultimately led to empirical testability. Peirce’s transcendental tendency is metaphysical and is part of his evolutionary cosmology since it is speculative.

Much of the difficulty Peircian scholars experience arises from his realistic views and his anthropomorphic thesis that nature ought to display the rational features that are characteristic of human intelligence. Peirce’s view is antithetical with the modern attitude that the natural world is devoid of all human qualities. The modern scientific anti-metaphysical program implies that philosophers should not seek a deep understanding of the unobservable entities of the universe. Thus, Peirce did not believe that there was an incompatibility between his pragmatism and metaphysical cosmology since he believed that mental properties are a seamless continuum between spontaneous thought and matter. Peirce’s application of the scientific methods opened up a whole new field of experimental metaphysics.

Reynolds believes that there are two chief difficulties with Peirce’s cosmology: redundancy and incompatibility. However, Reynolds outlines these difficulties in detail throughout the book since he believes that they violate the logical principle of consistency of Peirce’s whole cosmologico-metaphysical system. These are difficult problems to address, and this may be one reason why Peircian cosmology has not been adequately researched or written about by scholars. Reynolds brings these issues to the
reader’s attention in the hope that other scholars will become interested in Peircian cosmology.

Reynolds’ account of Peirce’s metaphysical system will ease the understanding of some of Peirce’s most difficult scientific and metaphysical points, making Peirce’s philosophy accessible to the non-specialist unfamiliar with Peirce’s doctrines and theories. This book is open to a wide readership which can be recommended to scholars interested in Peirce as an historical figure, those interested in the philosophy of science, especially concerning the application of statistical and probabilistic thinking to physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and cosmology. Lastly, I recommend Reynolds’ book on Peirce because it is interesting and a joy to read which is admirable given the complexity of Peirce’s thought.

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Noel Boulting’s To Be or Not to Be Philosophical: A Triptree Inspector Decides proposes to give its readers an introduction to philosophical inquiry by examining issues of environmental aesthetics and ecological ethics which arise in an actual public inquiry into the creation of a landfill site. Boulting gives detailed accounts of the arguments which emerge in these proceedings, offering the reader an opportunity to witness and examine the friction which so often develops between social, environmental, and commercial interests.

Boulting charges his readers to consider how one might oppose such land developments without recourse to the all too popular not-in-my-back-yard argument. We are thus brought to the ethical problem of how we ought to conceive of our relationship with nature. The collapse of the egocentric point of view, Boulting points out, may too easily lead us to sever human interests from environmental ones. In this dualistic situation, we are forced to adopt either an anthropocentric stance, committing ourselves to purely human interests, or a non-anthropocentric stance, disregarding human interests altogether.