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# Pragmatism, Science and Theology

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## Pragmaticism, science and theology

**Abstract:** This review assesses Ashley and Deely's claims regarding the relation of science and religion, taking Einstein's famous statement that "science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind" as its starting point. It argues that Ashley and Deely's book *How Science Enriches Theology* demonstrates that the actual problem in the contemporary dialogue between the two seem to be whether the link between science and religion shall be based on an impersonal process spirituality arising from a void or on a personalism with a personal god at the source.

**Keywords:** evolution; perennial philosophy; philosophy of knowledge; process theology; semiotic transdisciplinarity

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It seems unreasonable to presume that empirical science alone can get at the whole truth, since not all of fundamental truth may be empirically knowable. Einstein famously said, "science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind" (1940: 2). Thus, acknowledging that science might not be able to answer all questions about life and the world does not constitute an abandonment of science. There are many good scientists who embrace the knowledge produced by science, while remaining open to the idea that there may be other ways of gaining knowledge about the world, and that empirical, observation-based science may not have every answer to every legitimate question and therefore needs to interact with philosophy and theology (Stenmark, 2004). The main point of this deep book by Ashley and Deely is to describe the possibility for an open science to enrich theology that is not fundamentalist when it comes to how the material processes of the world are set up, but is willing to listen to the results of science. Science on the other hand

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**Article note:** Ashley, Benedict and Deely, John N.: *How Science Enriches Theology*, South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2012, pp. 232, Hardback, ISBN: 1587313634.

must reflect on its own limitations when it comes to the meaning of life and the universe and how they are connected.

If science is a way of knowing the universe and how it works, then religion is a way of making sense of our relationship with the universe and all the other forms of living intelligence in this universe. If these are two sides of the same coin, then the coin is us, not the universe itself, and it raises the problem of who or what we are. An aspect of our body can be described by science in an evolutionary and ecological framework; but are we related to the universe in other ways than science can thus far describe? This view raises the problem that if science is not our foundation for solving all our problems of knowledge and meaning, then what is? There are many books and papers on the relationship between science and theology published over the last 50 years. This book is special in that its deliberations result from the meeting of a Thomist and a Peircean view.

There is no doubt that spiritual and religious knowledge surrounds all of our cultural worldviews as Habermas (2002) argues. This leaves the problem of how to negotiate a common platform that allows for both science and religion to work fruitfully together and at the same time conserve the ability to distinguish between each other. This is what Ashley and Deely's book is about.

Like Deely, I am fascinated by Peirce's attempt to encompass the divine in his thinking by way of a form of perennial philosophy (Brier, 2008) borrowed from Emerson and the American transcendentalists, combined with Peirce's logical and empirical scientific background (Brier, 2014a). Peirce makes mathematics and consciousness converge through his three category based semiotics, where logic is semiotic. Ashley and Deely argue that we know that reality is not a deterministic algorithm playing itself out because QM experiments are tied to the free will choice of a measurement chooser. But the concept of codes and signs has this choice element, since a code must be operated by a free will chooser. A language or code is simply a finite set of symbols with rules and freedom. The freedom in codes is what ensures they are not deterministic algorithms. But you cannot operate the free part of a code randomly or it will break down; there must be something else. That something is relation, which is impossible to establish between *res externa* and *res cogitans*. Where things in the outer world become "things in themselves" that cannot be known – as in Kant's philosophy – the possibility of scientific knowledge breaks down. Contrary to this view, Peirce's semiotics established the connection in a synechistic monism, where mind and matter are different ends of a continuum. This synechism is also the basis for Peirce's fallibilism and his objection to the idea of transcendental absolute mechanical laws governing the cosmogony. We do not have absolute knowledge. The laws are rather vague tendencies in the

beginning that become more and more rigid habits as the universe unfolds. Nature may not be mathematical in itself but we have created mathematical models that fit much of our empirical data.

But Ashley and Deely argue against monism, while arguing for monotheisms. As all matter-energy needs to be moving for us to see it, then there must be some Archimedes point from where it is moved, which is not matter. Thus monism fails to explain the world, they argue. Thus science and religion must agree on the point that the world is necessarily controlled to some degree or else there is completely chaos. For Peirce, the answer is in the tendency to take habits governed by evolutionary love. Furthermore, one can deduce that there can necessarily be only one controller or else there will be competition, strife and warfare, even among gods, which we see among the Nordic and the Olympic gods. Thus there is necessarily a transcendent monarch-like agent, be it Odin, Zeus, Brahma or God. That agent must be the infinite existence, consciousness, and bliss of which the world arises. Peirce writes: “The starting-point of the universe, God the Creator, is the Absolute First, the terminus of the universe, God completely revealed, is the Absolute Second; every state of the universe as a measurable point is the third” (CP 1.362).

In such an absolute transcendental idealism causation must be some kind of mental phenomenon and there must be some kind of top-down process or what is also called downward causation. All living beings, not just animals but plants and microorganisms, from the earliest forms down to the earliest bacteria, must be self-referring, self-reflexive.

Physics hopes to solve this through a unified theory of quantum mechanics and relativity theory – through string theory – but so far has not succeeded. It often ends up with a vacuum – a nothing ripe with potential energy and forms – from which the universe emerges. Ashley and Deely find that theory to be very much lacking as emptiness cannot be the cause of matter and movements. It has to be a personal God. Since, there cannot be more in the effect than in the cause, we can deduce something about the nature of the cause. Living systems that are aware, intelligent, and have learning capability are part of the effect and so are the conscious embodied language-driven humans. Thus the original cause must have intelligent awareness and (subjective?) consciousness! They therefore discharge pantheist explanations as there is no distinction between the divine creator and the world.

This is where I am fascinated by Peirce who, though he was a chemist, logician, and a philosopher, also attempted to encompass the divine in his thinking in a form of perennial philosophy borrowed from Emerson and the American transcendentalists. Peirce was against fundamentalism in religion as well as science. An important way to understand Peirce is his synechism.

According to this unbroken field view, there has to be some deep invisible connection between matter and mind. Peirce integrates chance as a foundational element in tychism and considers it a fundamental element of his metaphysics, viewing the basis of reality as a spontaneously generating field or force of possible existence of quale-consciousness. It is a level of pure potentialities, like the modern theoretical idea of the quantum vacuum field that is never at rest. I can see that the Peircean view goes some of the way to convening fruitfully with the religious view of basing reality on a divine subject in the form of a personal god, but departs when it comes to the basic concept of a divine transcendental subject and the creation of an almost infinite number of souls at the beginning of space-time. In Peirce's theory you cannot be transcendental and a personal subject at the same time. Here he is close to Eckhart who prays to God to make him free of God – in order to enter into a unity with the Godhead. There is this a distinction between the personal God and the transcendental Godhead.

Phenomenology attempts to localize and characterize what is common for all subjects and Peirce cultivates a special mathematical version of it that he calls phaneroscopy. It is the foundation for knowledge and science, but it is not a science in itself. This is the basis for most pure mysticism and the non-dual mysticism that seems to be the common ground of Shankara, Nargajuna, Meister Eckhart, and Emerson. Peirce's philosophy seeks a way to make this encompass what we have learned from science thus far without crossing the line into worshipping religion, since he avoids the personification of the divine and does not see telos as a conscious person's intention but rather as a sort of blind force of general love (Agapism). This is where I find Peirce to have developed Aristotle in that he incorporates a complex understanding of evolution, making Aristotle's philosophy part of a true semiotic process philosophy. In modern system science this is known as self-organization and autopoiesis. Peirce thought of his triadic philosophy as a kind of monism like the Christian trinity philosophy (Margerie, 1982). Peirce manages to stay within an enlarged view of science broadly understood. But his view of nature is bigger than science's view of nature. Peirce places his semiotics between Plato and Aristotle, adding modern scientific evolutionary theory inspired by Hegel's dialectics and finally integrating modern science.

But Ashley and Deely argue against the mystical non-dual view as a phenomenological monism that has the same lack of explanatory power as the materialist monism, since it cannot encompass the idea of a cause different from the substance of the world. Peirce, on the other hand, operates with emptiness, or a pure Zero as the origin of the world that is not defined negatively as the lack of content but positively as a potentiality in the form of a

Superorder of tychastic free chance operation dynamics which – like the quantum vacuum field with its free basic spontaneity of virtual particles – possesses the possibility of all the forms of the world as a tendency to take habits. Peirce's argument that the actual world is only one possibility of an eternal number of other worlds is very close to the present multiverse idea of physics.

If we then ask, "Why *this* world with *these* physical constants?" then the answer could be from the anthropic principle that it is because we are here as observers and that is only possible with these constants and habits. We do not know if there are other universes because they have not established such a basic relation between observers and universe. The observer is viewed by Peirce as a symbol and the universe as a huge argument – another form of symbol – in Peirce's monistic metaphysics, which is not pantheism, but panentheism (Hartshorne and Reese, 1953 and Raposa, 1989). Panentheism is a concept and classification that Ashley and Deely dismiss and do not seriously implement. Here the divine is both transcendent and immanent and therefore the dimensionless ground of all existence as impersonal awareness. Peirce was somewhat inspired by Buddhism (Bishop, 1981; Brier, 2014) and influenced by Emerson and the Concordia transcendentalists (CP 6.102). I believe – like Hartshorne and Reese (1953) – that Peirce has to be understood as a panentheist (Brier, 2014a). Hartshorne (1984) is also the torchbearer and developer of Peirce's suggestion of an agapistic Buddhisto-Christian process view of God. Thus Peirce's transcendental potential superorder is the transcendental aspect and the created world in Agapistic development and internal evolution is its living parts. His view is also inspired by Schelling (Ejsing, 2007), but on the other hand deeply integrated in the development of a non-mechanical modern logic and empirical science.

In much Western philosophy, people claim that we just have sensations, and we do not know if there is an external world. That is wrong-headed, because the representation *refers* to the world through a *name*. Our brain interprets consciousness in symbols embedded in models that we as a species agree upon. Peirce's logic of events regarded the present state of the universe as having been evolved from an original state of things in which there was "no compulsion and no law" (CP 6.217), and thus the rationale of its evolution was not limited to deductive logic, the only kind of inference that can be exact. But Peirce goes beyond this in saying:

It is true that the whole universe and every feature of it must be regarded as rational, that is as brought about by the logic of events. But it does not follow that it is constrained to be as it is by the logic of events; for the logic of evolution and of life need not be supposed to

be of that wooden kind that absolutely constrains a given conclusion. The logic may be that of the inductive or hypothetic inference. (CP 6.218)

Peirce is ahead of both Prigogine's non-equilibrium thermodynamics (Prigogine, 1996) and quantum theory. What the present book shows is that the actual problem in the dialogue these days seems to regard whether the link between science and religion shall be based on an impersonal process spirituality arising from a void (Nicolescu, 2014) or on a personalism with a personal god at the source. This applies not only for the Abrahamic religions on which this book focuses, but also for the Vedic and Buddhist religions (Peirce, 1893; Suzuki, 1957).

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## Bionote

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