INTRODUCTION

Negotiating the faults and merits of two excellent theologians could not be more in line with the heart of American pragmatism. The pragmatists understood their philosophy as a means for cutting off the chaff in order to ensure energy is spent discussing what truly matters. Focusing on Cobb and Neville amounts to cutting off classical substance theism as chaff. This point will be elaborated upon, but Cobb and Neville agree regarding its death. However, the ground-of-being tradition being creatively reconfigured by Neville is very much alive, as is Whitehead's process philosophy, championed theologically by Cobb. While certainly applying to Neville and Cobb, any ground-of-being or process theologian motivated by the pragmatists or Whitehead should be able to accept the following features of good philosophy and theology without trouble. Consistency with science is valued, often as an alternative to analytic philosophies of religion that comparatively downplay the role of experience and narrative forms of theology that deny the importance of dialogue with other disciplines. Beyond dialogue with other disciplines like science, dialogue with other religious traditions is not only valued by Cobb and Neville, but actually engaging in such dialogue should also lead to a positive embrace of religious pluralism. Such interdisciplinary and interreligious work is a crucial test of theological claims. Both Whitehead and the pragmatists provide broad definitions of experience in which sense impressions are derivative of more basic feelings and possibilities. Both philosophical ways of

thinking defend metaphysics, thereby resisting a full linguistic turn in both philosophy and theology while simultaneously acknowledging a place for symbolic constructions of language. Finally, in order to defend engaging in metaphysics and avoid falling into reductive, hierarchical, and exclusive pitfalls of modern metaphysical schemes, Whitehead and the pragmatists argue that metaphysical work must be hypothetical, fallible, and open to correction.

Peirce understood human inquiry as propelled by existing commitments. He was extremely critical of "paper" Cartesian doubt. Inquiry always hits the ground running, so to speak, because existing beliefs cannot be removed and replaced by a blank slate just by saying such should be the case.[3] There is a preexisting social element to both scientific and theological inquiry, existing habits that work for our dealings with the world. In this regard, Cobb and Neville have different models of God that come partly from the very different starting points of their theological work. Viewed as Peircean habits, this is simply a fact and not to be questioned. However, when faced with positive reasons to doubt, it becomes evident that beliefs are not infallible and new explanations must be searched for until doubt again ceases. There is much that still works in the different Peircean habits of Neville and Cobb, but there are also problems with each position according to the argument for PCR that will be developed. Those problems provide the opportunity to reach a mediating position through pragmatism that debates centered on Whitehead never achieved.

A Sketch of the Argument

Realism is a common sense position. Skeptics usually violate their skepticism in daily life. One of the greatest among their number in David Hume admitted he had to set aside his doubts about causation when going about his daily business.[4] But naïve realism is easily and decisively refuted by even a cursory glance at the history of ideas. Even giants of the philosophical and scientific canon have been incorrect about what they took to be true features of reality. René Descartes wanted solid foundations on which to carefully build a tower of secured knowledge.[5] Four hundred years later we are still waiting for the indisputable foundations. As a result, the fallibility of any knowledge claim is an uncontroversial position to hold, and epistemology shifted from external realism to constructivism. But what is truth if nothing stable can be referenced? Any claim is approximately true, limited, and open to correction because truth claims are determined in relation to changing

historical circumstances. Absolute foundations for theology seem as unlikely as for philosophy, but understanding theology as nothing but the investigation of language seems equally troublesome. Many people who devote themselves to God do so because they understand God to be a reality to which one can be devoted, not a pleasing psychological construct. However, if theologians are to be realists they must also adapt to changing knowledge of the world and admit the indisputable role humans play in that changing knowledge. Peirce understands knowledge as commitment to interpretations of an environment in specific and limited contexts. His pragmatism allows for religious beliefs to similarly be understood as speculative hypotheses rather than assured truths. Creative religious ideas, like novel interpretations of reality in science, can discover religious *realities* in a growing and changing universe. PCR maintains that we are propelled by existing commitments and yet constructive in creatively making sense of new data through novel interpretations of reality.

The chief tools to be employed by PCR in the following argument come from Peirce. Some terminology that will be explained in chapters 2 and 3 will be mentioned up front. His categories of Firstness (qualitative possibility), Secondness (brute fact), and Thirdness (law and generality) mark the real features of the world and their evolution.[6] Abduction (imaginative hypotheses), deduction (logical conclusions), and induction (testing hypotheses through time) are the actions we perform in trying to interpret the world and explain surprising phenomena.[7] Icons, indices, and symbols are the specific features of those interpretations.[8] Thirdness and symbolic reference indicate *synechism,* or the reality of continuity.[9] The transition from Firstness to Secondness, the presentation of shocking new facts requiring interpretation, points to the reality of *tychism,* or chance.[10] Bold theological hypotheses are allowed as abductions, but are also subject to criticism from the rest of PCR's toolbox to ensure they are hypotheses of *this reality* and not some imaginary landscape.

Viewed through the lens of PCR, the debate between Cobb and Neville seems to have three possible resolutions: Cobb may be right that God alongside the world, both mutually transforming the other in the throes of creativity, is the best ultimate explanation; Neville may correctly note a transition from nonbeing to being; or there could be a position affirming that the ground of the determinate world both transcends and yet nonetheless grows in generality with that world. Cobb argues that God is a being with intentions for the world, a point especially important in explaining the

features of subjective experience and defending mentality against scientific reductionism. Neville rejects the concept of a divine *being* and instead argues that God is indeterminate, a result from focusing on a transition from nonbeing to being in the divine creative act. Despite the fact that they have restated these differences over and over again in terms of Whitehead's process philosophy, they share many of Peirce's methodological commitments. There is a mediating position capable of being revealed by a deeper investigation of Peircean themes in their work.

Some groundwork will need to be prepared before jumping directly into a creative reinterpretation of two giants of modern theology. Topics like scientific realism and the fallibility of truth claims are well-worn territory. However, covering such terrain, even if just briefly, reveals why current debates such as the one between constructivism and realism keep occurring. Both positions are unsatisfying on their own, and philosophers who have devoted their careers to improving one position or the other have been unable to resolve the tension. The debates are still ongoing. The starting point of this excursus is the debate between realism and constructivism in philosophy, and it is taken in order to problematize both positions and indicate the need to move beyond them. The aim is not to advance analytic debates about realism or constructivism or dig into a deep explanation of either position. The goal is to explain each position well enough to show why neither suffices. This result is less a detailed refutation than a heuristic argument about their usefulness, or lack thereof. Neither is the transition from their problematic nature to PCR presented as a proof. It is an argument that a compelling defensible philosophy that overcomes the problems of realism and constructivism will have features similar to those of PCR. Those features will be more adequate to reality than the binary oppositions it transcends, and those features can be used to criticize and then improve theological work.

Chapter 1 starts with common sense. It is uncontroversial that knowledge is limited to contexts that create inherently partial views open to growth. Even if one argues that genuine truth is correlation between a claim and its referent, knowledge at any moment will be limited by a given context in an evolving world. Dogmatic defenses of absolutely certain claims quickly crumble when novel facts emerge. The limits of context and time make broad consensus difficult to achieve. The possibility of learning the truth about broad pervasive features of reality can quickly be lost to skeptical caution. Thomas Kuhn responded to problems with correspondence theories of truth in philosophy of science through an analysis of scientific revolutions.

The creative role of human agents is laid bare when scientific theories no longer make sense and new explanations must be *created.*[11] Subsequent to this awareness, it could easily seem as if all understandings of reality are constructions, a consequence systematically spelled out by Paul Feyerabend, who moved from realism to constructivism, and then slid down the constructivist slope into an anarchy where anything goes.[12] If that is the only philosophical paradigm, there are implications for theology. Religious ideas are mere projections. Interpretations are fictitious constructions, albeit useful ones, resulting from needs, desires, and fears. Such a view can be found in Ludwig Feuerbach and all hermeneutics of suspicion. However, while created theories do not perfectly mirror reality, the mismatch is only realized when investigators are faced with novel manifestations *of reality* that need explanation. New theories *of reality* must be *constructed.* The necessity of uniting constructivism with realism becomes the inevitable conclusion, even though the two ideas are often depicted as incompatible.

Chapter 2 argues that Charles S. Peirce's philosophy is capable of achieving such a mediating position. Realism can be naïve or based on progressive inquiry. For example, cell biology has *revealed* deeper *previously hidden* structures. Regarding such progression, Peirce argues that signs are the basic units of meaning and interpretation is the basic causal activity of the world. Interpretation is a sign transformation with *causal* connections to the objects interpreted. Signs bring us closer to the objects interpreted. There is a sense in which signs can be constructions and still real. Achieving success in a changing universe requires the right method, otherwise novel interpretations will not be attuned to novel developments in that world and will lack any ability to predict and control. We start inquiry as creatures of habit and only later realize what inferences are truly valid.[13] We learn self-control over previous habits. Signs are also not just a matter of conscious interpretation. From intelligent animals, all the way down to single cell organisms, semiotic relations are found, a point that will be elaborated upon with examples in chapter 8.[14] Even in humans, signs have a basic physicality in which chemical reactions respond to stimuli in an environment. Sign systems also have complicated interrelations. Those chemical connections became necessary for the evolution of more complicated nervous systems. Symbolic codes constructed and learned socially led to evolution in the biological realm. For example, chemical reactions in the auditory system can be signs of a distant, more significant thing such as a crying baby or threatening person. Stimuli lead to interpretations, which lead to intelligence, environmental

discrimination, and imagination capable of integrating the initial stimuli into more complex harmonies. It is beneficial that symbols can be projections. Becoming self-conscious of the constructed aspect of symbols allows for the use of creativity and the discovery of previously unnoticed *aspects of reality.*

The appreciation of Peirce in chapter 2 turns to necessary criticism in chapter 3. Peirce was so concerned about establishing the reasonableness and lawlike behavior of nature that he affirmed panpsychism. This is his position that "matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws."[15] An associated questionable anthropocentric doctrine he embraced was agapism, evolutionary love.[16] Matter was destined, since it is also mind, to develop in reasonable, predictable ways in the universe. These associated claims not only explain why our minds are attuned to be able to know the natural world, but our ability to predict and control that world. The natural world is for us, because something like our mind has always been in it. However, to avoid the questionable conclusions that rocks have conscious experiences or the evolution of the world is due to the inevitable development of that mental aspect of reality, it will be necessary to push Peirce deeper into his own philosophical system. His categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness account for the emergence of novel orders in the world. They can account for the emergence of human experience from inert matter, without reading mind into that matter. Similarly, the development of the universe is a contingent matter open to empirical inquiry. Thirdness is an achievement, not preordained. Only intelligent use of method and collaborative inquiry will further its growth.

Chapter 4 represents a transition in the argument from philosophy to theology. With the method and key features of PCR established, the stage will be set to use PCR to analyze the theological positions of Cobb and Neville. This transition relies upon the work of Sandra Rosenthal, who construes the debate between process and pragmatic thinkers as centering on continuity and time.[17] For Whitehead, each emerging occasion comes into being and in so doing defines its present spatial and temporal scope. Once definite, it stops becoming and is past. The continuity between present emerging and past definite occasions is that the past is prehended in the present. Continuity in this view is the coming together of distinct elements from the past in a decision that then increases the next diversity to be brought together by one by becoming one of the many elements to be prehended in that moment. When it is satisfied and in the past, it has specific spatial and temporal locations. There is therefore disconnect between past (fully definite) and emerging

(not yet definite) entities. Pragmatic thinkers like Peirce have an opposite intuition: emerging out of instead of coming together. Peirce expresses this theme in the movement from Firstness to Thirdness. There is growth and extension of what was emerging and will continue to emerge. Emergence is without breaks; it is small accretion in a continuous stream. Causality in this case is from the past to what emerges from it, as opposed to process thought in which the causal power of the present integrates potentials. For pragmatists, the past is relatively definite because it can change as what emerges from it gives it new character. There is a specious present "blooming, buzzing, confusion," as William James would say.[18] Process thought presents separate discontinuous acts of creativity while Peirce presents emergence as continuous creativity. Despite being known as a pragmatic theologian, Neville explicitly sides with Whitehead on this issue. This thematic debate is relevant for moving beyond Cobb and Neville, for understanding a God who creates a world that emerges out of rather than one that comes together.

Later in his life Peirce came to believe that once growth, thought, and reasonableness have become pervasive features of the universe, they become inseparable from the idea of a personal creator. His affirmation of genuine chance mitigates against rigid causation and makes space for mind, even a divine mind, to be inferred from the lawlike regularity of the world. He had already embraced panpsychism, the view that mind is more basic than matter. It is a small step from that to understanding mind as the source of all existence as well. Such recognition of chance and mind, along with his argument that all inquiry begins with existing habits, is amenable to process theologians. That is the point with which chapter 5 starts.

The existing habit, so to speak, for Cobb is Christian theism. When that position ran aground on the shore of experience, work was done to fix problems but save what remains of the ship.[19] Whitehead's philosophy was the life raft, enabling Cobb to understand God as alongside the world, transcending it in the lure of ideas that actual occasions of experience can realize or neglect. The realization of divine ideas depends on the world. This places limitations on dualistic substance theism, limiting God's power and knowledge before actual occasions are completed. Still, God remains a being with intentions for God's creatures. In Cobb's theology, there is hope for theological progress as well as connection to older, possibly cherished, beliefs. Correction, though, seems unsystematic. The ability to adapt comes from the protective belt of the very systematic process metaphysics developed by Whitehead, but appears in theology piece by piece as challenges come where they may. Nonetheless,

process thought does allow Cobb to establish new habitual responses to the world by which people are capable of living ethically, pluralistically, and with strong religious beliefs while also being aware of the best science of the day.

Neville is also unsatisfied with substance theism but makes a move opposite that of Cobb in response. Rather than modifying theism to fit the data, he makes a new creative hypothesis for the sort of God responsible for the world, the subject matter of chapter 6. Only after this God hypothesis is in place does Neville consider the formation of religious beliefs. As a result, his theology provides a strong break with some previous ways of considering God's being but is intended to provide a more systematic and thorough connection with the world he considered in developing his God hypothesis. Cobb takes challenges to existing beliefs serially, as they arise, adjusting a piece of a theology here and another there, with a hope for systematic integrity through the skillful use of Whitehead's philosophy. Neville looks at the whole world now and seeks a unifying explanation. His answer is that God is the indeterminate source of the determinate world, and apart from the act of creating that world, God is indistinguishable from nothing.[20] However, God cannot be sheer indeterminacy, nothingness, since there is creation. In the creative act, God is established as the indeterminate source of the determinate world.

Neville's argument for God's indeterminacy is satisfying. Where Neville falls short is in thinking he does justice to the transcendence *and* presence of God. His argument for God the creator provides what may be one of the most transcendent models of God available, and because of that fact Neville has difficulty affirming God's immanent determinate character. In fact, he does not. Any determinate claim about God is a broken symbol that cannot univocally apply to God.[21] God's immanence breaks on God's transcendence. While Cobb's process theology does not struggle with this issue, it does face a problem when it comes to God's transcendence, God's primordial nature. Cobb's God, like Whitehead's, contains the possibilities for the world. Cobb believes they cannot be contained in the past, which is settled. To avoid constructing a philosophy that describes us as being in a box universe, he argues that the possibilities for the world, its Platonic forms, are eternal objects in God. Furthermore, this God must be an actual entity alongside the world, not a being transcending it, to be able to provide these possibilities to actual occasions in the form of initial aims. Explaining then criticizing both these positions happens in chapter 7. My pragmatic alternative then follows in chapter 8.

God can be understood as real, near, and participating in all three of Peirce's categories by binding them together, a theme expressed well in the developmental teleology of Cobb's process theology. God can also be understood as the creative source of the three categories, a theme captured by Neville. If the theme these debating theological positions ignore is given more attention, the emerging out of rather than the coming together of reality, both God and Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness can be understood as growing *together* in concrete reasonableness. God would emerge from an indeterminate Firstness to a determinate Thirdness with the character given by the act of creating those features. God's character as indeterminate creator remains so in Firstness until specific instances of coming together propel Secondness and Thirdness into existence and give undifferentiated possibility determinate character. An indeterminate God without a fixed finite identity can be determinately extended by the world. Creative interpretations maintain the meaning and reality of God in the world by giving symbolic expression to what cannot be known in any other fashion. Furthermore, far from being flights of the imagination, interpretations are continuous with symbolizations found in the natural world at simple levels devoid of conscious experience. This means that religious individuals work together with God in a crucial way to constantly redeem the reference of that term in unique ways for a world constantly growing in novelty. Symbols of God are not broken as much as they are growing, shifting, and adapting.

The concluding chapter makes a form of pluralism implicit in the entire argument explicit. We do not have uncomplicated direct access to reality given the role of interpretation, nor should we expect consensus as if culture had no role in interpretation. Interests partly determine how and what we engage in an environment. Anyone who understands their religious identity pragmatically immediately understands the nature and necessity of there being very different religious neighbors. That is, they understand that no one can understand or prejudge another religion because members of that tradition are likely making interpretations and engaging values that arise within the codependence of contexts and interpretations. This inherent pluralism of PCR is on display in the way Cobb and Neville are treated as equals to be pushed and challenged on a quest, not opponents to be vanquished. If fallibility is taken seriously, religious traditions will naturally be modified when individuals and communities need to create novel religious interpretations of religious realities when existing interpretations no longer engage. Knowing one's own pragmatic commitments means knowing why others in

different contexts with different presuppositions will differ. This pluralism is not due to indifference as can be the case in relativism. Rather, distinct differences and contexts are what shock people, grab them, and demand, or fail to demand, adherence. Doubt and belief are mental states of affairs forced upon us by *external* experiences. Different people in different cultures interpret reality differently. This is a good thing. The only bad conclusion is exclusive dogmatic positions that admit no position other than their own. They self-exclude from pragmatic inquiry by freely choosing positions incapable of being included in and learning from open dialogue. For good pragmatic philosophical theologians such as Cobb, Neville, and myself, we move onward together because of, not despite, our differences.