

Peirce and Spinoza's Pragmaticist Metaphysics

A Metafísica Pragmaticista de Peirce e Espinosa

Shannon Dea

University of Waterloo – Canada
sjdea@uwaterloo.ca

Abstract: In the early 20th century, moved by James's popularization of pragmatism and by the so-called "Battle of the Absolute" that divided American philosophers in the period, Peirce sought to communicate his own pragmatism¹ both directly via repeated attempts to formulate the doctrine and indirectly by comparing his thought to that of such philosophical forebears as Spinoza, Berkeley and Kant. Peirce's debt to Berkeley and Kant are well-documented. However, insufficient attention has been paid to his invocations of Spinoza. In this paper, I survey Peirce's discussions of Spinoza, and identify a shift in his account of Spinoza. Specifically, in 1904 he comes to regard Spinoza as an important early pragmaticist. I argue that this shift corresponds with Peirce's own late efforts to distinguish his pragmatism from the pragmatism of such figures as James and Schiller. While both pragmatism and pragmaticism take as their starting point some version of the pragmatic maxim, the latter is distinctive for retaining a realist metaphysics. I argue that, on Peirce's view, an early version of the pragmatic maxim, evidence of critical commonsensism and a weak scholastic realism are all evident in Spinoza's thought.

Keywords: Peirce. Spinoza. Pragmaticism. Pragmatism. Pragmatic Maxim. Critical Common-sensism. Scholastic Realism. Metaphysics.

Resumo: *No início do Século XX, movido pela popularização por James do pragmatismo e pela assim chamada "Batalha do Absoluto" que dividiu os filósofos americanos no período, Peirce buscou comunicar seu próprio pragmaticismo, tanto diretamente, através de tentativas repetidas para formular a doutrina, quanto indiretamente, pela comparação do seu pensamento com o de filósofos anteriores como Espinosa, Berkeley e Kant. A dívida de Peirce para com Berkeley e Kant está bem documentada. Todavia, pouca atenção foi dedicada às suas invocações de Espinosa. Neste trabalho, eu pesquisei as discussões de Peirce sobre Espinosa e identifiquei uma mudança em sua apresentação de Espinosa. Especificamente em 1904, ele passou a considerar Espinosa como um importante pragmaticista antigo. Eu afirmo que esta mudança corresponde aos seus próprios esforços tardios para*

1 "Pragmaticism" is the term Peirce coined in 1905 (CP 5.414) for his own particular doctrine. He makes clear that the pragmaticism is a species of pragmatism. After 1905, he uses both terms to describe Spinoza's (and his own) thought. Throughout, I use both terms, as appropriate, but also "pragmati(ci)sm" when it is not clear which term is more apt.

distinguir seu pragmaticismo “Absoluto” do pragmaticismo “Fenomenal” de figuras tais como James e Schiller. Enquanto tanto o pragmatismo quanto o pragmaticismo têm como origem alguma versão da máxima pragmática, esta se distingue por reter uma metafísica realista. Eu demonstro que, na visão de Peirce, tanto uma versão antiga da máxima pragmática quanto evidências do senso comum crítico e de um fraco realismo escolástico estão evidentes no pensamento de Espinosa.

Palavras-chave: Peirce. Espinosa. Pragmaticismo. Pragmatismo. Máxima Pragmática. Senso Comum Crítico. Realismo Escolástico. Metafísica.

1. Peirce on Spinoza

From 1863 to 1904, in both published and unpublished texts, Peirce discusses or mentioned Spinoza no fewer than 25 times. His most fulsome discussions of Spinoza occur in his reviews for *The Nation* of a number of Spinozist and other early modern texts² and in his entry on Spinozism for the *Century Dictionary* (1891).³

These pre-1904 texts reveal a number of consistent themes. Peirce repeatedly claims that Spinoza was a great thinker who produced great works, and deplors the various historical attacks on Spinoza and Spinozism.⁴ He often remarks upon the obscurity of Spinoza’s thought, and about the degree to which Spinoza has been misunderstood by scholars. He urges that the so-called geometrical method of the *Ethics* is particularly responsible for philosophers’ misinterpretations of Spinoza.

Whatever Peirce’s qualms about Spinoza’s geometrical form of presentation, he cannot praise too highly the “real meaning” that lies beneath “the garb of Euclid.” Over and over, he expresses his regret that the style of the *Ethics* conceals the “deep,”⁵ “weighty,”⁶ “living”⁷ thought of Spinoza. While Peirce is never explicit about what exactly is the “living thought” that is concealed by the geometrical method, several of his discussions of Spinoza offer hints. He argues in a number of texts that the key to a proper understanding of Spinoza resides in reading the whole of his *oeuvre*, and not just the *Ethics*. He hints in his 1902 Joachim review that the *Treatise*

2 These include Fullerton’s *The Philosophy of Spinoza* in 1892, Hale White’s translation of the *Ethics* in 1894, and Joachim’s *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* in 1902 (N 1.163-65, N 2.83-87, N 3.76-78).

3 C 5837. Peirce was the author of *Century Dictionary* entries concerning philosophy, mechanics, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, weights and measures and universities, as well as a number on psychology. See CP 1.106n.1, CP 6.482, N 1.75-78. In his personal copy of that work (now held at Harvard’s Houghton Library), he marked the entries for which he was responsible with a coloured pencil. This, combined with the twelve handwritten index cards concerning Spinozism among Peirce’s research materials for the *Century Dictionary* (also at Houghton Library, under call number MS CSP *1596) identify him as the author of the Spinozism entry.

4 See, for example, N 3.77.

5 N 3.76.

6 NEM III/2 956.

7 N 2.84.

on the *Emendation of the Intellect* (TIE) offers a truer account of Spinoza's thought than the *Ethics*.

While Peirce deplors the Euclidean form of the *Ethics* as unmathematical, a further theme recurs throughout his pre-1904 mentions of Spinoza: this is that there is something deeply mathematical about Spinoza's thought. Indeed, in his 1894 review of Hale White's translation of the *Ethics*, Peirce devotes two whole pages to the history and philosophy of mathematics, a subject that he maintains is "indispensable to the comprehension" of Spinoza.⁸

Finally, Peirce's early discussions of Spinoza reveal his thoroughgoing familiarity with historical and contemporary Spinoza scholarship. In his review of Joachim, for instance, he argues at length that, in virtue of living in the Netherlands, Spinoza was influenced not by the medieval scholastics, as was the case for most philosophers in continental Europe, but by the Dutch reformed peripatetics, whose doctrine (Peirce reports) was closer to Aristotle's than the scholastics' was.⁹ Peirce evinces familiarity with various Spinoza editions and translations, and knowledgeably describes and critiques trends in Spinoza scholarship; indeed, he often chastises authors for being insufficiently attentive to secondary scholarship about Spinoza. In short, even before Peirce came to identify Spinoza as a fellow pragmatist, he was exceptionally well-read in Spinoza scholarship. His remarks on Spinoza were not those of a dilettante.

Prior to 1904, then, Peirce had read a great deal by and about Spinoza, had developed his own considered views both about Spinoza's thought and about the comparative merits of different scholarly approaches to Spinoza, and had published several short pieces on him. However, there is scant reason to believe that he regarded Spinoza as a pragmatist. Starting in 1904, however, Peirce began praising Spinoza's pragmatism, ranking him with such (on Peirce's view) proto-pragmatists as Berkeley and Kant.

The first locus of such remarks was Peirce's 1904 review for *The Nation* of Robert Duff's *Spinoza's Political and Ethical Philosophy*. Peirce begins the review with his usual pre-1904 themes. Then, having rehearsed all of his earlier views about Spinoza, Peirce does something new: he tells us that, had he lived longer, Spinoza would have formulated the pragmatic maxim.¹⁰ This review marks a turning-point in Peirce's discussions of Spinoza. Afterwards, Peirce kept coming back to the idea that Spinoza was a pragmatist, and, he included Spinoza in all of his lists of historical pragmatists.

The following year, in an article on pragmatism for the *Monist*, Peirce again linked Spinoza with pragmatism, this time by emphasizing the scientific cast of thinking that led him (Peirce) to formulate the pragmatic maxim, and listing Spinoza, along with Berkeley and Kant, as a metaphysician whose work similarly recalls "the ways of thinking of the laboratory."¹¹ Circa the same year, in a letter to the Italian pragmatist Mario Calderoni, Peirce wrote that pragmatism was "not a new way of thinking," but claimed among its early adherents Berkeley, Locke, Spinoza and

8 N 2.86.

9 N 3.78.

10 N 3.178-79.

11 CP 5.412.

Kant.¹² He revisited this theme in 1906 in an extended metaphor about the “river of pragmatism,” whose waters flow through the work of such figures as Socrates, Aristotle, Locke, Berkeley, Kant, Comte, and Spinoza: “They run, where least one would suspect them, beneath the dry rubbish-heaps of Spinoza.”¹³ In 1910, Peirce again referred to Spinoza’s pragmatism, writing that pragmatism is “an old way of thinking... practiced by Spinoza, Berkeley, and Kant.”¹⁴

In total, Peirce makes six references each to Kant’s and Berkeley’s pragmatism and five to Spinoza’s. The only other figure to be mentioned more than once is Locke, whom Peirce only twice credits with pragmatic tendencies. Spinoza is, then, one of Peirce’s “top three” canonical pragmatists, and the only one of whom he says that he, rather than Peirce, might have formulated the pragmatic maxim.

2. The Pragmaticist Spinoza

What explains the 1904 turn in Peirce’s attitude to Spinoza? Clearly, Duff’s book had something to do with it. However, it seems unlikely that the volume was the only cause for Peirce’s new appreciation of Spinoza. Duff doesn’t say anything about Spinoza that Peirce himself had not said several times before. Certainly, Peirce would have enjoyed reading an account of Spinoza that so closely aligned with his own view of him, but one would have expected this to reconfirm Peirce’s views, not change them.

To understand the 1904 shift, we need to consider what else Peirce was doing in the period. From 1903 onwards, following James’s popularization of pragmatism in 1898 and the Carnegie Institution’s heartbreaking 1902 rejection of Peirce’s application for funding to write his *Memoirs on Minute Logic*, Peirce set about elaborating and proving his own distinctive version of pragmatism. In a series of lectures and articles from the period, we see Peirce at pains to distinguish his late, importantly realist, version of pragmatism from his earlier nominalistic doctrine and from the pragmatisms of such figures as James and Schiller.

A recurring trope in this period of Peirce’s writing is the list of historical pragmatists. That is, in the same texts in which he criticizes his own earlier views and the views of his pragmatist contemporaries, Peirce repeatedly identifies canonical philosophers—typically Spinoza, Berkeley, and Kant—as pragmatists. Such identifications, then, must be read as part of his larger project of elaborating and demarcating his view. In other words, Peirce’s praise of Spinoza is not a careless one-off, but rather deeply connected to Peirce’s most mature expressions of his pragmatism. I propose that what made Duff’s book so influential on Peirce was its timing. During the exact period in which Peirce was working to articulate pragmatism and to get clear on which philosophers subscribed to it and which didn’t, his encounter with Duff’s book reminded him of his admiration for Spinoza and persuaded him that Spinoza belonged in the pragmaticist category. If this is

12 CP 8.206.

13 CP 5.11. Spinoza is not the only target of Peirce’s gentle mockery in this passage. He also makes fun of Berkeley’s use of tar-water, and of Kant’s and Comte’s “habit of mingling these sparkling waters [of pragmatism] with a certain mental sedative.”

14 N 3.36.

right, then what is striking about Peirce's late reception of Spinoza is that it shows that Peirce must have taken Spinoza to have held the very views that excluded James and Schiller from consideration as pragmaticists.

I have discussed elsewhere the significance of this matter for our understanding of Peirce's pragmatism.¹⁵ I won't rehearse that argument here. Instead, I will use the time that remains to offer a sketch of what I take to be the brand of pragmatism that Peirce discerned in Spinoza.

Peirce is not always consistent in his account of what distinguishes his pragmatism from non-pragmaticist versions of pragmatism. In his c. 1911 "A Sketch of Logical Critics," for instance, he attributes his coinage of the later term to James and Schiller's having made "pragmatism" "imply 'the will to believe,' the mutability of truth, the soundness of Zeno's refutation of motion, and pluralism generally."¹⁶ While Spinoza is pretty clearly on Peirce's side in all of these matters,¹⁷ so are all continental rationalists, and Peirce clearly had no interest in welcoming Descartes or Malebranche into his fold. Denying these Jamesian/Schillerian views, then, is necessary but not sufficient for pragmatism.

Peirce's 1905 "What Pragmatism Is" lays out three jointly sufficient conditions for pragmatism: (1) "first, its retention of a purified philosophy"; (2) "secondly, its full acceptance of the main body of our instinctive beliefs"; (3) "and thirdly, its strenuous insistence upon the truth of scholastic realism..."¹⁸

It is not at all clear what counts as "purified philosophy." One plausible reading, though, is that the application of the pragmatic maxim purifies philosophy of ontological metaphysics. If this is right, then the three key features of pragmatism seem to be (1) the application of the pragmatic maxim in reasoning, (2) the acceptance of our instinctive beliefs (which acceptance Peirce elsewhere terms "critical common sensism"),¹⁹ and (3) insistence upon the truth of scholastic realism. I think that Peirce saw all three of these conditions as present in Spinoza's thought.²⁰

Spinoza's Pragmatic Maxim

Perhaps the most obvious candidate for a pragmatic maxim in Spinoza occurs in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (TTP), where he berates those Christians who claim to believe the Bible, but whose behaviour belies the claim. "The moral value of a man's

15 DEA, 2014.

16 EP 2.457.

17 I discuss Spinoza on Zeno in DEA, 2011.

18 CP 5.423. In "Issues of Pragmaticism," the next article in the same *Monist* series as "What Pragmatism Is," Peirce describes Critical Common-Sensism and Scholastic Realism not as conditions or aspects of pragmatism, but rather as consequences of it. EP 2.346. Whether they are jointly sufficient conditions of pragmatism or important consequences of it is beyond the scope of this paper. Either way, it seems that if Spinoza is a pragmaticist, he should hew to these positions.

19 EP 2.346-53.

20 Even if I am wrong that Peirce's remark about "purified philosophy" points to the pragmatic maxim, it is nonetheless obvious that to count as a pragmaticist Spinoza must at least implicitly accept some version of the pragmatic maxim.

creed should be judged only from his works,” writes Spinoza.²¹ However, “on every side we hear men saying that the Bible is the Word of God, teaching mankind true blessedness, or the path to salvation. But the facts are quite at variance with their words, for people in general seem to make no attempt whatsoever to live according to the Bible’s teachings.”²² For Spinoza, the true measure of belief is behaviour.

However, this Spinozist heuristic for identifying and avoiding hypocrisy is hardly unique. Moreover, especially for the mature Peirce, it hews rather too closely to James’s pragmatism in emphasizing behaviour rather than the growth of concrete reasonableness as the consequence of thought.

In fact, despite Peirce’s complaints about the *Ethics*, the most striking anticipation of the pragmatic maxim in Spinoza arguably occurs in the last proposition of Part 1 of that work, where Spinoza argues that “nothing exists from whose nature an effect does not follow.”²³ In accordance with this principle, Spinoza goes on to use the words “cause” (*causa*) and “thing” (*res*) interchangeably, most notably in his early Part Two invocations of E2P7’s parallelism²⁴. For Spinoza as for Peirce, if we cannot conceive of a thing having any effect, we cannot even conceive of it as a thing.

Proposition 36 sits, as it were, on the cusp of Parts 1 and 2 of the *Ethics*, and thereby serves as an important bridge between the metaphysics of the first Part and the epistemology of the second. *Ethics* Part 1, “Concerning God,” is Spinoza’s account of the character of the universe *qua* substance.²⁵ It is in this part that we find all of Spinoza’s central metaphysical theses, including his thesis of Part 1 Proposition 33 that God does not create the universe through an act of will. For Spinoza, God is not a transcendent creator, but is rather the immanent cause of the universe insofar as everything in the universe is entailed by his very being. The demonstration to Proposition 36 lays out how this entailment works: Whatever exists expresses God’s nature or essence in a definite and determinate way (Cor. Pr. 25); that is (Pr. 34), whatever exists expresses God’s power, which is the cause of all things, in a definite and determinate way, and so (Pr. 16) some effect must follow from it. According to Spinoza, then, finite beings are expressions of God’s essence; God’s essence and his power are the very same thing.²⁶ Therefore, finite beings are expressions of God’s power. Any expression of power *ex hypothesi* brings about an effect. Therefore, all finite beings are causes.

If Proposition 36 were itself only an expression of Spinoza’s alleged necessitarianism, then it might be argued that the proposition is merely a typical tenet of seventeenth century mechanistic determinism that bears a superficial resemblance to pragmatism. Read in this light, Proposition 36 is just the claim that everything exists on a chain of efficient causes—that every effect is itself a cause, and that God is the first cause that got it all rolling. If this is right, then Proposition 36 is not a distinctively Spinozist claim, nor, indeed, a particularly persuasive one.

21 TTP P/393.

22 TTP 7/456.

23 E1P36.

24 Esp. E2P9Dem1 and E2P9Dem2.

25 Famously, Spinoza uses the terms “God”, “Nature” and “substance” interchangeably.

26 E1P34.

Jonathan Bennett, who understands Proposition 36 in just this way, describes the argument as “notably bad... as it was bound to be: there are no powerful reasons why every effect must be a cause.”²⁷ It is, of course, an *a priori* truth that all effects have causes—that’s what makes them effects. However, it is an empirical question whether all effects are themselves causes. Thus, if Spinoza’s position in Proposition 36 is just the metaphysical one Bennett suggests, then there is no powerful reason to accept it.

However—and here is why, above, I described Proposition 36 as a “bridge” between Parts 1 and 2—Spinoza’s reasons for holding that all things are causes is not only metaphysical, but also (and perhaps, *especially*) epistemological and ethical. Proposition 36 is a key premise in four arguments in Parts 2, 3 and 5, three of which stake out a distinctly pragmaticist epistemology,²⁸ while the fourth introduces the Spinozist concept of *conatus*—a concept that is crucial for Spinoza’s ethics and politics.

If, following Peirce, we read Spinoza as a pragmaticist, and Proposition 36 as a forerunner of the pragmatic maxim, then, when Spinoza says that all things are causes, he is not simply making the banal and questionable metaphysical point attributed to him by Bennett that all effects are themselves causes. Rather, he is making the deeply pragmaticist point that our very concept of a thing is intimately bound up our conception of its possible effects. We can think of a thing without thinking of it as having a particular determinate effect. However, the notion of a thing without *some* effect—whatever it may be—is impossible.²⁹ Moreover, throughout the remainder of the *Ethics*, Spinoza repeatedly draws upon Proposition 36 in his arguments that the world is knowable, if not right away, then in the long run. That is, the role that “Spinoza’s pragmatic maxim” plays in underwriting empirical enquiry is of a piece with Peirce’s conviction that pragmatism leaves the way of scientific enquiry open.

Spinoza’s Critical Common-sensism

Among the three conditions for pragmaticism we are considering, the second is perhaps most obviously present in Spinoza’s thought. Critical common-sensism was, for Peirce, Scottish common sense philosophy, naturalized³⁰ and tempered by fallibilism and an appropriately critical attitude. Put differently, critical common-sensism entails (*inter alia*) rejecting Cartesian “paper doubt” and accepting at the outset of our enquiry both that we are incapable of doubting many of our instinctual beliefs, and indeed that many of these beliefs are correct—not, as Reid supposed,

27 BENNETT, 134.

28 An elaboration of these arguments is beyond the scope of this paper, but see DEA, 2007 (76-86). In essence, all three of these arguments effectively deny a gap between the knower and the known and thereby underscore Spinoza’s optimism that the world is in principle knowable to us.

29 It is appropriate that the notion of effect in E1P36 (on this reading) is “possible effect”; this accords with the tight connection that Peirce draws between pragmatism and scholastic realism.

30 Christopher Hookway expressed the matter in this felicitous way at the Peirce reading group, University of Sheffield, October 3, 2013.

because of God's benevolence, but because of our deep connection with the world around us, a world along with which we evolved.

For Spinoza, as for Peirce, Cartesian skepticism is not only dishonest (since we say we doubt what we really cannot), but also blocks the path of enquiry. He complains of Cartesians that "it is quite impossible to discuss the sciences with them. If a proof is presented to them, they do not know whether the argumentation is valid or not. If they deny, grant or oppose, they do not know that they deny, grant or oppose."³¹

By contrast, Spinoza argues that we can best understand the world not by attempting to doubt individual beliefs but via the interrelations that obtain between everything in Nature, including ideas: "those things that do have interrelation with other things—as is the case with everything that exists in Nature—will be intelligible, and their objective essences will also have that same interrelation; that is, other ideas will be deduced from them, and these in turn will be interrelated with other ideas, and so the tools for further progress will increase."³²

For Spinoza as for Peirce, we come by our initial instincts legitimately and these instincts are appropriate starting-points for enquiry. To work iron, writes Spinoza, requires a hammer, but to make a hammer, one needs other tools, and so on. But, no one would ever claim that this regress means that human beings cannot work iron today. Rather, we know that the first human tools were, in a sense, in-born. Using these rustic "tools", early humans produced slightly better tools, and, with these, slightly better ones in turn, until they reached the point where they could make "very many complex things with little labour."³³ Likewise, writes Spinoza, "the intellect by its inborn power makes intellectual tools for itself by which it acquires other powers for other intellectual works, and from these works still other tools... and thus makes steady progress until it reaches the summit of wisdom."³⁴ The honest philosopher uses the very good tools that are naturally at her disposal, improving them as she is able, but never simply throwing them away in order to begin the process of tool manufacture, as it were, from scratch.

Spinoza's Scholastic Realism

The final element of pragmatism we are looking for in Spinoza is scholastic realism. There are two senses in which Spinoza might count as a scholastic realist: first, by sharing certain features with Duns Scotus, the scholastic realist Peirce most often discusses as a model; and second, by exemplifying a version of Peirce's own "extreme scholastic realism." Peirce considered his scholastic realism extreme because it admits the reality of two kinds of generals—possibilia and laws, unlike less extreme varieties that accept the reality of laws but deny the reality of possibilia. To be a scholastic realist in the first sense is to oppose nominalism by asserting the reality of generals; to be a scholastic realist in the second sense is to assert that these generals are of two types (and hence that reality has three categories: two of them

31 TIE 48.

32 TIE 41.

33 TIE 31.

34 TIE 31.

general and one of them, existent things, particular³⁵). I have argued elsewhere that, contra the usual understanding of Spinoza as a necessitarian, a pragmatist reading of Spinoza reveals his ontology as containing, real possibility, as well as law.³⁶ Here, I wish in addition to point to ways in which Spinoza's thought may be thought to resemble those aspects of Duns Scotus Peirce ranked as most important for science.

The medieval nominalism-realism debate was at bottom concerned with the question of whether our concepts of universals refer to the real world or to our thoughts about it. Scotus intervened by rejecting the disjunction. On Scotus's view, there are real "common natures" possessed by all existents to which we have access via these existents. However, we are also able to conceive of these natures abstracted from the particular individuals in which they inhere. For Scotus, common natures are real, but they are not physical because they are indeterminate. It is precisely because the nature requires determination by an individual *haecceity* in order to be properly individual or universal that we can see it as ontologically prior to both physical individuals and thoughts, and hence, real.

This picture accords rather strikingly with both Spinoza's and Peirce's ontologies. For all three philosophers, the universe is not a collection of determinate atoms, but rather a single continuum, of which any portion is intrinsically indeterminate, and is only rendered determinate through its relation with other portions of the continuum. There are no intrinsic individuals. Rather, individuals exist extrinsically in virtue of relations between regions of the continuum. Peirce held that nominalism and substantial individualism are co-extensive since, when the nominalist denies that there are real connections between things, she fails to apprehend the relational nature of all reality. For what we might term "modal monists," who recognize only existent beings as real, if the laws of nature are real, then these laws must themselves exist as entities or individuals. Peirce held that even Platonism (which he termed "nominalistic Platonism"³⁷) falls prey to this, in that the Forms are simply another class of individuals in the Platonic ontology. Like Scotus, both Peirce and Spinoza escape this dilemma by holding that reality has a broader scope than existence, and thereby clearing a space for real laws and commonalities that are not themselves entities.

Casting Spinoza's metaphysics in Scotus's terms, we can see that what Spinoza terms "common notions," "those things that are common to all things and are equally in the part as in the whole [and] can be conceived only adequately,"³⁸ are first intentional *entia rationis*—unlike our abstract ideas about universals and transcendentals, which are second intentional. Scotus's *haecceities*, what Peirce terms things' "hereness and nowness," are, on Spinozistic terms, just particular determinations of substance as finite modes—determinations that at once individuate

35 For convenience, I here use the term as it is commonly employed. Peirce did not use "particular" in quite this way. However, that matter is well beyond the scope of this paper.

36 DEA, 2008.

37 "Nominalistic platonism" is Peirce's term for the metaphysical position that accepts the reality of generals, but regards them as a variety of individuals. See CP 5.503.

38 E2P38Dem.

and instantiate substance as individual existents.³⁹ For Spinoza, as for Scotus, common notions (for Scotus, common natures) have no existence apart from individuals since commonalities are indeterminate and only determinate things have existence. However, common notions (natures) and individuals are not numerically identical since numerical identity applies only to things that are susceptible of enumeration.

Two pieces of circumstantial evidence further support the view that Peirce regarded Spinoza as a Scotistic realist. In an 1891-93 exchange with Paul Carus, in response to Carus's having obliquely claimed Spinoza as a nominalist, Peirce castigates his opponent for falling into the nominalistic "absurdity of talking of 'single facts,' or individual generals. Yet Dr. Carus says that natural laws describe the facts of nature *sub specie aeternitatis*. Now I understand Spinoza to be a realist."⁴⁰ That Peirce here contrasts Spinoza's realism with nominalistic Platonism makes clear that the variety of realism Peirce is attributing to Spinoza is scholastic realism. Then, in a 1903 diatribe against early modern nominalists, Peirce lists Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant and others as nominalists.⁴¹ Spinoza is conspicuously absent from the list.

Epilogue

My space is short; so I will dispense with the usual practice of summarizing the arguments I have just made. Instead, I would like to conclude by offering a reply to my late colleague, Angus Kerr-Lawson. Angus, who knew the thought of both Peirce and Spinoza very well, held that the two men's projects were, in fact, very different.⁴² While both of them were motivated by the question of how to make our ideas clear, he argued, Peirce's answer to the question resides in his theory of meaning. By contrast, Spinoza held that the best way to make our ideas clear is to control our emotions, and thereby to unite our minds with God, understanding the universe *sub specie aeternitatis*. However, I think that it is just this view of Spinoza that Peirce forces us to re-examine. For Peirce, the ultimate goal of Spinozism is not the metaphysical project of describing the character of the universe under the form of eternity. Rather, it is blessedness itself, the union of our minds with God, that is its goal. That is, Peirce's Spinoza is not arguing that, by achieving blessedness, we thereby make our ideas clear, but rather that, by making our ideas clear, we thereby achieve blessedness—a Peircean hope, if ever there was one.⁴³

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39 Spinoza discusses this at E2P8S, using an analogy with a circle in which the very act of drawing renders the angles contained in the circle existent and countable.

40 CP 6.593.

41 CP 1.19.

42 Kerr-Lawson raised this objection at a talk I gave at University of Waterloo in 2007.

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Endereço/ Address

Shannon Dea
Department of Philosophy
University of Waterloo
200 University Avenue West
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G1

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