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Abstract

This paper briefly examines the relationship between chance, creativity and ethics in Peirce's development of tychism. In the early 1900s Peirce began to suggest that chance ought to be understood as a type of agency or as "psychical action" upon matter. I discuss the ethical implications of this suggestion. Peirce remained reticent to translate the speculations concerning chance and purpose into the language of applied ethics. It is for this reason that I look to Ella Lyman Cabot to extend Peirce's metaphysical speculations. Cabot was an active interlocutor with Josiah Royce between 1888 and 1916. In comparison to Peirce, Cabot's interest in chance is overtly ethical; she believed that a specific orientation to chance events can dramatically alter the course of human conduct. This point is made clear in her unpublished papers from 1902 and in her *Everyday Ethics* (1906). Cabot's work stands as an original contribution to the canon that deserves serious attention.

Keywords: Ella Lyman Cabot, tychism, creativity, originality, continuity, imagination, agency, ethics.

I. Introduction: Peirce and Cabot on Chance

The religious landscape of ancient Athens began to shift as it entered its Golden Age (448–290 BCE). This change occurred very literally "by chance." It shifted by chance not in the sense of changing at random, but rather in the sudden emergence of novel votive practices dedicated to Chance (Tyche) as a deified abstraction. Soon, a trend was established: Greeks began to venerate Tyche in the attempt to explain and negotiate the sudden events that took place in their public

Chance and Creativity: The Nature of Contingency in Classical American Philosophy

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and personal histories. Such votive practices also reflected the belief that one's orientation to chance and possibility could affect the ways in which individuals flourished and matured in their everyday lives.²

As American philosophy came into its own in the nineteenth century, the investigation, if not the worship, of Tyche had a meaningful comeback. Poets, theologians and scientists sought to counteract the determinism and material reductionism of the last stages of the scientific revolution by harkening back to the ancient conception of chance. On the philosophical front, Charles Sanders Peirce contributed to this resurgence of chance, appropriating the Greek understanding of chance phenomena in his "pragmatism" and expanding this understanding in his concept of tychism, his doctrine of "absolute chance." Peirce himself comments on his indebtedness to the Greeks' investigations, stating that his tychism was an elaboration on Aristotle's comment that some things are determined and others happen by chance.³ This paper briefly examines the relationship between chance and creativity in Peirce's development of tychism. My investigation of Peirce's work serves to frame the writings of another American thinker, Ella Lyman Cabot, who grapples with similar issues and whose work remains largely, if not fully, untouched by the philosophic mainstream.

In the main, I will address Cabot's "The Relation of Chance to Purpose in Invention," written in 1902, and *Everyday Ethics* (1906).⁴ These writings center on the place of chance in nature and human conduct. Her 1902 papers, written as a graduate student in Josiah Royce's twentieth-century philosophy seminar, is an important contribution to the American philosophical canon for at least two reasons: First, it seems to attempt a revision of tychism that is made along the lines that Peirce sketches in the early 1900s that describe chance as a type of agency. Here, Cabot provides a sustained reflection on the issues of contingency and growth that occupied her male contemporaries. The fact that these pieces, written by a forgotten figure in the American canon, is written four years before Peirce makes his 1906 suggestion concerning the necessary relationship between chance and agency is also particularly intriguing. Cabot's work complements and helps to unpack Peirce's *Monist* articles written in the 1890s, articles that attempt to develop the concept of tychism but fail to make explicit the concrete ways that chance might underpin the opportunity of human flourishing. Second, while Cabot's papers have Roycean undertones, she is not simply parroting Royce on the issues of contingency and purpose. While at first glance it may appear that Cabot holds the Roycean position that chance is an illusion produced by an individual's limited perspective, Cabot maintains that chance is real, beneficial, and inextricably linked to the possibility of human creativity.⁵

As Anderson has noted, Royce and Peirce parted company on the issue of pure chance.⁶ Peirce holds that chance is a real and active force;

Royce does not. It is also well known that the disagreements between Royce and William James turned on this issue as well. This time, James is the Thrasymachus character, insisting that contingency undermines the steady progress of inquiry; Royce continues to maintain a more deterministic bearing. Cabot's work clears a sort of middle ground between these two positions. Most of her graduate studies survey the fertile space between random contingency and determinacy, the space where creativity and imagination seem to reside. In creating this middle position, instead of mimicking any of the aforementioned thinkers, Cabot proposes an original stance that is akin to Emerson's work in "Fate" and "Quotation and Originality."⁷ In effect, Cabot seems to encourage thinkers such as Peirce and Royce to stop their cosmological squabbling, reminds them of their intellectual roots, and at the same time reframes the discourse surrounding chance events in order to focus on issues of human opportunity and creativity. While Cabot seems relatively unaware of Peirce's work, she is well aware of Peirce's transcendental legacy, and her writing allows us to extend his tychistic hypothesis in new and interesting directions while reconnecting this hypothesis to the wider field of American thought. Emerson, Peirce, and to a lesser degree, Royce remained reticent to translate the speculations concerning cosmological chance and purpose into the language of *applied* ethics. In comparison, Cabot's interest in chance is overtly ethical; she believes that a specific orientation to chance events can dramatically alter the course of human conduct. On these grounds, Cabot's work stands as an original contribution to the canon that deserves serious attention.

II. Agency and Spontaneity — The Development of Tychism

While the issue of contingency emerges in Peirce's early works, such as his Lowell lectures of 1866, it is clear that he had yet to grasp the ontological and epistemological import of this doctrine of absolute chance. In the first years of his career, he explores, and then rejects, two less radical understandings of chance that try to attribute chance to either "human ignorance (as Hobbes had) or to the coincidence of thoroughly regulated actions."⁸ It was only in late 1870s that he brought to bear his concept of tychism on the problem of determinism, asserting that spontaneity was a real and motivating force in the evolution of the universe and in the growth and variation of law itself.

Peirce makes this suggestion in opposition to the work of the modern day Democritus and Leucippus, namely, the Spencerian and Darwinian evolutionists that he faced in Cambridge. He insists that these scholars, while concentrating on determinate facts and laws of evolution, overlooked the agential force of tyche upon which variation and adaptation depend. Siding with Epicurus and Aristotle, Peirce holds that "events come to pass in three ways, namely, (1) by external compulsion,

or the action of efficient causes, (2) by virtue of an inward nature, or the influence of final causes, and (3) irregularly without definite cause, but just by absolute chance.”⁹ As Turley explains, chance, as rendered by Aristotle and Peirce, can account for the four main pitfalls that continually befuddle determinists: the phenomenon of growth, the increase of diversity, the existence of regularity, and the continuous processes of consciousness.¹⁰ The work of Cosculluela and others addresses these four points in detail.¹¹ My intent is to extend this work, but focus primarily on the relationship between tychism and Peirce’s understanding of purpose and creativity.

In the “Doctrine of Necessity Examined,” the second article of his *Monist* series, Peirce begins to develop his mature model of tychism as a response to a train of thought that he terms “necessitarianism.” According to the “necessitarian,” nature operates by way of mechanistic rules that could, at least ideally, be exhaustively defined. Peirce, however, suggests that the “growth and developing complexity, which appears to be universal” cannot be understood by means of necessary laws. Similarly, he states that “variety itself is beyond comparison the most obtrusive character of the universe: no mechanism can account for this.”¹² Instead he proposes, and begins to demonstrate by his earlier studies of mathematical probability, that such phenomena can only be explained by way of chance. Here, Peirce writes that he attributes these phenomena “altogether to chance, it is true, but to chance in the form of spontaneity that is to some degree regular.”¹³ This is also to say that “firstness” (which Peirce simultaneously describes as spontaneity, chance and feeling) is one of the defining characteristics of the natural world.¹⁴

In terms of Peirce’s ontological claims, many commentators point to tychism as an important wellspring of the evolutionary cosmology that defines his thought after 1886. This interpretation seems appropriate since Peirce himself indicates that his attempt to develop an account of diversity, evolution, and continuity stems from his initial investigations of the nature of chance. In 1906, in a lecture to the National Academy of Science, Peirce reflected on the role that tychism played in his thinking on the nature of continuity, suggesting that synechism, his notion of evolutionary continuity, is “the synthesis of tychism and pragmatism.”¹⁵ At first glance, this synthesis seems to fit nicely with Darwin’s belief that evolution could be largely explained by way of the synthesis of two factors: the random variability of mutation and the pressure of selection exerted on the phenotypic consequences of these mutations. Peirce, however, unlike Darwin, suggests that a full description of evolution ought to concentrate not on random variability, but the variability of spontaneous agency. This may seem to be a minor distinction, but it is a distinction that becomes more dramatic and more decisive in Peirce’s later writings on tychism. In his description of chance, he writes that, “there is probably in nature some agency by which the complexity

and diversity of things can be increased; and that consequently the rule of mechanical necessity meets in some way with interference.”¹⁶ Hausman is quite good on this point when he writes that this agency ought to be considered the “originative condition that is in some sense responsible for its own action.”¹⁷

At first glance, the relation between chance and agency remains unclear. Peirce addresses this ambiguity, however, in a comment made in 1906 in his unpublished “Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmatism.” He writes:

I intend, as soon as I can command the requisite leisure from pot-boiling, to revise my tychistic hypothesis. I still believe that the universe is constantly receiving excessively minute accessions of variety; but instead of supposing, as I formerly did, that these are causeless (chances), I think there is sufficient ground for supposing that they are due to psychical action upon matter . . . at present, the psychical researchers have certainly cast serious doubt on our old materialist theory without instituting any progressive method of research into the problem. In this situation, a happy working hypothesis might prove of the utmost service. It would be a pity that the human race should go down to its grave, to which it is visible drawing near, without (addressing) its principal problem.¹⁸

In this passage, Peirce makes explicit the way in which chance might be considered the visible outcome of psychical action. This suggestion is significant for it not only recasts the concept of chance, but suggests that we reconsider the continuity of matter and mind. Peirce foreshadows this move when he claims that “chance is but the outward aspect of that which within itself is feeling.”¹⁹

The vital connection between psychical life and material processes is brought to the fore in Peirce’s description of the “regularity” of tyche; Peirce is going to insist that chance does not imply sheer randomness, but rather gives birth to a type of order that emerges provisionally in the midst of phenomena. In discussing the variation of Darwinian evolution, he suggests that spontaneous acts of variation, constrained by particular contextual forces, can beget provisional order and a type of directionality. In his “Architecture of Theories,” Peirce explains that, “the Darwinian principle is plainly capable of great generalization” and is a reflection of the broader principle that he termed synchism. He elaborates on this point by stating:

Wherever there are large numbers of objects having a tendency to retain certain characters unaltered, this tendency, however, *not being absolute but giving room for chance variations*, then, if the amount of variation is absolutely limited in certain directions by the destruction of everything which reaches those limits, there will be a gradual tendency to change in directions of departure from them.²⁰

It is necessary to note that Peirce's description of Darwinian evolution is markedly similar to his rendering of habits in psychical action. Tyche motivates the order of nature, an order that interestingly reflects the spontaneity and adaptation that had been often reserved for descriptions of the human mind. Just as the habits of the human mind are occasionally overcome and revised by the generation of new hypotheses, the laws of nature are occasionally violated by a novel occurrence that provides the possibility of growth and adaptation. In regard to Peirce's epistemological claims, scholars such as Hausman suggest that Peirce's acknowledgement of tychism in the world coincided with his conviction that chance must also play a vital role in any theory of human knowledge and the growth of the natural world.²¹ Knowledge, and the natural processes by which it arises, develops by hypothetical leaps and bounds rather than by the direction of pre-established axioms and laws.

In Peirce's words, chance is "a mathematical term to express with accuracy the characteristics of freedom and spontaneity."²² In this sense, the principle of tychism draws Peirce to rethink the natural world in terms of a type of idealism that he had internalized against his will; in his early life he admits that "transcendentalist" is one of the unfortunate names he calls himself. He admits this point in "The Law of Mind" when he writes: "I have begun by showing that *tychism* must give birth to an evolutionary cosmology, in which all the regularities of nature and of mind are regarded as products of growth, and to a Schelling-fashioned idealism which holds matter to be mere specialized and partially deadened mind."²³ In this article Peirce elaborates, commenting that his interest in tychism *per se* must, at least for the time being, be put aside in order to pursue the evolutionary idealism that his investigation of chance and spontaneity has revealed. While tychism sets the stage for his later work, Peirce explicitly shifts his focus away from absolute chance toward the principle of synechism and true continuity. He justifies this move in the last article of the *Monist* series, "Evolutionary Love," when he explains that synechism in fact encompasses the principle of pure chance, or more accurately put, tychism is a degenerate form of synechism.²⁴

To say that Peirce shifts his focus from the topic of spontaneous agency as the defining element of tychism to the character of phenomenological continuity as the characteristic of synechism and agapism may misconstrue the development of his writing. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that, in his investigation of tychism as "some type of agency," he discovers one of the continuous threads that unifies the psychical-physical world. In this sense, he does not abandon one topic for another, but rather comes to realize the implications of the topic of tychism that had long occupied his attention. In one stroke, tychism entails synechism, Peirce's doctrine of continuity, and agapism.²⁵

To elaborate on these points, it seems wise to return to the passage from his 1906 “Apology to Pragmatism.” Here Peirce suggests that chance occurrences—occurrences that characterize every aspect of the universe—might be understood as emerging in the interaction of psychological and physical actions. To reframe chance along these lines is at once to reconsider the purposive actions by which diversity and complexity are increased, that is to say, to reconsider the agency that animates our natural and mental lives. According to Peirce, this task of understanding chance-agency stands for the human race as “its principal problem.” Peirce, however, makes only partial attempts to explain *why* the question of chance might be significant. I believe that Cabot provides precisely this explanation.

In taking up this principal problem—the problem that emerges from his study of chance events—Peirce merely alludes to the fact that we not only investigate “our own” agency, but rather the agency and purposiveness of the world at large. Additionally, he begins to explore the conditions by which individuals maintain fruitful relations with the chance spontaneity of the world. This is the point that Cabot will extend in her writing. As she underscores, this is not some abstract problem but an immediate and pressing issue of how human beings are to act rightly and meaningfully in ever-changing circumstances. And they are ever-changing: we are continually confronted by the newness and growth that emerge in our immediate situations and in our wider communities. Peirce seems to suggest, but not state explicitly, that we forego the *chance* of acting rightly precisely at the point that we disregard, or simply overlook, the novelty that we encounter. In such cases, our habits and conventions are out of kilter with our surroundings and lead us further from the harmonious growth that only our encounters with novelty can afford.

IV. An Unexpected Swerve: Cabot on Contingency and Purpose

I did not originally set out to write an essay on this topic. It chanced during last summer that I was sifting through boxes of notes taken by Peirce and Royce during the late 1890s. My purpose at the time was quite clear: I intended to write about the concepts of the imagination and contingency as they were developed by these American thinkers. In the process of this inquiry, however, I began to notice things that were outside the scope of my project, beyond the usual habits of my research. More specifically, I noticed a name that continued to emerge in the course of my archival work, a name that was unfamiliar to my given purposes: “Mrs. Cabot.” In 1902, Royce had repeatedly referenced this individual and her work on growth and chance events. In the *Philosophy of Loyalty* and the *Problem of Christianity* he thanks her for helping to develop his projects. My unexpected encounter with this unknown figure in American philosophy caused my former project to take a dramatic turn. In

the language of Epicurus or Peirce, my investigation took an unexpected swerve. Indeed, I never got around to finishing my original project. Some might say with a certain amount of disgust that I “got distracted.” Perhaps this is true. I would, however, suggest that the distraction and disruption caused by chance encounters can lead to innovation and original work. It seems pointedly Peircean to suggest that one’s musings, which he describes so nicely in “The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” ought to hold some sway over the lockstep rules that often govern philosophic pursuits. “Musement,” according to Peirce, is the free play involved in sustaining chance encounters. I would later find out that Cabot herself had voiced this opinion in 1894:

It’s a rule of the game that on penalty of death no one shall use uniform phrases or acts save for the task of a new construction. We tend forever to slip into the ease and luxury of our old accustomed ways. A stranger disturbs our peace. We do not see that in the ruffling caused by the interruption may be our opportunity. For the stranger has a message be he a seer or a fool . . . everyday is a reconstruction period. If I can only work in my particular armchair or niche I am in so far making a story shell—acquiring moral arterial sclerosis. Not that I can instantly and by myself assimilate the difficulty, but that the sources of strength are in the reach of many.²⁶

In addressing Cabot’s work, a virtual stranger to most us, we allow ourselves to enter a type of “reconstruction period”—the reconstruction of American philosophy. Cabot herself seems aware of the opportunity that the interruption of chance phenomena can afford. She suggests that distraction may lead us to make original contributions, but that it need not lead us away from our guiding plans and purposes. It only takes a bit of insight to see how creative and improvisational enterprises might lead us back to enrich and enliven our original intentions. I hope that the forthcoming treatment of Ella Lyman Cabot’s work reflects this fact. I believe that her work on chance and invention helps us revisit and refresh our understanding of Peirce’s tychism in a meaningful way. Additionally, by highlighting a figure whose work has been excluded from the field of American thought, we have the chance to revisit and renew our understanding of the canon.

In “The Relation of Chance to Purpose in Invention” (1902), Cabot opens her reflection by stating that it is her intent to define the three principal terms of her title. She begins by stating that, “Chance is the encounter of factors outside of our plans with our special end.” Next, she addresses purpose, admitting that the term is a slippery one and that there is the temptation, and perhaps even an honest reason, to broaden the term beyond the realm of mere human pursuits. She writes that, “I know of course, that there is and can be no fixed moment in the growth of an individual at which purpose begins and it is rooted in

what is less definite, but to keep myself to a standard of clearness, I shall say that an individual has a purpose when he has a deliberate plan of action."²⁷ Cabot's account of chance and purpose seem, at least initially, to mirror Josiah Royce's reflections in the *World and the Individual*. As Anderson notes, Royce continues to maintain that contingency is an illusion produced by our perspectives as finite individuals. Additionally, and I would argue more importantly, this fact led Royce to adhere to a particular kind of philosophical practice that eschewed inductive and experimental approaches. Throughout the *World and the Individual*, he indicates that the goal of philosophy is see through this illusion, to tear down the pesky veil of the accidental, in order to see with rational clearness the World, and ultimately God. This objective was to be achieved largely through a particular form of philosophical dialectic that relied heavily on deductive methods. Royce had not strayed too far from his position expressed in *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, namely that chance occurrences, not criminals, are the true devils of life.²⁸ Cabot will diverge from Royce's position in several significant respects.

The similarities between Cabot and Royce, however, seem to be on full display when she writes:

The question at once arises what is chance? In the first place it does not involve lawlessness. All effects in Nature, however complicated have causes and hence there is no chance in the outer world. Again, all human actions are determined by ends and there is no chance in the world of man though here, as in any complicated natural event, the difficulty of tracing intricate relations may give the appearance of a lack of motive or cause. There is no accident either in the world of nature or of thought, but what we call chance is always the encounter of factors of which our plans are unaware with our own end.²⁹

We might assume, quite safely, that these views coincide with Royce's insistence that Nature be lawful and causally explicable. I am inclined to suggest that in this section Cabot is taking her cues not only from Royce, but also from Emerson in his claim that, "Fate then is a name for facts not yet passed under the fire of thought;—for causes which are unpenetrated."³⁰ Cabot was attracted to Emerson's work as a teenager, and his essays written in the early 1860s would remain touchstones for Cabot throughout her life. To recognize this intellectual history is to explore a more fruitful interpretation of Cabot's work on the topics of chance and creativity. For Royce and Peirce, the statement that chance is a name for causes that remain unpenetrated is question-begging: Could the causes of nature, in this case, be ideally and exhaustively penetrated? Both approach this question through a detailed and exhausting investigation of logic—Peirce in his logic of relations and Royce in his development of system Σ . For Emerson and Cabot, however, this question prompts a slightly different response.

In Emerson's words, "the question of the times," and here he suggests that this is also the question of fate and chance, "resolved itself into a practical question of the conduct of life. How shall I live?"³¹ Cabot's treatment of chance is similarly practical and will take its heading from these remarks. After asserting that fate is the name for unexplained causes, Emerson asserts that some causes will *always remain* beyond the realm of the intellect: "Providence has a wild, rough and incalculable road to its end, and it is no use to try to white wash its huge, mixed instrumentalities, or to dress up that terrific benefactor in a clean shirt and white neckcloth of a student in divinity."³² This road is "incalculable to its end" in the sense that nature always extends beyond the maps employed to negotiate its confusing intersections, switchbacks and very *longue duree*. This does not, however, mean that we are fated to be perpetually and thoroughly lost, only that our plans and explanations will remain partial and provisional.

Cabot seems to make a similar move to the extent that she insists that every theory will fall short in its ability to anticipate the swerve of nature. She writes that Darwin complained about his plant specimens, exclaiming, "the little beggars are doing exactly what I don't want them to!" Cabot suggests that the scientist ought to have appreciated this sort of irregularity since it is precisely the deviation from the rule of inherited traits that provides the variability by which adaptive selection operates. The fact that "the beggars" defied his expectations was also the factor "that led Darwin to (the) truly original discoveries" of natural selection and variation.³³ There may "be no accident either in the world of nature or of thought," but for Cabot accident is actual and causally significant in the encounter *between* nature and thought. This is the region where human purposes arise and grow.

On this note, Cabot insists first that "chance actually does enter into our purposes and second that when we rigidly exclude chance originality dies."³⁴ Cabot turns our attention not to the deductive proofs of some of her teachers, but to experimental and aesthetic experience in order to demonstrate her point:

Is not the starting point of invention the imperfect, the chaotic, the disorderly, rather than the exclusively deliberate and definite? . . . the fact that roots grow only in the dark and that seeds must be buried has wider applications than in the realm of horticulture. It is most often out of the dark unconscious that the greatest thoughts grow and poems written for occasions and deliberately commemorative pictures at usually the least original.³⁵

The elision of natural invention and human creativity is a move that Emerson makes in "Nature" (1844) when he pays "homage" to "natura naturans," or nature in its active capacity. This activity, according to

Emerson, is “itself secret” to the extent that it is neither determinate nor fully determinable. The emergence and creativity of nature is, however, a real and vital force. Things are kept on the move, and Nature’s “works (are) driven before it in flocks and multitudes (as the ancients represented nature by Proteus, a Shepard) and indescribable variety.”³⁶ Having briefly discussed Peirce’s rendering of chance as a spontaneous “first,” the meaning of Emerson’s reference to Proteus comes into clearer view; Proteus’s name refers to “the first,” in the sense that *protogonos* refers to “the first-born,” “the original” and “the primordial.” The flexible activity of nature depends on the “firstness” of spontaneous variation. It is this spontaneity that drives the creation of nature forward.

When Cabot enters the discussion of chance and contingency, she notes that a variety of chance factors break into the birth of human purpose “at the starting point of invention.” While this aspect of chance interests Cabot, she is particularly impressed by the way in which contingency maintains its protean function by transforming our deliberate purposes in the latter stages of their development. Seemingly unaware of Peirce’s description of thirdness as generality, Cabot writes that contingency’s ability to affect habitual purposes is due “primarily to the fact that every idea or plan we form is vague, it is a frame to hold a thousand different pictures. . . . this looseness of indefiniteness of any plan which might be considered a lack, is the center of radiating opportunity.”³⁷ In her notebooks for the “The Search for the Eternal,” written in the same year, the author indicates that the indefiniteness reflected in a particular plan may also lurk at the heart of general laws. Here, butted up against a scribbled copy of Wordsworth’s “Mutability,” Cabot writes: “When we say that the Truth or the law holds unchanged in spite of incessant variation in manifestation we are separating form from content. We put the law so far off from this changing manifestations that it cannot be hurt. In so doing, we find that it is too remote to be a source of heat.”³⁸

Cabot realizes that she is treading dangerous philosophic ground—the chasm of relativism and nihilism gapes below. If, as she suggests, “plans ought to be vague,” what becomes of definite and meaningful purposes? In the words of the cynical student, “What is the point of having ideas or purposes, if chance is just going to come along and change them?” Cabot keeps her balance in answering these questions by leading us back to her initial definition of chance as occurrences that emerge beyond the scope of our current pursuits. “Without purpose,” therefore, “there is no chance and . . . any purpose in proportion to its width and strength changes chance to *my* chance.”³⁹ Here it is obvious that the general question of Fate and Chance is to be negotiated only to the extent that responds to the more pressing particular question of “*my* chance,” the personal possibilities of human conduct.

For Cabot and Emerson, the encounter with our natural surroundings, often defined by its emergent and unexpected character, provides

a space for chance. More specifically, it creates a clearing for *my* chance—a personal and meaningful opportunity for creative engagement. It is Darwin's sensitivity to factors beyond his current purposes, to chance, that led him to original developments.⁴⁰ It is the poet's attunement to external facts—the inspiration of rhyme or nature—that grants her the power of the first word. Issues concerning the wildness and contingency of Providence lead Cabot and Emerson not to a study of logic and cosmology, as in the case of Peirce and Royce, but to a reflection on genius and human creativity, to the question of how we are to live our lives. These thinkers are led to address the realm of human conduct, the place where the dilemma of determinism meaningfully matters.

V. The Vision of the Imagination—The Chance Provided By Chance

So women, as most susceptible, are the best index of the coming hour. So the great man, that is the man most imbued with the spirit of the time, is the impressionable man,—of a fibre irritable and delicate, like iodine to light. He feels infinitesimal attractions. His mind is righter than others, because he yields to a current so feeble as can be felt only by a needle delicately poised.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate" (1860)⁴¹

A brief comment needs to be made, not on the topic of pure chance *per se*, but on the human capacity that stands equipped to respond to the chance encounters that Cabot describes. In addition to purpose, another capacity is required in order to allow chance to emerge and work its way into our projects. Cabot, along with a host of German Idealists and fellow pragmatists, describes this capacity as the imagination. Cabot's work on the imagination is extensive and, written in the first decade of the 1900s, anticipates much of Dewey's thinking in *Art as Experience* and the *Quest for Certainty*, tomes that continue to be regarded as American philosophy's most definitive word on the subject. Her prescience is evinced in writings, such as *Everyday Ethics*, that wed ethical action to the creative imagination. The reliance of ethics on the imagination will be pursued in the coming section, but a few words are warranted on the relationship between the imagination and chance.

In her 1906 *Everyday Ethics*, Cabot writes that, "we define the imagination as the power to follow the spirit and trend of any fact."⁴² When chance facts break into our usual routine, as they invariably do, it is the imagination that allows one to respond to these interruptions as real opportunities. It is the imagination that allows one to take a turn in her thinking that is motivated by a chance encounter. Instead of passively ignoring or actively destroying a chance, the imagination seizes upon the unexpected, and recognizes the possibilities that it affords. Cabot

returns to the ancient distinction between *eikasia* and *phantasia* in stating the difference between imagination and mere fancy. She writes that, “imagination seeks and tries further to reveal the dawning truth . . . while fancy is not governed by any such allegiance.”⁴³ Here, the definition of the imagination that Cabot provides as a “dawning truth” is a rendition of *eikasia* that Plato gives in Book 6 and 7 of the *Republic* as an “argument from appearances.”⁴⁴ *Eikasia* connotes the interplay of purposes and contingent appearances. In her words, “in all that we see we constantly use the imagination. The red wall of my neighbour’s house looks solid and hard because my imagination leaps to the conclusion that it is made of brick; but my eyes never see the brick.”⁴⁵ While the imagination may be operative in all cases of seeing, as Cabot suggests, it is most obviously at play when we encounter and creatively integrate chance appearances, that is, appearances that fall outside the narrow confines of our given domain of inquiry.

She elaborates on the character of imagination as *eikasia* through an everyday example, pointing out the fact that while many people have had “delicious fancies awakened as they dream over a steaming kettle,” it was only to an imagination like Watts that the fact of boiling water suggests “new principles and prophetic constructions.”⁴⁶ In effect, the imagination identifies a chance, personal and meaningful, that is provided by chance encounters experienced in relation to a purpose. It is only through the imagination that chance becomes *my* chance. It seems likely that Cabot is again echoing a passage from Emerson’s “Fate.” Here Emerson comments that inexplicable chance is regarded as the devil until the imaginative genius puts it to good use: “Steam was, till the other day, the devil which we dreaded. Every pot made by any human had a hole in the cover, to let off the enemy, lest he should lift the pot and the roof, and carry the house away. But Watt and Fulton bethought themselves, that, where was power was not devil, but was God; that it must be availed of and not by any means let off or wasted.”⁴⁷ Cabot suggests that the lack of this sort of insight begins to explain not only the systemic dullness of her day, but also its dis-ease. Chance is not to be regarded as the devil, as Royce occasionally portrayed it, but rather unexpected occurrences are to be cherished as divine opportunities. She writes, “The man of little imagination may plod along doing about what is expected of him . . . thousands of iridescent opportunities open for a moment like a rainbow before him, but he sees only the dust in the road.”⁴⁸ For this wanderer, the road of life is characterized by an odd, but all too familiar, mix of drudgery and anxiety. Things appear on this road in one of two unsatisfactory ways: as a patterned and boring landscape or as disjointed and chaotic terrain. In both cases, Elbert Hubbard would say that “life is just one damn thing after another.” In both cases, we remain oddly out of touch with our surroundings, displaced and forever not at home.

Cabot suggests that it is only through acts of the imagination that we can make a meaningful home on the road, or more accurately, make this road, with all of its blind curves, our home. “The imagination,” she writes, “is the power to be in whatever we touch. It is through imagination that we fill the gaps and out of fragments make a whole.”⁴⁹ This power keeps us firmly grounded to, and in contact with, the facts that continually confront us. In typical fashion, Cabot employs a mundane example to illustrate an esoteric point. She asks her students to consider the facts that one might find in a newspaper. The newspaper is filled, at least in a certain sense, with descriptions of extraordinary events and unforeseen circumstances—hence being called “the *news*.” This teacher makes a list of the headlines from the day and then points out that “each of these items . . . may be read with a maximum or a minimum of imagination.”⁵⁰ When the imagination is fully awake, each of these topics—from a railroad accident, to a sudden heavy gale, to a miners’ strike in Wilkes-Barre—have a meaningful bearing on our lives. This meaningful bearing is realized by dwelling with the “news,” by being intimately familiar with circumstances as they emerge, and grasping the relations that might exist between these chance events and our current purposes. Cabot, however, reflects on the lethargic imagination of the modern age, stating that “so unimaginative are we that often read the newspaper . . . and as we throw it down complain that nothing is in it. There is indeed nothing in it for those who are “out of it.”⁵¹

We need to be careful to distinguish between Cabot’s suggestion that we are to be imaginatively involved in the novel occurrences, and the modern tendency to fetishize and mindlessly consume the news. As Samuel Johnson indicates in his *Idler* (1754), there is a tendency for an individual “to loose himself in the croud, filling the vacuities of his mind with the news of the day.”⁵² This state of mind—or mindlessness—is one of passive occupation and serves to mask the tedium that silently underpins our lives. Thomas Gray criticizes women precisely along these lines, stating that women busy themselves with the news, but fail to engage it as meaningful “business.” They “always find something to do,” according to Gray, “a variety of inventions and occupations fill up the void.”⁵³ Men, in his misogynistic portrayal, must be imbued with a spirit, or a type of “Genius,” to occupy their time. Cabot’s comments concerning the imagination respond to Gray’s insult on a variety of levels. First, Cabot’s engagement with the news relies on two, equally important dispositions that modern thinkers continued to regard as antithetical ideals. On the one hand, this engagement requires an attunement to events and facts outside our current purposes; we are to remain open to chance events and allow them to have a say in our future. On the other hand, it demands an active participation in these events as they unfold. If chance has a say in our future, it is equally true that we can affect the headline of tomorrow’s news. The two-sided dis-

position that Cabot evokes as the character of the imagination may be regarded as uniquely pragmatic, but its origins lie in the description of the imagination and genius as rendered in the works of Kant, Schiller and Coleridge. Cabot, in effect, reclaims the concept of imaginative genius, or at the very least, underlines the way in which the way that women once “passed the time” could now be taken up as a meaningful creative enterprise if one approached novel occurrences in a particular pragmatic fashion.

VI. Conclusion

It may be helpful to survey the path that has been covered to this point. It is interesting to note that most commentators suggest that Peirce’s investigation of chance events led him deeper into the metaphysical speculation of his later works. A few of these same scholars note that this turn in his later work also signals a type of late-budding interest in the ethical conduct of human beings. As Claudine Tiercelin recently writes, in the later years of Peirce’s life, “tychism is . . . linked with ethics and theology.”⁵⁴ For example, his continual interest in abduction as hypothesis formation and his discussion of musement in 1908 serves as a description of a careful encounter of the self with the dawning of new facts. “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” outlines a type of musing disposition that, apart from opening an individual to the reality of the Divine, reflects a type of ethical attunement that might be necessary to respond to novel circumstances. Let us remember that in the act of musement we temporarily set aside our self-centered purposes or, at the very least, look beyond their constraining scope. That is also to say that we await the emergence of chance and are willing to claim this chance as our own. I think Tiercelin is right in her evaluation of tychism, but I also know that exposing the relation between Peirce’s cosmological understanding of chance and the mundane affairs of everyday ethics is arduous labor. If tychism is linked to ethics, it is, at best, a loose link that requires the hands of today’s scholars to tighten it.

In the case of Cabot’s work, however, there is no such challenge. Indeed, we might use Cabot’s work to affix Peirce’s metaphysics to the sphere of human conduct. Her investigation of chance and creativity is, from the outset, steeped in the challenges and opportunity of worldly affairs. Being a woman in the intellectual spheres of Cambridge in the late 1800s, Cabot learned first hand what some of her male contemporaries only vaguely intuited: that circumstances brought about by chance and fate could be seen as obstacles and nuisances, but equally, as occasions for imaginative insight. In fact, it seems that Peirce, perennially dissatisfied with his career and life-trajectory, might have taken a note from Cabot and applied his intellectual ingenuity in reforming *his* everyday ethic. Instead of retreating to an isolated home in eastern Pennsylvania or into the rarified air of cosmology, Cabot’s writings on

chance, opportunity, and imagination lead her back to the life of her community, to her activism, and to rethink the ethical sphere.

Cabot's reading lists, drafted between the ages of nineteen and thirty-three, reflect a consistent interest in Emerson's essays. As mentioned earlier, her thinking on chance and creativity resonates with Emerson's "Fate." This resonance with Emerson can also be heard in Cabot's willingness to identify the deadening effects of modernity and to chastise her countrymen for their lack of meaningful and creative activity. In an 1899 notebook, she takes her cues from the "American Scholar." She writes:

Americans are inventive and active minded to an unusual degree, but a fearfully large proportion of the population act passively and mechanically. We are parasites, sucking the life out of the past instead of contributing the new word. We don't earn our salt. We have hardly to learn that nothing is to be accepted passively, but all is to be faced imaginatively, not from a sense of superiority, but of indebtedness, of loyalty.⁵⁵

This type of admonishment, usually interpreted as *mere* social commentary, is rooted in Cabot's philosophical study of chance and contingency. Cabot's is the realization that the study of philosophy in America must lead out into the uncharted territory of human relations in order to understand the chances that may remain open to individuals and communities. We ought to engage in the discourse surrounding *tyche* not for the sake of intellectual *busyness*, but for the sake of creative flourishing in human *business*. Today, in our not-so-golden age, the religious veneration of Tyche is still meant to bring us in touch with Fortune—our fortunes—and to awaken us to the chances that lie beyond our current purposes.

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NOTES

1. I would like to thank Scott Pratt for his helpful review of an early draft of this article. Douglas Anderson and Carl Hausman also made comments that proved extremely helpful in the development of this work. The research for this article was sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

2. See John Kaag. "Tychism." *The Routledge Encyclopedia of American Philosophy*. ed. John Lachs and Robert Talisse. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

3. "A Guess at the Riddle." Charles Peirce. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vol. I-VI, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vol. VII-VIII, ed. Arthur W. Burks. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1960). References to the *Collected Papers* will be given in the usual manner; thus CP 6.204.

4. A brief biographical note seems warranted before addressing the works of Ella Lyman Cabot. Ella Lyman Cabot, educator, author and lecturer, was born into a prominent Boston family in 1866, the fourth of the seven children of Ella (Lowell) Lyman (1837–1894) and Arthur Theodore Lyman (1832–1915). The Lymans, a close-knit family, lived at 39 Beacon St. in Boston and at the Lyman estate in Waltham, and as Unitarians attended King’s Chapel. Ella Lyman was educated in Boston private schools, attended Radcliffe College as a special student (1889–1891), and took graduate courses at Harvard (1897–1903). Cabot began her career as an educator in 1897. Over the next four decades she taught ethics and applied psychology at Boston private schools and at Pine Manor Junior College in Wellesley; she also directed the Sunday school at King’s Chapel. She served on the governing boards of Radcliffe College, 1902–1934, and on the Massachusetts Board of Education, 1905–1934. Cabot published seven books on ethics and childhood education between 1906 and 1929, a privately-printed 3-volume biography of her parents, and many articles and pamphlets. She died in 1934. Throughout her career, she was in regular contact with Josiah Royce and visited John Dewey’s Chicago school in 1898 and again in 1907. See also John Kaag, “Women and Forgotten Movements in American Philosophy: The Work of Ella Lyman Cabot and Mary Parker Follett,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 44:1 (2008).

5. In *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (1892), Royce disparages “brute chance” on the grounds that chance jeopardizes the gains made in human inquiry and disrupts our steadfast faith in law and God. He states that, “the true devil is not crime, then but brute chance. For this devil teaches us to doubt and grow cold of heart; he denies God everywhere and in all his creatures, makes our world of action, that was to be spiritual tragedy, too often mere farce before our eyes.” Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), p. 469. In Royce’s later works, especially in *The Problem of Christianity*, he amends his position and alludes to the fact that chance *qua* chance may play a very small role in human growth and progress. He seems to tacitly accept that contingent occurrences, facts that lie outside the habits of nature and the purposes of man, may serve as the impetus for our imaginative and creative progress.

6. Douglas Anderson. “Who’s a Pragmatist?” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 41:3 (2005): 467–481.

7. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Fate” in *The Oxford Authors Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Richard Poirier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 345–66; and “Quotation and Originality,” *op. cit.*, pp. 327–39.

8. Peter Turley, “Peirce on Chance,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 5 (1969): 244.

9. CP 6.36.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Victor Cosculluela, “Peirce on Tychism and Determinism,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 28 (1992): 741–54. See also David Dearthmont, “A Hint of Empirical Evidence for Peirce’s Tychism,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 31 (1995): 193.

12. “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined.” CP 6.64.

13. “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined.” CP 6.63.

14. For Peirce’s discussion of “firstness” as chance see CP 6.202.

15. CP 4.584.

16. CP 6.58
17. Carl Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 172.
18. MS 292.
19. CP 6.265
20. CP 6.15.
21. Hausman, *op. cit.*, 160–67.
22. CP 6.201
23. “The Law of Mind.” CP 6.102.
24. “Evolutionary Love.” CP 6.287
25. Anderson and Ventimiglia address the relationship between chance and love in detail. See Douglas Anderson and Michael Ventimiglia, *Philosophy Americana: Making Philosophy at Home in American Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 167–87.
26. Many of the citations from Ella Lyman Cabot are from the unpublished papers housed at Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University. *Collected Papers of Ella Lyman Cabot*. A-139. Folder 322. After this point, all citations will be made in call/folder style. Hence, MS A139 / 322
27. MS A139 / 324
28. Royce writes, “The true devil isn’t crime, then, but brute chance. For this devil teaches us to doubt and grow cold of heart; he denies God everywhere and in all his creatures, makes our world of action, that was to be a spiritual tragedy, too often a mere farce before our eyes. And to see this farcical aspect of the universe is for the first time to come to a sense of the true gloom of life.” Josiah Royce. *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*. (New York: Dover, 1983), 469.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Ralph Waldo Emerson. “Fate” in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*. Ed. Richard Poirier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 358.
31. *Ibid.*, 345.
32. *Ibid.*, 347.
33. MS A139 / 324.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. Ralph Waldo Emerson. “Nature” in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*. Ed. Richard Poirier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 239.
37. After publishing the *Monist* series in the early 1890s, Peirce becomes increasingly interested in the character of generality and vagueness in the construction of mediating plans and purposes. See CP 3.338. Cabot reference A 139/ 324.
38. A139/ 373.
39. A139 / 324.
40. In fragments entitled “The Search for the Eternal,” Cabot reasserts the ubiquity, not of chance, but of change. This is an interesting passage since Shelley’s “Ozymandius” is often interpreted as an ode to fate and chance. Cabot writes: “In Ozymandius of Egypt, Shelley brings before us irresistible devastating crushing power of time . . . Nothing besides remains. Change has crept in and leveled

the glory of the tyrant. His fortresses and palaces have vanished. But what happened to Ozymandius is happening all around us though only the vast stretches of time have made the complete wreck visible yet it is around everywhere if our eyes were keen enough to see it. All is change, Heraclitus said, and the thought brings a haunting restlessness, a longing for some firm hold. As Clifford says in his Essay I in *On Moral Development*, 'If you will carefully consider what it is that you have done most often during this day . . . you have really done nothing else from morning to night but to change your mind.' . . . The incessant change is covered up by its gradualness and by the common habit of ignoring . . . is there in the last analysis anything that remains permanent through the flow of events, any unity that holds past, present and future together? There have been persistent efforts to answer this question, Efforts often as desperate as struggles of one overboard to save himself, for without something solid to which to hold life is meaningless. If change itself is to have meaning it must be through some standard, some unity by which we compare past and present. One of the commonest types of answer to the question what endures through change is though changes are numerous there remains still something that is which is common to and persistent through all change that may occur. We see everywhere the contrast of the relatively permanent with the more lasting. A great many things indeed appear absolutely permanent until we look at them closely." A139 / 373.

41. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate" in *The Oxford Authors Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Richard Poirier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 364.

42. Ella Lyman Cabot, *Everyday Ethics* (New York: H. Holt and co., 1910), p. 204.

43. *Ibid.* 205.

44. *Republic* 516 c-d.

45. Ella Lyman Cabot, *Everyday Ethics* (New York: H. Holt and co., 1910), p. 203.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *op. cit.*, p., 359.

48. Ella Lyman Cabot. *Everyday Ethics*. (New York: H. Holt and co., 1910), p. 212.

49. *Ibid.*, 210

50. *Ibid.*, 206.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Samuel Johnson, *The Idler and The Adventurer*, ed. John Bullitt, vol. 2 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven: Yale, 1963), 11, no. 3.

53. Thomas Gray, *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, vol. 2, ed. P. Toynbee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 666. Patricia Meyer Spacks provides a very useful account of these passages that explores the relation between activity of the imagination and the state of boredom. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 31–59.

54. Claudine Tiercelin. "Peirce on Norms, Evolution, and Knowledge." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 33:1 (1997) 59.

55. A139 / 322v.