



Gesche Linde\*

# Is the Principle of Sufficient Reason Dispensable in a Cosmological Argument for an *Ens Necessarium*? An Inquiry with Peirce

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**Abstract:** This essay examines the relationship between the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) and the claim of a necessarily existing being (NEB) within the context of cosmological arguments for the existence of God. While the contemporary philosopher of religion Friedrich Hermanni, following Leibniz, regards the PSR as implying – or even being equivalent to – the assumption of a NEB, Charles Sanders Peirce, who shares certain philosophical concerns with Leibniz but writes under the influence of 19th-century evolutionary theories, appears to treat the NEB either as having a projection function or merely as a conjunct. This article seeks to illuminate the distinct conceptual backgrounds – particularly regarding the theory of signs and the paradigms of logic – and to explain how Peirce, by taking into account vagueness and indeterminacy, arrives at a different understanding of inference, metaphysics, reality, and the idea of God as the *Ens necessarium*.

**Keywords:** Peirce, Leibniz, Hermanni, Cosmological Proof, Ens Necessarium, Principle of Sufficient Reason

**Zusammenfassung:** Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit der Beziehung zwischen dem Satz vom zureichenden Grund (PSR) und der Annahme eines notwendig existierenden Wesens (NEB) im Kontext kosmologischer Argumente für die Existenz Gottes. Während der zeitgenössische Religionsphilosoph Friedrich Hermanni in Anlehnung an Leibniz PSR als Implikation – vielleicht sogar als Äquivalent – der Annahme eines NEB betrachtet, scheint Charles Sanders Peirce, der bestimmte philosophische Anliegen mit Leibniz teilt, jedoch unter dem Einfluss der Evolutionstheorien des 19. Jahrhunderts schreibt, das NEB entweder als Projektion oder lediglich als Kon-

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**\*Corresponding author:** Prof. **Gesche Linde**, Eberhard Karls University Tübingen, Faculty of Protestant Theology, Systematic Theology, Liebermeisterstr. 12, D-72076 Tübingen, Germany,  
E-Mail: gesche.linde@uni-tuebingen.de

junkt von PSR zu verstehen. Dieser Artikel versucht, die unterschiedlichen begrifflichen Hintergründe – insbesondere in Bezug auf Semiotik bzw. Logik – zu beleuchten und zu erläutern, wie Peirce unter Berücksichtigung von Unbestimmtheit und Indeterminiertheit zu einem eigenständigen Verständnis von Inferenz, Metaphysik, Realität und der Idee Gottes als *Ens necessarium* gelangt.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Peirce, Leibniz, Hermanni, Kosmologischer Beweis, Ens Necessarium, Satz vom zureichenden Grund

## 1 The Cosmological Proof for the Existence of God and the Principle of Sufficient Reason

Cosmological proofs for the existence of God, regardless of how one determines their function with regard to faith (whether foundational or explicative), traditionally require the principle of sufficient reason as a presupposition. Why? Because, in short, every contingent being, in accordance with the well-established and customary rules of human reasoning, demands a causal explanation for its existence and nature. This is what the philosopher of religion Friedrich Hermanni states in his response to Nicholas Rescher from 2016, titled „Why is anything possible at all?”<sup>1</sup> – a position that is already found in a similar form in his *Metaphysics*. If the principle of sufficient reason holds, then „from it, as well as from the unproblematic assumption that contingents exist, it will necessarily follow the factuality, and thus also the possibility, of a necessarily existing being.”<sup>2</sup> Even if the chain of explanations were to be infinitely extended within the world, „the question of why a world exists at all and why it is specifically the factual one would remain unanswered.”<sup>3</sup> Hermanni draws the following contrapositive from this: „If it [i.e., a necessarily existing being] were impossible [...], then the statement of the principle of sufficient reason could

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Hermanni, „Warum ist überhaupt etwas möglich? Eine Antwort auf Nicholas Rescher,” *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 123, 2 (2016): 27–36.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 35: „Denn aus diesem Satz [sc. vom zureichenden Grund] und aus der unproblematischen Annahme, dass Kontingentes existiert, folgt zwingend die Wirklichkeit, mithin auch die Möglichkeit eines notwendig existierenden Wesens.” See also: Friedrich Hermanni, *Metaphysik: Versuche über letzte Fragen*, Collegium Metaphysicum 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2017), 40–41.

<sup>3</sup> Hermanni, „Warum ist überhaupt etwas möglich?,” 30: „Mit der Erklärung jedes einzelnen kontingenten Dings durch die kausale Wirksamkeit eines anderen wäre die Frage, warum überhaupt eine Welt besteht und warum gerade die faktische, nicht beantwortet.”

have no validity.”<sup>4</sup> Why? Because then, at the very least, the entire world as a contingent entity would no longer have a causal explanation.

Under the crucial condition of such a contraposition, two possibilities arise for determining the relationship between the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) and the assertion of a necessarily existing being (NEB). It is either an implication from PSR to NEB or an equivalence relation. In the first case, the implication, the assertion of a necessarily existing being would hold even if the principle of sufficient reason did not apply. Therefore, a proof of God’s (i.e., a NEB’s) existence could, but would not have to, be based on the principle of sufficient reason. In the second case, the equivalence, the assertion of a necessarily existing being would hold if and only if the principle of sufficient reason also applied; if the principle of sufficient reason were to be discarded, then the assertion of a necessarily existing being would likewise collapse. Thus, a proof of God’s existence could be limited to proving the principle of sufficient reason; and similarly, a proof of the principle of sufficient reason could be limited to proving God’s existence.

PSR	NEB	Hermann	... implication	... equivalence
t	t	t		
t	f	f		
f	t		t	f
f	f	t		

If, on the other hand, the contrapositive construed by Hermanni does not hold, then two other possibilities will arise.

PSR	NEB	... conjunction	... projection function of NEB
t	t	t	
t	f	f	
f	t	f	t
f	f	f	

In the case of a conjunction, the principle of sufficient reason and a necessarily existing being would indeed occur together, but only contingently. In the case of a projection function of NEB, the assertion of a necessarily existing being would be

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 35: „Sollte es [sc. ein notwendig existierendes Wesen] [...] unmöglich sein, dann könnte der Satz vom zureichenden Grund keine Gültigkeit besitzen.“

true, regardless of whether the principle of sufficient reason applied or not. In both cases, therefore, a possible proof of God's existence would have to forgo the principle of sufficient reason.

This brief overview can be summarized as follows: in a cosmological proof of God's existence, the principle of sufficient reason is relevant in two cases – namely, when one (as Hermanni seems to do) assumes  $PSR \rightarrow NEB$  or  $PSR \leftrightarrow NEB$ . Below, however, I introduce an author who disputes the contraposition drawn by Hermanni – one who denies that the falsity of the principle of sufficient reason and the denial of a necessarily existing being must coincide: Charles Sanders Peirce. Hermanni might well agree with Peirce – who notably influenced Hermanni's interlocutor, Nicholas Rescher, particularly in the field of non-standard logic – that „[i]t is a damnable absurdity indeed to say one thing is true in theology and another in science.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Peirce is oriented towards an author to whom Hermanni also feels committed: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.<sup>6</sup> Two centuries after Leibniz (1646–1716), though, Peirce (1839–1914), who shares Leibniz's interest in universal semiotics and logical notation systems, maintains the reality of an *Ens necessarium* without ascribing universal validity to the principle of sufficient reason. Rather, Peirce seems to claim a projection function for the thesis of the reality of an *Ens necessarium*: the *Ens necessarium* is real *regardless* of whether the principle of sufficient reason holds or not.

In the following, I will outline in four brief steps how Peirce departs from the paths paved by Leibniz and thus arrives at a position that also deviates from Hermanni.

## 2 The Concept of Signs

For both Leibniz and Peirce, thinking takes place through the proper use of signs.<sup>7</sup> For both, the proper use of signs can – in order to grant „relief from the hardship of

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Collected Papers* [henceforth: CP], vols. 1–6, ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–1935); vols. 7–8, ed. by Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); at vol. 6, § 216 („The Logic of Events,” 1898).

<sup>6</sup> See: Max Harold Fisch, „Peirce and Leibniz,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (1972) [Festschrift for Philip P. Wiener]: 485–496, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709048>; Victor F. Lenzen, „Peirce, Leibniz and Infinitesimals,” *Proceedings of the XVth World Congress of Philosophy* 3 (1974): 363–366, <https://doi.org/10.5840/wcp151974380>; Francesco Bellucci, „Peirce, Leibniz, and the threshold of pragmatism,” *Semiotica* 195 (2013): 331–355, <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2013-0030>.

<sup>7</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, „Vorarbeiten zur allgemeinen Charakteristik,” in *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. by Carl Immanuel Gerhardt, vol. 7, Olms-Paperbacks 17,

thinking”<sup>8</sup> – be formalized, controlled, and accelerated, especially through the employment of logical notation systems, including those of a graphical kind. However, whereas for Leibniz the function of signs primarily consisted in analyzing relations of identity and inclusion, especially of an intensional nature, Peirce expanded his concept of signs at an early stage.

Firstly, according to Peirce, anything that captures attention in a given situation functions as a sign. This ultimately means that all processes of consciousness, or all processes of orientation undertaken by an organism, can be described as processes of sign interpretation. The results of such processes of sign interpretation may manifest as feelings, as volitions and actions, as well as concept-using thought, including perceptual judgments. In this way, the use of signs does not merely enable combinatorics and the handling of logical calculi; rather, it interweaves the organism of the interpreter with the physical world. Ultimately, for Peirce, the entire world of experience is constituted through the interpretation of signs.

Secondly, Peirce posits that all forms of sign usage – however diverse – share one and the same basic structure, which is both capable of and requires differentiation. Unlike Leibniz, Peirce does not distinguish between the *signum* (the perceived sign) and the *signatum* (that which is not perceived but has to be signified) – that is, between the sign and what it signifies, whether this be a concept (*conceptus*), an idea (*idea*), or a thing (*res*).<sup>9</sup> Instead, Peirce identifies three elements, connected by a triadic relation: the sign, the object, and the interpretant. These three are not con-

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194–217 (Hildesheim / Zürich / New York: Olms, 2008 [4th reprint Berlin 1890]), at 204: „Omnis humana ratiocinatio signis quibusdam sive characteribus perficitur. Non tantum enim res ipsae, sed et rerum ideae semper animo distincte observari neque possunt neque debent, et itaque compendii causa signa pro ipsis adhibentur.”

8 Stephan Meier-Oeser, „Die Entlastung von der Mühsamkeit des Denkens. Zeichentheoretische Bemerkungen zur Urgeschichte artifizieller Intelligenz im 17. Jahrhundert,” in *Das sichtbare Denken: Modelle und Modellhaftigkeit in der Philosophie und in den Wissenschaften*, ed. by Jörg F. Maas (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993): 13–30, at 26: „Das Motiv der Entlastung von der Mühsamkeit des Denkens zieht sich refrainhaft durch die verschiedenen Selbstanzeigen der Leibnizschen Rechenmaschine. Mit ihrer Hilfe werde die Multiplikation und Division allein durch eine gewisse Drehbewegung und gänzlich ohne jene Arbeit des Geistes vollzogen.” Ibid.: „Die Rechenmaschine verkörpert ein System von Zeichen, die ihre compositio und divisio selbst durchführen. So apostrophiert auch Leibniz die von ihm erfundene Rechenmaschine als eine ‚lebendige Rechenbank,‘ dieweil dadurch zuwege gebracht wird, daß alle Zahlen sich selbst rechnen [...] ohne einzige Mühe des Gemüths.”

9 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, „Unbegreifliche Gedanken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der teutschen Sprache,” in *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Hauptschriften zur Grundlegung der Philosophie*, translated by Artur Buchenau, with an introduction and notes ed. by Ernst Cassirer, part 2, Philosophische Bibliothek 497 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1996), 672–712, at 673: „Es ist aber bei dem Gebrauch der Sprache, auch dieses sonderlich zu betrachten, daß die Worte nicht nur der Gedanken,

nected by two or even three dyadic relations (sign-object, sign-interpretant, object-interpretant), but by a single triadic relation. The interpretant mediates between a newly emerging sign and an object that is already known or presupposed. In more complex cases, the interpretant assumes a representational function: it represents not only the sign and the object – each individually – but also the relation between them. This can be illustrated by the example of a judgment: the interpretant – namely, the judgment – represents the sign through the predicate term, the object through the subject term, and additionally makes explicit the relation between them, including its modality. For example: if one trusts the Wikipedia entry on Friedrich Hermanni, then one of the interpretants that arises is the judgment that Friedrich Hermanni (object) was in fact – or contingently – born in Schwelm (sign), and not not in Schwelm.

Thirdly, in the final decade of his life, Peirce refined his distinctions between sign, object, and interpretant by analyzing the various manifestations of signs according to their possible internal structures, doing the same for objects and interpretants, while also classifying the relations between them by type. Of relevance here is that Peirce recognizes not only signs, objects, and interpretants of a regular, law-governed kind, nor only strictly logical and thus necessary relations between them like those central to Leibniz's philosophy. Instead, Peirce systematically embraces indeterminacy and vagueness at every level, alongside physically situated individuals and unique events that occur in space and time. For example, an icon is a sign that, although it appears in a regular form and thus possesses recognizability, refers to its object by virtue of an attributed similarity, allowing it to potentially denote a broad spectrum of objects. Consequently, an icon neither possesses informational value nor permits reliable intersubjective communication: a painted circle might represent the sun to one person, and a well opening to another. A symbol, such as the word 'blue,' which relates to its object through a regulated convention, can still signify a turquoise shade to one person and an ultramarine tone to another, with neither hue clearly distinguishable from neighboring colors. Similarly, it may denote for one individual the concrete occurrence of blue in the Chagall windows in St. Stephen's Church in Mainz, and for another, the occurrence of blue on the ceramic columns at the Hundertwasser House in Plochingen – and so forth. While Leibniz also addressed the phenomenon of qualities, he considered the associated concepts deficient insofar as they are clear but not distinct.<sup>10</sup> Peirce, by contrast, allows

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sondern auch der Dinge Zeychen seyn, und daß wir Zeychen nöthig haben, nicht nur unsere Meynung Andern anzudeuten, sondern auch unsren Gedanken selbst zu helfen."

<sup>10</sup> See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, „Brief an die Königin Sophie Charlotte von Preußen. Von dem, was jenseits der Sinne und der Materie liegt,“ in *Leibniz, Hauptschriften*, 580–591, at 581: „[...] es läßt sich z.B. kein Merkmal angeben, vermittels dessen man das Blau erkennen würde, wenn man es noch nie

vagueness and indeterminacy, as well as the actual, individual, and unique, to shape not only certain classes of symbols that are interpreted through concepts, judgments and rationales but also less elaborate signs that are nonetheless the indispensable foundation for those types of symbols ultimately employed in logical reasoning. So, while Leibniz's focus lies primarily on symbols, Peirce extends his inquiry into the broader realm that precedes symbols. This is why Peirce's classification of signs carries both descriptive and normative implications: descriptive implications regarding those less elaborate signs processed through emotions, volitions, actions, etc., and normative implications regarding the rules for transforming symbols into interpretants of a conceptual nature.

Fourthly, from the fact that the use of signs is by no means confined to necessary relations of implication, it follows that in most cases interpretants are not fully congruent with the signs they process. Such perfect congruence occurs only with deducent signs – that is, judgments that allow deductive justification from a given set of premises. All other signs are transformed into interpretants that display a semantic surplus in relation to the signs from which they arise. According to Peirce, this is precisely the mechanism by which new knowledge is generated.<sup>11</sup> Interpretants are thus, for the largest part, synthetic in nature – and this holds not only for judgments in general,<sup>12</sup> including those concerning the reality of God, but also for true judgments in particular. In contrast, for Leibniz, true propositions are analytic, insofar as the subject concept necessarily contains the predicate concept. As Sibylle

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gesehen hätte. Demnach ist das blau sein eignes Erkennungszeichen, und damit ein Mensch erfahre, was es ist, muß man es ihm notwendig zeigen. Aus diesem Grunde pflegt man zu sagen, daß die *Begriffe* dieser *Qualitäten* klar sind; denn sie dienen dazu, von ihnen Kenntnis zu geben, nicht aber distinkt, weil man sie weder von andren unterscheiden, noch auch den Gehalt, den sie in sich schließen, entwickeln kann. Es ist ein ‚ich weiß nicht was‘, dessen man sich bewußt wird, wovon man aber keine Rechenschaft ablegen kann.“

11 In this sense, see Peirce on Leibniz in CP 5.392 („How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” 1877/78) in Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Writings: A Chronological Edition*, vol. 3, ed. by Christian W. Kloesel (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 260: „This great and singular genius was as remarkable for what he failed to see as for what he saw. That a piece of mechanism could not do work perpetually without being fed with power in some form, was a thing perfectly apparent to him; yet he did not understand that the machinery of the mind can only transform knowledge, but never originate it, unless it be fed with facts of observation.“

12 CP 1.475 („The Logic of Mathematics: An Attempt to Develop My Categories from Within,” c. 1896): „But if we compare the monad implicated in a genuine dyad, as red is in ‘this thing is red,’ with that dyad, we see that the latter is more than any mere explication of red. It is the truth of what Kant called a synthetic (that is, genuinely dyadic) judgment. It involves *existence*, while *red* or any mere explication of red is but a *possibility*. Even in ‘something is red,’ which leaves wholly indeterminate what it is that is red, and consequently does not really explicate red, at all, *existence* is just as positive as in, ‘this is red.’“

Krämer explains, this holds even for contingent truths, „only that their logicality is revealed solely to God’s eye, but not to human proof practices, insofar as these would have to extend into infinity. This means that although Leibniz clearly distinguishes between truths of reason and truths of fact epistemologically, ultimately – that is, *sub specie aeternitatis*, in God’s perspective – *he concedes the reducibility of factual truth to logical truth.*”<sup>13</sup>

Unlike in Leibniz’s philosophy, the concept of God, for Peirce, cannot be derived analytically. Rather, it is the result of a complex web of interpretive processes that are ultimately rooted in experience and eventually culminate in a vague concept of a benign Creator. This web of interpretive processes not only cannot ultimately be clarified,<sup>14</sup> but may also differ significantly from one individual to another: it may incorporate perceptions, even feelings, as well as metaphysical reflections on the fundamental structures underlying reality. The justification Peirce offers for the God-concept that thus evolves is therefore not substantive but formal: according to Peirce, it results from abductive processes – that is, processes which, although inferential in nature, link premises and conclusions only loosely, and which in this way open up possibilities of thought, even though they terminate merely in hypotheses. Indeed, Peirce’s God is, as he himself puts it, „strictly hypothetical”.<sup>15</sup> However, it is in the course of a person’s life that the God-hypothesis may gain increasing validation, and Peirce includes within this validation the individual’s engagement with the experience of evil. Accordingly, the problem of theodicy leads Peirce to interpret the encounter with evil (as a sign) in such a way that it reshapes the concept of God (as object), ultimately permitting the Creator to be conceived also as the Reconciler.

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<sup>13</sup> Sibylle Krämer, „Tatsachenwahrheiten und Vernunftwahrheiten (§§ 28–37),“ in *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz; Monadologie, Klassiker Auslegen* 34, ed. by Hans Poser (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009), 95–111, at 109: „Für Leibniz sind auch kontingente Wahrheiten genau besehen analytischer ‚Natur‘, nur daß sich deren Logizität allein Gottes Auge, nicht aber menschlichen Beweispraktiken eröffnet, insofern diese ins Unendliche ausgreifen müßten. Das aber heißt, daß Leibniz, wiewohl er die erkenntnistheoretische Unterscheidung von Vernunft- und Tatsachenwahrheiten sehr klar trifft, dann doch – in letzter Instanz, d.h. dann für ihn: *sub specie aeternitatis*, also in Gott – *die Zurückführbarkeit von faktischer Wahrheit auf logische Wahrheit zugesteht.*“

<sup>14</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *Digital Peirce Archive, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*, at MS 0842\_011 (1908), <https://rs.cms.hu-berlin.de/peircearchive/login.php?url=&auto=&nocookies=1>: „[...] the humble argument, although every mind can feel its force, rests on far too many premisses to be stated in full.“

<sup>15</sup> CP 6.467 („A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,“ 1908) in Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 2 (1893–1913), ed. by Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 440: „strictly hypothetical God.“

### 3 The Principle of Sufficient Reason

It is as conspicuous as it is in need of explanation that Peirce, despite his sympathy for Leibniz, makes hardly any reference to the principle of sufficient reason. Leibniz employs the principle of sufficient reason as a criterion for truths of fact, which are to be distinguished from truths of reason. In Leibniz's formulation, the principle states „that no fact can be true or existent, and no statement correct, unless there is a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although such reasons are in most cases unknown to us.”<sup>16</sup> As is well known, the principle of sufficient reason in Leibniz binds together an ontological and a logical axiom. The ontological axiom reads: everything that is the case has a determining cause – not only with respect to its *that* (its occurrence), but also with respect to its *how* (its manner of occurrence). Every fact thus presupposes another fact as its determining cause. Conversely, it follows that what has no determining cause is not a fact. The logical axiom reads: every factual statement requires, in order to be regarded as true, another factual statement as its rationale. Conversely, a factual statement that cannot cite such rationale cannot be regarded as true.

Peirce, by contrast, separates these two axioms and assigns them to different scientific domains. The ontological thesis concerning the causal concatenation of facts belongs to metaphysics. Metaphysics, however, is grounded – within the framework of his theory of the sciences – on presuppositions established by semiotics; and it is semiotics that constitutes the proper domain of the logical thesis regarding the sequence of justification between factual statements. Thus, in Peirce's view, the logical thesis takes precedence over the ontological one, rather than standing on equal footing with it.

Regarding the logical justification of factual statements, Peirce analyzes these statements, on the one hand, as interpretants. They thus arise from one's own observations, memories, etc., or from trust in the testimony of others. As with all interpretants, they process signs and objects; in this case, however, the signs and objects processed do not themselves take the form of judgments but are instead represented by mere terms functioning as predicates and subjects. Factual statements, understood as interpretants, are therefore not based on inferences in Peirce's view. Rather, they neither require nor permit justification through inferences from other factual statements; instead, they call for confidence in one's own reliability or in the

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<sup>16</sup> Leibniz, „Monadologie,” in *Leibniz, Hauptschriften*, 603–621, at 609, § 32: „[...] kraft dessen wir annehmen, daß keine Tatsache wahr und existierend, keine Aussage richtig sein kann, ohne daß ein zureichender Grund vorliegt, weshalb es so und nicht anders ist, wenngleich diese Gründe in den meisten Fällen uns nicht bekannt sein mögen.”

credibility of others. Consequently, the principle of sufficient reason does not apply here.

Factual statements, however, can also function as signs and as objects. Only in such cases do they require justification through inference or serve as justifications themselves. Yet even then, they do not necessarily fall under the principle of sufficient reason. Peirce, after all, distinguishes three kinds of justification or explanation: abductive justification, which merely reveals possibilities; inductive justification, which gathers individual cases to establish general laws; and deductive justification, which applies general laws to determine specific cases. Since all these forms of reasoning – though each requires mediating concepts to link premises with conclusions – follow different rules, the principle of sufficient reason lacks the precision to adequately account for any of them.

These semiotic structures find their counterparts in Peirce's metaphysics, developed under the influence of 19th-century evolutionary theories. Metaphysics encompasses not only time and space,<sup>17</sup> which are invoked in semiotic interpretation processes once a certain level of complexity is reached, but also (1) uniformity or generality, derived from signs such as symbols and deducents, (2) compulsion, individuality, or diversity,<sup>18</sup> derived from signs such as indices and inducents, and (3) absolute chance, derived from signs such as icons and abducents. The principle of sufficient reason does not apply to chance, which operates in the world.<sup>19</sup> It may,

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<sup>17</sup> CP 1.501 („The Logic of Mathematics: An Attempt to Develop My Categories from Within,” c. 1896): „According to the metaphysical law of sufficient reason, alike in all respects two things cannot be. Space evades that law by providing places in which two things or any number, which are precisely alike, except that they are located in different places, themselves precisely alike in themselves, may exist. Thus, space does for different subjects of one predicate precisely what time does for different predicates of the same subject. And as time effects its evasion of the logical law by providing a form analogous to a logical form, so space effects its evasion of the metaphysical law by providing a form analogous to a metaphysical form. Namely, as metaphysics teaches that there is a succession of realities of higher and higher order, each a generalization of the last, and each the limit of a reality of the next higher order, so space presents points, lines, surfaces, and solids, each generated by the motion of a place of next lower dimensionality and the limit of a place of next higher dimensionality.”

<sup>18</sup> CP 6.100 („Uniformity,” in *Baldwin's Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, vol. 2, New York: Macmillan, 1902): „In fact, the great characteristic of nature is its diversity. For every uniformity known, there would be no difficulty in pointing out thousands of non-uniformities; but the diversities are usually of small use to us, and attract the attention of poets mainly, while the uniformities are the very staff [sic] of life.”

<sup>19</sup> CP 6.612 („Reply to the Necessitarians. Rejoinder to Dr. Carus,” *The Monist* 3 [1893]: 526–570): „[...] my absolute chance is something ultimate and inexplicable. I go back to a chaos so irregular that in strictness the word existence is not applicable to its merely germinal state of being; and here I reach a region in which the objection to ultimate causes loses its force.” CP 5.119 („Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism,” 1903) in *The Essential Peirce* 2, 194: „The premisses of Nature's own process are all the inde-

however, apply to the realm of interacting and mutually responsive individual things – that is, to what Leibniz terms the contingent. Yet according to Peirce, it is no longer sufficient to fully account for the regular and the uniform – that is, what appears as the instantiation of law, because the effect of lawfulness consists in co-ordinating all future instances, all would-bes. This is what renders such regularities real. For this reason, Peirce, who described himself as a „scholastic realist of a somewhat extreme stripe,”<sup>20</sup> considered Leibniz to be a „modern nominalist par excellence.”<sup>21</sup>

## 4 The Principle of Non-Contradiction

By applying the principle of non-contradiction, Leibniz holds that truths of reason can be identified. A truth of reason („Vernunftwahrheit”) is characterized by the fact that its opposite must be regarded as impossible.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the principle of non-contradiction states that „we,” as Leibniz puts it, „consider everything that involves a contradiction to be false, and everything that is contradictorily opposed to the false to be true.”<sup>23</sup> This already indicates that truths of reason are analytic truths. The concept of a NEB, too, is for Leibniz an analytic one. Since it includes actual existence, it also includes possible existence; and thus, it cannot contain anything that would exclude existence.

Peirce approaches the law of non-contradiction in a divergent way, using it – again with reference to semiotics – to construct three distinct realms of logic and, derived from these, three corresponding realms of metaphysics, that is, of reality. In

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pendent uncaused elements of facts that go to make up the variety of nature which the necessitarian supposes to have been all in existence from the foundation of the world, but which the Tychist supposes are continually receiving new accretions.” In Dirk Evers, „Unendlichkeit und Kontinuum bei Leibniz und Peirce,” in *Unendlichkeit: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, ed. by Johannes Brachtendorf, Thomas Moellenbeck / Gregor Nickel / Stephan Schaede (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 249–267, at 249: „Während Leibniz das Unendliche und das von ihm so genannte Gesetz der Kontinuität ganz der Seite des Idealen zuschlägt, zugleich aber die Realität dieses Ideal abbilden und es ausschöpfen lässt, ist das kontinuierliche Unendliche bei Peirce vor allem das Potentielle, das als Quelle des Neuen, als das Woher der Evolution der Schöpfung in den Blick kommt und darin zugleich die Quelle echten Zufalls und kontingenten Werdens darstellt.”

<sup>20</sup> CP 5.470 („Pragmatism (Editor [3]),“ c. 1906).

<sup>21</sup> *The Essential Peirce* 2, 157 („Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism,” 1903).

<sup>22</sup> Leibniz, „Monadologie,” 609, § 33: „Die Vernunft-Wahrheiten sind notwendig und ihr Gegenteil ist unmöglich, die Tatsachen-Wahrheiten dagegen sind zufällig und ihr Gegenteil möglich.”

<sup>23</sup> Leibniz, „Monadologie,” 608, § 31: „[...] kraft dessen wir alles als falsch bezeichnen, was einen Widerspruch einschließt, und als wahr alles das, was dem Falschen kontradiktorisch entgegengesetzt ist.”

the first of these three realms, the law of the excluded middle holds, but the law of non-contradiction does not. The only applicable truth value is that of ‚possibly true.’ Metaphysically, this realm is governed by the both-and of overdetermination: both p and not-p can be the case. In the second realm, which is familiar to us from everyday practical experience, both the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle hold. The two truth values that apply are ‚true’ and ‚false.’ Metaphysically, the disjunctive either-or prevails: either p is the case or not-p is the case. In the third realm, the law of non-contradiction holds, but the law of the excluded middle does not. Three truth values apply: ‚true’, ‚false’ and ‚indeterminable’. Metaphysically, this realm is governed by the neither-nor of underdetermination: neither p nor not-p must hold.

In theology, the construction of such non-standard worlds can be traced back to late antiquity. For example, the non-standard world of both-and could be, and indeed was invoked for a concept of God that embraces all possible opposites within itself. This notion also appears in Luther, specifically with regard to the doctrine of the two natures in Christology: that Christ was both God and not-God (a contradictory opposition), that is, divine and human, is something that, according to Luther, is accessible here and now only through faith, but one day – *in regno gloriae* – will also be accessible through reason.<sup>24</sup> The non-standard world of neither-nor, in turn, can (in my view) be found in the concluding sections of Luther’s *De servo arbitrio*, where he addresses the problem of theodicy. There, Luther suggests that God’s *iustitia iustissima*, which can be grasped only *in lumine gloriae*, surpasses the two lower types of justice: both the social justice of *suum cuique*, which is revealed *in lumine naturae*, and the unmerited justice through faith, which becomes thematic *in lumine gratiae*.

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<sup>24</sup> The contradictoriness of the doctrine of the two natures is currently being emphasized – and for this reference I am indebted to Dr. Winfried Lücke of the University of Tübingen – particularly by the philosopher Jeffrey C. Beall, „Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology,” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 7 (2019): 400–433, at 400: „[...] Christ appears to be contradictory because Christ is contradictory (i.e., some predicate is both true and false of Christ, and hence some logical contradiction is true of Christ).” 401: „The fundamental problem of Christology is the apparent contradiction of Christ’s having two apparently complementary – contradiction-entailing – natures, the divine and the human [...].” 416: „[...] Contradictory Christology responds to the fundamental problem by accepting the apparent contradictions as genuine contradictions. This is not simply ‚because we can’ (given the correct account of logic); the view is motivated by the screamingly apparent contradiction at the heart of Christ’s role – perfect God but also as human in imperfection and limitation as you and me.”

## 5 The *Ens necessarium*

According to Leibniz, the claim that a being exists actually – and therefore possibly – whose existence is necessary will constitute a truth of reason („Vernunftwahrheit“) if denying the possible existence of such a being leads to a contradiction. Hermanni, however, shares Kant's critique of the ontological argument for the existence of God, which, as is well known, consists in the claim that existence cannot be regarded as a property among others, as a conceptual determination, a real predicate, or *perfectio*.<sup>25</sup>

Peirce raises this objection as well, though with a different focus. Existence is that which judgmental interpretants express; and since judgmental interpretants – by relating signs (represented as predicate terms) to objects (represented as subject terms) – are fundamentally synthetic in nature, existence cannot be claimed analytically as a component of a concept. Peirce understands existence as a dyadic relation: an encounter between two entities (in the broadest sense, including qualities or possibilities) at a specific coordinate of space and time.<sup>26</sup> The existent is that which could be observed or interacted with, were one present at that coordinate. That which exists thus always falls within the domain of the empirical, the individual and the contingent, not within the domain of what is necessary in thought. This is why Peirce considers the attribution of *existence* to God to be a category mistake.<sup>27</sup> Existence cannot be predicated of God. To do so would be to represent God as a

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25 Hermanni, „Warum ist überhaupt etwas möglich?“, 33: „Von einem Wesen zu sagen, es existiere, heißt nicht, es habe neben anderen Eigenschaften auch noch die Eigenschaft zu existieren. Nach Kant bedeutet es vielmehr, dass es etwas gibt, auf das der Begriff dieses Wesens mit allen darin enthaltenen Bestimmungen zutrifft. Existenz kann mithin nicht als Vollkommenheit, d.h. nicht als begriffliche Bestimmung verstanden werden, durch die ein Gegenstand charakterisiert wird. Daher kann sie selbst im Falle Gottes kein Element des Begriffs sein.“

26 CP 1.328–329 („The List of Categories: A Second Essay,” c. 1894): „The dyad is an individual fact, as it existentially is; and it has no generality in it. The being of a monadic quality is a mere potentiality, without existence. Existence is purely dyadic. It is to be noted that existence is an affair of blind force.“ CP 1.457 („The Logic of Mathematics: An Attempt to Develop My Categories from Within,” c. 1896): „Existence is that mode of being which lies in opposition to another. To say that a table exists is to say that it is hard, heavy, opaque, resonant, that is, produces immediate effects upon the senses, and also that it produces purely physical effects, attracts the earth (that is, is heavy), dynamically reacts against other things (that is, has inertia), resists pressure (that is, is elastic), has a definite capacity for heat, etc.“ CP 2.84 („Minute Logic,” 1902): „[...] only existing individuals can react against one another.“ CP 6.336 („Some Amazing Mazes, Fourth Curiosity,” c. 1909): „In the metaphysical sense, *existence* is that mode of being which consists in the resultant genuine dyadic relation of a strict individual with all the other such individuals of the same universe.“

27 CP 8.262 (Letter to William James, 1905): „But the God of my theism is not finite. That won't do at all. For to begin with, existence is reaction, and therefore no existent can be *clear supreme*. On the con-

finite and immanent entity, located in time and space, a possible subject to the actions of other beings.

Rather, it is *reality* that must be ascribed to God. Peirce conceives of reality as a triadic relation that mediates between two events through a regularity – a habit or a law. The real governs particular instances, producing uniform effects that persist over time. It is in this continuity that the mark of the real is found: it is what it is, independently of how it is conceived in any given instance. Unlike that which merely exists, the real reveals itself persistently through its effects, has revealed itself in the past and will continue to do so in the future: while an individual apple that falls to the ground merely *exists*, the law of gravity, which has caused apples to fall and will continue to do so, is *real*. In this sense, God too, according to Peirce, must be regarded as real: He produces effects, always and unceasingly, in the manner of a *creatio continua*.<sup>28</sup>

As the real manifests itself as a coordinating regularity or law, it can be adequately represented only through argument-like interpretants, for these alone establish connections between individual statements or facts, such as observations. This is why Peirce, in his seminal 1908 text „A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” posits a conditional relationship between the reality of God and the capability of that reality to be justified: *If* God is real, Peirce argues quite consistently, *then* it should be expected that an argument for God’s reality could be found.<sup>29</sup> Between the claim that God is real and the claim that God’s reality can be justified,

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trary, a finite being, without much doubt, and at any rate by presumption, is one of a genus; so that it would, to my mind, involve polytheism.”

28 CP 8.138, footnote 4 (Letter to Francis C. Russell, 1905): „I look upon creation as going on and I believe that such vague idea as we can have of the power of creation is best identified with the idea of theism.”

29 CP 6.457 („A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” 1908) in *The Essential Peirce* 2, 435: „If God Really be, and be benign, then, in view of the generally conceded truth that religion, were it but proved, would be a good outweighing all others, we should naturally expect that there would be some Argument for His Reality that should be obvious to all minds, high and low alike, that should earnestly strive to find the truth of the matter; and further, that this Argument should present its conclusion, not as a proposition of metaphysical theology, but in a form directly applicable to the conduct of life, and full of nutrition for man’s highest growth.” *Digital Peirce Archive*, MS 0842\_008f. (1908): „From the time when I first began as a boy, until now, to reflect upon the question of the being of God, – meaning by God, not some god, but that God in whom religious people of all creeds believe in proportion as they are truly religious, – it has always seemed to me reasonable to suppose that, if He really is, there must be some good reason, for believing so, otherwise than on authority of any kind, which should appeal to the lowliest mind [...].” *Ibid*: „[...] when we consider how much an assurance of His Reality would help men to govern their conduct by the best attainable lights, how can we refrain from expecting of His Benignity, in case He really is, that we shall find some sound reason to believe in Him that is open to every human mind, high and low?” CP 6.612 („Reply to the Necessitarians. Rejoinder to Dr. Carus,” *The*

there exists an equivalence rather than a mere subjunction, for Peirce rules out the possibility that God might be real without there being any justification for God's reality, on the grounds that what is real will make itself known through the effects it evokes (a position that aligns with his long-held thesis of the ultimate knowability of the real).<sup>30</sup> Such a justification, according to Peirce, can – and indeed will – be found through a process of reflection that begins freely and playfully, and then gradually becomes more focused: a process he calls *musing*. The justification that the metaphysician Peirce presents as his *own* focusses on the metaphysical structures of what he calls the three universes of experience: three persisting, structurally distinct, and phenomenologically accessible modes of reality – ideas,<sup>31</sup> matter, and mind.<sup>32</sup> According to Peirce, these cannot be reduced to one another, nor can they be dissociated from one another. Rather, they interpenetrate and mediate one another. The striking and explanation-worthy tendency toward uniformity that emerges both within each of these three universes and between them<sup>33</sup> – especially what Peirce refers to as „growth,” a progression toward greater richness in variation, diversification, and complexity<sup>34</sup> – makes the hypothesis of a Creator God not merely plausible but compelling.

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*Monist* 3 [1893]: 526–570): „If what is demanded is a theological backing, or rational antecedent, to the chaos, that my theory fully supplies.”

30 CP 6.419 (“The Order of Nature,” *Popular Science Monthly* 13 [1878]: 203–221) in Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1 (1867–1893), ed. by Nathan Houser and Christian W. Kloesel (Bloomington, IN / Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 182: „Now, what is absolutely incapable of being known is [...] not real at all.”

31 CP 6.455 („A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” 1908) in *The Essential Peirce* 2, 435: „[...] their Being consists in mere capability of getting thought, not in anybody's Actually thinking them, saves their Reality.”

32 *Digital Peirce Archive*, at MS 0843\_019.021 (1908): „Indeed, meaning by 'God,' [...] a Being not immanent in the Universes of Matter, Mind, and Ideas, but the Sole Creator of every content of them without exception [...].” Ibid.: „Throughout this paper, the word 'God' (capitalized, as we Americans say,) will be used as the definable proper name, signifying *Ens Necessarium*. [...] that Being, Real or fictive, Who, out of Nothing, less than a blank, is creating all three Universes of experience. I do not mean, then, a 'soul of the World' or an intelligence is 'immanent' in Nature, but is the Creator of the three Universes of minds, of matter, and of ideal possibilities, and of everything in them.”

33 CP 8.136 („[Karl] Pearson's ,Grammar of Science,” 1901): „The very being of law, general truth, reason – call it what you will – consists in its expressing itself in a cosmos and in intellects which reflect it, and in doing this progressively; and that which makes progressive creation worth doing – so the researcher comes to feel – is precisely the reason, the law, the general truth for the sake of which it takes place.”

34 CP 6.64 („The Logic of Events,” 1898): „[...] I point first to the phenomenon of growth and developing complexity, which appears to be universal, and which, though it may possibly be an affair of mechanism perhaps, certainly presents all the appearance of increasing diversification. Then, there is variety itself, beyond comparison the most obtrusive character of the universe: no mechanism can account

This Creator God, thus inferred – or even self-disclosing – is described by Peirce as „pure mind”<sup>35</sup> in the sense of being structured according to the sign-object–interpretant matrix of interpretation: a God who is distinct from the world, not immanent within it, but rather situated beyond time and space. In the manner of a *creatio ex nihilo*, God brings reality about by creating – that is, by thinking – a continuum of indeterminate possibilities (or qualities), that stretches infinitely into an increasingly diffuse past. As Peirce puts it: „We cannot ourselves conceive of such a state of nility; but we can easily conceive that there should be a mind that could conceive it, since, after all, no contradiction can be involved in mere non-existence.”<sup>36</sup> From this continuum, particular possibilities suddenly spring into existence, manifesting as singular qualities, and eventually give rise to regular patterns.<sup>37</sup> In this sense,

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for this. Then, there is the very fact the necessitarian most insists upon, the regularity of the universe which for him serves only to block the road of inquiry. Then, there are the regular relationships between the laws of nature – similarities and comparative characters, which appeal to our intelligence as its cousins, and call upon us for a reason. Finally, there is consciousness, feeling, a patent fact enough, but a very inconvenient one to the mechanical philosopher.”

<sup>35</sup> CP 6.490 („Additament,” 1908).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.: „A full exposition of the pragmaticistic definition of *Ens necessarium* would require many pages; but some hints toward it may be given. A disembodied spirit, or pure mind, has its being out of time, since all that it is destined to think is fully in its being at any and every previous time. But in endless time it is destined to think all that it is capable of thinking. Order is simply thought embodied in arrangement; and thought embodied in any other way appears objectively as a character that is a generalization of order, and that, in the lack of any word for it, we may call for the nonce, ‘Super-order.’ It is something like uniformity. The idea may be caught if it is described as that of which order and uniformity are particular varieties. Pure mind, as creative of thought, must, so far as it is manifested in time, appear as having a character related to the habit-taking capacity, just as super-order is related to uniformity. Now imagine, in such vague way as such a thing can be imagined, a perfect cosmology of the three universes. It would prove all in relation to that subject that reason could desire; and of course all that it would prove must, in actual fact, now be true. But reason would desire that that should be proved from which would follow all that is in fact true of the three universes; and the postulate from which all this would follow must not state any matter of fact, since such fact would thereby be left unexplained. That perfect cosmology must therefore show that the whole history of the three universes, as it has been and is to be, would follow from a premiss which would not suppose them to exist at all. Moreover, such premiss must in actual fact be true. But that premiss must represent a state of things in which the three universes were completely nil. Consequently, whether in time or not, the three universes must actually be absolutely necessary results of a state of utter nothingness. We cannot ourselves conceive of such a state of nility; but we can easily conceive that there should be a mind that could conceive it, since, after all, no contradiction can be involved in mere non-existence. A state in which there should be absolutely no super-order whatsoever would be such a state of nility. For all Being involves some kind of super-order.”

<sup>37</sup> CP 6.419 („The Order of Nature,” *Popular Science Monthly* 13 [1878]: 203–221) in *The Essential Peirce* 1, 182: „If, therefore, the universe is infinite, the attempt to find in it any design embracing it as a whole is futile, and involves a false way of looking at the subject. If the universe never had any beginning, and

Peirce's view aligns with what Hermanni, following Leibniz and Augustine, maintains: „[...] God [is] not only the ground for the being of the actual but also the ground for the being of the possible [...]. Even prior to and apart from their actuali-

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if in space world stretches beyond world without limit, there is no *whole* of material things, and consequently no general character to the universe, and no need or possibility of any governor for it. But if there was a time before which absolutely no matter existed, if there are certain absolute bounds to the region of things outside of which there is a mere void, then we naturally seek for an explanation of it, and, since we cannot look for it among material things, the hypothesis of a great disembodied animal, the creator and governor of the world, is natural enough.” CP 6.612 („Reply to the Necessitarians. Rejoinder to Dr. Carus,” *The Monist* 3 [1893]: 526–570): „Even this nothingness, though it antecedes the infinitely distant absolute beginning of time, is traced back to a nothingness more rudimentary still, in which there is no variety, but only an indefinite specificability, which is nothing but a tendency to the diversification of the nothing, while leaving it as nothing as it was before. What objectionable ultimacy is here? The objection to an ultimate consists in its raising a barrier across the path of inquiry, in its specifying a phenomenon at which questions must stop, contrary to the postulate, or hope, of logic. But what question to which any meaning can be attached am I forbidding by my absolute chance? [...] The chaos is a state of intensest feeling, although, memory and habit being totally absent, it is sheer nothing still. Feeling has existence only so far as it is welded into feeling. Now the welding of this feeling to the great whole of feeling is accomplished only by the reflection of a later date. In itself, therefore, it is nothing; but in its relation to the end it is everything.” CP 6.33 („The Logic of Events,” 1898): „It [sc. a Cosmogonic Philosophy] would suppose that in the beginning – infinitely remote – there was a chaos of unpersonalized feeling, which being without connection or regularity would properly be without existence. This feeling, sporting here and there in pure arbitrariness, would have started the germ of a generalizing tendency. Its other sportings would be evanescent, but this would have a growing virtue. Thus, the tendency to habit would be started; and from this, with the other principles of evolution, all the regularities of the universe would be evolved. At any time, however, an element of pure chance survives and will remain until the world becomes an absolutely perfect, rational, and symmetrical system, in which mind is at last crystallized in the infinitely distant future.” CP 6.217–218 („The Logic of Events,” 1898): „We start, then, with nothing, pure zero. [...] It is the germinal nothing, in which the whole universe is involved or foreshadowed. As such, it is absolutely undefined and unlimited possibility – boundless possibility. There is no compulsion and no law. It is boundless freedom. So of potential being there was in that initial state no lack. Now the question arises, what necessarily resulted from that state of things? But the only sane answer is that where freedom was boundless nothing in particular necessarily resulted.” CP 1.412 („A Guess at the Riddle,” c. 1898) in *The Essential Peirce* 1, 278: „Out of the womb of indeterminacy we must say that there would have come something, by the principle of Firstness, which we may call a flash. Then by the principle of habit there would have been a second flash. Though time would not yet have been, this second flash was in some sense after the first, because resulting from it. Then there would have come other successions ever more and more closely connected, the habits and the tendency to take them ever strengthening themselves, until the events would have been bound together into something like a continuous flow.” CP 6.490 („Additament,” 1908): „In that state of absolute nility, in or out of time, that is, before or after the evolution of time, there must then have been a *tohu bohu* of which nothing whatever affirmative or negative was true universally. There must have been, therefore, a little of everything conceivable.”

zation, possibilities possess being, namely, in that they are thought by God.”<sup>38</sup> However, Peirce’s critique of Leibniz lies in the assessment that in Leibniz’s system, God’s thought – „by making its knowledge Perfect and Complete” – is deprived of the possibility of development and expansion.<sup>39</sup>

For Peirce, God is *Ens necessarium* not in a logical sense. The concept of an existing God is neither logically necessary, as in an ontological proof, nor can it be derived as a necessary conclusion from the contingent taken as a premise. Rather, God is *Ens necessarium* in a metaphysical sense. He is conceived as the necessary precondition for the world – for its very existence and the specific mode of its existence: that is, for the three distinct universes of experience, which, being irreducible, do not emerge or develop successively out of one another but are co-original, as well as for the strikingly uniform structural features of these universes: „[...] the three universes must actually be absolutely necessary results of a state of utter nothingness.”<sup>40</sup> As Jon Alan Schmidt succinctly summarizes, „[...] the Reality of God as *Ens necessarium* is indispensable to both the origin and order of our existing universe of Signs.”<sup>41</sup> It is certainly no coincidence that Peirce’s commitment was not to a unitarian but to a trinitarian conception of God – a position shaped by his doctrine of the three differentiated universes of experience and, ultimately, by the irreducible triad of sign, object, and interpretant.

That the Reality of the Creator God, from a metaphysical perspective, constitutes the necessary precondition for the world<sup>42</sup> – both for its existence and the mode of its existence, both its *that* and its *how* – cannot, as mentioned, be logically secured by appeal to the principle of sufficient reason. For although Peirce, as previously mentioned, does not commit himself definitively or exclusively to any spe-

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<sup>38</sup> Hermanni, „Warum ist überhaupt etwas möglich?,” 32: „[...] Gott [ist] nicht nur der Grund für das Sein des Wirklichen, sondern auch der Grund für das Sein des Möglichen [...]. Auch vor und abgesehen von ihrer Verwirklichung besitzen Möglichkeiten ein Sein, nämlich dadurch, dass sie von Gott gedacht werden.”

<sup>39</sup> CP 7.380 („Minute Logic,” 1902) in *The Essential Peirce* 2, 519: „The Deity of the *Théodicée* of Leibniz is as high an Instinctive mind as can well be imagined; but it impresses a scientific reader as distinctly inferior to the human mind. It reminds one of the view of the Greeks that Infinitude is a defect; for although Leibniz imagines that he is making the Divine Mind infinite, by making its knowledge Perfect and Complete, he fails to see that in thus refusing it the powers of thought and the possibility of improvement he is in fact taking away something far higher than knowledge. It is the human mind that is infinite.”

<sup>40</sup> CP 6.490 („Additament,” 1908).

<sup>41</sup> Jon Alan Schmidt, „A Neglected Additament: Peirce on Logic, Cosmology, and the Reality of God,” *Signs* 9 (2018): 1–20, at 1.

<sup>42</sup> According to Peirce’s ladder of the sciences, the metaphysical concept of the *Ens necessarium* is one of the tacit presuppositions that the special sciences carry with them but leave unexamined.

cific content in justifying the God hypothesis – other observations might equally serve as its basis, in place of the structural congruence among the experiential universes – he does commit to its logical form, and thus to the mode of its validity. The God hypothesis is justified abductively, and in such a way that aesthetic qualities play a role.<sup>43</sup> In this sense, what is sought is not the disclosure of a *sufficient* reason for the world, but merely an „*adequate* cause.”<sup>44</sup>

Unlike William Kingdon Clifford, Peirce (like William James) does not hold that „it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insuffi-

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43 CP 5.119 („Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism,” 1903) in *The Essential Peirce* 2, 193–194: „Therefore, if you ask me what part Qualities can play in the economy of the universe, I shall reply that the universe is a vast representamen, a great symbol of God’s purpose, working out its conclusions in living realities. Now every symbol must have, organically attached to it, its Indices of Reactions and its Icons of Qualities; and such part as these reactions and these qualities play in an argument that, they of course, play in the universe – that Universe being precisely an argument. In the little bit that you or I can make out of this huge demonstration, our perceptual judgments are the premisses for us and these perceptual judgments have icons as their predicates, in which icons Qualities are immediately presented. [...] The Universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art, a great poem – for every fine argument is a poem and a symphony – just as every true poem is a sound argument. But let us compare it rather with a painting – with an impressionist seashore piece – then every Quality in a Premiss is one of the elementary colored particles of the Painting; they are all meant to go together to make up the intended Quality that belongs to the whole as whole. That total effect is beyond our ken; but we can appreciate in some measure the resultant Quality of parts of the whole – which Qualities result from the combinations of elementary Qualities that belong to the premisses.” If we assume that Peirce intends the universe – accessed through perceptual judgments – to be employed as a sign and „God’s purpose” as its object, then the „living realities,” the interpretant, would consist in human conduct that seeks to respond to God’s purpose. Understood in this way, however, the universe would not, according to Peirce’s semiotic classification of the ten trichotomies from 1905, operate as an abducent sign – that is, one interpreted through an abductive argument culminating in a judgment that makes the hypothetical mode of its truth claim explicit – but rather as a sign whose interpretation results in a genuine dynamic interpretant, namely, a habit. On the other hand, if we assume that the premisses – specifically, the perceptual judgments – constitute the presupposed object to which the sign – a vague belief concerning God’s purpose as a good one – is spontaneously related, then the link between the sign (the initial belief) and the object (the presupposed perceptual judgments) would consist in a quality, or rather, a resemblance between two qualities: the beauty (aesthetic goodness) of the world, from which the reality not of just any God, but of a benevolent (ethically good) God, is inferred. See also CP 6.457 („A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” 1908) in *The Essential Peirce* 2, 435: „If God Really be, and be benign [...].” CP 5.536 might also be interpreted in this way (see the following footnote).

44 CP 5.536 („Pragmatism, Prag. [4],” c. 1905): „I do not believe that man can have the idea of any cause or agency so stupendous that there is any more adequate way of conceiving it than as vaguely like a man. Therefore, whoever cannot look at the starry heaven without thinking that all this universe must have had an adequate cause, can in my opinion not otherwise think of that cause half so justly than by thinking it is God.”

cient evidence.”<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, anything not ruled out as impossible – any hypothesis that spontaneously arises, including the hypothesis of God’s reality – may initially serve as the basis for a belief, that is, a conviction that guides action and forms habits. Such hypotheses, however, must subsequently be subjected to testing. With regard to the hypothesis of God’s reality, I suggest that Peirce – contrary to his explicit statements and unlike the approach taken in the „Neglected Argument” – ought to have referred to the method of qualitative induction, by which something is identified as something through the gradual accumulation of relevant characteristics.<sup>46</sup> The attributes that the muser ascribes to his hypothetical God, Peirce indicates, resemble qualities that manifest themselves in the world process, in the course of history – a history that, under divine governance (*gubernatio*), will, over the long term, tend toward increasing order, coordination, and, in this sense, love. In this light, one might understand Peirce’s observation that the muser – the reflective inquirer – who has begun revering and „adoring his strictly hypothetical God,”<sup>47</sup> that is, the idea of God, develops the desire „to shape the whole conduct of life and all the springs of action into conformity with that hypothesis.”<sup>48</sup> With respect to the problem of theodicy, this means that the muser, in light of the God hypothesis, becomes capable of interpreting the evils encountered as expressions of divine goodness – however hidden or obscure that goodness may be, and always from a first-person perspective. In this way, the musing individual transforms the God hypothesis into a (weak) kind of inductively tested claim: one that no longer

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<sup>45</sup> William Kingdon Clifford, „The Ethics of Belief,” in William Kingdon Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*, ed. by Leslie Stephen and Frederick Pollock, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1879), 177–211, at 186. 211: „It is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence; and where it is presumption to doubt, there it is worse than presumption to believe.”

<sup>46</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *Supplement to the Microfilm Edition of the Charles S. Peirce papers, Reel L1–L6*, ed. by Richard S. Robin / Houghton Library, Cambridge (Harvard University Library [Microreproduction Service], 1970), at MS L 231, 89 (1911): „It [sc. Qualitative Adduction (Induction, G. L.)] enumerates qualities and circumstances though they are things not capable of being counted, or rather, they have no sharp unmistakable boundaries so that there can be no doubt how they ought to be counted. Indeed we don’t want to count them but we need to weigh them. But there is no simple unmistakable way of measuring them.” *Digital Peirce Archive*, MS 0842\_057f. (1908): „It [sc. Qualitative Induction] consists of those inductions which are [...] founded upon [...] a stream of experience in which the relative evidential values of different parts of it have to be estimated according to the sense of the impressions they make upon us.” CP 8.233 (Letter draft to Paul Carus, on „Illustrations of the Logic of Science,” c. 1910): „Only it is most usually an induction from instances which are not discrete and numerable. I now call it Qualitative Induction. It is this which I used to confound with the second line of procedure, or at least not to distinguish it sharply.” The slightly earlier text CP 2.759 (“A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” MS „G.”, c. 1905 [?]) argues differently.

<sup>47</sup> CP 6.467 („A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” 1908) in *The Essential Peirce* 2, 440.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

grants to God's reality merely the status of possibility but recognizes it as an actual, though not logically necessary, fact.<sup>49</sup> This world is not the best of all possible worlds in the mind of God; rather, it is the *only* world. It does not come into being through a value-based or rational selection among alternatives by God, but from sheer chance, disorder, and chaos. Yet it evolves – over a vast span of time – toward improvement. God is the *causa efficiens* of the world – not by having absorbed every detail of its unfolding into his thought, but by creating the structures along which it can develop, including through spontaneity. At the same time, God is also the *causa finalis* of the world – not by having predetermined a certain end from eternity, but by seeking, from each given state, to realize the best possible outcome from that point, without forcefully imposing this aim upon the world.<sup>50</sup> The world follows, step by step – albeit with unsettling interruptions again and again – „God's purpose.”<sup>51</sup> It is meant to *become* the best world.

## 6 Summary

Certainly, I have not been able to demonstrate the validity of the principle of sufficient reason, from which the reality of an *Ens necessarium* could be inferred. And certainly, I have not been able to show that Peirce, despite his restriction of the

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49 One might ask how, at this stage of inquiry, God is present to the muser's mind. A possible solution to this problem could be found by appealing to the different kinds of abstraction processes that Peirce employs in his phenomenology. While the *concepts* of God and world can be *discriminated in intellectu* – since they do not relate to one another as genus and species – God and world, as mental contents, cannot be psychologically *dissociated*; that is, they cannot be separated in terms of attention. Whenever attention is directed to the world, it is also, inevitably, directed to God – and vice versa. However, God can, *in re*, be *prescinded* from the world (but not the other way around), because God is the condition of the world's possibility (and not vice versa). I owe this line of thought to Professor André De Tienne of Indiana University Indianapolis, who presented the idea at the international conference „Charles S. Peirce's Neglected Argument for the Reality of God: Contemporary Perspectives,” held at the University of Tübingen in June 2025.

50 Evers, „Unendlichkeit und Kontinuum bei Leibniz und Peirce,” 265: „In Peirce' Auffassung der Wirklichkeit als einem Werden aus dem unendlichen Kontinuum des Möglichen ist echte Evolution, ist die Entstehung von Neuem und Überraschendem eingeschlossen. Dann aber [...] muß die Vorstellung eines voll informierten Schöpfers aufgegeben werden.”

51 CP 5.119 („Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism,” 1903) in *The Essential Peirce* 2, 193: „[...] the Universe is a vast representamen, a great symbol of God's purpose, working out its conclusions in living realities.” CP 8.212 (draft letter to Mario Calderoni, c. 1905): „Now man cannot believe that creation has not some ideal purpose. If so, it is not mere action, but the development of an idea which is the purpose of thought; and so a doubt is cast upon the ultra pragmatic notion that action is the *sole* end and purpose of thought.”

validity of the principle of sufficient reason, rightly insists on the reality of the *Ens necessarium*. However, what I hope to have illustrated is that proofs of God's existence, whether cosmological or ontological, rely on far more underlying assumptions beneath the surface than are visible above it. It is precisely these invisible yet crucial governing assumptions, especially in terms of logic and semiotics, that require discussion and therefore deserve at least as much attention as the proofs of God's existence based on them.

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