THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF C. S. PEIRCE TO CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Prof. Dr. ROBERT CUMMINGS NEVILLE

Abstract: The classical North American pragmatists were intrigued by religion and devout in varying ways, all of which were compatible with a secularist outlook. Peirce is the most fruitful to pursue because of the analytical usefulness of his semiotics for interpreting religious symbols. First, his theory shows that symbols make possible and guide engagement with the divine, rather than substitute for it. Second, his theory distinguishes meaning from reference and interpretation, each of which opens new ways to think about religious engagement. A theory of religious symbols can be developed from his theory of meaning that highlights their mutual correction and resonance rather than logical coherence. A theory of indexical reference can be developed that shows how symbols are true or false depending on the causal relations established by the index between the object and the interpreter. A theory of contextual purpose for interpretation can show how symbols that are true in one context are false in another. Peirce's theory can be supplemented by a discussion of those persons for whom the symbols actually engage the divine and those for whom they do not. These developments open new approaches to understanding religious belief as part of practice, an old pragmatic theme, with doctrines reinterpreted in terms of symbolic engagement.

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) was probably the United States' most important philosopher. If pragmatism is defined as an epistemological theory of meaning and truth, Peirce was the founder of that movement but himself far more than a pragmatist. If pragmatism is defined as the great imaginative and systematic vision initiated by Peirce and carried on by many others since then, as I would prefer, then pragmatism itself is an important world philosophy, like Platonism, Aristotelianism, Confucianism, Daoism, Samkhya, and Vedanta.[1]

Pragmatism is often associated with science, not least because Peirce himself was a practicing scientist as was his colleague William James. John Dewey associated pragmatism with the hope that science is the instrument of social progress, and

Robert C. Neville is Professor at the Philosophy Department of Boston University (USA).

George Herbert Mead connected pragmatism closely to the social sciences. Pragmatism is essentially non-Kantian, even anti-Kantian. Therefore, most Europeans, who seem to be especially well disposed toward Kant, cannot see anything in pragmatism except its similarities to technologies and usefulness to achieving pre-set goals (despite Peirce's claim that the question most interesting to pursue pragmatically is what goals are worth having). That Peirce's pragmatism has important contributions to make to philosophy of religion thus might seem something of a surprise.[2]

Tonight I want to single out four connected topics in philosophy of religion for which Peirce has important insights, which conveniently can be labeled (1) the evolutionary weight of religion, (2) contributions to theology, (3) comparative theology, and (4) the importance of erudition. The discussion will make apparent how each of these topics opens out into many more fields of fruitful inquiry.

1. THE EVOLUTIONARY WEIGHT OF RELIGION

In 1898 Peirce delivered a series of lectures at Harvard that he called "Detached Ideas on Vitally Important Topics," the first of which was entitled "Philosophy and the Conduct of Life."[3] Peirce sharply distinguished (untypically for him) reason from instinct or belief. For reason he advocated utmost dispassion and objectivity, with as much imitation of mathematics as possible, and urged philosophy to be rational; most of that essay consists in classifying sections of philosophy as reason. For instinct or belief, however, he advocated the greatest trust in dealing with the vitally important topics of life. The truly important matters of life, on which human beings need to act, should not be trusted to reason, Peirce argued. Indeed, his argument took an extreme polemical turn. He criticized philosophers who sought to guide morals and the search for the good life by philosophical reasoning, reaching back to attack his ideal, Plato. On the one hand, such moralizing philosophy is likely to corrupt the dispassion of rational inquiry. But on the other hand, and even worse, philosophy is relatively superficial and is likely to introduce false distinctions and misleading ideals into the guidance of life, which is better left to instinct and commonly evolved belief.

Now this point is Peirce at play, not his typical position. In his more systematic moments he regards logic as the ethics of thought and ethics as the aesthetic beauty of life. He emphasizes continuities and mutual reinforcements rather than separations, in ways I'll mention later. But here his moral is that the deep things in life are those best formed and trusted to evolved belief and instinct.

In his celebrated "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God," he developed this point in an epistemological context directly relevant to religion.[4] There he argued that the evolution of the human mind/brain has been such that it has come to pick up on what needs to be known of vital importance for human life. Otherwise we would not have survived. In particular, he notes that just about everyone in every culture who has thought about how it is possible that there be a universe with radically different things in it that are still related to one another, has come up with

some vague notion that the universe is created. This notion is extremely vague, he noted (and he did not bother to give historical evidence that every culture indeed thinks this way, though obviously many do); as soon as theologians or philosophers start to explain it in more detail, they introduce complications that are problematic. The philosophers are usually specifically wrong, he said, though the vague belief is very likely right and worth guiding life in fundamental respects.

From this point I believe contemporary philosophy of religion can learn three points. First, its inquiry should be guided by the image of religion as sets of elementary behaviors and practices, mostly unreflective, and shaped and guided by beliefs that are more like instincts than objects of consciousness. Or better yet, religion should be imagined as having a hierarchy of behaviors and practices, shaped by a hierarchy of symbolic forms that run from unreflective instincts through greater and greater responsible elaboration up to conceptual theologies. The warning contained in this image is that we should not identify religion first with its elaborated conceptual doctrines and then work down to their expressions in practice, but the other way around. This point puts philosophy of religion in much greater consonance with anthropological, sociological, and psychological studies of religion than is possible for the epistemological approaches to philosophy of religion deriving from Hume and popular in the United States today.

The second thing for philosophy of religion to learn from Peirce's emphasis on the evolutionary weight of religion is the importance of genetic studies of religion, studies of how it evolves through history, reaching back to pre-historical times. Religions need to be studied in terms of their biological bases and the adaptive pressures of human evolution. The warning that comes with this lesson is that structuralist accounts of religion have limited value unless set in the larger genetic context.

The third lesson is that philosophy of religion should reject nominalism in favor of realism. Peirce recommended this rejection in all fields, and here is what that means for philosophy of religion.[5] The most real and important elements of religion are those very vague adaptations that orient human wonder, gratitude, fear, and guilt. These are specified in many ways by different traditions, with different situations for adaptations. But what is real and important are the vague commonalities they all have developed in response to common elements in the human environment. I shall return to the notion of vagueness shortly.

2. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEOLOGY

Having begun with what amounts to Peirce's insistence that religion deals with a depth of human reality more safely formed by evolution and expressed in instincts than in theology, permit me now to draw out a contribution his thought does make to theology. For Peirce, theology is the cognitive study of the meaning and truth of hypotheses about God and related matters as these have been symbolized in religion. He did not use the word "theology" often. Most of the time he spoke of

metaphysics and the science of being and beings, as in the essay on "Philosophy and the Conduct of Life." He was also interested in how religious symbols such as the Eucharist might be meaningful and true. All of these are embraced under the contemporary meaning of theology. Peirce has three main contributions on this head.

First, his theory of interpretation shows that signs function to engage us with reality, not to substitute for reality.[6] He understood semiotic systems to be themselves part of the adaptive developments of human life, serving to allow people to make ever more accurate and relevant discernments and responses to the important features of reality. Such systems have syntactic and semantic structures, or codes, as later semioticians would say. But the actuality of semiotic structures within personal and social life itself serves to mediate or interpret reality into meaningful units by means of which intelligent differential human responses can be made. Any interpretation of a reality by means of a sign and its defining semiotic system can itself be represented by a proposition within the semiotic system; I call this the extensional meaning of signs. This has led some thinkers to conclude that the object of any sign is another sign within the semiotic system, with the result that there is no reference to real things outside cultivated human semiosis. But this is a mistake, from Peirce's point of view. The intentional character of signs has to do with their actual use in engaging reality, employing the signs with their defining semiotic systems as the engaging media.

A result of this is that to say that a sign such as "God" might not have a real referent is unhelpful. Obviously, something is engaged by religious people attending to God. The question is whether the real referent is what the sign says, or something else indeed. The sign of a personal God, for instance, might refer to something that is not personal, or not a being, or that is a dream and hope rather than an external agent (however real the dream is as projection). So the big question for philosophy of religion is not whether God or some ultimate exists or, put more subjectively, whether there is something to which theological ideas refer, but rather what those ideas say and whether they are true.

The second part of Peirce's contribution to theology within philosophy of religion thus deals with truth and derives from his well-known semiotic theory. He himself did not develop this point to any great degree, but I have elaborated it in some detail.[7] Whereas many thinkers have believed that truth consists in a likeness or formal correspondence between ideas or propositions and their objects, Peirce pointed out that this assumes that all reference is iconic. To refer to an object iconically is to affirm that it is like the sign in some way, isomorphic with it. This might be physical resemblance as when a crucifix in church resembles the cross on which Jesus died (one of Peirce's examples). Or it might be more formal kinds of isomorphism as in the old logical positivists' theory that propositions mirror or express the forms of facts. Indeed, any description, no matter how poetic or periphrastic, has an element of iconicity in that it says its object is "like this." But Peirce pointed out that some reference or dimension of reference is indexical, that is pointing. An indexical reference determines a causal relation between the object

and the interpreter so that the interpreter gets the object. Pointing with the finger determines the interpreter to turn toward the object to see; an indexical shout wakes the interpreter up to what is happening. An index lifts an object into attention. Or more pointedly, an indexical reference changes the interpreter so that the object can be taken in. Religion, obviously, is deeply involved with indexical reference with symbols. Religious symbolization involves the practitioner in changing so as to be more open to religious realities. It brings to attention dimensions of life obscured by profane existence. It articulates in profound emotional ways depths in realities about which there is little customary consciousness but to which our instincts might be attuned. A very great many religious symbols are obviously false, in fact silly and stupid, if taken literally or iconically. No geologist would say that God is a rock, and no religious people would ever say that when they point to God as the rock of salvation. The most common kind of reference in religion is indexical, not iconic, however much there might also be iconic elements. The third kind of reference for Peirce is symbolic, by which he means that the sign's reference is determined within a semiotic system. All signs we can talk about are at least symbolic in their reference. Most are also iconic in some ways and indexical too.

Peirce's semiotic theory points out that truth is not a function of reference alone, however, even when made complicated by recognizing indexical reference. The act of referring to a religious reality by means of a sign is an interpretation made by concrete interpreters in actual contexts. An interpretation can be represented by a proposition within a semiotic system. But the interpretation itself is a concrete reality. As such, it has contexts that determine what is important to interpret, what kinds of signs to use, what purposes are being served, and indeed the cultural meaningfulness of the semiotic system employed. The truth of an interpretation has to do with whether the object is accurately represented within the interpreter in context. A sign that renders a true interpretation in one context might be false in another. Moreover, signs always interpret objects in certain respects, and the interpretive contexts determine the respects in which it is relevant to interpret the objects. Although abstract theologians like to develop complex signs that are universal across many contexts, and might succeed in this, most signs employed in the practice of religions are rather specific with regard to context.

The third part of Peirce's semiotics is the analysis of the signs as meaning systems. Religious signs are unusually complex, often involving several different symbol systems playing off against one another, reinforcing one another or limiting their claims. What is striking about this point is that so much philosophy of religion is nothing more than worrying about meanings and how to distinguish and define them. The whole of several senses of phenomenology lies in this part of semiotic analysis.

Now my point about the contribution of Peirce's semiotics to theology is that it lays out in detail just how complicated a judgment about the truth of a theological hypothesis is. To assess whether an interpretation is true requires determining whether what is important in the object is carried over into the interpreter's interpretation in the respects in which the signs stand for the object. That is a fairly technical definition

of truth that I have developed myself out of Peircean inspiration, namely, the carryover of what is in important in the object interpreted into the interpreter in the respects in which the signs stand for the object. To assess such claims for truth, it is not enough to determine whether there is some kind of likeness, correspondence, or isomorphism between the form of the object and the form of the signs. That kind of correspondence is not even relevant except insofar as the mode of reference is iconic. Rather, the modes of reference involved in the interpretation themselves need to be identified and interpreted; perhaps the question of truth requires that the interpreter be changed indexically so as to be able to pick up on what is relevant and important in the object. Moreover, whether the interpreter really gets what is important requires interpreting the context of interpretation, determining its theoretical and practical interests. Part of that is also determining in what respect the signs are supposed to interpret the objects. Much confusion comes when the same or similar signs are used to interpret objects but in different respects. Finally, the nuances of the signs and symbols themselves, their apophatic character and double entendre, need to be identified and specified. All this means that the very issue of identifying what is at stake in an interpretation in order to determine its truth requires a vastly more complicated hermeneutical apparatus than might be expected on positivist models. Peirce's semiotics shows just how complicated reference, interpretation, and meaning are in the logic of truth, and its application to religion needs to reshape the ways philosophy of religion asks the truth question.

The third part of Peirce's contribution to theology, beyond insisting on signs as instruments of engagement and the semiotic structure of interpretation, has to do with truth itself. My previous point had to do with laying out the complexity of identifying what has to be checked in assessing truth, namely reference, interpretive contexts, and meaning systems. Once that has been made clear, how can we tell when a theological claim is true?

Peirce's brilliant "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God" is really very little about God and mainly about testing hypotheses. Let me quickly sketch his theory about this, and then draw a moral for philosophy of religion and theology. Peirce said that explanation or understanding has three parts, which he called retroduction, deduction, and induction. Retroduction is the move from something to be explained or understood, the object, to what might explain it, and itself has two parts. The first part of retroduction is the kind of instinctual guess at what might explain, like the common vague instinct that a complex universe is to be understood as depending on a creator. But then that guess needs to be transformed into an hypothesis, such as that the creator is a God with intentionality and infinite power. Neither part of retroduction is an argument that proceeds according to a logical form, but consists in giving rise to explanatory form. Deduction also has two parts, explication and demonstration. Explication is the translation of the hypothesis into logical form from which deductions might be made, and demonstration then is the inferences from the hypothesis to what should and should not be found in experience if the hypothesis is true. Demonstration results in empirical categories. Demonstration

proceeds according to logical form, but explication is an "argument" (in Peirce's sense that it tends to produce a definite belief) without rules or premises. So far in his discussion of hypothesis Peirce was saying things that would be largely agreed to today in philosophy of science, albeit a century early. His greatest innovation has to do with the third stage of inquiry, induction, which in turn has three parts, classification and two steps of probationary induction. Peirce's point is that an examination has to be made as to whether the elements of experience fit the theoretically derived empirical categories. Classification is really the checking of the empirical categories derived from the hypothesis to see whether they cut reality at its natural joints, to use Plato's phrase, or whether they distort the phenomena, perhaps systematically so. This question is deeply important in religion where the abstractions of theoretical statements might be very far off from what is truly significant in the phenomena. I have developed this Peircean point to require a fairly elaborate phenomenological testing of the empirical categories. Only after the categories themselves are examined and approved is it helpful to use them to classify experience. Then probations can be made as to whether what appears in the empirical categories tends to confirm or disconfirm the theoretical hypothesis.

The effect of Peirce's theory of hypothesis formation and testing is to balance theoretical and phenomenological activities over against each other, each as a check for the other. Theorizing in any stage always has some empirical material, at least in the problems that give rise to questioning in the first place, and usually also in the convictions about what else is true that guide theorizing. Similarly, all empirical or phenomenological analysis has theoretical suppositions. With Peirce's scheme in mind, it is possible to check these against one another, correcting them as understanding proceeds. He would agree with Hegel that inquiry never begins at the beginning. There is no pure problem, but rather something problematic arising in a sea of relatively established convictions. Rather, inquiry is always in the middle, correcting previous assumptions and inferences, fine-tuning habits of thought by engaging reality with hypotheses under testing.

This point is particularly important in the study of religion because of the great danger of bias. Not only are there values and interests that bias researchers because of their social positions, as postmodern scholars love to remind us. Religious commitments themselves notoriously produce bias. Most study of world religions so far has taken placed with categories assumed from European religions. To counter the bias of religious commitments with methodological (if not emotional) skepticism is only to create another kind of bias. Only a process of inquiry that continually objectifies and tests out biases, moving dialectically between theory and phenomenological engagement, can provide a way forward, not wholly unbiased of course, but not biased the way it used to be.

The upshot of Peirce's contribution to theology is to show how to make it vulnerable to correction so that it can learn from its engagements with reality. This is a clear alternative to theology by authority or by experiential self-expression. The nature of theology is a major topic for philosophy of religion.

3. COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

Peirce's third main contribution to contemporary philosophy of religion has to do with establishing a public within which the theological assumptions and claims of the various world religions can engage one another. No excuse can be made these days for discussing religion in a context that does not include all the major world religions and such local religions as might be pertinent to the topic. Whereas Locke, Hume, and Kant might have identified religion with deist Christianity, Hegel understood philosophy of religion to include the historical and conceptual relations among the world religions. The very politics of intellectual work these days takes place in a context of intercultural encounter and challenge.

But the plain fact is that the state of scholarship in comparative religions has not established a sufficiently well justified unbiased map of the interactions of the world's many religions to provide a background public for philosophic discussion. Comparison even at the elementary level is a work in process, an urgent scholarly need. This is true even for that limited portion of comparative religions in which different theologies or conceptual commitments are compared. To be sure, the separation of comparative theology from the larger subjects of comparative religion is not easy, precisely because of the first Peircean point made above, namely, that religions are deep and largely unreflective practices whose theologies articulate only the tip of the iceberg, if you will. Nevertheless, comparative theology would be possible, bearing in mind its abstract limitations, if there were a map of fundamental comparative categories that provide a background for discussion.

Peirce's conception of vagueness and specification is an extraordinary tool for comparative theology. Peirce defined vagueness as the character of a category to which the principle of non-contradiction does not apply.[8] So, for instance, the category "God" is vague with respect to whether specific candidates for falling under the category have to be intentional. Many biblical representations of God construe him to have a discursive mind that can argue with people, as with Abraham or Moses; Neo-Platonic and Thomistic conceptions of God deny the internal pluralism of discursive intentionality. That is, the popular biblical representations and Neo-Platonic-Thomistic representations contradict one another in respect of intentionality, and yet both fall under the vague category God. Comparison in theology has the logical form of finding a vague category under which all the candidates for comparison fall, and then specifying the category in their different ways, summarizing how they contradict, agree, supplement, overlap or show indifference to one another. Vagueness differs from generality, according to Peirce, in that, whereas vagueness can contain contradictories, generality does not exhibit the principle of excluded middle and therefore admits of many different specifications, though perhaps not contradictories.

Another way of stating this point about comparison is to note that things always are compared in some respect or other. Comparison as such does not exist, only comparison in this respect or that. The "respect" in which things can be compared is a vague category, vague in that the things compared in this "respect" can specify

it in contradictory ways. So, in respect of whether God is intentional, the biblical representations usually say yes and the Neo-Platonists and Thomists say no.

The scholarly process of comparison always starts with comparative categories that are assumed and then brought to attention; these categories have a history, usually one arising from their usefulness in one religion. As I've said, most studies of religion, including comparative religions and comparative theologies, have arisen out of Christian interests. We can assume that such historically derived categories have a bias and are unable, until corrected, to be fair in allowing for radically different theologies to be compared. Many people used to define religion itself by reference to God, and stumbled over Buddhism, which has no main God and altogether too many little ones without being animistic. If we now were to define religion by reference to something transcendent, it could not be God but something ultimate in a vaguer sense. Some forms of Buddhism cannot be encompassed even under the notion of the ultimate when that is given an ontological interpretation; ultimacy then needs to be redefined even more vaguely as the goal of the religious quest, for instance. The task of developing comparative categories thus is involved in a never-ending dialectic to criticize and purify the vague comparative categories to prevent them from building in bias.[9]

At the same time, the comparative task of determining what the compared theologies have to say about the vague category is itself not obvious. Remembering Peirce's warning about testing empirical categories, the specification of vague categories according to each tradition compared has to include testing the applicability of the empirical categories. The inquiry needs to ask just how to represent the religion with regard to the respect in which it is being compared with others. Part of this representation is saying what the theology says in its own terms. But often theologies have not addressed the comparative question before and therefore do not have anything to say short of some creative extrapolation. Therefore, the work of specifying the comparative categories is an ongoing process requiring constant criticism. Both the elaboration of vague comparative categories and the specification of them for each position compared need to present hypotheses that are vulnerable to correction within the scholarly community, including the correction that comes from engaging those hypotheses in the living religions.

Comparison, as I mentioned, is not merely establishing vague comparative categories and filling them in with the specifications of the traditions compared. Comparison also requires saying just how the traditions compare. This requires translating the various specifications into the language of the vague category, for instance, translating the biblical language and Neo-Platonic language into the language of intentionality in God. Then it is possible to say that the former affirms intentionality and the latter does not, except perhaps in compromised forms. This translation and summing up process is yet another fallible undertaking, marked by hypotheses that are put forward for criticism and modified as the result of the testing. The summary part of this is triply vulnerable, depending on the vulnerable process of steadily redefining the vague category and the other vulnerable process of deciding how the

compared positions specify the category, as well its own vulnerable process of tying these together.

Peirce's categories of vagueness and specificity thus lie at the heart of an urgent and massive research project for philosophy of religion, namely, the development of elementary categories by which the connections and differences among different religions and theological positions can be mapped. The research project calls for imaginative generalists to develop the vague categories through criticism,, historically scrupulous specialists to represent the positions on the categories with vulnerable attention to amendment of representation, and cooperation between these two groups to bring the comparisons to explicit statement, again in a process subject to continual revision.

So far I have argued that Peirce had several brilliant and powerful ideas that make important contributions to contemporary philosophy of religion. His evolutionary approach to religion urges for us a careful discernment of the roles of instinct and responsible intellection in religion life, and deflects attention from defining religion by its cognitive beliefs, as earlier philosophy of religion had done. His semiotic theory lays out patterns of meaning and truth so that philosophy of religion does not have to be merely descriptive but can deal the questions of norms and truth that are so important to religions. His theory of logical vagueness and specificity shows the way to the urgent research project of comparative religions and comparative theology. Scholars of Peirce investigate his own treatment of these topics is much more detail than I have given here in these brief allusive sketches. The fourth contribution I cite from him has a different character.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF ERUDITION

Classical European and Anglo-American philosophy of religion in most of its schools defined itself so as to require little erudition in religious matters. The empiricist branch stemming from Hume assumed religion was either superstition in which it was not interested or a kind of natural theology deism whose epistemological foundations it investigated. Contemporary American Calvinist philosophy of religion associated with Plantinga and Wolterstorff has a different conception of religion, but not much different and surely not inclusive of the religions of East and South Asia or of traditional folk.

In contrast to the British empiricist approach to philosophy of religion is the Kantian transcendental tradition. I call this tradition transcendental because it believes that philosophy's special or professional contribution to the study of religion consists in pursuing some version of a transcendental reduction or theory of religion. Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* is probably the most famous example of this after Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone.* The enduring value in that work is likely to be the phenomenological study of forms of mysticism. But its intent was to justify

the transcendental conditions of the human mystical faculty responsive to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Neo-Kantian philosophers of religion such as Ernst Cassirer have done much to study symbols, but as constrained within quasi-apriori theories of categoreal schemes. The Kantians and Neo-Kantians have tended to see philosophy as an apriori discipline, setting the conditions for empirical studies that are to be done by the scientists. The major exception in philosophy of religion to this is Hegel and his tradition. Hegel thought he had to know everything, and in a way he was right.

The fourth contribution from Peirce is his conviction that philosophy of religion, like any philosophy, should be as empirical as possible and that apriori and transcendental arguments are to be distrusted. The reason they are to be distrusted is that apriori and transcendental arguments require a certain, foundational starting point. Peirce's earliest (1868) published articles, "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man" and "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," attacked what he called "intuition," any claim that represents itself as self-justifying.[10] His target was Descartes, but his arrows also hit Kant's supposition that there is apriori synthetic knowledge in the sciences and mathematics, the foundation for transcendental arguments. What Kant thought we need to affirm as the conditions for the possibility of knowledge Peirce showed could be affirmed as fallible and empirically vulnerable hypotheses about those conditions.

I have already mentioned three broad areas in which philosophy of religion needs to be empirical and thus requires great erudition. First, religion should be understood at least in terms of human evolution, which makes biological, anthropological, sociological, psychological, and historical inquiry relevant as well as the more reflective theological and philosophical. Put negatively, it is a mistake to identify religion by its intellectual beliefs without seeing how they rest on deeper and perhaps surer if vaguer evolved bases. Second, religious interpretation should be understood in terms of engaging reality in its religious dimension, which in turn can be understood through Peirce's semiotic distinctions between reference, interpretive context, and meaning systems. The truth of religious interpretation is to be ascertained by empirical studies that identify and analyze the modes of reference, the interpretive contexts, and the meaning systems in question; these empirical studies allow the question of truth to be formulated. Then the question of whether what is important in the object is in fact carried across to the interpreter can be pursued, again a matter of empirical learning. Third, the very context for the study of religion is a public within which all religions are recognized, which requires a background in history of and comparative religions, a background that even now is still in the making.

The result of all of this is that philosophy of religion, or any kind of philosophy, cannot define itself as a professional discipline with exclusive methods and boundaries. Rather, it blends in with the sciences and the arts of interpretation. More than any of these special sciences, philosophy of religion attempts to pull things together into as nearly whole an account as possible. Whereas special sciences

tend to define themselves in terms of a few variables and constants, philosophy in principle cannot neglect anything.

Peirce had an arresting way of putting this. He said that an argument should not be conceived as a logical chain, which is only as strong as its weakest link. Rather it should be conceived as a rope consisting of many fibers, none very long perhaps, but each twisted with a few others, twisted against yet others, and spun cumulatively as a very strong cohering set of reinforcing forces. Peirce's essays tend to be frustrating bafflements to philosophers who like neat arguments. He appeals to various sciences, to historical examples, to anecdotes, to diagrams, all in apparently illogical ways. But the ways add up. Any number of them might turn out to be wrong. But if he can weave the justification for an hypothesis from many different strands at once, and not serially, they have a power that steadies itself under criticism rather than self-destructs.

I commend to you this conception of philosophy of religion as a comprehensive empirical study, requiring massive erudition and connection to experts with more erudition. Philosophic argument itself is absolutely crucial in philosophy of religion, and sometimes looks more like an appeal to logic, even mathematical logic, than to scientific studies. Peirce himself would be the first to characterize philosophy, at least metaphysics, in analogy with mathematical logic. But for Peirce, mathematics itself is the study of diagrams, and philosophical conclusions are always hypotheses vulnerable to correction by those who have perspectives beyond what have already been examined. Charles Peirce, who died eighty-seven years ago, contributes powerful ropes of arguments for a new and vital approach to philosophy of religion.

NOTAS

1. My assessment of the overall place of Peirce and pragmatism in world philosophy is in my *The Highroad around Modernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), especially chapter 1 which is a sketch of Peirce's overall philosophy.
2. A striking exception to this European failure to appreciate Peirce, especially on religion, is the work of Hermann Deuser. See his translation of Peirce's religious writings, *Religionsphilosophische Schriften* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995) and his *Gott: Geist und Natur: Theologische Konsequenzen aus Charles S. Peirce' Religionsphilosophie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993).
3. See *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, volume 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), parr. 616 ff; or *The Essential Peirce*, edited by the Peirce Edition Project (Nathan Houser general editor), vol. 2, p. 27 ff.
4. *Collected Papers*, vol. 6 (1935), parr. 452 ff; *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, p. 434 ff.
5. Peirce sniped at nominalism throughout his works. One of the best statements, very early (1871), is his review of Fraser's *The Works of George Berkeley*, in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1, p. 83 ff., and in *Collected Papers, vol. 8*, edited by Arthur Burks (1958), parr. 7 ff.

6. Peirce's discussions of signs are throughout his work, but focused in volume 2 of the *Collected Papers*.
7. See my *The Truth of Broken Symbols*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.
8. *Collected Papers*, vol. 5 (1934), parr. 447-448; *The Essential Peirce*, p. 350-352.
9. These reflections on comparison arise out the Boston University Cross-Cultural Comparative Religious Ideas Project which has produced three volumes of comparisons: *The Human Condition*, *Ultimate Realities*, and *Religious Truth* (all Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001). The discussion of God as ontological ultimate comes in the second volume.
10. The essays are in the *Collected Papers*, vol. 5, parr. 213 ff. and 264 ff.; they are also in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1, chapters 2 and 3.