

Pragmatism among the pragmatists: a brief history and future prospects¹

O pragmatismo entre os pragmatistas: uma breve história e perspectivas futuras

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Abstract: This essay revisits the historical circumstances and philosophical developments that motivated Charles Peirce's decision to distinguish his own philosophy as a form of "pragmatism" from the pragmatism of contemporaries like William James and F.C.S. Schiller; it also underscores the continuity between Peirce's thought and Josiah Royce's later deliberations. Such a historical survey, albeit quite brief, sets the stage for a discussion of how pragmatism might prove to be of contemporary and future relevance, especially for inquiries in philosophical theology and the philosophy of religion.

Keywords: Pragmatism. Peirce. Royce. Theosemiotic. Inquiry. Self-control.

Resumo: *Este ensaio revisita as circunstâncias históricas e os desenvolvimentos filosóficos que motivaram a decisão de Charles Peirce de distinguir sua própria filosofia como uma forma de "pragmatismo" do pragmatismo de contemporâneos, como William James e F.C.S. Schiller; também sublinha a continuidade entre o pensamento de Peirce e as deliberações posteriores de Josiah Royce. Esta pesquisa histórica, embora breve, cria condições para uma discussão de como o pragmatismo pode se revelar pertinente na atualidade e no futuro, especialmente para investigações na teologia filosófica e na filosofia da religião.*

Palavras-Chave: *Pragmatismo. Peirce. Royce. Teosemiótica. Investigação. Autocontrole.*

In 1905, Charles S. Peirce coined the term "pragmatism" as a new label for his philosophy, one that he felt assured was "ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers"

1 This essay represents the slightly expanded version of a keynote address delivered on November 12, 2015 at the 16th International Meeting on Pragmatism, held at the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, in Brazil. I am especially grateful to Prof. Ivo Ibri of that university for his kind invitation to participate in the conference.

(CP 5.414).² Three years later, in a well-known article published in *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Arthur O. Lovejoy identified and distinguished at least “thirteen pragmatisms.”³ So very early in the twentieth century the pragmatic landscape had already become quite muddled and complex. With the emergence and development of various forms of “neo-pragmatism” late in that century and now early in the twenty-first (most recently in the work of Robert Brandom), this situation has certainly not become any more tidy or simple.

In this essay, I will reconsider briefly the historical circumstances that led Peirce to distinguish his own point of view from that of certain contemporaries. I will also revisit Lovejoy’s article, to supply a snapshot of the pragmatic landscape as he surveyed it at that point in time. But my primary historical interest will be in exploring how one of Peirce’s earliest interpreters, Josiah Royce, appropriated some elements of pragmatism for his own constructive philosophical purposes. I will conclude by turning my attention to the present and future. Rather than quarreling unproductively about whether or not certain neo-pragmatists or “new pragmatists”⁴ are justified in their claim to be “pragmatists” of any sort, I will look for evidence that something like Peirce’s pragmatism survives in this new century, and evaluate its prospects for flourishing “in the long run” (most especially as a mode of inquiry adapted to the purposes of any theology conceived as *theosemiotic*—the latter a term I coined in 1989, unfortunately without any real concern at the time to insure its safety from kidnappers).⁵

II

Why did Peirce decide in 1905 that it was time “to kiss his child good-by and relinquish it to its higher destiny,” while simultaneously announcing “the birth of the word ‘pragmatism’” (CP 5.414)? This announcement was preceded by a report about the development of pragmatism in the thought of William James and F.C.S. Schiller.

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- 2 These references in my text are to Charles S. Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss (Volumes 1-6) and Arthur Burks, (Volumes 7-8), (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935, 1958). “CP 5.414” should be read as “volume 5, paragraph 414.”
 - 3 Arthur O. Lovejoy, “The Thirteen Pragmatisms,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Vol. 5 (January, 1908): p. 5-12 and 29-39; reprinted as Chapter 1 in *The Thirteen Pragmatisms and Other Essays*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), p. 1-29. (My page references here are to the latter.)
 - 4 The label “new pragmatists” was coined by Cheryl Misak in an edited collection of essays bearing that title. See *New Pragmatists*, ed. Cheryl Misak, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
 - 5 “Theosemiotic” was the title of the last chapter of my book on *Peirce’s Philosophy of Religion*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). Since then, the word has appeared in numerous publications by various scholars, some referring to my own work, all attempting to adapt Peirce’s ideas for constructive theological purposes. That chapter was a promissory note, one that I hope will be redeemed with the completion of my book-in-progress, entitled *Theosemiotic: religion, reading and the gift of meaning* (under contract with Fordham University Press).

“So far all went happily,” Peirce wrote, although this remark must be taken with a grain of salt, since we know that Peirce was not entirely happy with the directions that pragmatism had been taken by either James or Schiller. Nevertheless, it was the “merciless” abuse of the term in “literary journals” that clinched his decision to part ways and strike out in a new direction. Of course, this is not entirely accurate either. The word may have been new but the philosophical direction that it designates is one that Peirce had been moving in for quite some time.

The “proof” of the doctrine to which this new word is now attached, Peirce explained in 1905, “would essentially involve the establishment of the truth of synechism” (CP 5.415). Now Peirce’s meditations on the concept of continuity represent a thread that had been woven into the fabric of his philosophy throughout much of its development. That proof was not forthcoming in Peirce’s remarks here. In fact, Peirce never did articulate it in a manner that he judged to be fully satisfactory. At the same time, his observation is a crucially important one: pragmatism is indissolubly linked to the doctrine of the real continuity of all things, with its corollary belief that “all this universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs” (CP 5.449, note #1). Both Peirce’s synechism and, I will argue, his semiotic are crucial to understanding the meaning of his pragmatism.

This brief sketch of his birth announcement for pragmatism hardly does justice to the detail that Peirce supplied there in surveying the distinctive features of his new progeny. But I want to skip ahead three years to 1908, and to another important discussion of pragmatism, this one constituting the final section of Peirce’s *Hibbert Journal* article on “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” (CP 6.478-85). In the first place, I think it is significant that Peirce returned to this topic within the context of his single most important publication dedicated to an explicitly religious topic. Moreover, it is important to notice exactly what it is that he said within that context. Some of his remarks have a familiar ring, for example, as when he observed that “all thinking is performed in Signs, and that meditation takes the form of a dialogue” (CP 6.481). This observation is consistent with the theory of cognition that Peirce had begun to articulate already forty years earlier. At the same time, he demonstrated more ambivalence in these pages, specifically, in reporting the role that William James played in adapting and then popularizing Peirce’s own pragmatic insights; certain aspects of James’s “transmogrification” of pragmatism resulted in a doctrine that Peirce now evaluated “as opposed to sound logic” (CP 6.482). Peirce concluded that his own mature view is “a very different position from that of Mr. Schiller and the pragmatists of today” (CP 6.485). Moreover, one key respect in which it does differ is in terms of the emphasis placed by Peirce on self-control, so that there should be no confusion between “active willing (willing to control thought, to doubt, and to weigh reasons) with willing not to exert the will (willing to believe)” (CP 6.485). The latter is clearly a reference to James’s philosophy, its emphasis on episodic acts of volition and immediate practical effects needing to be contrasted, at least on Peirce’s view, with a narrative about how volition shapes the self over time, also with a perspective that registers the significance of results both actual and conceivable, some to be achieved only in “the long run.”

This talk about “willing to doubt” surely also needs to be contrasted with Peirce’s earlier account of inquiry as arising in response to the “irritation of doubt,” an

account presented in his most famous published article, on “The Fixation of Belief.” Peirce pointed to that article in these pages of his *Neglected Argument*, marking its appearance in 1877 as the official birthdate of pragmatism—although he had already named and expounded the doctrine in earlier “conversation about it” (CP 6.482). One could argue that there was an evolution in Peirce’s thinking between the first published articulation of his pragmatism in 1877 and the state of his pragmaticism in 1908. And there is certainly ample evidence of a development in Peirce’s philosophy during these three intervening decades.⁶ Yet I remain convinced, as I have argued on several earlier occasions, that “The Fixation of Belief” is a problematic representation of the perspective to which Peirce adhered even in the late 1870s.⁷ It is an overly simplistic and somewhat exaggerated version of his theory of inquiry. Nevertheless, it was highly influential, shaping the deliberations of philosophical pragmatists like James, Schiller, Papini and the young Dewey. If Peirce’s dissatisfaction with their views—one resulting in the birth of the term “pragmaticism”—was solely a function of his own mind having changed, then it would have been a bit harsh for him to talk about the threat posed by “kidnappers” (even if we assume that his tongue was pressing at least lightly against his cheek). Rather, in the spreading of the gospel of pragmatism by its noteworthy popularizers, Peirce recognized that something had gone amiss. Logical rigor, a commitment to synechism, the awareness of semiosis as a virtually ubiquitous phenomenon, and an understanding of self-control as something exercised in the long run are all features of his account that Peirce now felt the need to emphasize.

In the same year that Peirce’s *Neglected Argument* appeared, Lovejoy produced his own survey of the pragmatic landscape. It is interesting to consider briefly what he reported there, especially in light of what has already been revealed about Peirce’s concerns regarding the present and future of pragmatism. Lovejoy supplied a certain critical distance on the topic, since it would be a gross misrepresentation to regard him as having been a philosophical pragmatist of any kind. He announced that he was writing on the tenth birthday of pragmatism, a reference to James’s 1898 Berkeley lecture on “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” an occasion during which James famously credited Peirce with being pragmatism’s originator. Ten years out, Lovejoy now felt able to identify “at least thirteen pragmatisms: a baker’s dozen of contentions which are separate not merely in the sense of being discriminable, but in the sense of being logically independent, so that you may without any inconsistency accept any one and reject all the others, or refute one and leave the philosophical standing of the others unimpaired.”⁸ While it had originated

6 In my judgment, the best account of this development remains that provided by Murray G. Murphey in his classic study of *The Development of Peirce’s Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

7 I first worried in print about “The Fixation of Belief” being regarded as an accurate representation of Peirce’s position even in the 1870s, in *Peirce’s Philosophy of Religion*, p. 99. (In this regard, I am indebted to my teacher Murray Murphey, who offered a similar judgment of this article decades earlier in *The Development of Peirce’s Philosophy*, p. 164). I addressed this topic at somewhat greater length more recently, contrasting any inquiry that arises solely from the stimulus of doubt with inquiry motivated by the “will to learn,” in “Pragmatism and the Spirit of the Liberal Arts,” *The Pluralist*, 10:1 (Spring, 2015): 64-79.

8 Lovejoy, *The Thirteen Pragmatisms and Other Essays*, p. 2.

in Peirce's and James's earliest utterances about the topic, as "a doctrine concerning the meaning of propositions," pragmatism was also now being used as the label for multiple theories of truth, as well as for an ontological theory that emphasizes "temporal becoming."⁹ Several of these theories, Lovejoy objected, confuse the predicted consequences of a proposition *being* true with those following from the *belief* that a proposition is true.

It does not serve my present purpose to scrutinize Lovejoy's decidedly unsympathetic inventory of pragmatic perspectives at great length. But it is interesting to observe that James was Lovejoy's primary interlocutor in this discussion of pragmatism, both in the 1908 article and in the later volume on pragmatism for which this article provided the title and then served as the first chapter. In fact, James was treated at length in each of that book's first six chapters, with two of them (chapters 4 and 5) being devoted exclusively to his thought; in the book's last three chapters, Dewey's philosophy became the central object of Lovejoy's concern. Peirce was mentioned a mere three times in this 286 page critical reflection on the nature and significance of pragmatism: two brief mentions very early on in a discussion of the first of thirteen pragmatisms (as a theory of meaning), and then one more time in the middle of the book where Peirce was quoted as disagreeing with James—about the precise nature of the relationship between thinking and breathing!¹⁰

By 1908, William James, and then increasingly during the next few decades, John Dewey had come to dominate the discussion of pragmatism in much the same way that first Richard Rorty and now Robert Brandom have done so in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It is not my intention to portray "pragmaticism among the pragmatists" by driving a deep wedge between Peirce's thought and all of these other perspectives, especially the one defended by James.¹¹ Nevertheless, some light does need to be shined into the shadows cast by these other more accessible and, at least initially, more influential proponents of philosophical pragmatism.

William James was not the only Harvard professor who looked to Peirce for philosophical inspiration, while adapting the latter's ideas for his own constructive purposes. Josiah Royce did so as well, most notably in a series of lectures published in 1913 as *The Problem of Christianity*.¹² He drew there, not on Peirce's *Popular*

9 Ibid., p. 3, and then also see the summary list of all 13 pragmatisms on p. 26-28.

10 Ibid., p. 130.

11 Nathan Houser has argued that the differences between James's pragmatism and Peirce's pragmaticism ought not to be exaggerated and, more specifically, that Peirce's "use of pragmaticism in support of a religious hypothesis," in his *Neglected Argument*, resonates with the perspective articulated by James in his 1898 Berkeley lecture. See his article on "Peirce's Post-Jamesian Pragmatism," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, III (2001): p. 39-60. Although I argue here that Peirce's thinking about religion exhibits a closer relationship to Royce's ideas than to James's, I would agree with Houser's general conclusions. See my article "From a 'Religion of Science' to the 'Science of Religions': Peirce and James Reconsidered," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 27 (May/September, 2006): 191-203.

12 Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

Science Monthly articles from the 1870s, but on articles published a decade earlier in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, as well as from a dictionary entry on the concept of “Sign” and from the later Neglected Argument.¹³ While Royce carefully distinguished the philosophical perspective that he delineated in these pages from the pragmatism of William James, I want to suggest that Royce’s “absolute pragmatism” is actually quite faithful to the inspiration of Peirce’s pragmatism.¹⁴

Peirce’s semiotic and mature theory of inquiry were crucial to Royce’s account, also the conclusion that self-knowledge is a product of inference and interpretation in much the same way that our knowledge of other persons is achieved. Isolated inferences are of marginal value, with inquiry best conceived as a communal process, one that gradually unfolds over long periods of time. That any genuine community is always already a community of interpretation, and that the human mind is naturally attuned to the universe so as to be able instinctively to interpret its signs with greater accuracy than could otherwise be predicted, are also key ideas that Royce claims to have borrowed from Peirce. Conversation—whether it be the mind’s ongoing internal dialogue *or* one occurring between selves *or* exemplified in the self’s mindful communing with nature—always takes the form of continuous semiosis, for both thinkers, a time-ordered series of signs whereby something present conveys the meaning of something past to something *in futuro*. Such conversations are ideally and crucially shaped, for both thinkers, by repeated acts of volition, that is to say, by the way that each conversation partner chooses to direct his or her attention.

This essentially semiotic picture of the self and of its interactions both with other selves and with the world is one that had a religious significance for Peirce. Royce echoed Peirce’s claim that the universe is “perfused with signs,” also, that the world as a whole is best to be conceived as “a vast representamen, a great symbol of God’s purpose” (CP 5.119), when the former asserted that “the universe consists of real Signs and of their interpretation.”¹⁵ In his embracing of Peirce’s pragmatism, I would argue that Royce made the first extended attempt to fill in the details of the “poor sketch” that Peirce had supplied in his Neglected Argument. That is to say, Royce was the first thinker after Peirce, also inspired by Peirce’s ideas, clearly to conceive of philosophical theology *as theosemiotic*.¹⁶

III

It is sadly ironic that Peirce’s self-identification as a “convinced Pragmatist in Semeiotic” appears as the prelude to a defense of slavery. Nevertheless, that label is an accurate and illuminating one, linking pragmatism inextricably to semiotic, with the former to be regarded, at least in part, as a theory about how best to determine the meaning of signs. The label’s aforementioned appearance was in a letter to

13 Ibid., see note 1 on pages 275-76 and note 1 on page 390.

14 Royce identified his own position as “absolute pragmatism,” while distancing himself from much of “recent pragmatism,” on page 279 of *The Problem of Christianity*.

15 Ibid., p. 345.

16 For an expanded discussion of this claim, consult my article “In the Presence of the Universe: Peirce, Royce and Theology as Theosemiotic,” *Harvard Theological Review* 103 (April, 2010): 237-47.

Lady Victoria Welby, written in December of 1908.¹⁷ This letter is noteworthy in a number of respects, not least of all because Peirce there offered to his correspondent some clarification of his “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” an article published earlier that same year. It is one of two long responses (on December 14 and December 23) made to a letter that Lady Welby wrote to Peirce earlier during the same month raising questions about his article. One of the concepts clarified was Peirce’s understanding of the word “faith,” since the Neglected Argument proposed that faith in God is the natural precipitate of regular engagement in musement, a meditative practice that he described at some length in the article. Here Peirce explained that the faith of a believer is essentially “that which he is prepared to conform his conduct to,” without requiring recognition of “what it is to which he is conforming his conduct.”¹⁸ By way of illustration of this concept, Peirce suggested that any scientist who “really believes the universe to be governed by reason” necessarily has an implicit “Faith in God.” While she may not recognize it as such, the scientist who conducts her investigations with the assumption that all natural phenomena have a rational explanation holds beliefs that are vaguely theistic.

Now Peirce also suggested in this letter that science ought best to be understood not as a “doctrine,” but rather that it “consists in *inquiry*.”¹⁹ And what I wish to propose here is that his own pragmatism is portrayed most fully and accurately when it is represented as a full-blown theory of inquiry, or as Peirce described it, “a theory of the nature of thinking” (CP 6.491). The articles published by Peirce in the 1870s introduced to readers his now famous doubt-belief theory of inquiry. Problematic in various respects, that theory has nevertheless inspired several generations of serious pragmatic reflection. Then, in a series of lectures presented in Cambridge in 1898, Peirce reacted somewhat sarcastically to the constraints that William James seemed to have been placing on his presentation of those lectures, thus driving a wedge between theory and practice that stands in stark contrast to the continuity with which they are portrayed in the doubt-belief theory.²⁰ I would contend that both of these accounts, in 1877-78 and twenty years later in 1898, while not entirely false, are certainly distorted views of how Peirce understood these matters. Inquiry arises for Peirce *both* episodically in response to the doubt induced by problematic situations *and* in disinterested deliberations motivated almost entirely by the “will to learn.” Fortunately, Peirce offered a much more balanced account of his theory of

17 See *Semiotic and Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby*, ed. Charles S. Hardwick, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 73-86.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

20 The details of this interaction between Peirce and James leading up to the Cambridge lectures have been rehearsed and discussed by numerous scholars in numerous places. James’s plea that Peirce deal less with logically complex topics and speak instead about “vitaly important” matters was not terribly well-received by Peirce. For one account, see the Introduction by Kenneth L. Ketner and Hilary Putnam to Peirce’s *Reasoning and the Logic of Things: The Cambridge Conferences Lectures of 1898*, ed. Kenneth L. Ketner, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

inquiry, first in a series of published and unpublished papers written in 1905 (see CP 5.411-537), and then a few years later in the *Neglected Argument*.

From the perspective articulated in these writings about pragmatism, inquiry begins with a process of reasoning designed to produce a hypothesis (what Peirce called “abduction”) and then moves to the task of deductively explicating the meaning of this hypothesis. Such explication would lead us “to discover and recognize just what general habits of conduct a belief in the truth of the concept (of any conceivable subject, and under any conceivable circumstances) would reasonably develop” (CP 6.481). Subsequently, its “ultimate test must lie in its value in the self-controlled growth of man’s conduct of life” (CP 6.480). The point here is not just about how one’s beliefs *actually* shape one’s conduct, but about how they could be *conceived* to shape one’s conduct, under any imaginable circumstances. And so the truth of a belief cannot consist in any “*actual* satisfaction” of our doubts, “but must be the satisfaction which *would* ultimately be found if the inquiry were pushed to its ultimate and indefeasible” end (CP 6.485). Inquiry is “pushed” in this fashion, not merely by responding to the irritation of doubt whenever it happens to arise as a stimulus, but moreover by engaging in “active willing,” the exercise of self-control in thought and imagination, what Peirce identified as the “will to learn” in his 1898 lectures and then later illustrated with the example of musement.

The preceding remarks serve as a prolegomenon to the task of surveying the future prospects for a philosophy conceived as pragmatism. I do not say “for *any* philosophy,” because I do not pretend to be exhaustive in the brief discussion that follows, nor do I think that such prospects are limited to the specifically theological project that I intend to sketch here. Nevertheless, I want to focus the spotlight back on the task of adapting Peirce’s semiotic theory for the purposes of contemporary philosophical theology and philosophy of religion, a task initiated by Peirce himself in 1908 and then taken up by Royce with his publication of *The Problem of Christianity*.

The intervening century between Royce’s work and the present day has not proven to be a period of great progress in this regard. H. Richard Niebuhr appropriated Royce’s philosophy of loyalty for his own theological purposes, but the Peircean semiotic background against which Royce came to understand such loyalty is a bit muted in Niebuhr’s account.²¹ Much more recently, Robert Corrington has brilliantly developed certain Peircean and Roycean insights, weaving them as a strand into the articulation of his “ecstatic naturalism,” albeit in a way that best illuminates Corrington’s own highly idiosyncratic theological perspective rather than serving carefully to fill in the details of Peirce’s “poor sketch.”²² In my judgment, the

21 Royce’s influence on Niebuhr is perhaps best displayed in such works as *The Meaning of Revelation*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2006), and *The Responsible Self*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1999), as well as in several essays published posthumously. For a useful discussion of this influence, consult Joshua Daniel’s recent book, *Transforming Faith: Individual and Community in H. Richard Niebuhr*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), especially chapters two and four.

22 See Corrington’s *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), as well as my review of that book, in *Modern Theology* 18 (April, 2002): p. 302-04.

most sustained and faithful contemporary attempt to extend the project initiated by Peirce and Royce early in the twentieth century is represented by the work of Robert C. Neville, most especially in a book written a decade ago that (much like Peirce's writing about religion), sadly, has been somewhat neglected.²³

During the same period of time, pragmatism has morphed into a variety of "new and neo-pragmatisms," some more and some less concerned with tracing their roots back further than 100 years to the deliberations of Peirce and James. As already indicated, my primary objective here is *not* to map this contemporary territory, nor to evaluate each perspective as a candidate worthy (or not) to bear the title of "pragmatism."²⁴ Nevertheless, if a Peircean pragmatism is to survive among the pragmatists—perhaps even to flourish—in the years moving forward, it will need to distinguish itself from the more prominent of these perspectives in at least two crucial respects. In the first place, the pragmatist will refuse to proclaim that she has no real use for the concept of *experience* in her philosophy, as Robert Brandom did when he boasted that the word does not appear even once in the nearly 800 pages of his magnum opus, *Making it Explicit*.²⁵ In sharp contrast, Peirce claimed that every logical concept, in order to be truly meaningful, must enter through the "gate of perception" and exit through the "gate of purposive action" (CP 5.212). Two definitions of the word "experience" are invoked by this claim, both the one that construes it as roughly synonymous with sense perception and the one that links it etymologically to the sort of purposive action that constitutes an "experiment." From "gate to gate," it can surely be argued, pragmatism is a philosophy that can by no means dispense with the concept of experience.

In their emphatic decision to take the "linguistic turn" in philosophy, neo-pragmatists like Brandom and Richard Rorty have distanced themselves from pragmatism in a second important respect. For the pragmatist will surely need to resist the reduction of semiosis to language, of semiotic behavior to linguistic behavior. In the history of thought linking Augustine to Peirce, any truly general theory of signs has acknowledged the meanings communicated by words without being limited in scope to such meanings. From the perspective supplied by Peirce's pragmatism, once again, the world is "perfused with signs;" moreover, the interpretation of any given sign cannot be limited to a linguistic account, as if (just to cite one example) a dancer's physical movements and gestures did not constitute a meaningful *interpretation* of the music to which he dances. The need to develop a broad and nuanced understanding of what it means to give an interpretation is

23 I refer to Neville's masterful *On the Scope and Truth of Theology: A Theology of Symbolic Engagement*, (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2006).

24 I do supply a somewhat more extended and critical account of neo-pragmatism, contrasting such a perspective with Peirce's position, in an essay on "Instinct and Inquiry: A Reconsideration of Peirce's Mature Religious Naturalism," to be included in a volume on *Pragmatism and Naturalism*, ed. Matthew Bagger, (Columbia University Press: forthcoming).

25 Brandom's comment appeared in his book, *Perspectives on Pragmatism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 197. The work to which he referred there is his magisterial *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

especially relevant to the task of harnessing semiotic insights for the purposes of philosophical theology. The meaning of religious symbols will often be displayed in the rich variety of habits developed by their interpreters—habits of thought, feeling and behavior, both verbal and non-verbal behavior.

As I, myself tried to argue in 1989, in one important respect, “semiotic is always already theosemiotic.”²⁶ If the world is perfused with signs and all of reality is continuous, as Peirce insisted, then “everything is potentially a sign of God’s presence.” In addition, as I suggested several years later, “If anything can function as a sign and if everything that exists can trace its origin back to some divine source [...] then every sign has among its potentially infinite but nevertheless determinate set of meanings a *religious* meaning.” If everything is “related to God as effect to cause,” for example, then “anything can function indexically as a sign of the Creator.”²⁷ To be sure, there may or may not be such a Creator. The very idea of there being one is only a *hypothesis* that Peirce predicted would emerge in the process of musing over a universe of signs. Moreover, it is a hypothesis that is extraordinarily *vague*.

The metaphysical picture that best supports such a hypothesis, one wed to an objective idealism that both Peirce and Royce vigorously defended, is not—at least in any way that I can discern—entailed by the principles of pragmatism. Furthermore, it is not the particular aspect of theosemiotic with which I am most preoccupied at present. I am much more interested, at least for immediate purposes, in the way that such a hypothesis is supposed to take root in the mind (and heart) of one who engages in the regular practice of musement, to the point of its becoming believed, and then also in its coming to exert a “commanding influence over the whole conduct of life of its believers” (CP 6.490). On at least one occasion, Peirce grumbled that having to describe how all of this works “is like having to explain a joke.”²⁸ And so perhaps that complaint will help to soften the disappointment of my readers if I fail in these concluding remarks to offer an exhaustive or even a reasonably thorough explanation of how I think it works.

Any useful explanation, however, would need to include an account of how the inquirer, through the exercise of self-control, directs *attention* for the purpose of engaging in various forms of inference. Deduction will involve the contemplation of “what may lie hidden in the icon” (CP 7.555), that is to say, a directing of attention to all of the consequences that would be entailed by believing any given hypothesis to be true. For the success of induction, attention will be controlled in the form of “precise abstraction,” so that it will be focused on selected features of the phenomena under consideration regarded as salient for the purposes of that inquiry, while simultaneously ignoring everything else. Finally, the generation of hypotheses in abduction will require an altogether different exercise of attention, as in musement, not narrowly focused, but rather “open” or “awake” to whatever may manifest itself either “about or within you” (CP 6.461). This requires a certain letting go of one’s firmly fixed beliefs, if not a pretending to doubt them then at least a willingness to

26 Raposa, *Peirce’s Philosophy of Religion*, p. 146.

27 These remarks appear in my discussion of “Theology as Theosemiotic,” *Semiotics 1992* (Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America): p. 105.

28 Peirce, *Semiotic and Significs*, p. 76.

consider what doubting them could mean, a willingness to learn, a playing out in the imagination of alternative possibilities. Peirce's critique of "paper doubt" as a method of inquiry should never be allowed to obscure the crucial role of volition in inquiry, or to mitigate the significance of Peirce's commitment to fallibilism.

Quite apart from whether the universe really is God's "great poem," whether or not the hypothesis about a divine origin or creator is true, the commitment to a discipline of attention—one that inquiry in the spirit of pragmatism entails—does help to render that philosophy religiously meaningful. The possible etymology of the word "religion" as having a root meaning associated with the Latin verb *relegere* (to reread or read again) may help to explain why this is so. It illuminates the special nature and quality of attention that is cultivated in various religious practices, especially meditative practices, while also being regarded as crucial to their success. Religious "success," in the sense intended here, is both complex and multi-faceted. But it will always involve the formation of some *habitus*, through the regular exercise of attention, for example, some idea or belief taking root in the mind and heart of the practitioner. The "letting go" of entrenched beliefs through a practice like musement creates the sort of psychic space in which certain rational instincts might also be enabled to exert some influence on the formation of belief. In Peirce's view, any belief developed in this fashion will necessarily be quite vague and perhaps not fully conscious (like the scientist's implicit belief in God.) Yet, once existing in the mind *habitualiter*, it can exert an enormous impact over the whole conduct of one's life, giving shape to what Royce called a "life plan," becoming ever more explicit in the thoughts, feelings and behavior that such a life comes to embody.

Neither the meaning nor the truth of such a belief can be ascertained "on the spot," in any given moment, no matter how completely at that particular point in time the irritation of doubt has been assuaged by the results of a particular inquiry. Patterns of meaning emerge over a lifetime; they are even more fully delineated when displayed over many generations or as revealed in conversation among the members of a vast community of inquiry. As a result, inquirers guided by the basic principles of pragmatism will be sure to keep their gaze fixed on the "long run." Thus liberated from the blinding constraints of any kind of "temporary urgency" (CP 5.339, note 1), somewhat paradoxically, they will be more open and awake to whatever might appear in the present moment. This kind of freedom, Peirce explained, is the very essence of self-control. He also concluded that it was the only kind of freedom worth cultivating or caring about, the only freedom of which one "has any reason to be proud."

Much as Peirce regarded all of logic as semiotic, I would argue that a theology inspired by pragmatism is best conceived as theosemiotic. The proponents of such a philosophical theology will (unlike certain contemporary neo-pragmatists) take experience seriously. They will understand experience itself as consisting in semiosis, its meaning shaped in some measure by the deliberate exercise of attention. They will resist reducing semiosis to language and will likewise refrain from conceiving of interpretation either narrowly or rigidly. Such theologians will perceive theory and practice as being connected, sometimes directly and immediately, but oftentimes via the mediation of habit and only over time. Their inquiries will always take the form of conversations, occurring in community, thus vulnerable to criticism and

humbled by a commitment to fallibilism. They will understand that to make religious utterances is often to “wildly gabble” (CP 6.509), yet still hope that something religiously meaningful might be discerned through the careful interpretation of those signs given in experience. To be sure, like all good pragmatists, they will repudiate the “myth of the given,” but as pragmaticists they will never fail to appreciate the extent to which meaning, even if achieved through inquiry, is also—at least to some extent—a kind of gift.

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Data de envio: 20-01-2016

Data de aprovação: 22-02-2016

