

C. S. Peirce and Josiah Royce: Understanding, self-understanding, and self-misunderstanding

C. S. Peirce e Josiah Royce: Entendimento, entendimento de si e desentendimento de si

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Abstract: There is, at the heart of this paper, a comparison between Peirce's understanding of inquiry and Royce's account of interpretation. It is framed by a consideration of self-misunderstanding (a consideration developed in reference to Peirce) and, tied to this discussion of self-misunderstanding, a consideration of understanding itself. For Peirce, in his account of inquiry, and Royce in his meta-interpretation (i.e., his interpretation of the meaning and function of interpretation itself), some form of understanding is at stake. For example, the task of the scientific inquirer is unfinished if it stops at the discovering of the bare facts (simply that something is actually the case—i.e., a body such as a small stone held aloft by a person will fall to the ground if the person lets it go). While for both thinkers, science is not a body of secure knowledge but rather a form of ongoing inquiry, it aims primarily at understanding. Both Peirce and Royce are animated by a commitment to the intelligibility of the cosmos in its full sweep and smallest detail. Peirce's account of inquiry and Royce's conception of interpretation are endeavors to detail how human actors render ever more deeply and widely intelligible the world of their experience. Much can be learned comparing them in this respect.

Keywords: Comparison. Inquiry. Interpretation. Mediation. Science. Self-understanding. Semiosis. Triadicity. Tuism.

Resumo: *No âmago deste artigo há uma comparação entre a investigação sobre o entendimento de Peirce o relato de interpretação de Royce. Estrutura-se por uma consideração do desentendimento de si (uma consideração desenvolvida em referência a Peirce) e, ligada a esta discussão do desentendimento de si, uma consideração sobre o próprio entendimento. Para Peirce, em razão de sua abordagem da investigação e Royce em sua meta-interpretação (i.e., sua interpretação do significado e da função da própria interpretação) alguma forma de entendimento está em jogo. Por exemplo, a tarefa do investigador científico é inacabada se ela para na descoberta de fatos nus (simplesmente que algo é verdadeiramente o caso – um corpo tal como uma pedra pequena sustentada no alto por uma pessoa cairá no solo se a pessoa soltá-la). Enquanto para ambos os pensadores, as ciências não um corpo de conhecimento seguro, mas uma forma de investigação contínua, ela visa principalmente o entendimento. Tanto Peirce quanto Royce estão animados por um compromisso com a*

inteligibilidade do cosmos em sua varredura plena e nos mínimos detalhes. A abordagem de Peirce sobre a investigação e a concepção de interpretação de Royce são esforços para detalhar como os atores humanos tornam cada vez mais profunda e amplamente inteligível o mundo de sua experiência. Muito pode ser aprendido comparando-os a este respeito.

Palavras-chave: *Ciência. Comparação. Entendimento de si. Investigação. Interpretação. Mediação. Semiose. Triadicidade. Tuísmo.*

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1 Introduction

My purpose in this essay is to compare C. S. Peirce and Josiah Royce, and to do so with respect to a central preoccupation of each thinker (inquiry in the case of Peirce and interpretation in that of Royce). Comparing them with respect to these topics entails contrasting them, though I am especially interested in areas of convergence or agreement. That is, I want to highlight the affinities between these two thinkers, but without ignoring their differences. Everything is, as Peirce notes, similar to everything else, in some respect (see, e.g., EP 1:253-254). Hence, nothing could be easier than finding similarities, especially between two thinkers who—despite numerous differences, superficial and profound¹—shared so much in common. The point of this comparison is to illuminate the terms (in this case, the philosophers) being compared and, ideally, more than just this: it should also illuminate that wherein they show themselves to be akin. In this instance, that means illuminating the topics of inquiry and interpretation.

2 The “Logic” of comparison

Human beings are *hermeneutic* animals and, as a result, they live in communities, depending on them “for insight and salvation” (ROYCE, 1968, v.2, p. 168).² In

- 1 The issue of religion—in particular their conceptions of God—is a site wherein both affinities and divergences are readily apparent and deeply important. Peirce judged Royce’s tendency to cast God in the role of the Absolute as most unfortunate, since the Absolute “[...] is strictly speaking only God in a Pickwickian sense, that is, in a sense that has no effect” (CP 8.277). He does so in a letter to William James, in which he also issues this judgment: “I don’t think it good taste to stuff it [Royce’s book entitled *The World and the Individual*] so full of the name of God.” In a very early writing, contrasts “the God of prayer” (W 1:503-504) with the God who appears in the writings of philosophers. In fairness, Royce intended his God to be a person or consciousness to which one can appeal, but Peirce judged him to have failed in this.
- 2 Royce and especially Peirce were methodologically conscientious thinkers. They characteristically took pains to justify how they were going to undertake an investigation. It only appears appropriate, then, to commence this comparison by sketching, if only in broad strokes, the logic of comparison. As it turns out, this immediately immerses

our practical and theoretical lives, we are incessantly making comparisons. These comparisons involve “an elementary form of interpretation” (ROYCE, 1968, v.2, p. 169). Comparison, “in the fuller sense of the word, takes place,” Royce suggests, “when one asks or answers the question: What constitutes the difference between A and B?” (ROYCE, 1968, v.2, p. 171). You look at two scripts (to use Royce’s own example) and discern a striking difference between them but no less an inexplicable similarity. Then you realize that they are mirror-images of each other. The conception of a mirror-image allows you simultaneously to account for the similarities *and* the differences between the two scripts. In general, then,

[...] a complete act of comparison involves such a “third,” such a mediating image or idea—such an “interpreter.” By means of this “third” you so compare a “first” object with a “second” as to make clear to yourself wherein consists the similarity and the difference between the second and the first. Comparison must be triadic in order to be both explicit and complete. Likeness and differences are the signs that a comparison is needed [they call forth an act or process of interpretation]. But these signs are not their own interpretation.³ (ROYCE, 1968, v.2, p. 173).

Other signs are needed to bring out explicitly and completely the relevant similarities and differences, especially ones fulfilling the function of mediation. These elementary considerations are of profound importance. They pertain to an incalculable range of our cognitive processes, not least of all the potentially illuminating work of comparative philosophy, in all of its forms. We might compare the early and the later Wittgenstein or the later Wittgenstein and the youthful Peirce or, indeed, entire epochs of philosophical thought (say, the ancient period and the modern). Or, then, we might compare Peirce and Royce, formally in reference to the process by which each argued we render reality, as encountered in experience,⁴ intelligible. The mediating term at the center of our comparative effort is accordingly whatever *process* (and, for both Peirce and Royce, it must be a temporally extended process, not an instantaneous act such as an intuition) enables us to render intelligible (or

us in our main topic, the irreducibly triadic processes in which alone understanding is advanced (comparison being itself one such process).

- 3 Readers of Peirce will of course see how Royce moves from what Peirce calls the *interpretant* of a sign to what Royce identifies as an *interpreter*. As it will turn out, Royce’s preoccupation with the role of the *interpreter* tends to blind him to certain key features of signs, as conceived by Peirce.
- 4 Though sympathetic to absolute idealism, Royce was committed to doing justice to experience. He would say that his idealism demanded this of him (see, e.g., Hegel’s so-called *Lesser Logic*). Though committed to pragmatic empiricism, Peirce eventually moved toward a more sympathetic stance toward such idealists as Hegel and Royce. He would say that his interest in articulating a robust account of human experience sufficient to explain (among other things) the remarkable success of scientific inquiry led him to see such idealists as resources and not simply obstacles.

explicable) what we encounter in experience.⁵ Peirce's preferred name for this process is *inquiry*, whereas Royce's is *interpretation*.

This is, thus, our task, though this task itself must be set in the context of two fundamental differences: one pertaining to the agency of signs vis-à-vis the role of the interpreter (or inquirer), and the other, to the genres of understanding (above all, the difference between understanding a phenomenon such as the leaves of trees in some regions changing colors in autumn and *self*-understanding). Hence, before engaging in our comparison of Peirce and Royce, we will consider two crucial differences—Peirce's emphasis on the agency of signs themselves vis-à-vis Royce's on the role of the interpreter and, then, different genres or forms of human understanding. Even if the contrast resulting from a consideration of these matters is not as stark as it initially appears, the differences in emphasis are hardly superficial or insignificant.

But first, a word or two more about comparison in general, since a critical feature of my specific comparison has yet to be identified. If we compare, for example, two poets, we are most successful when we illuminate not only the work of these two artists but also the very nature of poetry. My hope then is not only to illuminate both of these philosophers but also the processes they themselves strive to shed light on. They took *themselves* to be signs, pointing beyond themselves to a range of phenomena and, inseparable from this function, to a cluster of concepts whereby these phenomena could be rendered more finely and fully intelligible. As interpreters of them, we would be amiss if we so focused on the signs themselves that we failed to attend to the objects to which they are pointing. In the case of Peirce, that object is, on this occasion, inquiry, set against a backdrop of semiosis (i.e., his quest of quests is first and foremost an inquiry into the nature, forms, and success of inquiry, though this inquiry is itself set against a background of a comprehensive theory of sign-processes and signifying practices). In the case of Royce as a sign, that object is interpretation. Peirce and Royce are not only signs. They are also self-conscious in their appreciation of themselves as signs. They might not be equally adept as self-interpreting philosophers,⁶ but they are unquestionably

5 Royce is correct to point out that "Peirce's theory of comparison [we might say of sign-activity], and of the mediating idea or 'third' which interprets, is, historically speaking, a theory not derived from Hegel." Even so, Royce notes a relationship between the two theories: "Peirce's concept of interpretation defines an extremely general process, of which the Hegelian dialectical triadic process is a very special case" (ROYCE, 1968, v.2, p. 185). Peirce came in his later years to appreciate this affinity between his pragmatism and Hegel's "idealism" (see, e.g., CP 1.41-42, EP 2:345; also, COLAPIETRO, 2018).

6 I am inclined to think Royce was more adept than Peirce at interpreting his own undertakings. There is certainly a paradox here, since Peirce was one of the most intensely self-critical philosophers with whom most of us are acquainted and self-criticism entails self-interpretation. But Peirce was especially perceptive regarding specific flaws in argumentation, his own even more than that of others, but less perceptive regarding dimensions of his own endeavors (e.g., the very nature of his philosophy). There is often a gap between what one is doing and one's self-understanding (one's understanding of the character of one's participation in a practice, especially such a complex and intricate practice as philosophy) (CP 3.404). Here, if anywhere, the Cartesian view of the human mind is most suspect: we are not *as agents* immediately and fully transparent to

both strongly disposed to self-critique (THOMPSON, 1953, p. xii) and, by implication at least, self-interpretation.

Peirce's approach is rooted in a deep appreciation of human beings being truly ingenious animals innately endowed with cognitive capacities of a remarkable character (above all, the capacity to guess, at least in a rough and ready way, rightly).⁷ However much we are instinctually advantaged by a rough, practical attunement to the natural world, we are prone to make countless mistakes, to frame innumerable hypotheses inadequate for explaining the pertinent phenomena. This propensity itself is, however, of the utmost importance. "It is," Peirce insists, "[...] a truth well worthy of rumination that all the intellectual development of man [or *Homo sapiens*] rests on the circumstance that all our action is subject to error. *Errare est humanum* [...]" (CP 6.86; Cf. W 1:5). Royce is not nearly as appreciative of this facet of our being, though he is hardly oblivious to it. He is disposed very quickly to move to the level of self-consciousness and self-interpretation, whereas Peirce is inclined to tarry at the level of tacit and mundane human cognition. While Royce uses the possibility of making mistakes (that of identifying and correcting errors) as a launching pad to attain the heights of a Divine Mind (only such a Mind allegedly makes sense out of our undeniable capacity to identify and correct our errors),⁸ Peirce attends to this feature of our life in order to elaborate a normative theory of objective inquiry in which our ineradicable fallibility plays a critical role. They are united in their hope to understand not only nature but also our efforts to render

ourselves. Self-understanding is therefore an achievement. It is, moreover, an endeavor in which we might fail. Self-misunderstanding is a ubiquitous possibility (if Jacques Lacan and other theorists of the unconscious are right, it is indeed an endeavor in which we *must* fail!). The possibility of self-misunderstanding might be simply an implication of our status as finite and fallible beings. Peirce himself suggests as much (see, e.g., CP 7.591; CP 7.595). In my reading of Peircean fallibilism, at least, this doctrine amounts to nothing less than such *radical fallibilism*—the acknowledgment that fallibility extends to the possibility of being mistaken about ourselves and our acts as well as motives and strivings. It may even be that Peirce is no less radical than Lacan and other theorists. After all, he insisted: "Each man has an identity that far transcends the mere animal. [...] He cannot know his own essential significance; of his eye it is [as R. W. Emerson says in "The Sphinx"] eyebeam" (CP 7.591).

- 7 "In the light of the successes of the sciences to my mind there is [Peirce asserts] a degree of baseness in denying our birthright as children of God and in shamefacedly slinking away from anthropomorphic conceptions of the universe" (CP 1.316), especially when such conceptions have proven so efficacious in our efforts to render the world of our experience intelligible. But Peirce's position is rooted as much in biological evolution as traditional theology. "The chicken pecks [he observes] by instinct. But if you are going to think every poor chicken endowed with an innate tendency toward positive truth, why should you think that to man alone this gift [of instinct] is denied" (CP 5.591). It is important to appreciate that Peirce is taking the chicken's capacity to be a *cognitive* competency, not reducing ours to an utterly blind act of mindless groping.
- 8 In a letter to James, Peirce confessed to finding Royce's ideas "very beautiful" but the logic "most execrable" (CP 8.277). Thought referring specifically to Royce's *The World and the Individual*, it is almost certainly the case he would cast substantively the same judgment about the argument in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, the work in which he presented his argument for God from the possibility of error.

nature and indeed all else comprehensible. It might be, as Albert Einstein claimed, the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible.⁹ Peirce and Royce were, however, not content to leave it at that: they strove to make maximal sense out of our *very* capacity to make sense of the cosmos. In my interpretation, at least, this is what animated Peirce to elaborate his conception of inquiry and Royce his conception of interpretation. At bottom, both were committed simply to understanding; yet both were aware that this commitment drove them to reflexive understanding, to making sense out of our capacity to make sense of phenomena. And both concluded this capacity entails irreducibly triadic processes in which penetrating discoveries of mediating terms plays a (if not *the*) decisive role.

3 Genres of knowledge (or understanding): from tacit know-how to explicit self-knowledge

The irreducible triadicity and, of greater pertinence to the point at hand, the inescapable reflexivity just noted, imply that Peirce's semeiotic and Royce's theory of interpretation ought to provide us with the resources for understanding the nature of their own endeavors. In other words, they ought to be integral parts of a *reflexive* project, at least, to provide important insights into philosophical self-understanding (VERENE, 1997). As I read them, however, (and in noting this at this juncture I am anticipating one of my conclusions, a point most appropriately made at a later juncture) Royce's theory of interpretation is more developed and simply more explicit in this specific regard than Peirce's semeiotic. That is, Royce provides more resources for understanding self-understanding, philosophical and otherwise, than does Peirce. Certainly, Peirce's writings are far from devoid of such resources; they simply do not match Royce's in this regard. This partly reflects Royce's greater interest in psychology, partly his intensely and, occasionally, morbidly introspective cast of mind, and, no doubt, a number of other factors, philosophical, psychological, and characterological. Moreover, what Peirce observes regarding Plato seems to be true of Peirce himself. But, to provide the context for this, I must quote a sentence highlighting a critical difference between Plato and Peirce: "Although Plato's whole

9 In one place, Peirce claims: "Our physical science, whatever extravagant historicists may say, seems to have sprung up uncaused *except* by man's intelligence and nature's intelligibility" (CP 2.13; *emphasis added*). What he appears to be guarding against here is any reductionist account of the historical emergence of experimental inquiry (e.g., the attempt to see it as an exemplification of the will to power or that of the sort of motives highlighted by Karl Pearson in his *Grammar of Science*). (See Peirce's review of Pearson's book, originally published in the *Popular Science Monthly* (January 1901) and republished in CP 8.132-56 as well as EP 2:57-66.) There is at least the appearance of a dilemma here. On the one hand, if the emergence of such inquiry is uncaused, it seems to be a purely dyadic affair in which humanity's intelligence and nature's intelligibility by themselves account for this phenomenon. On the other hand, explanation, on Peirce's own account, requires mediation (some term other than such intelligence and such intelligibility must be brought into play in order to explain this phenomenon—that the universe *is* comprehensible). I suspect this dilemma is apparent and that the requisite terms are implicit in what Peirce means by intelligence and intelligibility, but this is not the occasion to elaborate this point.

philosophy is a philosophy of Thirdness [...] he himself only recognizes duality [or Secondness] and makes himself an apostle of Dichotomy” (EP 2:37). Peirce is quick to point out that in making himself such an apostle, Plato reveals “a misunderstanding of himself” (we might add: a misunderstanding at the most fundamental level). Peirce stresses: “This misunderstanding, this failure to recognize his own conceptions, marks Plato throughout.” Plato’s philosophical self-understanding is, in Peirce’s judgment, an instance of profound self-*mis*understanding. But Peirce finds a way of casting this failure in an honorable light, when he suggests, it is a characteristic of Plato “[...] that he sees much deeper into the nature of things than he does into the nature of his own philosophy,” adding this trait is one “[...] to which we cannot altogether refuse our esteem.” Perhaps the example of Plato prompted Peirce to become so insistently “an apostle” of Thirdness. However that might be, it is, in my judgment, the case that in this Peirce is deeply akin to Plato: “It is characteristic of the man that he sees much deeper into the nature of things than he does into the nature of his own philosophy.” (EP 2:37).

The self-effacing quality of the passionate inquirer who looks upon the totality of things as a *cosmos*, albeit a cosmos that has evolved and is yet evolving out of chaos, might enable such an individual to see more deeply into the nature of that cosmos than the character of his own endeavors to understand the cosmos. And, indeed, there is something to esteem in this quality. Lest I be misinterpreted, let me stress that I am not making an encompassing claim regarding either Peirce’s self-understanding in general or his psychological acuity regarding himself and indeed others. On any number of occasions, he reveals remarkable *psychological* insight into himself. But, at the same time, he betrays rather consistently a less than accurate and penetrating *philosophical* self-understanding. This is most apparent in his identification of himself as a scientist, that is, an experimental inquirer solely preoccupied with strictly scientific questions, though of course questions falling within the scope of logic, as re-imagined by him, to a greater extent than within that of, say, physics, chemistry, astronomy, and other natural sciences. He *was* unquestionably such a scientist and this captures something central to his identity as a philosopher.¹⁰ But he was also, without question, something more than this. As much as anything else, he is trying to provide for his contemporaries and for those who will be the inheritors of the revolutions, intellectual, political, and social, wrought in the 19th century, a normative portrait of the responsible sign-user, not merely such a portrait of the experimental inquirer. One might object that he both knows this about his own endeavor and, in addition, he has provided an appropriate place for such a normative portrait in his systematic classifications of the scientific pursuits most worthy of being advanced in his time and for the indefinite future. There is much truth in this. But the place of self-understanding—please note: strictly *philosophical* self-understanding in this scheme is hardly as secure or simply as explicit as it would be desirable to have had him make it. This is in no small measure due to the arguably undeveloped state of the third branch of his semeiotic and, inseparably connected to this, a wavering between *methodeutic* and *speculative rhetoric* as the most appropriate name for the culminating branch of his “logic.” As presumptuous as this must sound in the mind’s ear of my readers, Peirce

10 See FISCH, 1986, p. 376-383; MOORE, 1972, p. 2-5.

ought, in the final phase of his intellectual life,[to have] identified this third branch as *speculative rhetoric* rather than *methodeutic*. His theory of signs was broader than the latter name indicates or implies. His semeiotic was as truly as comprehensive as the “*ens in posse*, a universal art of rhetoric” envisioned in “Ideas, Stray or Stolen, about Scientific Writings” (1904) and elsewhere (EP 2:326). If this is so, methodeutic would be only one of three branches of this third branch of semeiotic; and, if *this* is so, then his identification of the third branch with methodeutic suggests, at least, to be a misunderstanding of the nature of his own project (in a word, a self-misunderstanding).

While he came to appreciate his kinship with Hegel and, connected to this, his eventual distance from his youthful adulation of Kant, he does not seem to have come to appreciate one of the most important respects in which his project was akin to Hegel’s. Both are adventures in human self-understanding, adventures in which dramas of self-correction are the pivots around which everything turns. They are such adventures since both Hegel and Peirce were self-consciously children of their respective times, without taking their status as such to be a form of imprisonment in the present. This means that their philosophies were adventures in self-understanding because each of these thinkers took and indeed felt himself to be caught up in the adventures of self-transfiguration taking place in their world.¹¹ They did not stand apart from their time, though, in various ways, they certainly did struggle to obtain a critical distance from the tumultuous present in which each one was implicated (Hegel dies at the beginning of the decade into which Peirce, near its end, was born, events separated a little more than only eight years. Emerson serves to some extent as a bridge here, since he is one of the figures so responsible for making Hegel a vital force in his fledging country and, hence, for shaping the cultural context into which Peirce was born. “It is,” Emerson claims in “The Fortune of the Republic,” “[...] impossible to extricate yourself from the questions in which your age is involved.” Peirce appreciated this almost as much as Hegel. While he would never characterize philosophy simply as the endeavor to comprehend one’s age in thought (*Philosophy of Right*), he would and indeed does take, for example,

11 The language of drama is not imposed upon either thinker from without, but is sanctioned by the letter of their texts. “All communication from mind to mind [hence, any communication from the Divine Mind to any human mind is through continuity of being. A man is capable of having assigned to him a *rôle* in the drama of creation, and so far as he loses himself in that *rôle*,—no matter how humble it may be,—so far he identifies himself with its Author” (CP 7.572). One way to read this is that our talents and interests, in effect, assign us a role and in our sustained devotion to carrying out, in our unique manner, a more or less recognizable role, we are assuming our role in the drama of Creation. The identification with such a role is tied, in Peirce’s judgment, to one of the defining emphases of his mature thought—self-control. It is, he suggests in a rather late manuscript, “[...] by the indefinite replication of self-control upon self-control that the *vir* [or admirably mature person] is begotten, and by action [by energetic, situated, constrained exertion], through thought, he grows an esthetic ideal, not for the behoof of his own poor noodle merely [i.e., not only for his individual self-], as the share which God permits him to have in the work of creation” (CP 5.403n3; see KROLIKOWSKI (1964) on Peirce’s notion of *vir* and Peirce’s debt to Henry James, Sr., for his understanding of this figure). See, however, WILSHIRE (1991) for the limits of this metaphor.

the state of logic just as he was coming to intellectual maturity to be a sign of his times, one calling for immediate and deep remediation. His self-conscious historical sense of his actual time, more generally, is nuanced, informed, and penetrating, however much he always tends to focus on the scientific developments, especially those in the natural sciences, *tout ensemble*, gathering the encompassing force of epochal change.

Writing near the beginning of the twentieth century, William James was unquestionably observing the dramatic upshot of historical developments afoot long before 1904, the year in which the essay I am about to quote was published:

It is difficult not to notice a curious unrest in the philosophic atmosphere of the time, a loosening of old landmarks, a softening of oppositions, a mutual borrowing from one another on the part of systems anciently closed [to one another], and an interest in new suggestions, however vague, as if the one thing sure were the inadequacy of extant school-solutions. The dissatisfaction with these seems due for the most part to a feeling that they are too abstract and academic. Life is confused and superabundant, and what the younger generation appears to crave is more of the temperament of life in its philosophy, even though it were at some cost of logical rigor and of formal purity. (JAMES, 1976, p. 21).

Peirce no less than James was aware of the upheavals at this time, though he would not be willing to sacrifice logical rigor, however much he would not be overly committed to guarding “formal purity,” in responding to the defining exigencies of his historical moment. While James tended to pit life against logic, Peirce was desirous to render even the most formal logic into a living affair (see, e.g., PEIRCE CP 2.264. The life of evolving signs is, after all, no less a form of life than the life of biological organisms. Moreover, the “*love of life* is more than the love of sensuous life; it is also a love of rational life” (WIENER, 1965, p. 139). And rational life devoid of logical rigor, to the extent the subject matter accommodates itself to such rigor,¹² is in truth hardly rational. Sensuous life was surely not to be denigrated, but rational life and moreover rational life translated into the dynamic forms (CP 5.434) of a living logic was to be seen for what it was—a form of life irreducible to any other (see, e.g., CP 2.111).

Life in all its forms was arguably the phenomenon to which Peirce most strenuously directed his attention,¹³ including life in the straightforward sense manifest in biological organisms. Of course, no question was more central to his

12 Peirce stressed while he was *in* the world of symbolic or formal logic, he was not *of* that world. In addition, it is crucial to see how close to Aristotle Peirce was. Here is a case in point. In opposition to the Cartesian ideal of a univocal method applicable to any subject matter whatsoever, Peirce was committed to crafting specific methods attuned to the nature and indeed the peculiarities of the specific field providing opportunities for investigation.

13 In one place, and that, a very prominent place (his 1903 Lectures on Pragmatism), he even characterized pragmatism in connection to life: “What the true definition of Pragmatism may be, I find it very hard to say; but in my nature it is *a sort of instinctive attraction for living facts*” (EP 2:158; *emphasis added*).

time than that of evolution. “Peirce lived,” Dewey astutely noted, “[...] when the idea of evolution was uppermost in the mind of his generation. He applied it everywhere” (DEWEY, LW 11, p. 482-483). What Dewey adds is no less illuminating: to Peirce, however, *evolution* meant “whether in the universe of nature, of science, or of society, continual growth in the direction of interrelations, of what he called continuity” (DEWEY, LW 11, p. 483). Peirce was one of those who immediately absorbed the profound impact of the Darwinian revolution but rather than follow either his mentor Louis Agassiz in strenuously resisting or his friend Chauncey Wright in so enthusiastically embracing Darwin’s theory, Peirce tried critically and creatively to appropriate Darwin’s insights. While Peirce was a thoroughgoing evolutionist, he might have been little more than a half-hearted Darwinian (WIENER, 1965). But even as such a Darwinian, he was appreciative of the factors brought to his and his contemporaries attention by Darwin’s painstaking account of natural selection by means of chance variation. To say that Darwin made too much of chance does not entail a failure to appreciate how chance occurrences and, in addition, violent struggle play an important role in biological evolution. While a tychastistic theory of evolution is insufficient, Peirce’s own more general theory of tychism disposed him to appreciate the importance of chance. This, however, might put the cart before the horse. It is likely that Darwin’s theory did something, perhaps a great deal, to dispose Peirce to appreciate the role of chance in the evolution of species and, more broadly, the evolution of nothing less than the cosmos itself.

As important as absolute chance and brute opposition might be for offering an accurate depiction of the natural world, especially as an arena in which life emerged and evolved, these two factors by themselves are insufficient to render either this world or the processes within it intelligible. Interwoven processes of ongoing mediation must be added to these two factors.

Peirce, no less than Royce, discerned how deeply Hegel’s efforts were bound up with insisting upon mediation as *the* means by which any phenomenon whatsoever, ranging from the cosmos in its entirety to the most minute particles discovered so far. But Royce more than Peirce appreciated the extent to which Hegel’s dialectical account traded upon what can be called, without exaggeration, world-shattering conflicts. That is, he appreciated the extent to which Hegel was advocating an agonistic vision of historical development. (COLAPIETRO, 2018).

“Contrast is,” Royce suggests, “the mother of clearness” (ROYCE, 1971, p. 193). But comparisons in which the terms being compared are, at the same time, exhibited in their irreducible, even if subtle differences, can no less be means by which thinkers and theories are made clear. Indeed, contrast is but a special case of comparison, one in which differences are foregrounded. Such is at least my hope in this paper and, now, I turn directly to the task of comparing Peirce and Royce, but comparing them in light of their differences.

4 The agency of signs and the role of interpreters

To repeat, everything is similar to everything else in some respect, so the identification of a respect in which X is similar to Y might be incontrovertible without being illuminating or especially enlightening. The trick is then to hit upon illuminating and,

ideally fruitful similarities, that is, affinities that enhance not only our understanding of each of the terms being compared but also the matter in reference to which the comparison is being made. An example would be a comparison between Petrarch and Shakespeare as authors of sonnets in which our understanding not only of both poets but also this genre is deepened or enhanced in some way. Hence, I intend (as already indicated) to compare these two thinkers specifically in reference to what Peirce calls *inquiry* and Royce calls *interpretation*, though, throughout, guided by the realization that inquiry (or investigation) is, for Peirce, an instance of semiosis (or sign-activity) and, in turn, semiosis is an instance of thirdness. Even so, my specific focus is on inquiry rather than semiosis in its utmost generality or thirdness in its even greater generality. Rather than prejudice the case in Peirce's favor, however, I will identify *the term of comparison* as mediation, not as semiosis or, even worse in terms of prejudicing matters, inquiry.¹⁴ Both Royce and Peirce—and I am strongly inclined to think both equally—regard (in the case of Royce) interpretation and (in the case of Peirce) inquiry as instances of mediation. How do things stand with each of these thinkers *vis-à-vis* each other *vis-à-vis* mediation? To what extent can Peirce's conception of inquiry do justice to at least what Royce identifies as the paradigms of interpretation and, in turn, to what extent can Royce's theory of interpretation do justice to what Peirce identifies as the paradigms of inquiry? Is either account demonstrably superior to the other, or is an evaluative comparison ultimately destined to assume a patchwork form, one wherein Peirce's account is superior to Royce's in these respects while Royce's is superior to Peirce's in these other respects?

Though mediation is our term of comparison, a word or two, at least, must be voiced regarding semiosis. This insures allowing our comparison to unfold against a background of difference, difference not only noted but also underscored. In my judgment, however, sign-activity is, in its rudimentary forms but also to some degree in *all* its forms, even the most sophisticated ones in which self-conscious and self-critical agents play such a prominent role, the activity of a sign (semiosis is, in brief, the action of signs): it is a process in which the agency of signs themselves, apart from human interpreters and utterers, exerts itself. However much signs are, in some cases, directed and even instituted by forces or agencies other than themselves, they are not primarily amorphous, inert stuff waiting to be molded by such forces or agencies. They are, rather, inherently dynamic and (to some extent) dynamically determinate beings in their own right. This is at least part of what it means to ascribe life to signs. The ascription of life to signs is nothing less than what has come to be called the decentering of the subject. The conscious, voluntary human subject is the sovereign of neither meaning nor truth. Signs alone are such sovereigns. In

14 Royce aims to craft a conception of interpretation comprehensive enough to include everything Peirce intends by *inquiry*—and more. His hermeneutic conception of mediation draws in some respects very near, while in other respects moves dramatically away, from Peirce's methodetic understanding of mediation, especially as exemplified in inquiry. Both are striving for the utmost generality. At the same time, both are extremely interested in working out the details of their conceptions with specific reference to more or less distinctly circumscribed fields or disciplines (e.g., scriptural interpretation, our interpretation of the actions of another person, or the rock formations within a particular geographical region).

so far as such subjects are bound together into certain forms of solidarity, however, they can facilitate an evolutionary process in which inherited and newly emerging signs become integrated in such a way that self-conscious, self-critical, and self-controlled agents play a dramatic role in this ongoing process. Such agents however are never in the position to control the process from “on high”: they are indeed more in the process of signs overlying signs, infinitely, than this process is in them. Unquestionably, this process is in such agents, in the form of internal or reflexive dialogues, pivoting primarily around such questions as, “How are we to go on?” (Wittgenstein), “What are we on make of this situation?” (Dewey), “How are we to resolve this doubt? (Peirce). The course of this process, however, involves something more than signs overlying signs, *ad infinitum*.¹⁵ For it encompasses the inevitably diverse and often conflicting ways in which semiosis generates habits of feeling, action, and thought. That is, not every closure of semiosis is a premature arrest of an interminable process, for some instances of closure, such as the experimental resolution of a specific doubt, bring semiosis to a halt in such a manner that the integrity of semiosis is not violated. Of course, the resolution of such a doubt only sets the stage for the dramatic appearance of unanticipated doubts, so too, bringing a specific inquiry to its “natural” resolution does not spell halting the processes of semiosis even in the discipline or discourse within which such a resolution has been attained. The significance and implications of the discovery itself are matters about which inquirers might disagree. Not only does one sign lead to another, but the resolution of a single, specific doubt, not infrequently, provides the occasion for countless signs to proliferate in diverse directions. Moreover, the generation of conflicting habits, in turn, generates the need for effective mediation, for a more or less harmonious integration of these divergent tendencies.

Both Peirce and Royce were deeply appreciative of these ineliminable features of the actual circumstances in which human (and indeed other) sign-users are thrown. While Peirce was more finely aware of the agency of signs themselves, Royce tended to focus upon those levels of our signifying practices where the emergence of self-conscious interpreters assumes utmost importance. Peirce, especially in his more mature years, makes room for the agency of scientists and other human sign-users, above the most rudimentary levels of semiosis, but even in his final decades he insists upon seeing signs themselves as inherently vital, exhibiting a life and force of their own, apart from the interventions and ingenuity of human sign-users. What he wrote in an early article of words might be said of signs more generally. Human semiosis might thus be envisioned as the “reciprocal education” of human-sign users and signs in their relative autonomy from the ways humans are wont to deploy signs. Humanly instituted signs do not evolve *in vacuo*: rather, they evolve in the natural world in all its irreducible complexity and incessant “doings.” Nature is anything but fixed and immutable and eternal: it is, through and through, fluid, alterable, and temporal. All processes of semiosis are hence inescapably caught up in the fluidity, mutability, and temporality of the world in which they emerge and evolve, are so forcefully frustrated, but also, not infrequently, so greatly aided by

15 “In consequence of every sign determining an Interpretant, which is itself a sign, we have,” Peirce stressed at least at one point of his inquiry into the nature of signs “sign overlying sign” (CP 2.94) and doing so *ad infinitum* (see, however, SHORT, 2007; also, ECO, 1994).

other natural processes.¹⁶

Royce's model of interpretation owes much to Peirce's understanding of semiosis. At the very least, Peirce owes something to the experience of having such a brilliant philosopher take some of his seemingly wilder ideas seriously, at a time when Peirce was feeling increasingly isolated and even ostracized. He almost certainly owes Royce more than this, but he owes his younger colleague at least this. Properly integrated into Peirce's theory of signs, Royce's conception of the interpreter can enhance that theory. There is no fundamental conflict between Peirce's insistence on the agency of signs themselves and Royce's emphasis on the role of interpreters in such practices as experimental inquiry, religious worship, and moral deliberation. As Peirce explicitly notes, without a doubt, "intelligent consciousness must enter into the series" of interpretants, at some point. To be sure, Peirce strove to articulate a conception of sign "[...] which no more refers to human thought [or, for that matter, any other form of thought] than does the definition of a line as the place which a particle occupies, part by part, during a lapse of time" (NEM IV:20). The continuum of a line can be completely abstracted from the temporal continua from which we would seem to derive such a pure or abstract continuum as a line, just as the mediation of signs can be completely abstracted from those processes in which such mediation is concretely instantiation in human conduct and consciousness. There are of course countless cases in which the generation of interpretants is dependent upon the intervention of intelligence (signs do not merely flow in and through us, since they are to some extent directed and indeed arrested by us). What speculative grammar banishes in its inaugural conception of semiosis, in the most rudimentary sense, speculative rhetoric reclaims at some point in its endeavor to offer a normative portrait of sign-using agents—signs in relation to an agency other than themselves (RANSDELL, 1980; also, GALLIE, 1967).¹⁷ Sign-using agents, such as human organisms, join mind-generating signs and the conjoint work of such

16 The youthful Peirce wrote: "Nature is a book which science interprets, and yet all its poetry which is a form and all its pathos which is a force are foreign to science" (W 1:55). This is to a large extent true of science very narrowly conceived. It is, however, not true of science and most of the coenosopic disciplines making up philosophical investigations (see KENT, 1987), as identified by Peirce. There is, however, both poetry and pathos in Peirce's own philosophy, as muted and seemingly marginal as they might appear to some readers to be. But in Prof. Ibri's work on Peirce—above all, his magisterial *Kósmos Noetós*—the poetry is appropriately front and center. Nothing is, in Peirce's judgment "truer than true poetry" (CP 1.315). Arguably, no philosophy of nature is more philosophical than the one in which the poetry of nature is itself rendered poetically, as it is by Prof. Ibri. In being rendered poetically, nature as itself a poem and symphony as well as an argument is properly rendered philosophically. This is, in my judgment, *shoun* convincingly in *Kósmos Noetós*.

17 "In coming to Speculative Rhetoric, *after* the main conceptions of logic have been well settled, there can be," Peirce notes, "no serious objection to relaxing the severity of our rule of excluding psychological matter, observations of how we think, and the like" (CP 2.107; *emphasis added*). Strictly speaking, however, the admissible observations are not psychological, in the sense that they come from the experimental science of psychology, but "psychological" (or psychic) in that they are the kind of observations a rational being can make of its own conduct.

minds and the most rudimentary forms of semiosis (as well as more sophisticated forms of signs) is a cooperation (a *co-operation*) of diverse agencies, ranging from those inscribed in the givenness of things (e.g., fossils or lightning) to those self-consciously instituted by some form of intelligent consciousness (e.g., the form exhibited by humans in and through their conduct, including those forms unfolding in the interiority of their own minds). But, for Peirce at least, we should not be seduced into a Cartesian construal of these “interior” processes: even regarding them, we are more in signs than they are in us (CP 5.289n1). In short, Peirce is hardly oblivious to the role of the interpreter or that of the inquirer. In the context of methodeutic or speculative rhetoric especially, the agency of a self-conscious, self-critical, and self-controlled self-demands critical attention. In the context however of speculative grammar, *before* the basic conceptions of logic have been settled, the utmost care must be taken to adhere to the severe strictures of excluding from consideration any reference to mind or consciousness. Of course, Peirce is aware that he, in his role as a self-conscious inquirer, is instituting and trying to adhere to these strictures. He would both compromise the generality of his general theory of signs and lapse into psychologism were he not to institute and honor these strictures.

Royce is most interested in picking up the story after “intelligent consciousness” (to use Peirce’s expression) has appeared on the scene. It is not even clear whether he fully appreciates Peirce’s point regarding the agency of signs. In any event, Royce’s emphasis does incline some, perhaps it disposed even Royce himself, to miss the radical nature of the Peircean point (apart from minds, divine or human, signs are inherently alive and dynamic). But, then, so too does Peirce’s preoccupation with the agency of signs tend to incline him and many of his followers to overlook the need to develop in detail a conception of the interpreter compatible with the understanding of semiosis, as *sign-activity*, to be found at the root of Peirce’s semiotic.

It is hardly possible to miss that Peircean inquiry and Roycean interpretation *significantly* overlap. Even so, they are not identical: there are unquestionably basic differences, truly fundamental divergences. It is, however, not at all easy to specify them. At least, I find it rather difficult to specify these differences while doing justice to both of these thinkers. Any attempt to do so drives us beyond this focal concern to large and indeed thorny questions of meta-interpretation (how to interpret our own task as interpreters). I will address several of these questions, though the limits of space preclude any full or even minimally adequate treatment. But some suggestions, I hope, fruitful ones, can be made to assist us in taking important steps toward how to approach the task of interpreting Peirce’s account of inquiry or Royce’s theory of interpretation, when each is appreciated for what it is—an integral part of a systematic endeavor to frame a comprehensive vision of the experiential universe.

5 Comparing Peirce on inquiry to Royce on interpretation

Royce uses comparison and contrast to illustrate the irreducibly triadic form of interpretation, unhesitatingly acknowledging his debt to Peirce regarding this point. When we compare, say, Shakespeare and Keats we of course compare them as poets, but ordinarily we also do so in a more specific respect. Often the term or

terms of comparison are left implicit, but the minimal conditions for a meaningful comparison are X and Y with respect to Z (e.g., Shakespeare and Keats with respect to a use of vivid images). This is analogous to what we observe in any act of giving (to use one of Peirce's favorite examples to illustrate this point: an irreducibly triadic form or structure. Giver, gift, and recipient are welded in an intrinsic unity. The accidental juxtaposition of an act of divesture (X discards Z) and an act of acquisition (Y comes along and picks up the discarded item) does not make giving. Y must be the intended beneficiary or recipient of X's gift: X must give Z to Y. In terms of form, comparison and contrast are analogous to giving. A difference that makes an intelligible or illuminating difference is, likewise, not the result of a purely external or accidental juxtaposition, though such a juxtaposition might prompt an interpreter to insert, if only implicitly, an illuminating term of comparison (i.e., a mediating term by which an illuminating comparison can be made).

For both thinkers, the pragmatic meaning of intelligibility is interpretability. The pragmatic maxim itself might properly be interpreted as a maxim urging us to interpret certain ascriptions, in certain contexts (e.g., "This substance is hard"), in terms of habits of conduct (i.e., not to remain context with merely verbal interpretation, relying solely on words to explicate the meaning of other words, but to break out of the circle of words by interpreting their meaning in terms of dispositions to act in certain ways in certain contexts). Of course, the term interpretation figures much more prominently in Royce's writings than it does in Peirce's. Peirce more characteristically uses the term inquiry than interpretation. But does this terminological choice signify anything deeper than a merely verbal (or linguistic) preference? I am disposed to assert that here we have a difference that makes a difference, though I feel hard pressed to make out this difference in a clear and compelling manner. The moment I hit upon a formulation of the difference, striking counterexamples occur to me, from both sides. This much certainly needs to be granted: what Peirce means by *inquiry* and Royce by *interpretation* overlap to a great degree. For example, trying to ascertain the meaning of a literary text is, in many fundamental respects, an instance of what Peirce calls *inquiry*. The interpreter of such a text is engaged in the task of framing, testing, and (in light of the results of a more or less uninterrupted series of hermeneutic abductions) modifying hypotheses. In brief, the interpreter in this instance is unquestionably an inquirer in precisely Peirce's sense (perhaps the interpreter is more than this, but that individual cannot be any less than an inquirer). On the other side, what Royce means by *interpretation* manifestly encompasses what Peirce means by *inquiry*. Indeed, many of Royce's most illuminating examples of the process under consideration are drawn from the natural sciences.

What, then, is the difference, between Roycean interpretation and Peircean inquiry—if indeed there is a significant or fundamental difference? Alas, any attempt to answer this in a simple and direct way plunges us into the thorny questions regarding interpretive process, since addressing such questions primarily concerns the responsible interpretation of philosophical texts in both their inherent generalizability and their irreducibly singularity. Peirce's doctrine of inquiry and Royce's of interpretation can, to a significant degree, be detached from the philosophical projects in which they were actually formulated, defended, and, if response to objections, refined. In a word, they are inherently *generalizable*. Royce's

creative appropriation of Peirce's general theory exhibits the generalizability of that theory. One of course might object that Royce in one or more important respects distorts the import of Peirce's theory (e.g., his translation or interpretation of the *interpretant* of a sign into the *interpreter* betrays the letter, not just the spirit, of Peirce's semeiotic). But he was not fated by his own commitments and interests to introduce this distortion. In any event, Peirce's utterly general characterization of sign-mediation can be detached from his project and put to work in countless other theoretical endeavors. At this point, however, I am inclined to issue a warning: it might—it just might—not be the case that the inherent generalizability of Peirce's historical accomplishment in its irreducible singularity can be completely detached from the overarching goals defining his philosophical project. I am disposed to go so far as to suggest that doctrines such as those laid out by Peirce in this theory of inquiry or Royce in this account of interpretation possess their full force and meaning only in the context in which they were conceived, elaborated, and modified. This is, I realize, a controversial claim, likely an *extremely* controversial suggestion. One might reasonably argue just the opposite. For example, one might contend, as Justus Buchler actually did decades ago, that Peirce's account of inquiry stands on its own feet and, as a result, it can stand apart from many of his other doctrines. In fact, one might be strongly inclined to argue that it is rendered more plausible and useful by being dissociated from at least some of these other doctrines. As Buchler urged, against Paul Weiss,

[t]o strain principally for the conservation of his [i.e., Peirce's] picturesque architectonic will scarcely be to provide the corrective which he lacked while alive. It would be better to honor him in the act, learning from the rich conceptions and potentialities of his thought by intelligent dissection rather than by the esthetic contemplation of their dubious unity. (BUCHLER, 1939, p. 269).

Turning to Royce for a moment, though with Buchler's point in mind, we might very well contend that it is not only possible but desirable to dissociate his doctrine of interpretation from some of his other doctrines. I readily concede this. But, when we look at the critical moments in the actual articulation of the Roycean position, attending to the central place wherein its most detailed formulation is to be found (namely, *The Problem of Christianity*)—when we do this—we of course encounter a chapter entitled “The Will to Interpret,” and quickly discover how much of a voluntarist slant Royce gives to his hermeneutic theory. Peirce's account of inquiry grants nature a status and role nature simply does not have in Royce's hermeneutics. I am not, in this context, at least, not claiming there is, in general, anything inherently objectionable about voluntarism or, in particular, about Royce's version of this doctrine. I am only saying that his theory of interpretation cannot be completely dissociated from his voluntarism, from his emphasis on the *will* to interpret. In an analogous manner (but this is a far more disputable claim), I am strongly disposed to [affirm that] Peirce's *formal* theory of inquiry is not completely dissociable from some of his substantive commitments in cosmology, biology, and arguably several other fields. That is, he is with respect to methodology or (to use his own word)

methodeutic much closer to Aristotle and Hegel than he is to Descartes and Kant. Our methods of inquiry have to be crafted in reference to the matter into which we are inquiring. A purely formal, utterly univocal method—one size fits all—is a Cartesian ideal, not an Aristotelean or Hegelian—or, for that matter, Peircean—ideal. Yes, we can of course craft a purely formal and abstract logic having apparently nothing at all to do with the world in which we happen to live and, because we are the kind of animal we are, live by means of drawing inferences (above all, abductive inferences) and undertake investigations. The validity of our logic would seem to be utterly independent of the constitution of the world, especially the seemingly contingent constitution of our actual world. After all, what good would a logic be if it were not universally (and, hence, *not* just locally) valid? From the perspective of those who have been in the forefront of logic for centuries, the locale happening to be our world, rather than an infinity of other possible worlds, is, despite being a cosmos of uncalculated dimensions and incalculable complexity, parochial and thus unduly narrow. Nothing less than *all* possible worlds seems to be the universe of discourse when the discourse in question is logic. But I tarry with my suggestion. To rip Peirce's theory of inquiry from the context in which it was formulated but also the one in which he put it to such fruitful work would be an act of hermeneutic violence. Again, I immediately hear the objections even before I finish typing the sentence. Any number of readers might quickly object that I am making a fetish of Peirce's so-called "system." Buchler sure would, were he alive today.

We ought not to insist upon what Peirce apparently failed to achieve—an architectonic approach to philosophical inquiry animated and guided by his categorial scheme. But our judgments of him having failed in this regard ought not to be global: they need to be qualified and nuanced. For his architectonic is not a piece of architecture as much as the principles of a cartography elaborated in varying degrees of detail, for the purpose of orienting us to the world of our experience (a world in which we continually get lost). Given Royce's own theory of interpretation, is it not suspect to treat the impulses animating a project, the more or less determinate resolve emerging from a consolidation of these impulses) and the contours of the world at least implicitly projected by all of this—to repeat, is it not suspect to treat—all of this as utterly irrelevant to the pragmatic significance of what, after all, is always an historically evolved and evolving practice? Are we straining, as Buchler alleges, to perceive what is not there (are we striving for an aesthetic contemplation of what in truth are nothing more than disparate doctrines unified by nothing more than the idiosyncratic obsession of a philosophical "hedgehog")¹⁸ or are we rather properly respecting what Santayana calls the "spirit of system," a spirit animating Peirce's endeavors no less than Royce's? Recall that Santayana defines this spirit in moral terms, though the morality in questions is that of the theorist or inquirer: Consistency "[...] is but a form of honour and courage. It marks singleness of purpose, and the pressure of the total reality upon an earnest mind, capable of reflection." Of course, it carries its dangers. He is hardly unaware of them. "The spirit of system, though it so often renders the mind fanatical and obdurately blind

18 I am of course referring to Isaiah Berlin's distinction, based on a fragment by Archilochus ("The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing") (BERLIN, 1997, p. 436).

to some facts, is essentially an effort to give all facts their due, not to forget things once discovered and understood, and not to leave illusions and vices comfortably unchallenged” (SANTAYANA, 1942, p. 107). We see in Peirce’s struggle to make sense out of things no less than Royce’s “the spirit of system” but, at the same time, anything but the stiff-necked consistency of the seminary-trained thinker (PERRY, 1935, p. 415).¹⁹

Despite striking family resemblances, then, Peirce’s theory of inquiry cannot help but be different from Royce’s interpretation of interpretation. This has much, at least something, to do with the philosophical projects in which these to some extent generalizable doctrines are interwoven.

Peirce invited Royce to his home in Milford so that they might explore various topics of mutual interest, though the ones at the top of the list as far as Peirce was concerned with questions in logic (BRENT, 1998). Had Royce been in a position to accept Peirce’s invitation, there is of course no guarantee that the outcome would have been happy. But certainly nothing inherently doomed the venture. Even a short time of intense engagement might have produced the most memorable results. We are, alas, forced to speculate about what might have been, without being in the least justified in supposing we could ever know what would have unfolded. We are however the inheritors of their writings and, as such, we are in effect charged with the task of tracing out more fully than either thinker was able to do the arc of their thought. The only way to read such philosophers is to join them as co-inquirers and, accordingly, to take up in earnest the work of their inquiries. We must honor the letter of these writings but no less also their spirit. The spirit animating both Peirce and Royce, as philosophers, was that of a cooperative yet critical exchange in which detailed comparisons of various figures were made to achieve a number of goals, not the least of which was the goal of simply outlining, in definite form, the most basic positions of two thinkers who were, at once, akin yet different. Such comparisons often prove invaluable in getting our bearings, in orienting ourselves in a vast and, always to some extent, unfamiliar terrain.

To devote ourselves to these thinkers, in their spirit of inquiry, is to devote ourselves to the topics no less than the tasks to which they devoted themselves.²⁰

19 In a letter to William James, Peirce confessed: “my views were probably influenced by Schelling,—by all stages of Schelling, but especially by *Philosophie de Natur*. I consider Schelling as enormous; and one thing I admire about him is his freedom from the trammels of system, and his holding himself uncommitted to any previous utterance. In that he is like a scientific man” (PERRY, 1935, p. 415-416; cf. CP 1.55) The “trammels of system” as Peirce intends it here is one thing, “the spirit of system” in Santayana’s sense quite another.

20 “The purpose of the study of philosophy is,” as Thomas Aquinas insists, “not to learn what others have thought, but to learn how the truth of things stands” (apud PIEPER, 1960, p. 126). Here, as in so many other respects, Peirce stood shoulder to shoulder with his medieval predecessors. He discerned in them more of the *ethos* of science, especially that of truly cooperative inquiry, than he saw in modern metaphysicians such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza. Though they have been ridiculed and caricatured since the humanists during the Renaissance mounted their largely rhetorical assault on the scholastic authors, Peirce also discerned in these medieval thinkers a deeply empirical temperament tracing its roots to the example of “the Philosopher” (i.e., Aristotle). This

Just what is mediation? Semiosis (or sign-activity)? Inquiry? Interpretation? What is the most fruitful way of connecting these topics with one another? What are we *doing* when we undertake such a task? How did Peirce or Royce understand what he was doing when he devoted himself to such an understanding? Does that thinker's philosophical self-understanding truly square with that individual's actual endeavor or is there some degree of disjunction between this self-understanding and the undertaking of which it is a self-understanding?

Peirce once suggested that the measure of a philosopher's accomplishment must ultimately be gauged in terms of proof, that which that philosopher in the judgment of that individual's most competent peers has proven to be the case (FISCH, 1986, p. 362). If we take proof in a very broad sense, this might be true; if, however, we take it in its customary and, thus, narrow sense, I am dubious about this providing us with a very good measure of evaluating a philosopher's accomplishments. If we take it to mean which concepts proposed by a philosopher *have proven themselves, as tools of inquiry*, to be efficacious and fruitful in rendering the commonplace phenomena of our everyday experience more luminous, intelligible, and indeed interesting, then I am inclined to agree with Peirce. This however does not seem to be at all what this logician meant by *proof* in the context in which he offered this suggestion. Whatever may be the case regarding his intention, I am disposed to evaluate philosophers in terms of their categorial innovations and [not] simply their conceptual contributions. Have their categories and concepts, to repeat, rendered phenomena more luminous, intelligible, and interesting? Can we make more of signs, mediation, inquiry, and interpretation with the resources provided by Peirce and Royce? Can we make more of these two thinkers themselves by means of these resources? In the end, the decisive question is whether their efforts have enriched or impoverished us, conceptually and thus experientially. Though philosophers must comport themselves in some manner as do such experimentalists as physicists and chemists, naturalists such as biologists and geologists, their activity cannot be completely assimilated to that of such experimentalists or naturalists. Their task is at once easier and more difficult. It is easier since the observational procedures are rarely as exacting nor costly, moreover, the fierce pressure of working toward a communally sanctioned degree of practical consensus is rarely as operative as it is in the sciences. It is, however, harder since the irreducible complexity of the philosophical adventure includes doing justice not only to the phenomena themselves but also to our very efforts to do justice to these phenomena (i.e., one of the purposes of the philosopher is to offer models of human self-understanding,

temperament, so prominent in Albertus Magnus, was also luminous in his most famous student, Thomas Aquinas. In both teacher and student, it is nowhere more evident than in two convictions: About any fact of the matter, experience alone yields knowledge (PIEPER, 1960, p. 115-116); and, "Most of what is knowable is at this point unknown" (*Scientiae demonstrativae non omnes factae sunt, sed plures restant adhuc inveniendae*. "Most of what exists in the realm of knowledge remains still to be discovered") (Albertus Magnus (1890) apud PIEPER, 1991, p. 6). The young Peirce makes the first point in this manner: "However immense our science may become, we are only burrowing light into an infinitude of darkness. Once an infinitude, always an infinitude" (W 1:8; 1859; see also CP 1.117, CP 5.65). The mature Peirce made the second point in these words: "No amount of speculation can take the place of experience" (CP 1.655).

including the self-understanding specific to the philosopher (VERENE, 1997, p.243-259). As Peirce notes (and here, he is indebted to William Whewell),²¹ “[...] progress in science depends upon the observation of the right facts by minds *furnished with appropriate ideas*” (CP 6.604). Has the philosopher directed our attention to observe the right facts? Has that thinker equipped us with appropriate ideas, ones enabling us to discern these facts as facts, their significance in the context at hand, but ultimately their connections to any number of matters, both near at hand and far afield?

Truth, or so Peirce suggests, “merely means the way to attain one’s purposes.” He immediately adds: “If the skeptics think that any account can be given of the phenomena of the universe while they leave Meaning out, by all means let them go ahead and try to do it” (CP 1.344). For Royce as well as Peirce, however, the universe is shot through with meaning. Indeed, just this fact is that which makes the universe, the totality of all things, truly a cosmos, however chaotic and incomplete it is at any actual moment. There are forms and depths of meaning to which we are at any historical moment oblivious. The human mind is at once severely limited and inherently unbounded. In practice, the limits are numerous and, in many practical circumstances, unsurpassable—for the time being. In principle, however, the human mind is inherently boundless: nothing, *in principle*, exceeds the possibility of being discovered by this mind. What most people would take to be an unknowable fact, Peirce explicitly does not: the sound of Aristotle’s voice. Of course, we at this point in history have only the scantest information of this auditory phenomenon (some ancient writers here and there make incidental remarks about it) (CP 5.542). The point is that, unlike possibly most other philosophers, Peirce refuses to mark this phenomenon down as absolutely unknowable, such is his commitment to the intelligibility of the world. The unknowable thing-in-itself is, Peirce’s judgment, a nominalist heresy. For him, one of the most apt names (if not *the* most apt one) is the *cognizable*; and here cognizable does not mean that which is merely conceivable or able to be thought without contradiction, but that which is in principle knowable. In opposition to Kant, but in concert with Hegel, Peirce refuses to conceive the conceivable in stark opposition to the knowable. Whatever is, is knowable and knowable by humans (though not necessarily at this time or in these circumstances). Here, as in all of our other endeavors, we must be guided by the rule of hope. In the end, skepticism is a form of despair, while science in Peirce’s sense is a task undertaken and renewed, time and again, by the revivification of hope.

Royce, no less than Peirce, was shadowed by despair and depression but, like Peirce, he secured in his life and, of greater relevance to us, in his philosophy, a basis for hope. For both thinkers, the requisite hope was bound up with sustaining forms of (at least) human solidarity and, beyond human solidarity, communion with the divine. The weight of their lives never crushed these individuals:²² they find the

21 In terms of Peirce’s intellectual development, William Whewell is very important. Peirce’s endeavor to ground his account of science on the history of science drew its inspiration partly from Whewell’s efforts. Daniel Brunson has helped me to appreciate Whewell’s significance for Peirce’s development and to him I am deeply grateful for this and other insights.

22 The circumstances of Royce’s death are such that this claim might need to be qualified.

resources within themselves and within their worlds²³ to return, with intensified vigor, to their pursuits. Even apart from this personal dimension, however, they are deeply honest philosophers, acutely aware of just where their positions are vulnerable to significant criticism. As a result, they confront the weaknesses of their own positions and try in a responsible manner to answer their most serious critics. As exacting critics of their own endeavors as they were, they could also be generously receptive to the insights and suggestions of others. This was true of Royce *via-a-vis* Peirce and, to a less degree of Peirce *vis-à-vis* Royce.

6 Conclusion

George Santayana once wrote disparagingly of Royce, portraying his somewhat older colleague as “overworked, standardized, academic engine, creaking and thumping on at the call of duty or of habit, with not thought of sparing either itself or anyone else”! (SANTAYANA, 1956, p. 61). Elsewhere he described Peirce at one of the lectures on pragmatism, delivered in 1903, as red-nosed and disheveled, and a part of his lecture seemed *ex-tempore* and whimsical” (Letter to Justus Buchler, 15th October 1937, quoted in EP 2:520, n. 3). No doubt, Royce and Peirce lent themselves, to some extent, to such ridicule. In my estimations, however, they are far more admirable than ridiculous figures. C. S. Peirce and Josiah Royce have shown themselves to be nothing less than exemplary. The pragmatic import of this claim is that they are exemplary practitioners: by their methodological principles and, as much (if not more), by their straightforward example, these two philosophers show us what, practically speaking, it means to philosophize. Their example renders our practices clear and, therein, renders the activity of clarifying our ideas clearer than it would ever have been without their innovations, interventions, and interruptions. My inclination is to suppose this becomes more evident when they are juxtaposed to one another, rather than considered completely apart from each other. Both Peirce and Royce took and indeed felt themselves to be implicated in the questions of their age (EMERSON, 1878). As much as they were susceptible to the lure of the eternal,²⁴ they never succumbed to it as a way of extricating themselves from

He might in the end have taken his own life. If so, the weight of his life did prove too much. This however does not negate the nobility of his efforts to overcome despair and depression to this point.

- 23 There is no absolute split here between inner and outer, better, the resources to be found within oneself and those to be found within the world. At least, the synechism implied in the refusal to allow for such a split should be honored when we are offering an account of these thinkers, philosophers who so indefatigably worked to establish nothing less than the *reality* of mediation and continuity. To account for their relationship to hope in terms of a dualism between inner and outer resources would consequently be a violation of the very synechism they championed.
- 24 “Do you know what it is in Christianity [Peirce asks] that when recognized makes our religion the agent of reform and progress? It is its marking duty at its proper finite figure. Not that it diminishes in any degree its vital importance, but that behind that outline of that huge mountain it enables us to descry a silvery peak arising into the calm air of eternity” (CP 1.675). As I read this complex metaphor, the huge mountain is the historical present in its most immediately arresting features, the silvery peak beyond is that to

the present (cf. EMERSON, 1878).²⁵ Rather, the eternal sustained and steadied their stance in the temporal and historical. Among other things, this engagement with their time meant attention to their contemporaries, especially those contemporaries who both took up the wealth of their inheritance into their thought and pointed the how *to go on* (e.g., how to go on being both scientific and religious or being conservative and sentimental or, finally, being committed to individuality without being a champion of individualism in its culturally regnant forms). The two philosophers considered here exemplify such attention to their contemporaries. They were especially attentive to those contemporaries who appeared to be not only representatives of their time but also thinkers who point the way forward. In Peirce's judgment, Royce was such a thinker and, in Royce's, Peirce was clearly such a figure. As a result, Peirce took cognizance of Royce as Royce did of Peirce. Each influenced the other: the thought of each, was in certain details, but also in more profound but less clearly identifiable ways, shaped by critical engagement with the thought of the other. Irreducible mediation or triadicity was at the root of their affinity. Peirce's theory of inquiry and Royce's conception of interpretation reveal, though unevenly, [both] in their overarching ambition (to grant such mediation or triadicity its due, to offer in the one case a non-reductive account of inquiry and in the other such a theory of interpretation) and some of their more specific features, mutual influence. Royce's understanding of interpretation is indebted to Peirce's conception of semiosis and Royce is quite explicit and generous in acknowledging this debt. To a less but still significant degree, Peirce's thinking was influenced by Royce. Two such philosophers strongly invite comparison in the full-blown, deep-cutting sense analyzed by Royce in *The Problem of Christianity* and elsewhere. Such comparison should prove to be illuminating of not only each of these philosophers in their irreducible individuality but also their deep affinities. Moreover, it should be illuminating of the shared topics and concerns to which each devoted such great attention. Specifically, such a comparison should throw light on such topics [as] sign-activity, inquiry, interpretation, and self-interpretation in such a way as to depend or in some other way enhance our understanding of these topics and

which, at this time, we ought to devote ourselves, and of course it is telling that Peirce describes this "silvery peak" as one "arising in the calm air of eternity."

- 25 This is arguably more evident in Royce than in Peirce, but I would argue that they are equally engaged in the historical present. See, e.g., what might be counted as Peirce's first public oration ("The Place of Our Age in the History of Civilization" [1863]) exhibits a tendency Peirce never shed, to look at history as a drama in which we are implicated. His "The Century's Great Men in Science," originally published in *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institute* (1900) and reprinted a year later in the *New York Evening Post* (January 12, 1901) under the title "Review of the Nineteenth Century," is a remarkable text. In his anthology, Wiener has included a short section entitled "The Nineteenth Century: Notes" (SW 261-64): it too is quite remarkable, providing us with glimpses of how Peirce viewed some of the artistic innovations and cultural changes of the nineteenth century. Finally, there is his observation: "Many and many a century is likely to sink in Time's flood, and be buried in the mud of Lethe, before the achievements of the nineteenth shall get matched. But of all those achievements, the greatest in the eye of reason, that of bringing to light the supremacy of the element of *Growth*, was, after all, nothing but a special application of Aristotle's pure vision" EP 2:373).

concerns. Finally, our understanding of ourselves might be aided by taking Peirce and Royce to be included in the *dramatis personae* of their dramatic century, not least of all, as characters caught up in dramas of self-understanding, just at the moment when the inherited terms of self-interpretation seemed completely to lose their credibility or validity. In the end, we are returned to the Socratic imperative: Know thyself. If in knowing Peirce or Royce or each vis-à-vis the other we have not come to know ourselves better,²⁶ our efforts have to that extent been squandered. Our interpretation of others, even when it is undertaken at a distance, even when it is unfolded within the formal parameters of academic scholarship, should carry implications for self-understanding. The efforts of both, though especially those of Royce, drove toward the existential challenge of carrying out more thoughtfully, more conscientiously, indeed, more wisely the task of knowing ourselves (of interpreting those selves in their determinate actuality but also in their defining aspirations and loves). If I have done something to “prove” or show some of this—more modestly but also more accurately, if I have done anything to render these points more plausible—then I will have achieved my purpose. It is, after all, imperative to mark our duty “at its proper finite figure” (CP 1.675). In our role as interpreters, as in all our other roles, it is accordingly imperative to be guided by a keen sense of our finitude no less than a contrite sense of our fallibility. This does not preclude undertaking bold tasks or making large claims. It does, however, bear upon *how* such endeavors are undertaken and *how* such claims are made. My hope is thus to have undertaken a bold project in an appropriately modest manner. In the presence of such philosophers, humility is hardly a virtue. It is arguably the case that part of their power is to assist us in self-transcendence and self-transformation. If we are candid in our interpretations of our encounters with some philosophers (in my case, these two and a handful of others), we ought unabashedly to confess that they have truly aided us in this and other ways.²⁷ My final hope is that I have done

26 In a letter to Victoria Lady Welby, Peirce once wrote: “A sign is something by knowing which we know something more” (SW 390). If knowing the writings of Peirce, we only or mostly know what he happened to think about this or that topic, but have not enhanced our understanding of the topics to which he has devoted his attention and indeed genius, then we have squandered an opportunity to join him as a co-inquirer tasked with carrying forward the work he carried on with such single-minded devotion.

27 “A man of experience would be [Peirce suggests] somewhat surprised to find that a writer on esthetics was an artist of power, or that a writer on ethics was a moral hero. Logicians are, as a rule, far from being the greatest reasoners. Nevertheless, I am inclined to believe that the study of esthetics will be of benefit to the artist [e.g., Leonardo on the art of painting]: though I know too little of either esthetics or of art to speak with confidence. Some writers on ethics deny that it affords any aid toward a moral life. I cannot but think this is an exaggeration. I do not see how the study of Plato, or of Shaftesbury, or of Kant can fail to make men better. I doubt if the reading of Hobbes could do a man of much power any harm” (CP 2.201). See Peirce (W 1:10-12). This is a paper [Peirce] wrote as an undergraduate at Harvard College for one of his courses. It is a response to John Ruskin and a defense of a claim made by Friedrich Schiller in one of his *Aesthetic Letters*, the first philosophical text to which Peirce, in the company of his youthful companion Horatio Paine, devoted intense study. Contra Ruskin, Peirce is arguing for a sense in which the sense of beauty *does* aid the fulfillment of duty (see especially W 1:11-12).

something to make their thought more widely available, so that it might assist others in adventures of self-transcendence and self-transfiguration. The significance of C. S. Peirce and Josiah Royce resides partly in their power to facilitate such change – such is at least how I interpret them. “Don’t you think so?”²⁸ Or, more simply and less leadingly: “And you?”

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28 “There is [Peirce recalls] a celebrated passage in the second edition of the *Critick der Reinen Vernunft* and a very notable one, in which Kant says that the ‘I think’—*Das Ich Denke*—must be able to accompany all ideas. [...] [But] the [act of ‘I think’ manifests] the need of consecution of ideas.” This is, Peirce stresses, “a logical need and is due not, as Kant thinks, to their taking the form of the *Urtheil* [or judgment], the assertion, but to their making an argument [or drawing an inference, in whatever form this inference might be drawn –deductively, inductively, or abductively].” From these considerations, Peirce explicitly marks his divergence from Kant: if we shift our attention from *Urtheil* to inference in one or another of its three irreducibly modes, then it is not “I think” that “always virtually accompanies any argument”; it is rather, “Don’t you think so?” (MS 636:000024-26). (I am indebted to Jaime Nubiola for reminding me of the importance of this text.) Peirce’s heuristic *tuism*, as I am disposed to qualify his *tuism* (W 1:xxix), is nowhere more dramatically present than in Peirce’s realization that his most carefully argued conclusion carries with it at least an implicit invitation to competent individuals to subject the argument to further examination. *Tuism* implies an appeal to the other: all of our uses of signs implicitly carry this appeal. A conclusion is, from this perspective, never anything more than an invitation to the other to pick up the thread of the conversation, say, to go over the steps of an argument and assess the strength of that argument for oneself. “Don’t you think this is right?”

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