PEIRCE'S PRAGMATIC THEOLOGY AND STOIC RELIGIOUS ETHICS[1]

John R. Shook

ABSTRACT

Charles S. Peirce believed that his pragmatic philosophy could reconcile religion and science and that this reconciliation involves a religious ethics creating a real community with the cosmos and God. After some rival pragmatic approaches to God and religious belief inconsistent with Peirce's philosophy are set aside, his metaphysical plan for a reconciliation of religion and science is outlined. A panentheistic God makes the best match with his desired conclusions from the Neglected Argument for the reality of God, and this God is also capable of fulfilling the pragmatic role demanded by Peirce's ethical expectations for the intelligent functioning of religion. The discussion proceeds to an elaboration of the aesthetic, metaphysical, and ethical elements of Peirce's philosophical system, which indicate why Peirce's religious ethics is best categorized as akin to Stoicism, with some Christian elements. For Peirce, religious ethics proceeds from the (potentially universal) agapic community's cooperation with God's loving creativity of the universe.

KEY WORDS: *C. S. Peirce*, *Stoicism*, *Christianity*, *pragmatism*, *panentheism*, *agapic community*, *religious ethics*, *summum bonum*

PRAGMATISM HAS INSPIRED many thoughtful approaches to religion, including diverse approaches by philosophers from William James, Josiah Royce, and John Dewey to Charles Hartshorne and Cornel West. No theological school issued directly from Charles S. Peirce's own religious reflections, however. This absence is not due to lack of materials to consult. A collection of all of Peirce's writings relevant to religious questions would fill out a volume.[2] A clear theology

[1] This article developed from a portion of a talk I gave at the Institute for American Thought at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis in September 2009. My thanks go to the participants, especially David Pfeifer, Cornelis de Waal, and André De Tienne. My thanks also go to the anonymous referee for helpful comments and suggestions that improved this paper, which expresses my own views and not those of the referee or the Center for Inquiry.

[2] Most of Peirce's writings relevant to religion were published in the first and sixth volumes of *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Peirce 1931–58). Citations to this edition are given by CP followed by volume and paragraph numbers. See also the German translations of his religious writings in Peirce 1995.

has not emerged from these writings, however. Commentators on Peirce cannot agree on the nature of a Peircean God, and little work has been done on his religious ethics.[3]

To accurately identify Peirce's religious ethics, we begin with his confidence that religious truth cannot be radically different from scientific truth. Peirce believed that his pragmatic philosophy could reconcile religion and science, and that this reconciliation involves an ethical stance shared by both. This essay first eliminates some pragmatic approaches to the God and religious belief that are inconsistent with Peirce's philosophy. Next, his reconciliation of religion and science is explained, clearing a space for his argument for the reality of God. Then we look at the pragmatic role for God in the context of Peirce's ethical expectations for the proper functioning of religion. This essay concludes that Peirce's religious ethics is best categorized as quite close to Stoicism, expressed by some religious language from Christianity. For Peirce, religious ethics comprehends how the universal agapic community can cooperate with God's loving creativity of the universe.

1. Religion and Science

Peirce expected experience to be the ultimate source and judge of all human belief and knowledge, and he also thought of religion as an active way of life. Peirce respected the impact of religious experience, the "stirring of the spirit" (CP6.435) and inspiration of belief, the sort of faith that ultimately generates and sustains all religions. However, belief is not passive, but active: "it is absurd to say that religion is mere belief" because religion "is a life" and a religious belief is "a thing to be lived" (CP6.439). His pragmatism treated beliefs generally as matters upon which we are prepared to act. Theoretical science may be remote from daily life but not religion. "Religion is a practical matter. Its beliefs are formulae you will go upon" (CP6.214). People rely on religion for guidance in their "aspiration toward the perfect" (CP6.427). All belief is hypothetical, and belief in God hypothetically supplies religious guidance, as people try out this ideal hypothesis to build religious lives. Those who practice successfully religious lives may be said to be learning about God. As Peirce endorsed a social epistemology, which regards knowledge as a product of specialized community practices, he judged that people living in religious communities would have the best opportunity to know God.

[3] Important discussions of Peirce's philosophy of religion include Smith 1952, Mahowald 1976, Orange 1984, Deuser 1993, and Anderson 1995. Works more relevant to Peirce's religious ethics are Pfeifer 1971, Pfeifer 1981, Anderson 1987, Raposa 1989, and Ejsing 2006.

Peirce's version of pragmatism cannot credit any religion's judgment as alone grasping the truth, or that it alone produces satisfied believers. He would be far more impressed by religions that take other religions seriously and admit that partial knowledge is our common fate. For Peirce, experimental learning must respect the full breadth of human experience, make the most careful and temperate inferences, and seek convergences of viewpoint. Contrary to William James, neither private mystical experiences nor personal religious satisfaction can help justify any claim to religious knowledge (see Alexander 1987, and also Slater 2009). Furthermore, those things tend to confirm preexisting religious beliefs rather than creatively generate new truths, and inspired potential truths must be tested by further experience in any case—as James himself realized. Peirce had nothing but contempt for the stubborn preservation or artificial processing of beliefs. In his essays "A Religion of Science" (1893) and "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God" (1908), and in other papers, Peirce accuses religious theologians of being too conservative. Yet religion can be liberated from theological chains to become a creative way of life. Peirce's pragmatism offers a logical method for testing all beliefs against the course of future experience, and not a method for testing tentative ideas against some other set of ordained convictions.

Peirce's 1893 essay, "The Marriage of Religion and Science," states that the scientific spirit of free inquiry must now prevail everywhere, and religion's real power can only be strengthened and its proper aims can only be achieved through the incorporation of this spirit. But this is not a call for religion to be reduced to science. Philosophy's role as mediator promotes the ideal of the unity of method and truth in the long run. Commitment to this ideal, which Peirce regarded as a religious "state of mind," opens up the possibility of a "religion of science" (CP6.433) to be tested in the course of civilization like everything else. Philosophy must not demand any sudden radical alteration to religion, lest it only provoke harsher conservatism. "I do not say that philosophical sciences should not ultimately influence religion and morality; I only say that it should be allowed to do so only with secular slowness and the most conservative caution" (CP 1.620).

The "science of religion," following this ideal of unity of social inquiry, demands that religion gradually test and revise its conceptions of God and its ideals of conduct. Theologians "must also be judged as scientific men" (CP6.3) who can learn new knowledge rather than as defenders of outdated faith. Throughout his writings on religion, Peirce urges the use of the scientific method and close consistency with scientific knowledge for any theology that would be practically intelligent. The next section introduces Peirce's plan for this new theology. But the prior assumption has not yet been aired: Why should these

scientific methods be dictated to theology? Why not the methods of ethics or of politics? If religion is concerned with guidance for the conduct of life, why not look to a coordinate field of human wisdom having similar aims? Perhaps theology has far more to learn from ethics, because ethics concerns the intelligent formation and reconciliation of moral habits. Perhaps theology has plenty to learn from politics, as politics concerns the intelligent satisfaction of the human need for a stable society and just law. If humans really need God for moral guidance or for guarantees of justice, science's admitted ability to deliver factual knowledge does not seem so relevant.

Immanuel Kant, of course, marks a decisive turn in Western thought about theology's natural allies. Among Kant's children are the Pragmatists, and as the twentieth century proceeded to reveal the universe's immensity and emptiness, a proliferation of pragmatists were happy to combine theology with everything but science. Peirce, the founder of Pragmatism, stands almost alone in his demand that belief should aim at Real Truth. Peirce divided all belief systems into two kinds—those that try to learn about Reality, and those that have some other aim. Peirce renounced the notion that a postulate of idealized "As-If" reality has a cognitive value comparable to a postulate of actual Reality. It is pursuit of knowledge of the Real that is the most practical, for Peirce. Should we believe in an idealized God who ensures that a perfect moral system determines right from wrong in every situation? Should we believe in an idealized God who delivers perfect justice in an afterlife? These sound like admirably pragmatic questions, but they are not pragmatic in Peirce's sense.

Peirce believed that an essential part of religion is a view of ultimate reality and our proper relationship with it. Some acquaintance with these Real matters is crucial to adequate judgments about the meaning and conduct of life. The finest fallible method of learning about reality that Peirce can recommend is the scientific method. Again, science and religion need not be opposed. The scientific spirit is not contrary to the aims of the religious community: "owe what one may to the Church, the truth claims paramount allegiance; and above the importance of any particular truth, or body of truths, is that of the right methods of reaching the truth" (CP6.450). Truth is "the fruit of free inquiry" (CP6.450), and love includes respect for intellectual freedom to reach for truth, for "the law of love is not the rule of angry and bullying insistence" (CP6.446). But what is truth, and how could we know God? Frail, fallible human intelligence must try to appreciate its natural place within the vast universe. We are guided only by some confidence that a mind evolved within nature's structure would be naturally evolved to intuitively track nature's ways. Peirce thought that the very possibility of science itself indicates a common basis between human

rationality and creation's ways: "the discoveries of science, their enabling us to predict what will be the course of nature, is proof conclusive that though we cannot think any thought of God's, we can catch a fragment of his Thought, as it were" (CP6.346). Science yields knowledge of the universe, which in turn can orient our widest perception. "The variety of the universe . . . which we see whenever and wherever we open our eyes, constitutes its liveliness, its vivacity. The perception of it is a direct, though darkling perception of God" (CP6.613).

Peirce believed that logic, science, and philosophy could supply a sound empirical methodology for judging religious claims to truth. He regarded the scientific method as an exemplary use of logical methodology for evaluating verifications. Peirce subordinated both science and religion to the more fundamental disciplines of mathematics (where continuity, relations, and logical inference is studied) and phaneroscopy (where the basic categories of all experience are phenomenologically studied), and he also required science and religion to carefully coordinate with semiotics and metaphysics.[4] Peirce expected that this potent recombination of philosophy with science and religion would produce the unified inquiry into truth.

2. Scientific and Metaphysical Theology

"A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God" provides Peirce's most thorough attempt to explain how philosophy can supply the needed methodological mediation between science and religion. Peirce's Neglected Argument concerns the perceptual, cosmological, and metaphysical issues involved with God's reality. He announces his hopes for this argument:

> [M]an, like any other animal, is gifted with power of understanding sufficient for the conduct of life. This brings him, for testing the hypothesis, to taking his stand upon Pragmaticism, which implies faith in common sense and in instinct, though only as they issue from the cupel-furnace of measured criticism. In short, he will say that the Neglected Argument is the first Stage of a scientific inquiry, resulting in a hypothesis of the very highest Plausibility, whose ultimate test must lie in its value in the self-controlled growth of man's conduct of life [CP6.480].

Peirce begins his Neglected Argument emphasizing the role of the imagination, where possible explanations for curious phenomena are

[4] A useful overview of Peirce's classification of intellectual disciplines is provided by Anderson 1995, chap. 2. See also Burks 1996.

formed by what Peirce calls Musement, the playful freedom of imagination. He then describes how he permits himself to be curious about the world as a whole. When Peirce considers the entire world, his dramatically wider angle of vision brings the ultimate categories of all reality into view. Here the reader is introduced to Peirce's metaphysical views.

His Neglected Argument reviews the three basic categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness, which Peirce formulated and defended in essays during the 1880s and 1890s. He then says, without any argument, that "a latent tendency toward belief in God is a fundamental ingredient of the soul, and that, far from being a vicious or superstitious ingredient, it is simply a natural precipitate of meditation upon the origin of the Three Universes" (CP6.487). Peirce describes the three categories, the three Universes, in this way:

> Of the three Universes of Experience familiar to us all, the first comprises all mere Ideas, those airy nothings to which the mind of poet, pure mathematician, or another *might* give local habitation and a name within that mind. Their very airy-nothingness, the fact that their Being consists in mere capability of getting thought, not in anybody's Actually thinking them, saves their Reality. The second Universe is that of the Brute Actuality of things and facts. I am confident that their Being consists in reactions against Brute forces, notwithstanding objections redoubtable until they are closely and fairly examined. The third Universe comprises everything whose being consists in active power to establish connections between different objects, especially between objects in different Universes [CP6.455].

Following the Neglected Argument, Peirce's Muser is supposed to begin to appreciate how a deeper connective pattern runs through all three "universes," the three fundamental categories of the reality around us.

Peirce appeals to the results of his own metaphysical musings in his 1893 article "Evolutionary Love," which inquires into "an evolutionary philosophy, which teaches that growth comes only from love" (CP6.289). How could universal evolution lead someone to a God hypothesis? The Neglected Argument asks the Muser, after contemplating the three Universes and their connections, to take a closer look at the special phenomenon of growth.

> From speculations on the homogeneities of each Universe, the Muser will naturally pass to the consideration of homogeneities and connections between two different Universes, or all three. Especially in them all we find one type of occurrence, that of growth, itself consisting in the homogeneities of small parts. This is evident in the growth of motion into displacement, and the growth of force into motion. In growth, too, we find that the three Universes conspire; and a universal feature of it is

> provision for later stages in earlier ones. This is a specimen of certain lines of reflection which will inevitably suggest the hypothesis of God's Reality [CP6.465].

The universe not only has an evolutionary design, this design also exhibits the sort of purposive growth that we associate with mind. Peirce linked growth to mind, and linked universal mind to God, in his 1892 article "The Law of Mind":

> This reference to the future is an essential element of personality. Were the ends of a person already explicit, there would be no room for development, for growth, for life; and consequently there would be no personality. The mere carrying out of predetermined purposes is mechanical. This remark has an application to the philosophy of religion. It is that a genuine evolutionary philosophy, that is, one that makes the principle of growth a primordial element of the universe, is so far from being antagonistic to the idea of a personal creator, that it is really inseparable from that idea; while a necessitarian religion is in an altogether false position and is destined to become disintegrated. But a pseudo-evolutionism which enthrones mechanical law above the principle of growth, is at once scientifically unsatisfactory, as giving no possible hint of how the universe has come about, and hostile to all hopes of personal relations to God [CP6.157].

This all too brief synopsis of metaphysical arguments that he had already published cannot be expanded in this paper.[5] At this stage of the Neglected Argument, the reader is supposed to agree with Peirce that genuine evolution cannot be explained by mere mechanistic principles, but only by the work of purposive mentality. Peirce quickly infers that the universe's evolution must be guided by mind, "mind" as understood by Peirce. This mind is at work gradually connecting the universe's parts into a greater whole, which further suggests to Peirce that such mind genuinely cares about the universe's destiny. This hypothesis of a universal caring mind is the hypothesis of a loving God.

Peirce formulated some propositions about this God, although he warned that his "strictly hypothetical" concept of God is quite vague (CP6.466–67), and such vague concepts are liable to be inconsistent and self-contradictory (CP6.480, CP6.496). However, such vagueness is, for Peirce, characteristic of our common-sensical and indubitable beliefs (CP5.446, CP8.208), and this vagueness is the source of its practical fertility (CP6.494). Peirce also warned that the hypothesis of God is about an "infinitely incomprehensible" object (CP6.466), but such incomprehensibility did not stop Peirce from trying to comprehend God.

[5] The References section includes many works that amply discuss Peirce's Neglected Argument for God.

Peirce's conception of God includes attributes of infinity, necessity, creativity, eternality, and mentality. God must be infinite (CP8.262) and must be that "necessary being" which is the "creator of all three Universes of Experience" (CP6.452), in essence, "*all reality* is due to the creative power of God" (CP6.505, emphasis in original). God has "its being out of time" and God creates time (CP6.490, CP4.67). Peirce described God as a "disembodied spirit, or pure mind" and God "probably has no consciousness" (CP6.490, CP6.489). Peirce attributes to God more perfections such as omnipotence (CP6.509) and omniscience (CP6.508, CP6.510). Peirce believed in an anthropomorphic and personal God (CP5.47, CP5.496, CP5.536, CP6.162, CP6.436, CP6.502). God is "now creating the universe" and exemplifies "Creative Activity" (CP6.505, CP6.506). Peirce's God is "One Incomprehensible but Personal God, not immanent in but creating the universe" (CP5.496). Peirce repeatedly denied that we could understand God's mind, but what a pragmaticist means by "God" is an analogue of a mind that inspires worthy principles of conduct (CP6.502).[6] Peirce says that God is love, exemplifying the agapic love that he finds in the evolution of the world (CP6.157, CP6.287, CP6.302–4). Yet God is also entirely responsible for the creation and continued existence of the world's disorder, decay, tragedy, and evil (CP6.479) that attenuates the possibility of growth for the universe in general and the fighting goodness of humanity in particular.

Peirce talks about God as the beginning, middle, and end of the universe: "The starting-point of the universe, God the Creator, is the Absolute first; the terminus of the universe, God completely revealed, is the Absolute Second; every state of the universe at a measurable point of time is the third" (CP1.362). Peirce's Neglected Argument and his philosophical principles indicate a most intimate relationship between creator and creation. While his personal views about God resemble traditional theism, his philosophical system leans more toward panentheism.[7] A panentheistic God would have creative control over nature because God is both more than nature and also part of nature, thoroughly involved with every phase of its creation. The operations of thirdness in our universe, developing it from chaotic firstness into the planned divine design, are simultaneously the reality of God in the world and the working out of a transcending divine plan. This panentheistic God must be a dynamic God. If part of God's being

[6] Raposa 1989, 65–66 recounts several passages where Peirce endorses God's purposive thoughtfulness. Vincent Potter 1996, 155–68 describes Peirce's anthropomorphic theism.

[7] On the theology of panentheism, see Cooper 2006 and Clayton 2008. On Peirce and panentheism (and pantheism) see diverse perspectives offered by Corrington 1993, 173, 187, 200–4; Raposa 1989, 50; Orange 1984, 38; and Anderson 1987, 90–99.

is in creation as creation undergoes evolution, then God undergoes some evolutionary change along with nature. A Peircean panentheism finds that the growth of nature and God's creativity in nature are co-responding, cooperating, and communicating processes.

3. Peirce's God and the Ethical Function of Religion

This intimate relationship between creator and creation is the inspiration for Peirce's religious ethics. As we have already seen in the opening section, Peirce expects religion to make a practical difference to believers. His pragmatism forbids any direct inference to God from the improved lives of believers, however. Skeptics point to religious disagreement, over both religious lifestyle and theological doctrine, as disproof of God. Furthermore, even if God is real, then there ought to be some practical consequences for all religious people. The following passage from Peirce is central to his vision of God's role.

> If God Really be, and be benign, then, in view of the generally conceded truth that religion, were it but proved, would be a good outweighing all others, we should naturally expect that there would be some Argument for His Reality that should be obvious to all minds, high and low alike, that should earnestly strive to find the truth of the matter; and further, that this Argument should present its conclusion, not as a proposition of metaphysical theology, but in a form directly applicable to the conduct of life, and full of nutrition for man's highest growth [CP6.457].

This compressed statement of the connections among God's benevolence, religious truth, and human welfare raises far more questions than it answers; its meaning requires an explanation of Peirce's understanding of ethics. Demanding that God be benevolent makes for a poor start, as it sounds like Peirce is letting an ethical criterion rather than a logical methodology now take the theological lead. Peirce has no right to assume that God is benevolent without argument. Furthermore, Peirce considers an exclusively ethical standard for religious belief as a heresy against science and truth. He writes,

> let the consequences of such a belief be as dire as they may, one thing is certain: that the state of the facts, whatever it may be, will surely get found out, and no human prudence can long arrest the triumphal car of truth—no, not if the discovery were such as to drive every individual of our race to suicide! [CP6.426].

We are again confronted by the question, why should scientific and theological metaphysics take the lead in forming our notion of God, rather than permitting ethics or even aesthetics to begin this work? Actually, Peirce views metaphysics and aesthetics as philosophically

prior to ethics, because ethics has no independent principle as a foundation. Instead, ethics must find its foundation in aesthetics. Peirce holds that ethics involves the ideal of the *summum bonum* (CP1.573) but ethics does not define this ideal: "Ethics, or the science of right and wrong, must appeal to Esthetics for aid in determining the *summum bonum*" (CP1.191).

Peirce's description of Musement closely resembles the disinterested playful imagination necessary for the aesthetic in the philosophies of Kant and Friedrich Schiller. Peirce's Neglected Argument, we can now see, sets out from the aesthetic imagination where musement on the entire world has its play, next asks this imagination to harmonize the three Universes, and finally commends a workable God to ethical valuation. Peirce is quite explicit about this ordering:

> [I]n the Pure Play of Musement the idea of God's Reality will be sure sooner or later to be found an attractive fancy, which the Muser will develop in various ways. The more he ponders it, the more it will find response in every part of his mind, for its beauty, for its supplying an ideal of life, and for its thoroughly satisfactory explanation of his whole threefold environment [CP6.465].

Peirce expects the God hypothesis to arise from, and be first tested by, the aesthetic and metaphysical criteria of Beauty and Truth, and then additionally commends this hypothesis as ethically Good. Peirce avoided any direct link between God and ethics. He writes, "it seems to me that the very meaning of the word 'God' implies, not surely *morality*, for He seems to me to be above all self-restraint or law, but to imply aesthetic spiritual perfection" (CP6.510). But Peirce is not content to just prevent God from deciding ethics and to forestall ethics from proposing and testing good visions of God. Peirce preemptively tells ethics what its standard of the good should be.

> [T]he pragmaticist does not make the *summum bonum* to consist in action, but makes it to consist in that process of evolution whereby the existent comes more and more to embody those generals [universals, laws of nature, or habits] which were just now said to be destined, which is what we strive to express in calling them reasonable. In its higher stages, evolution takes place more and more largely through self-control, and this gives the pragmaticist a sort of justification for making the rational purport to be general [CP 5.433].

The process of growing complete reasonableness is mankind's highest growth—humanity's *summum bonum*—for Peirce. This identification is at the core of Peirce's religious ethics because he believes that his metaphysical God can satisfy the judgments of aesthetics, reason, and ethics. For Peirce, ethics essentially demands the growth of reasonableness. Peirce's God has the assigned task of gradually maximizing

precisely that reasonableness which God has planned out for the universe. If the God of metaphysics supplies to the highest degree precisely what ethics requires, then ethics not based on any transcendental speculation, but instead ethics is based on our best understanding of the way that the actual universe is operating. This is not a simplistic abductive argument, akin to some sort of Kantian postulation of God required for taking ethics seriously. Peirce's metaphysics is not Kant's metaphysics. When a person comprehends how the Universes are functioning in their harmonies, and how one's own life is lived by being embedded in those harmonies, the full reality of the foundation for the ethical life is thereby intelligently perceived. For Peirce, nature deserves the credit for realizing the religiously ethical life, not any transcendent or noumenal reality. Put boldly, scientific practice can overlap with religious practice. Still, the concept of the *summum bonum* requires some concrete elaboration. More has to be said about God and our relationship with God.

Peirce's Neglected Argument prepares a metaphysical way for considering God as a loving God. God's responsibility for the three categories, the three basic modes of being, is God's responsibility for the greatest good of the entire universe. "We now begin to see the sense of talking of modes of being. They are elements of cooperation toward the *summum bonum*" (CP2.118). Peirce asserts two attributes of God, which must be reconciled: the caring of God and the rationality of God. Sheer reasonableness is insufficient for any fully ethical standpoint. Here Peirce risks formulating an abstract ethical principle as empty as Kant's categorical imperative, but Peirce appreciated this risk. Peirce's 1903 Harvard *Lectures on Pragmatism* sketches his pragmatic modifications to Kant's ethics. Peirce retains Kant's demand for universalizability but adds a temporal dimension to the pursuit of the good. It cannot be any static pure reason but only a temporal practical reasoning involved with ethics. Peirce defines ethics as "the study of what ends of action we are deliberately prepared to adopt" (CP5.130), and then Peirce adds that ethics can particularly study the pursuit of a person's "ultimate ends" and any means used to achieve such ultimate ends in the long run. What can be said about ultimate ends? An ultimate end cannot also be any mere means; it cannot be recommended for the sake of something else. An ultimate end must instead be "a state of things that reasonably recommends itself in itself" and the only sort of thing for Peirce that has this character is some admirable aesthetic ideal. "It must be an admirable ideal, having the only kind of goodness that such an ideal can have; namely, esthetic goodness. From this point of view the morally good appears as a particular species of the esthetically good" (CP5.130). Aesthetics serves as the mediating third factor for reconciling God's love and God's rationality.

Peirce appears at first to permit the choice of an ultimate aesthetic ideal to be a subjective matter of personal decision, but severe rational constraints on this decision quickly emerge. Peirce's analog to the categorical imperative is the negative principle that "an ultimate aim which cannot be consistently pursued is a bad aim." Expressed in a positive way, this principle is something like: pursue an ultimate aim that could be consistently pursued in the indefinite long run (CP5.133). But we cannot pursue such an aim as if anyone actually knew what it concretely is. "If a moralist describes an ideal as the *summum bonum*, in the first place, the perfect truth of his statement requires that it should involve the confession that the perfect doctrine can neither be stated nor conceived" (CP5.566). Only the method of pursuit, and not the end pursued, can guide us in action. "Pursue the *summum bonum*" is no more a practical guide to action than "pursue the truth." It is the conception of the *summum bonum* that serves as the final cause of reasonableness; as a conceived ideal it enacts a reasonable method and hence it exerts its characteristically mental influence over the course of affairs under practical human control.

Peirce expects that some form of ethical objectivity will gradually develop in the intelligent conduct of life, similar to the way that he finds the growth of scientific objectivity in the intelligent exploration of nature. Peirce is careful not to presume what he needs to demonstrate: the possibility of an ideal moral community. He does hold the sociological view that any personal ethics is simultaneously a social ethics, but his philosophical procedure is more cautious here. Even if one assumes that ethical thinking starts from an initial individuality and subjectivity, the methodological constraints set by the rational consideration of all relevant factors to moral conduct should open up the path toward objectivity. Peirce does not commit to any Hobbesian premise of moral individualism but a methodological beginning that recognizes the plurality of moral views across individuals and between communities. Peirce expected ethical methodology to produce communal convergences in practice. What would a consistently reasonable aim of this ethical methodology look like? Peirce offers two criteria. First, "it should accord with a free development of the agent's own aesthetic quality" (CP5.136). Second, an ultimate aim "should not ultimately tend to be disturbed by the reactions upon the agent of that outward world" (CP5.136). How can these two criteria be simultaneously satisfied, so that the agent's own growth remains consistent with the development of the surrounding world? This is evidently a problem again for aesthetics, which focuses on the ideal harmonization of diverse elements, so Peirce tells us that these two criteria are satisfied only when the agent and the world are "parts of one esthetic total" (CP5.136). Can there really be one beautiful whole?

Peirce says that this question of any actual beautiful whole is a question for metaphysics, not ethics. We already see the metaphysical picture of the universe, which Peirce wanted to draw in order to answer this question. When Peirce sends ethics into the arms of a collaboration between aesthetics and metaphysics, we grasp why Peirce never developed an independent theory of ethical inquiry. Peirce did not regard ethics as capable of learning about reality; ethics cannot claim to offer knowledge and be scientific on its own, even with the help of all the other sciences. Ethics by itself cannot be sure that humanity can pursue reasonable ultimate aims, because that pursuit in practice must depend on the way reality actually is. Ethics nevertheless demands that we hopefully try, and our understanding of nature's ways makes such hope reasonable; as Peirce adds, "it is comforting to know that all experience is favorable to that assumption" (CP5.136). From his metaphysical speculations, his Neglected Argument, and his views on reasonable ethics, Peirce thinks that he has found a way for philosophy to show that a God-directed universe can provide an ultimate harmonization between its development and the development of agents within the universe.

But not just any sort of God could fulfill the dramatic role of being both an aesthetic ideal and an active creator of the universe's destiny.

4. A Stoic Religious Ethics

We have seen how Peirce gave God the metaphysical task of gradually maximizing precisely that reasonableness which God has planned out for the universe. Peirce's ethical theory additionally asks that God's ideal plan supply a way for harmonizing the ends of growing agents with the universe's overall development. Because of this demand placed on ethics, Peirce not only has a religious ethics, but one recognizably Stoic in form.

Peirce requires more than an ideally semiotic God, which could simply guarantee such harmonization in innumerable ways that brutely force or paternalistically control all agents. God could even accomplish this in ways that make us think that we are free ethical agents—maybe God would ensconce us within "experience machines," or a Matrix-style virtual reality, or just give us brains that are easily satisfied. What more must ethics demand of God? Peirce's writings on religion repeat the cryptic phrase that "God is Love." This phrase gestures toward his theory that God's agapic processes transforms all of the universe's semiotic reasonableness, including human reasonableness, into a harmonious ethical ideal. Peirce believes that there can be a philosophical reconciliation between Love, Life, and Logic, rediscovering the primacy of the three virtues of Charity, Faith, and Hope:

> It may seem strange that I should put forward three sentiments, namely, interest in an indefinite community, recognition of the possibility of this interest being made supreme, and hope in the unlimited continuance of intellectual activity, as indispensable requirements of logic. Yet, when we consider that logic depends on a mere struggle to escape doubt, which, as it terminates in action, must begin in emotion, and that, furthermore, the only cause of our planting ourselves on reason is that other methods of escaping doubt fail on account of the social impulse, why should we wonder to find social sentiment presupposed in reasoning? As for the other two sentiments which I find necessary, they are so only as supports and accessories of that. It interests me to notice that these three sentiments seem to be pretty much the same as that famous trio of Charity, Faith, and Hope, which, in the estimation of St. Paul, are the finest and greatest of spiritual gifts [CP2.655].

If it is indeed Love/Life/Logic that binds and grows the universe, and God is in that growth, then God is transformed by the processes of creation. Peirce's theological proposition that humanity participates in the universe's process toward a divine *summum bonum* is his philosophical justification for a God that is transformed through semiotic communication with humanity. God and humanity are in a community—not an externally related assembly of interacting beings but an internally related whole of organically interfused beings. Just as our human reason evolved in concert with the dynamic environment around us, our capacity for communication with God has evolved in concert with God. The God of Peirce's scientific theology is a panentheistic God whose mind includes our minds. When we reasonably change our minds, we change God's mind in sympathetic response as God guides the universe. There is no predetermined final end to creation in Peirce's philosophy; one reason why God must be continually creating the universe is because God's creatures can continually create, too. What humanity does neither automatically tracks, regrettably detracts, nor accidentally sidetracks some divinely aloof plan. A creation with its own minds must be carefully minded by a God.

For Peirce, God's love is not the intensely personal love of any traditional Christianity. Peirce's God would not guarantee happy lives for individuals, and would not meet any human expectations about what some "best of all possible worlds" would be like. God's love is more like systemic impersonal love, not designed to deliver to each individual a fine life or to ensure that deserving people obtain a heavenly afterlife, but rather to provide everyone with plenty of opportunities to build proud lives in loving harmony with each other, with the whole universe, and with God. Peirce's God neither delivers ethical edicts from on high, nor implants ethical norms in our minds, nor communicates ethical reasoning or stern judgment. Like logic and science, we

have to develop concrete ethical systems ourselves, as we figure out how to reasonably control our conduct within a universe of developing opportunities for both success and failure. Peirce hardly indicates what experimental ethical reasoning can precisely look like, and he does not explain what forms of semiotic communication about ethical matters would develop.[8] What is clear is the way that Peirce finds religions to be intelligent efforts at communing and communicating with God, and he understands religious lives to be responsible for creating ethical lives.

> A religious person keeps God at the center of his or her conduct.[This person] will come to be stirred to the depths of his nature by the beauty of the idea and by its august practicality, even to the point of earnestly loving and adoring his strictly hypothetical God, and to that of desiring above all things to shape the whole conduct of life and all the springs of action into conformity with that hypothesis. Now to be deliberately and thoroughly prepared to shape one's conduct into conformity with a proposition is neither more nor less than the state of mind called Believing that proposition [CP6.467].

Religious belief could never be a passive matter. Although the whole universe is evolving toward some beautiful ideal, the actual development of the universe partially depends on the roles of each and every agent. It is entirely possible, and obviously quite likely, that many people largely fail to make their lives into ethical works of art. The ideal plan does not guarantee that every agent is an ethical success, although the omega state of the universe will be a beautifully ideal creation that has benefitted from every agents' ethical successes. The universe is a work of art in progress, jointly created by agents and God.

This vision of our reasonable creativity supplies Peirce's attempted solutions to the problem of free will as well as the problem of evil, which we cannot explore here. This vision also explains why people do not automatically understand that they have a detectable connection with God and why they feel separated or ignorant of God.[9] However, people can understand that they are participating in a creative community, that they make a difference, and that they can strive for the greater good. But realizing these things is not automatically a realization that the universal *summum bonum* is thereby advanced, nor that this *summum bonum* has a divine explanation. One can be doing God's work without knowing God, and one can be experiencing "religiously" without having a "religious experience"—a

[8] On theology, semiotics, and theosemiotics see Raposa 1989, 142–54, Ochs 1992, and Corrington 1993, 206–10. For suggestive explorations of the role for semiotics in moral community with God, see Pfeifer 1971 and 1979.

[9] See a discussion of this problem in Ejsing 2006, 140–44 and Pfeifer 1976.

"church invisible" is always a companion to the "church visible." Knowing what one is *actually* doing is always more reasonable than not knowing, so the pursuit of theology is justified in its ultimate capacity to make people more aware of the fuller implications of their conduct. Informed perception of one's true relationship with the universe is precisely the condition encouraged in Peirce's Neglected Argument for God. One's conduct then becomes the means of communing with God.

Communing with God is no private affair, for Peirce. The proximate aim of theology is the communal church, while the ultimate aim is communing with God. For Peirce, these aims are mutually dependent. Lone worshippers could not reach an aloof God, and religious ethics is about conduct in this life, not anything that may happen in an afterlife. But people do not have to wait for direct communing for God, since we are all communing with God already. The only question is the degree to which we realize how we are communing with God, which can further enrich our lives on a higher religious level. This emergent religious attitude is not subservient acquiescence to God's predetermined plan. God is a dynamic ideal of potential conduct, not a static image of reflective mind. Recall how the meaning of an ideal for Peirce is a general practical method, not an image of some specific ultimate aim. The foundation of the agapic community, the one true Catholic Church, is firmly anchored to the co-creation of the lovingly reasonable destiny of the whole universe. God hopes that we all will contribute to a finer future world; God's creation would be less good without us.

No one can pursue a beautifully worthy life on their own. As the social community is a crucial part of each agent's surrounding context, any personal ethics is simultaneously a social ethics, because each agent must take into consideration the reactions of all developing agents who can establish relationships with each other. Due to the fact that the range of social relationships, direct and indirect, is in the long run potentially unlimited, no arbitrary discontinuity between people can be ethically tolerated. Social ethics must be the concern of all humanity working together. Social ethics is a potentially universal ethics, which in turn is religious ethics, and this implies the ideal of a universal church. Paralleling Peirce's insistence that reason can only lead toward one truth—the truth about Reality—he held that intelligent ethics can only lead toward one community—the community with God. Genuine reason can only tend to organically unify; its destiny is not to atomically isolate us. He wrote,

> Like every species of reality, it [religion] is essentially a social, a public affair. It is the idea of a whole church, welding all its members together

> in one organic, systemic perception of the Glory of the Highest—an idea having a growth from generation to generation and claiming a supremacy in the determination of all conduct, private and public [CP6.429].

Actual religions conform in varying degrees to this ideal of the "whole church," yet Peirce expected religion to try even harder to unify faith through the larger religious community. "The higher a religion the more catholic" (CP6.442). The unifying ideal is the divine ideal of perfect universal love. Religion begins in personal experience, but it culminates in the universal church. "Without a church, the religion of love can have but a rudimentary existence; and a narrow, exclusive church is almost worse than none. A great catholic church is wanted" (CP6.443). Christianity has set out on this path, and Peirce credits a few other religions (Stoicism, Buddhism, Confucianism) with centering upon the ideal of love. By this standard of universal love, theological schisms are condemned: "Discountenance as immoral all movements that exaggerate differences, or that go to make fellowship depend on formulas invented to exclude some Christians from communion with others" (CP6.445). Peirce also warns friends of science against setting up yet another pro-science church (CP6.447). Peirce urges moderation, tolerance, and a deliberate pace for everyone.

If Peirce's universal church had a supreme social creed, it might be something like this, quoted from Peirce himself: "Let us endeavor, then, with all our might to draw together the whole body of believers in the law of love into sympathetic unity of consciousness" (CP6.445).

Peirce consistently declared his confidence that his God, God's love, and God's true church are all thoroughly Christian in spirit. Perhaps they are. But they are vague enough to be much more than just Christian, and Peirce himself happily recognized this. The law of love was, as Peirce agrees, "anticipated by the early Egyptians, by the Stoics, by the Buddhists, and by Confucius" (CP6.442). A handful of additional writings and letters by Peirce (quoted in Raposa 1989, 84) approvingly credit Buddhism for its selflessness and stoicism, and for lending inspiration to Christianity.

Taken as a harmonious whole, Peirce's religious ethics is best classified as close to Stoicism, with some Christian language used to express Stoic insights. This classification may have been obscured by Peirce's other divergences away from Stoicism. Scholars have pointed out how Peirce's logic transforms and diverges from much of Stoic logic, and Peirce's metaphysics and panentheism is no repetition of the Stoic worldview. However, Peirce's religious ethics is recognizably Stoic in spirit and execution. Like Stoicism, Peirce locates each person's welfare in rational self-control and mankind's highest good in communal participation with the universe's reasonable design as constructed by a

benevolent God (or gods).[10] Peirce's appeal to the universe's evolving harmonization as the justification for human harmony and community, and his expectation that love and reason find their reconciliation in beautifully intelligent harmony, is also quite Stoic in principle.

As for the type of God needed for this Stoicism, a supernatural theistic God makes a poor match with the degree of intimate evolving community required for ethical co-creativity. Peirce departs widely from Christian theology in order to specify the nature of this kind of ethical community. Nor can any appeal to traditional Christian ethics accomplish this aim, although Peirce borrows the general idea of the universal church. Yet philosophical ethics by itself cannot decide this divine question about forming the ideal community either, as Peirce insisted. We have discussed some good reasons why additional philosophical resources from aesthetics and metaphysics suggest that a dynamic panentheistic God better fulfills the expectations of Peirce's evolutionary cosmos. This vision of a communing God supplies the needed cosmic perspective to indicate the genuine nature of the ethical community in the fullest sense.

While essentially communal, Stoicism has always had an intensely personal side. It is hard to tell how Peirce was personally nourished by his religious beliefs. Even when Peirce composes his own reflections on his religious opinions, they have more of an impersonal and distant tone of observation rather than emotional expression. Only through a few sentences, scattered across essays and letters, can we feel what Peirce felt. Joseph Brent's biography of Peirce recounts his most intensely religious experiences. Peirce's 1892 letter to a Reverend John W. Brown mentions how a divine calling into church for communion "seemed to promise me that I should bear a cross like death for the Master's sake, and he would give me strength to bear it" (quoted in Brent 1998, 18). Peirce gradually became comfortable with mysticism, fostered by direct experience, and this mysticism was a source of strength for him.

In some manuscripts collected together as "Answers to Questions concerning my Belief in God" (c.1906) he mentions his relationship with God, in ways consistent with this Stoic interpretation of his religious ethics. He writes, "God is perpetually creating us, that is developing our real manhood, our spiritual reality. Like a good teacher, He is engaged in detaching us from a False dependence upon Him" (CP6.507). On prayer, Peirce approved of any prayer that increases our

[10] We cannot pursue here the further question of which variety of Stoic theology most closely relates to Peirce. Peirce's views do impact the Stoic debate over the dependence of practical ethics on cosmological knowledge. On Stoicism's theology and ethics see Long 1996, Annas 2007, and Boeri 2009.

strength and calls on God to fulfill only those prayers that are truly best for us (CP6.517). Peirce doubted resurrection and immortality, saying that whatever his destiny upon death, "I simply am content to be in God's hands" (CP6.519). In a 1905 letter Peirce wrote, "the ideal would be to be fulfilling our appropriate offices in the work of creation. Or to come down to the practical, every man sees some task cut out for him. Let him do it, and feel that he is doing what God made him in order that he should do" (CP8.138n).

REFERENCES

Alexander, Gary
1987 "The Hypothesized God of C. S. Peirce and William James." *The Journal of Religion* 67: 304–21.

Anderson, Douglas
1987 *Creativity and the Philosophy of C. S. Peirce*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
1995 *Strands of System: The Philosophy of Charles Peirce*. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press.

Annas, Julia
2007 "Ethics in Stoic Philosophy." *Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy* 52: 58–87.

Boeri, Marcelo
2009 "Does Cosmic Nature Matter? Some Remarks on the Cosmological Aspects of Stoic Ethics." In *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*, edited by Ricardo Salles, 173–200. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brent, Joseph
1998 *Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.

Burks, Arthur W.
1996 "Peirce's Evolutionary Pragmatic Idealism." *Synthese* 106.3: 323–72.

Clayton, Phillip
2008 *Adventures in the Spirit: God, World, and Divine Action*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press.

Cooper, John
2006 *Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic.

Corrington, Robert S.
1993 *An Introduction to C. S. Peirce: Philosopher, Semiotician, and Ecstatic Naturalist*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Deuser, Hermann
1993 *Gott: Geist Und Natur, Theologische Konsequenzen Aus Charles S. Peirce' Religionsphilosophie*. Hamburg: Feliz Meiner.

Ejsing, Anette
2006 *Theology of Anticipation: A Constructive Study of C. S. Peirce*. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock.

Long, A. A.
1996 *Stoic Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mahowald, Mary B.
1976 "Peirce's Concepts of God and Religion." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 12: 367–77.

Ochs, Peter
1992 "Theosemiotics and Pragmatism." *Journal of Religion* 72: 59–81.

Orange, Donna M.
1984 *Peirce's Conception of God: A Developmental Study*. Lubbock, Tex.: Institute for Studies in Pragmatism.

Peirce, Charles Sanders
1931–58 *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. 8 vols. Edited by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur Burkes. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
1995 *Religionsphilosophische Schriften*. Edited by Hermann Deuser. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

Pfeifer, David E.
1971 *The Summum Bonum in the Philosophy of C. S. Peirce*. PhD Diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
1976 "Why God Cannot Be Perceived Directly: A Peircean View." In *Philosophy of Religion and Theology, 1975 Proceedings, American Academy of Religion*, edited by James W. McClendon Jr., 40–48. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press.
1979 "Peirce's Application of Semiotic to God." In *Studies in Peirce's Semiotic*, edited by Kenneth L. Ketner, 89–100. Lubbock, Tex.: Texas Tech University.
1981 "Charles Peirce's Contribution to Religious Thought." In Proceedings of the C. S. Peirce Bicentennial International Congress, edited by Kenneth L. Kenther, 367–73. Lubbock, Tex: Texas Tech University.

Potter, Vincent G.
1996 "'Vaguely Like a Man': The Theism of Charles S. Peirce." In *Peirce's Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Vincent M. Colapietro, 155–68. New York: Fordham University Press.

Raposa, Michael L.
1989 *Peirce's Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.

Slater, Michael
2009 *William James on Ethics and Faith*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, John E.
1952 "Religion and Theology in Peirce." In *Studies in the Philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by Philip Wiener and F. H. Young, 251–67. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.