

## PEIRCE TODAY

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The paper outlines and summarizes the contemporary state of Peircean studies, and sketches briefly the most striking traits of Peirce's intellectual portrait. The author takes up the challenge of placing Peirce in the context of present-day philosophy, but also reflects upon his relationship with the relevant philosophical past, and emphasizes above all the importance of Peirce's so often downplayed sentimentalism for the sake of his recognition as a valuable source of any kind of future's non-reductive naturalism in philosophy. The author moreover argues that Peirce today invites us to read him not so much as a contemporary but as a contributor to philosophy of the day after tomorrow.

**Keywords:** Pragmatism – Sentimentalism – Transformation – Intellectual portrait – Hermeneutics – Non-reductive naturalism

**Introduction.** As difficult as it might be to prove, it seems reasonable to suppose that C. S. Peirce (1839 – 1914) is as widely read and carefully studied today as at any time in the past.<sup>1</sup> His name is quite broadly recognized, his writings intensely studied. Hardly any serious student of philosophy is completely ignorant of him, having read at least one or two essays by Peirce (more likely than not, “The Fixation of Belief” [1877] and “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” [1878]). His name is indeed familiar to many outside of philosophy. Though such a matter is hard (if not impossible) to ascertain, especially with accuracy and certainty, it is likely he is now better understood than ever before. It may even be that, alongside of this, his ideas are also more fundamentally misunderstood and irresponsibly deployed than they ever have been in the past. The reception, comprehension, and appraisal of a thinker by later generations tend never to be of one piece. Even so, this singular genius is truly a living presence on the contemporary scene, in the sense that many of his most central ideas have shaped and continue to shape our intellectual outlook. Despite his influence and stature, there are questions regarding the *availability* of his philosophy (questions to be addressed in this essay). I am using this word broadly, to include the availability of Peirce's voluminous manuscripts, in the form and order in which they were at the time of his death in 1914; that of his thought in the spirit

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<sup>1</sup> Text je skrátenou verziou článku „Peirce Today“, *Pragmatism Today*, Vol.1, No 2, 2010, 7-24, ktorú autor pripravil špeciálne pre toto číslo časopisu *Filozofia*. Vedecká redakcia textu: František Mišina. Článok vychádza s povolením autora (pozn. red.).

in which it was out forth; and (closely related to the sense just noted) that of his thought in its inherent power to facilitate intellectual transformation.

Given the many-sided character of Peirce's intellectual life and also given fundamental disagreements among even his most insightful interpreters, the task of portraying Peirce today is a daunting one. Any attempt to sketch a portrait of C. S. Peirce today, especially within the limits of an essay, must be highly selective and somewhat idiosyncratic. My own inclination is to interpret Peirce's writings in light of their upshot, the most mature phase of his intellectual development (roughly, from 1898 until 1914). This is the phase in which his thought is most profoundly pragmatist, formally semiotic, and still undeniably experimental.

With respect to pragmatism in general and Peirce in particular, the emphasis on today seems appropriate. This is true especially if the present is conceived as the site of an intersection between "a stubborn past and an insistent future," the temporally thick expanse *through which* we are moving (one containing within itself to some degree that *from which* the present has come and also that *toward which* it is moving). The "living present" is, to quote Peirce's "Issues of Pragmaticism," "that Nascent State between the Determinate and the Indeterminate."<sup>2</sup> Attempting to situate Peirce in the present accordingly involves seeing him as an integral part of just such a nascent state. There is in this figure something determinate with which we must come to terms, a degree of secondness resisting our efforts to make this thinker into our puppet or plaything, but also something indeterminate, above all a philosophy *in the making* – thus, one calling for the conscientious exercise of our own theoretical imagination. What is generally true of the living present then is keenly true of the philosophical present – say, a philosopher *today*: "The consciousness of the present ... is that of a struggle over *what shall be*; and thus ... it is *the Nascent State of the Actual*" (CP 5.462; emphasis added). The topic of Peirce today therefore translates into the question, what shall Peirce become here and now? This is only partly a question of what we are able to make of him, for it is also a question of what he is able to make of us.

I at this juncture offer what is most accurately described as an attempt at a sketch of a portrait of Peirce. Such a sketch can only be essayed from one angle of vision. I highlight this point not to give myself license to present only my interpretation of a figure about whom so many others have written insightfully. For one thing, my interpretation is deeply indebted to various other expositors. For another thing, I do not take my interpretation to be simply mine. For such an interpreter, the overarching ideal is obtaining what Peirce himself calls "an interior understanding."<sup>3</sup> Obtaining an interior understanding of

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<sup>2</sup> Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, volume 5 ("Pragmatism and Pragmaticism") edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1934), paragraph #459. Also in *The Essential Peirce* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), volume 2 (1893-1913), edited by the Peirce Edition Project (PEP), p. 358. Cited hereafter as *EP 2*.

<sup>3</sup> *Peirce's Contributions to the Nation*, edited by Kenneth Laine Ketner and James Edward Cook (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech Press, 1975), volume I, page 33.

Peirce's characteristically intricate writings poses formidable challenges. "To read Peirce is," as John E. Smith asserts, "to philosophize, for to follow his arguments it is necessary for the reader himself to be wrestling with the problems Peirce envisaged."<sup>4</sup> Put differently, the reader can be nothing less than a co-inquirer.

In addressing the topic of Peirce today, I am addressing both the current state of Peirce studies and the thought of Peirce itself.<sup>5</sup> Before doing so, however, allow me a word about the context of philosophy today, the context in which my reflections on Peirce today must be situated. From a Peircean perspective, even the best philosophy today is an excessively verbal enterprise.<sup>6</sup> We certainly cannot dispense with words, but words ought to be used by philosophers principally as invocations of experience, occasions for observation. Moreover, philosophy is, despite encouraging developments within the analytic tradition, still an unduly ahistoric (at times, anti historical) discipline,<sup>7</sup> especially when one considers not simply the narrow history of philosophy but the inclusive history of culture.<sup>8</sup> So, too, it tends to be too insular a discipline. Professional philosophers read in an extremely selective manner, very rarely paying serious attention to anyone outside of the hothouse tradition in which they were trained, even more infrequently taking notice of what is going on in other disciplines.

It is far from certain whether Peirce would be more successful in the contemporary academy than he was in that of his own day. It is equally uncertain whether his style or

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<sup>4</sup> John E. Smith, Foreword to Vincent G. Potter's *C. S. Peirce on Norms and Ideals* (New Fordham University Press, 1997), p. xxv.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Anderson, "Old Pragmatisms, New Histories," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, volume 47, number 4 (October 2009), pp. 489-521; also Sami Pihlström, "Peirce's Place in the Pragmatist Tradition," *The Cambridge Companion to Peirce*, edited by Cheryl Misak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 27-57. For an assessment of the latter collection in general, however, see Risto Hilpinen, "Notes on the *Cambridge Companion to Peirce*," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, volume 41, number 4 (Fall 2005), pp. 740-761.

<sup>6</sup> See T. L. Short, "Pierce on Science and Philosophy" in *Philosophical Topics* (2008). 2007; 2008

<sup>7</sup> It is significant that the editors of *Studies in the Logic of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, 1997) – Nathan Houser, Don Roberts, and James Van Evra – selected as an epigram for this collection of essays Augustus De Morgan's claim, "All the men who are now called discoverers, in every matter ruled by thought, have been men versed in the minds of their predecessors, and learned in what had been before them" (*A Budget of Paradoxes*, volume I, p. 5). Though this claim might need to be qualified, it is generally (if in a strict sense universally) true. In any event, it is manifestly true of the logician on whom the essays in this volume are focused. It is certainly noteworthy that, in "Charles Sanders Peirce," Josiah Royce (with W. Fergus Kernan), a scholar of vast erudition, two years after Peirce's death and the very year of his own, considered Peirce to be a philosopher who united very wide knowledge of the history of philosophy with a generally fair-minded disposition to a discriminating criticism of philosophers, and with a capricious, though generally very well restrained interest in philosophical polemic, whose arts he regarded with a general skepticism and pursued with a usual moderation" (*Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, volume 13 [1916], p. 701).

<sup>8</sup> A book such as Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), the exception which proves this rule, makes this painfully clear. He connects philosophical history not only with the broader intellectual currents but also the fine arts, religious developments, political upheavals, and even subtle shifts in everyday life.

manner of philosophizing would be more congenial or acceptable to our contemporaries than his own. Neither of these points necessarily speaks against Peirce. He was and remains an unsettling philosopher even more than a difficult personality. In honestly confronting the challenge of his thought, we realize that continuing with business as usual is in many respects unjustifiable. As much as anything else, it means taking up anew the task of instituting a cooperative inquiry in which selfless concern for attaining a rational consensus about difficult questions is more than an irrational hope. In light of such considerations, we are forced to conclude that the institutions and disciplines of our own day are likely no more welcoming to Peirce than those of his own. We might conclude from this, so much the worse for these institutions and disciplines!

But, then, Peirce did not seek disciples. He sought co-inquirers, philosophers who were animated by a contrite sense of their own fallibility but also a high sense in the possibility of *our* efforts to attain knowledge. Such faith is just that – faith – and in order for it to flourish it must be conjoined to hope and love. The texts in which Peirce expounds this doctrine are worthy of quoting at length. In his judgment, logicality inexorably requires that our interests shall *not* be limited. They must not stop at our own fate, but must embrace the whole community. This community, again, must not be limited, but must extend to all races of beings with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation. It must reach, however vaguely, beyond this geological epoch, beyond all bounds. He who would not sacrifice his own soul to save the world, is, as seems to me, illogical in all his inferences, collectively. Logic is rooted in the social principle.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to this but also to our faith in our colleagues and, indeed, the possibility of our efforts and sacrifices converging with theirs to further our common undertaking, “there is nothing in the facts to forbid our having a *hope*, or calm and cheerful wish, that the community may last beyond any assignable date” (*CP* 2.654; also *EP* 1, 150). There is nothing in the facts to preclude the hope that our communal endeavor will approximate its defining objective before all potential members of this inclusive community are obliterated. Of course, Peirce is aware of how odd or even implausible his position must sound, especially to tough-minded thinkers. He readily concedes: “*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 an unlimited continuance of intellectual activity, *as indispensable requirements of logic*” (*CP* 2.655; also *EP* 1, 150; emphasis added). But, he argues, this becomes plausible when we consider logic in the light of its service to inquiry (indeed, logic as a theory of inquiry, more precisely, as a normative theory of objective investigation<sup>10</sup>): Yet, when we consider that

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<sup>9</sup> “The Doctrine of Chances” in *Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, volume 2, edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1932), paragraph #654 (*CP* 2.654); also in *The Essential Peirce*, volume 1 (1867-1893), edited by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 149 (*EP* 2, 149). What is especially salient in terms of the point being made is that Peirce argues for these points in the context of an otherwise highly technical discussion of induction.

<sup>10</sup> By *objective inquiry* I simply mean that process of discovering what we do not know, ranging-

logic depends on a mere struggle to escape doubt, which as it terminates, must begin in emotion, and that, furthermore, the only cause of our planting ourselves on reason is that other methods of escaping doubt [i.e., other modes of investigation] fail on account of the social impulse [see, e.g., “The Fixation of Belief,” specifically *CP* 5.378-381, also in *EP* 1, 116-118], why should we wonder to find social sentiment presupposed in reasonings?<sup>11</sup>

The theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity<sup>12</sup> are thus transfigured by Peirce into logical sentiments indispensable for the conscientious pursuit of experimental inquiry (the only form of inquiry in which our way of proceeding exposes itself to the radical risk of fundamental error). The pursuit of knowledge and even knowledge itself are accordingly definable only in reference to an array of virtues.<sup>13</sup> In this respect as so many others, Peirce anticipated later developments, not least of all what is called today “virtue epistemology.”

Ideally, the reality of community – hence, that of the community of inquirers – is the concrete, growing embodiment of nothing less than faith, hope, and *caritas*. Actually, the community of inquirers is never anything more than a motley association of more or less companionable antagonists disposed to challenge, question, and refute one another. On countless occasions, however, the exchanges of these antagonists exemplify the exercise of the virtues requisite for discovering the truth. But the danger is always that such an association will provide little or nothing more than occasions for displays of cleverness, at

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from the discovery of singular facts (e.g., where I misplaced my keys or who broke into my house) to that of laws. We not only undertake such inquiries but also we are in countless instances successful (I occasionally do find my keys, scientists sometimes hit upon the laws governing what we observe). Arguably the most succinct and accurate overview of this part of Peirce’s contribution to philosophy is Elizabeth Cooke’s *Peirce’s Pragmatic Theory of Inquiry: Fallibilism and Indeterminacy* (London: Continuum, 2006). Of course Cheryl Misak’s *Truth and the End of Inquiry* and other writings as well as Susan Haack’s expositions are very valuable resources, but better known ones – hence, my desire to make a point of stressing the value of Cooke’s study.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 10 (“Doubt: Affective States and the Regulation of Inquiry” in Christopher Hookway’s *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Peirce explicitly takes note of the correlation or coincidence (i.e., co-occurrence): “It interests me to note that these three sentiments seem to be pretty much the same as the famous trio of Charity, Faith, and Hope, which, in the estimation of St. Paul, are the finest and greatest of spiritual gifts. Neither Old nor New testament is a textbook of the logic of science, but the latter is certainly the highest existing authority in regard to the dispositions of heart which a man ought to have” (*CP* 2.654; or *EP* 1, 150-151).

<sup>13</sup> “The most vital factors in the method of modern science,” Peirce insists, “have not been the following of this or that logical prescription – although these have had their value too – but they have been the moral factors” (*CP* 7.86; cf. *CP* 2.82). It is instructive to recall what Peirce judges to be foremost among these factors: “First of these has been the genuine love of truth and conviction that nothing else could long endure” (ibid.). Cf. Susan Haack, “The First Rule of Reason” in *The Rule of Reason: The Philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by Jacqueline Brunning and Paul Forster (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 241-\_\_\_’ also her “Concern for Truth: What It Means, Why It Matters” in *The Flight from Science and Reason*, edited by Paul R. Gross, Norman Levitt, and Martin W. Lewis (NY: New York Academy of Sciences, 1996), pp. 57-63.

the expense of others. When the youthful Peirce wrote of “the inhumanity of the polemical spirit.”<sup>14</sup> (W 1, 5), it is likely he wrote with a fuller wisdom than he consciously or personally possessed. When motley associations of companionable antagonists degenerate into predominantly polemical affairs, we witness not only the degradation of humanity but also the disfigurement of inquiry, at least in the Peircean sense. This most tough-minded of philosophers was also a tender-hearted person: he was, in his own words, a sentimental conservative.<sup>15</sup> The work of inquiry is, for such a conservative, indissociable from the cultivation of certain sentiments, indeed from the acquisition of certain virtues.

If the technical, formal side of Peirce is allowed to eclipse the human, moral side, then Peirce in his unsettling otherness, his irreducible singularity, will be unavailable to us today, above all, to us in our efforts to re-institute philosophical investigation as an experimental undertaking in which the discovery of novel truth is the soul of the entire endeavor. Unquestionably, the technical, formal side of this thinker deserves painstaking, critical attention. For the most part, it is almost certainly the side most worthy of our consideration (the theoretical or intellectual obstacles, as distinct from the emotional and cultural ones, are here the most formidable). Given the inherent difficulty of the intricate issues with which Peirce was preoccupied (e.g., continuity, meaning, and reality), also given his novel approach to these challenging topics, this side ought to be one to which minute scholarship and philosophical imagination are devoted. My only caution is that our understandable fascination with the theoretical intricacies and challenges of this side of Peirce not be allowed to thrust completely from view Peirce the avowed sentimentalist.

The simple fact (albeit for some the uncomfortable fact) is Peirce was an avowed sentimentalist and, in attempting to sketch his portrait, this aspect deserves to be highlighted, especially at a time when sentimentalism is among philosophers and other intellectuals in such disrepute. His sentimentalism is an attempt to give sentiments, emotions, and feelings their due, to grant in our philosophical accounts the affective dimension of human life the status and indeed centrality this dimension exhibits in our experience and practices.<sup>16</sup>

**A Philosopher’s Philosopher.** The strictly philosophical stature of Peirce today is more secure, his influence more pervasive and profound, his leading ideas more carefully explicated and accurately understood, than at any time before our own. The publication of a critical edition, although far from completion, has contributed greatly to this state of affairs. Especially since the time of the founding of the Charles S. Peirce Society in 1965, there has been a cumulative growth in the critical understanding of this singular genius. This is not to slight the work prior to the founding of this Society. In addition, the sesqui-

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<sup>14</sup> *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), volume 1, p. 5. Hereafter cited, as is customary, as *W 1*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*. Also Haack

<sup>16</sup> In one place, he goes so far as to assert, “those things which are own hearts assure us are true, – such as the doctrine of love” (*MS 862*).

centennial celebration in 1989 of his birth did much to focus and solidify this growth, while the forthcoming centennial commemoration in 2014 of his death promises to accomplish nothing less than this with respect to the developments since 1989.

A philosopher's philosopher is nonetheless a theorist's temptation. Accordingly, theoretically inclined representatives of other disciplines and discourses (e.g., sociology, anthropology, linguistics, history, literary theory, and cultural studies) have been and will continue to be inclined to enlist Peirce's services in advancing their fields of study. The uses to which Peirce has been put will not necessarily accord with either the spirit of the letter of his writings. But the uses most in accord with Peirce's aspirations and aims are not necessarily those determined by philosophers, in particular, by contemporary philosophers (and, among these, by philosophers who all too often all too slight and superficial acquaintance with the history of their own discipline). Consequently, philosophers have in this context no right to be proprietary (at least to be presumptively proprietary), especially since Peirce was always more than a philosopher. Peirce does not belong to them. There is in my judgment no better characterization of him than that of experimentalist: he was a thinker devoted to trying out new ideas, thus to testing ideas in terms of their experimental consequences. As a result, he was more interested in opening fields of inquiry (think here of his study of signs or logic of vagueness) than in presenting in systematic form the certain conclusions of past investigations. He designed his classification of sciences as an *instrument* of inquiry. The same must be said of his theory of signs. Indeed, this is as true of any of his doctrines. Consider, for example, his *synechism* or doctrine of continuity. Synechism is first and foremost a principle of methodology. In other words, Peirce's principal preoccupation was with the logic of discovery, not the logic of exposition – truths not yet known, not truth already captured and tagged. He judged philosophers in this own day to be excessively antiquarian – insufficiently inquisitive.

Peirce tended to identify himself simply as a logician<sup>17</sup> and Peirce the logician has been carefully studied by a number of trained and indeed gifted logicians. Peirce also was keen to identify himself as a scientist, insisting that he had his mind molded by his life in the laboratory" (CP 5. 411; also in EP 2, 331). *Peirce's Scientific Metaphysics: The Philosophy of Chance Law, and Evolution* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002) by Andrew Reynolds is one of the most important contributions to Peirce scholarship in recent decades. But the "laboratory life did not prevent the writer [i.e., Peirce] ... from becoming interested in methods of thinking" (CP 5.412; also in EP 2, 332). Quite the opposite, such a life made of Peirce above all else a philosopher preoccupied with questions regarding methods of inquiry, though hardly indifferent to the specific discoveries made concerning substantive issues. He characterized himself as "a life long student of reasonings" (CP 3.415). This specific facet has also received considerable attention by some of his very best expositors (e.g., Haack, Short, Ransdell, Ketner, Delaney, and

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<sup>17</sup> This is somewhat misleading since what he meant by *logic* is wider than what is customarily designated by this term. In Peirce's writings it often signifies nothing less than the theory of signs (or semeiotic) in its entirety. Cf. Fisch, *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Peirce*.

Hookway). In this regard, the work of Cheryl Misak and Peter Skagestad is also helpful. There is however a tendency on the part of analytically trained philosophers to fit Peirce to contemporary concerns and debates rather than re-envisioning the possibility of transforming contemporary philosophy in light of Peircean ideas. Misak mostly avoids doing so, but not entirely. The bid to make Peirce respectable to mainstream philosophy is, at once, admirable and risky: he certainly deserves a hearing from those who are part of what is in obvious respects are the best trained and most rigorous professional philosophers today, but *he* deserves a hearing (i.e., he does not deserve to be trimmed to the fashions of the day). This invites us to reflect on what I am inclined to identify as the availability of Peirce's philosophy.

**The availability of Peirce today.** For reasons quite apart from Peirce being a philosopher's philosopher, his thought is still not optimally available to us today. As paradoxical as this might sound, I want to stress the degree to which Peirce's philosophy is unavailable to us at present. It is illuminating to explore why this is the case. In framing the matter in this manner – in focusing on the availability of Peirce's thought – I am following the example of an essay by Stanley Cavell ("The Availability of the Later Wittgenstein"). "It is a vision as simple as it is difficult. ... To attempt the work of *showing* its simplicity [and thereby its difficulty] would be a real step in making available Wittgenstein's later philosophy." (Cavell, 52). What Cavell asserts regarding Wittgenstein I am disposed to claim regarding Peirce: "The first thing to be said in accounting for his style is that he *writes*: he does not report, he does not write up results." (70). "Nobody would forge a style so personal [or so forbidding] who had not wanted and needed to find the right expression for his thought" (ibid.). If anyone supposes that this comparison to the later Wittgenstein is strained or implausible, that individual should consider Peirce's self-revelation: "what I write is done in the process of forming a conception" (*MS* 339). In other words, writing was for Peirce, as it was for Wittgenstein, not a means of reporting what he had discovered, but a process of discovery.

First of all, Peirce's writings are still not available to us. Despite the herculean effort of the Peirce Edition Project for a number of decades, the boxes of manuscripts acquired by Harvard University in 1914 from his widow Juliette<sup>18</sup> are now in greater disarray and incompleteness than they were at the time of that acquisition. Put otherwise, the manuscripts acquired by Harvard in 1914 are not exactly those possessed by us today.

The principal reason is that the spirit in which his texts are to be interpreted is the same spirit from which they flow. This spirit is experimentalism, one inclusive of fallibilism. But professional philosophers tend to hanker for deductive argumentation and conceptual closure far more than experimental proof and heuristic fecundity. Another

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<sup>18</sup> See Victor F. Lenzen, "Reminiscences of a Mission to Milford, Pennsylvania." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 1, 1 (Spring 1965), 3-11. This is the first article in the inaugural issue of this important journal. It is an account of Lenzen's visit to Milford, Pennsylvania, in behalf of Harvard to acquire Peirce's papers and library from Juliette.



reason is that the love of truth tends so often to be displaced by the love of notoriety or that of vainglory. Yet another reason is that the work of philosophers is carried out at too great a distance from the work of scientists (and this implies not only at too far a remove from the spirit of science but also a detailed familiarity with some of the best work in contemporary science). Professional philosophy is too often marred, if not destroyed, by vainglorious polemics.

The gulf between mainstream philosophy and the Peircean project, however, is not as wide as these considerations might be taken to imply. Making Peirce's thought available to us today practically means exposing ourselves to the radical risks of experimental inquiry. It means according observation, experience, and experimentation a much more prominent role in philosophical discourse than they tend to exhibit today. It involves being open and willing to learn to ask different questions than the ones we are accustomed to raise far more than seeking in his texts answers to our questions. The history of philosophy *is* a resource for insights and even answers to contemporary questions. But its deeper value is to explode the insular present, exposing our contemporary modes of query<sup>59</sup> to the potentially disorienting forces of alternative perspectives,

A candid look at the actual history of American pragmatism reveals something startling. Pragmatism was even in its inaugural phase more than an American philosophy. After all, the role accorded by Peirce to the Scottish psychologist Alexander Bain is quite telling here. On more than one occasion, Peirce recalled that "a skillful lawyer"<sup>19</sup> and spirited member of the Metaphysical Club, Nicholas St. John Green, urged upon Peirce and the other members "the importance of applying Bain's definition of belief, as 'that upon which a man is prepared to act.' From this definition, pragmatism is scarce more than a corollary; so that I am disposed to think of him [Bain] as the grandfather of pragmatism" (CP 5.12).<sup>20</sup> Also, his genealogy of pragmatism is instructive. In one place (and there is no possibility of here quoting anything but one text), Peirce acknowledges: "Socrates bathed in these waters. Aristotle rejoices when he can find them. They run, where least one would expect them, beneath the dry rubbish-heaps of Spinoza" (CP 5.11). Here he also mentions John Locke, Immanuel Kant, George Berkeley, and Auguste Comte. Of equal importance, pragmatism in its Jamesian re-inauguration in 1898 was very quickly an international movement. Pragmatism today is as vibrantly represented in Finland, Italy, Germany, and other countries as in US.

To repeat, Peirce today is an international figure. For me, this is an occasion for celebration. One reason for this is that Peirce provides invaluable resources for developing a non-reductive naturalism. His philosophy invites – indeed, demands – interrogation of the limits of the naturalism for which his voluminous writings provide such indispensable

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<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy that today the resurgence of pragmatism includes a number of trained lawyers who are also legal theorists, most notably Richard Posner, Michael Sullivan, and Kory Spencer Sorrell. Of these, Sorrell is the one most deeply acquainted with Peircean pragmatism and indeed indebted in his own thinking to this particular pragmatist.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (Third Edition), chapter 11, p. 505.

resources. As unfashionable or embarrassing as Peirce's traditional theism makes many of his contemporary followers or readers (that is, *us* today), it helps us avoid being smug or, worse, militant naturalists who paint religion as never anything but malicious folly and who portray believers as (at best) benighted fools. Matters are, at least from a Peircean perspective, more complex and undecidable than this.

**Conclusion.** In many circles, the resurgence of pragmatism has not entailed a renewal of interest in Peirce.<sup>21</sup> Critics of neo-pragmatism as often as neo-pragmatists themselves can be quite dismissive of Peirce. Peirce's "contribution to philosophy was," in Rorty's judgment, merely to have given it a name, and to have stimulated James." Saving the world is unquestionably a praiseworthy undertaking. Undertaking to do so by talking to other philosophers however hardly seems to be the most effective way of achieving or even simply approximating one's objective. The growing community of Peirce scholars runs mostly, at least strikingly, parallel to the contemporary resurgence of the pragmatist perspective. There are of course intersections. Richard J. Bernstein is, for example, a contemporary pragmatist who is intimately knowledgeable of the main currents in contemporary thought, including neo- and paleopragmatism. While the main focus of his concern tends to be social and political philosophy, he is anything but dismissive of Peirce.

Peirce today invites us to read him not so much as a contemporary but as a contributor to philosophy the day after tomorrow.<sup>22</sup> If we are to go beyond Peirce, we first have to catch up to him.<sup>23</sup> Peirce today is still a philosopher who outdistances us, one whom we are yet trying to overtake.

Peirce was in some respects benighted and arguably even worse.<sup>24</sup> But he was also a

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<sup>21</sup> This is of course not true of Richard J. Bernstein, from whom I have borrowed this expression. See "The Resurgence of Pragmatism," *Social Research* 59, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 813–40. For my critique of Bernstein's re-narration of the development of American pragmatism, see "Engaged Pluralism: Between Alterity and Sociality" in *The Pragmatic Century: Conversations with Richard J. Bernstein*, edited by Sheila Greve Davaney and Warren Frisina (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), pp. 39–68.

<sup>22</sup> "As philosophy finds its footing in this new millennium, there is," Nathan Houser wrote in 2005, "some reason to suppose that Peirce will play a larger role in setting its course than anyone would have expected during most of the half-century that followed the 1951 publication of Quine's 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'" ("Peirce in the 21st Century" in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, volume 41, number 4 [Fall 2005], p. 729. Friedrich Nietzsche. Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Harvard University Press).

<sup>23</sup> In the Preface to *Peirce and Contemporary Thought: Philosophical Inquiries* (NY: Fordham University Press, 1995), K. L. Ketner astutely notes: "While the ideas of honoring pioneers and of seeking further progress surely appeal to all scientific intelligences, it is poor economy of research to dash ahead without being fully aware of the progress made by one's ancestors. That is to say, how can we go beyond Peirce if we have not yet caught up to the waypoints he reached? That Peirce was ahead of his time, and in some respects is still ahead of our time, is a theme one finds recurring in serious Peirce scholarship" (p. xi).

<sup>24</sup> Even given the standards of his day, it is impossible for me not to cringe when I read in one of his letters to Victoria Lady Welby: "Being a convinced Pragmaticist in Semeiotic, naturally and neces-

philosophical genius and (in some respects) heroic individual, a thinker more profoundly a *pragmatist* than many pragmatists today realize or appreciate.<sup>25</sup> One way in which this is evident is in terms of one of his principal philosophical preoccupations, the clarification of meaning. In what might strike some students of pragmatism as surprising, Peirce insists:

When one seeks to know what is meant by physical force, and finds that it is a real component acceleration of defined amount and direction that would exist whatever the original velocity, it is possible to press the question further and inquire what the meaning of acceleration is; and the answer to this must show that it is a habit of the person who predicates an acceleration, supposing him to use the term as others do. *For ordinary purposes, however, nothing is gained by carrying the analysis so far; because these ordinary commonsense concepts of everyday life, having guided the conduct of men ever since the race was developed, are by far more trustworthy than the exacter concepts of science; so that when great exactitude is not required they are the best terms of definition.* (*EP 2*, 433; emphasis added).

His writings from 1898 to his death in 1914, many of them not yet available in print, reveal as thoroughgoing and subtle a form of pragmatism as anyone has to date articulated and defended. He was moreover more radically an *experimentalist* than most philosophers today acknowledge or even glimpse. His indefatigable efforts to institute philosophy as a cooperative inquiry have done little to help transform the discipline of philosophy into a science. But is such a transformation either possible or even desirable?<sup>26</sup> Even if philosophy can never be transformed into a science – even if philosophy must always be an unruly family of barely coordinated discourses – it might nonetheless become more deeply and minutely experimental than it is today. Finally, Peirce was more of a *philosopher* than most contemporary philosophers are, since he was devoted to offering nothing less than a comprehensive account of the empirical world. For him such an account should take the form of an evolutionary cosmology.<sup>27</sup> But, as pursued by him, it involved an indefatigable

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sarily nothing can appear to be sillier than rationalism; and folly in politics cannot go further than English liberalism. The people ought to be enslaved; only the slaveholders ought to practice the virtues that alone can maintain their rule.” *Semiotics and Significs*, edited by Charles S. Hardwick (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 78. The same is true when I read: “f they were to come to know me better they might learn to think me ultraconservative. I am, for example, an old-fashioned christian, a believer in the efficacy of prayer, an opponent of female suffrage and of universal male suffrage, in favor of letting business methods develop without the interference of law, a disbeliever in democracy, etc.” etc. (MS 645).

<sup>25</sup> Before I die I intend to write an essay entitled “Peirce *Was* a Pragmatist,” addressed primarily to those pragmatists who disparage Peirce *as a pragmatist*.

<sup>26</sup> Vincent M. Colapietro, “Transforming Philosophy into a Science: Debilitating Chimera or Realizable Desideratum?” in *ACPQ*, volume LXXII, number 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 245-278. Mats Bergman. Also Short, “Peirce on Science and Philosophy”

<sup>27</sup> In “The Architecture of Theories” (1891), the inaugural essay in a series of articles in *The Monist* outlining his cosmology, Peirce asserts, “philosophy requires thorough-going evolutionism or none” (*Collected Papers*, volume 6, #14 [CP 6.14]). While Peirce was a thoroughgoing evolutionist, he was in

effort to bring to methodological self-consciousness the most effective procedures by which the most reliable account of the empirical world is attainable

But Peirce truly was a pragmatist, in a principled and profound sense. The last years of his life his mind was on fire.<sup>28</sup> The oxygen feeding the blaze flowed from the various windows thrown open by a tireless investigator animated by a pragmatist sensibility. “The effect of pragmatism here is,” according to Peirce, “simply to open our minds to receiving any [relevant] evidence, not to furnish evidence” (CP 8.259). While Peirce was more than a pragmatist, everything else he was must be interpreted in reference to his pragmatism. He was a thoroughgoing anti-reductionist, so it would be especially ironic to reduce Peirce to nothing more than a pragmatist. But it would be equally ironic to deny him the title he more than anyone else deserves. What he wrote of semeiotic (he declared in a letter to Victoria Lady Welby that he was *a convinced Pragmaticist* in Semeiotic) might with equal justice be written of his other doctrines and undertakings.

From Peirce’s perspective, theory is a form of practice but it has an integrity and character of its own, so that it is not identifiable with (or reducible to) what we ordinarily call “practice.”<sup>29</sup> Though often not recognized, the deconstruction of the dualism between theory and practice is as much a part of Peirce’s project as it is of those of James or Dewey. There are without question occasions when he appears to draw an excessively sharp distinction between theory and practice, but what is all too seldom noticed is that he is doing so in order to protect the integrity of theory as an especially precarious and vulnerable form of human practice (all the more so in a culture deformed by its worship of “business” and practicality. In any event, Peirce in his own way grants primary to practice. Our loftiest theories presupposes instinctual attunement to the natural world: they are rooted in, and hence grow out of, our practical involvements, even though they in critical respects secure a functional autonomy from these immediate entanglements.

In the writings of Peirce, then, we encounter not only a nuanced formulation of the pragmatist position but also finely elaborated approaches to nothing less than phenomenology, a normative theory of objective inquiry, a theory of signs, and an evolutionary cosmology. In addition, we find a subtle defensibility of traditional theism and, what is likely to be of greater interest to contemporary philosophers, invaluable resources for articulating non-reductive naturalism in accord with recent developments in various sciences. Whether these doctrines cohere is of course a matter of ongoing debate. But philosophy today might benefit from more fully confronting Peirce in at least some of these respects.

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some respects a half-hearted Darwinian. See Philip P. Wiener, *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism*

<sup>28</sup> I borrow this expression from Robert D. Richardson’s biography, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). But it is as applicable to Peirce, especially during culminating phase of his intellectual life, as to Emerson.

<sup>29</sup> See H. S. Thayer, *Meaning and Action: A Critical Study of Pragmatism*; also Short, *Peirce’s Theory of Signs*; Bergman, “Experience, Purpose, and the Value of Vagueness,” *Communication Theory*, 19, 248-77; and Douglas R. Anderson, *Strands of System: The Philosophy of Charles Peirce* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1995)

This becomes manifest when we candidly assess where we stand today. Our understanding of nature is even today rather superficial and fragmentary.<sup>30</sup> In addition, our comprehension of our own status as natural beings is no less so. Finally, the question of God remains, as a question, at least as elusive and controversial as it has been in previous epochs of our intellectual history. There are nonetheless evident at every turn various attempts to address questions concerning nature, humanity, and divinity in a manner akin to Charles Peirce's experiential approach to philosophical issues. Those engaged in these queries might benefit from the hypotheses put forth by Peirce. But, in order to do so, these hypotheses and the context in which they make sense need to be made more available than they are today. Peirce today remains not only a somewhat elusive genius but also a somewhat unavailable author. His unavailability is, in part, the result of historical contingencies, in part that of his own personal shortcomings, and arguably in largest measure the result of *our* intellectual biases. We presume to have surpassed our ancestors. We tend to judge them by our standards and achievements, not stopping long enough to consider whether we on occasion ought not to subject ourselves to judgment in light of their norms and accomplishments. But this presumption is, in the case of a thinker such as Peirce, unwarranted. This tendency to judge others,<sup>31</sup> without subjecting ourselves to their judgment, is in this instance worse than arrogant. It can only result in our impoverishment or worse – our stultification.

Of course Peirce's thought is today not completely unavailable to us (far from it), especially if we are willing to interpret it in the spirit in which it was put forth and, in addition, if we are industrious enough to consult his unpublished manuscripts. This practically means that his thought will be available to the community of inquirers "only through the mediations and translations" of those who have devoted themselves to interpreting Peirce in the manner in which he most fervently desired to be read. If we can elevate ourselves to such a hermeneutic, then his presence as a co-inquirer can increasingly become a critical force and the relevance of his writings to our undertakings can acquire an ever sharper cutting edge. And if we can do *this* then the possibility of transforming philosophy and, more generally, advancing inquiry in a number of fields becomes neither infinitely distant nor utterly fantastic. Peirce today is, as much as anything else, a set of questions – not least of all, the question of what his thought shall yet be and, inseparably tied to this, the question of how our encounters with his writings might re-make us in surprising ways (that is, the question of who *we* might yet become). Given the cumulative

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<sup>30</sup> Peirce was disposed to stress just own minuscule and fragmentary is our knowledge of nature and all else, including our individual selves. "But, in point of fact, notwithstanding all that has been discovered since Newton's time, his saying that we are little children picking up pretty pebbles on the beach while the whole ocean lies before us," Peirce urges, "remains substantially as true as ever, and will do so though we shovel up the pebbles by steam shovels and carry them off in carloads" (*CP* 1.117). To underscore the paucity of our knowledge, in his estimation, he adds: "An infinitesimal ratio may be multiplied indefinitely and remain infinitesimal still" (*ibid.*)

<sup>31</sup> Regarding this tendency, it is not inappropriate to recall Peirce's own sage remark: "But a stay-at-home conscience does the most to render the world inhabitable" (*CP* 8.163).

growth of our understanding and appreciation of Peirce's singular accomplishment, however, we have some sense of how these questions should be answered. If Peirce is taken to serve as an exemplar for how to conduct our inquiries, then we ought to strive to conjoin "speculative audacity" and contrite fallibility, logical rigor and unembarrassed sentimentalism, self-control and self surrender, the cultivated naiveté of aesthetic perception and the disciplined generalizations of mathematical imagination,<sup>87</sup> the demand for experiential concreteness and the need for formal classification, the precision of abstract definition and the greater adequacy of pragmatic clarification, finally, painstaking treatment of particular questions and an orienting sense of the intimate connections among our various endeavors.

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