

The Many Faces of Pragmaticism: Peircean Semiotics as a Methodological Bridge between Science, Philosophy, and Religion

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Abstract: *Reconciling the many “faces” of Peirce – the Scientist, Philosopher, and Metaphysician - helps to make sense of the open-endedness and versatility of semiotics. Semiosis, for Peirce, knows no rigid hermeneutic or disciplinary bounds. It thus forces us to be open to interdisciplinary and holistic inquiries. The pragmatic maxim sets limits on metaphysical speculation, but it also legitimates the extension of the experimentalist method into cosmological, metaphysical, and even religious domains.*

1. Introduction: the opposite poles of inquiry

Charles Sanders Peirce is widely recognised for his contributions to philosophy, logic, and semiotics. His metaphysical and religious views, on the other hand, are usually either neglected or treated with suspicion. To many of his defenders, they are a source of downright embarrassment. Indeed, from the beginning, “Peirce’s cosmology was looked at by most people as a sort of white elephant: Perhaps it exists, but why care about such a strange creature?” (Pape, 1984: 209) Up to our own time, these aspects of his thought have been mostly ignored and ridiculed, with the important exception of scholars like Pape (1984, 1997) and Brier (2008). Following the line of inquiry of such scholars, this paper argues that Peircean cosmology - at least in its *intention*, if not always in *execution* - matters both for Peirce scholarship and the refinement of open-ended semiotic theory. It suggests pathways for semiotics as a unifying, transdisciplinary “bridge” between isolated and discrete domains of human inquiry. More specifically, it may help to foster dialogue and communication between science and religion. And while Peirce’s cosmological ambition seems outmoded, this is no excuse not to take it seriously. The Peircean quest for the semiotic-logical integration of human inquiry, from the gutter to the stars, from the scientist’s experiments to the mystic’s ecstatic visions, remains a dream worth pursuing.

Peirce was a prolific author who tackled various subjects in the course of his life. He was not only interested in the diversity of research topics, disciplines, and methodologies, but also of human characters, attitudes, and habits. This diversity manifests even in a single individual in a single lifetime, and even more so in complex, diverse human societies. Peirce’s own published writings reveal multiple preoccupations and personalities (or, excuse the pun, *Peirce-onalities*¹): scientist, philosopher, logician, pragmatist, semiotician, metaphysician, even mystic... This multiplicity is helpfully highlighted by his biographer, Joseph Brent:

“At the same time that he thought of himself as a first-rate, tough-minded, anti-metaphysical experimental scientist, he perceived the logic of science as leading to a realist metaphysics. Peirce often thought of his life as the joining of these two strands of his thinking in a search for the right guess (or hypothesis) to explain the constitution of the universe. Into this attempt to unify what most of his scientific peers thought to be at *the opposite poles of inquiry*, Peirce poured many of his talents and, above all, his enormous capacity for work.” (Brent, 1993: 18, my italics)

¹ Peirce was quite fond of puns involving his name. Brent (1993: 16) mentions that he characterised himself as having plenty of “Peirce-istence” and “Peirce-everance”.

Is it possible to integrate Peirce's different scientific, philosophical, semiotic, and even mystical interests together? Or are they, in fact, pulling in hopelessly contradictory directions? In order to answer this question, I analyse Peirce on a schematic (and rather speculative) *continuum of character types, roles, and positions*. In the Peircean triadic spirit, I focus on *three* prominent “faces” of Peirce: *Peirce-the-Scientist*, *Peirce-the-Philosopher*, and *Peirce-the-Metaphysician*. This is not intended as a reified, deterministic account of *Peirce-the-man*. I offer these categories as pragmatic tools for understanding the complexities, aporias, internal tensions, and open-ended possibilities of Peircean semiotics. Rather than seeing the different faces of Peirce as fixed psychological attitudes, they are better seen as different *masks* that correspond to different *character types* and *habits of inquiry*. Some people wear different masks out of sheer habit. Others do so because this enables them to do (and believe) different things. Peirce understood the utility of having access to a capacious collection of masks, and their corresponding character types, that facilitate critical human inquiry. While Peirce was especially fond of donning the identity of the laboratory scientist, he left room in his wardrobe for other useful masks, or faces, as well. It is important to understand why this is so. My analysis of the many faces of Peirce serves two analytical purposes: *biographical-exegetical* and *semiotic-hermeneutic*. On the one hand, it illuminates the pluralistic contours of Peirce’s life and thought. On the other hand, it illustrates the cosmic scope of Peircean semiotics as an open-ended, productive enterprise. It thus challenges narrowly scientific or otherwise one-sided readings of what semiotics is “really” about.

I take these different “faces” or “masks” of Peirce as capturing some systematic continuities and discontinuities in his *oeuvre*. My approach is partly inspired by Peirce’s own frequent categorizations of character-types. In *The Scientific Attitude and Fallibilism*, he divides people into “three classes:” artists, practical people, and scientific people. (Peirce, 2022: 42) He strongly self-identified as a “scientific” person. This corresponds to the ideal type of the “experimentalist” whose “disposition is to think of everything just as everything is thought of in the laboratory, that is, as a question of experimentation.” (Peirce, 2022: 251) But this leaves out his many other self-identifications. These do not *contradict* his scientific nature but *complement* it. In highlighting these, I hope to elucidate some core issues, topics, problematics, and continuities in Peirce’s output.² I do not claim to have discovered the “real” or “final” Peirce.

Peirce was quite self-conscious about the existence of different “isms” fuelling his quest for a comprehensive logical-metaphysical system. For example, while he ultimately rejected Hegelianism, he was attracted to its metaphysical impetus. And while he never fully embraced Emersonian transcendentalism, he acknowledged its indirect influence.³ And in a self-parodying passage from his early student days, he writes: “List Of Horrid Things I Am: Realist, Materialist, Transcendentalist, Idealist.” (quoted by Brent, 1993: 58) This quote, while somewhat facetious (and partially precisely for that reason), helps to track down the multifaceted sign “Peirce” as a sum of sundry influences and interests, pulled into different, seemingly contradictory directions. This continuum from experimentalism to metaphysics - and from science to spirituality - reflects the many faces, or masks, of Peirce that we must face. Doing so clarifies the internal logic of Peirce’s system and, more than that, helps to make sense of the *open-endedness*, *versatility*, and *methodological promise* of semiotics as a *hermeneutic bridge* between divergent domains of inquiry.

In **section 2**, I explore Peirce as a representative of the scientific character type. In **section 3**, I show how philosophical inquiry emerges out of Peircean scientific inquiry and, in turn, gives birth to metaphysical speculation. In **section 4**, I show how Peircean metaphysical inquiry, infused with the scientific method, leads semiotics into the domain of religion, mysticism, and perennial philosophy. **Section 5** concludes.

2. Peirce as Scientist (Experimentalist)

In *The Essence of Pragmatism*, Peirce gives a striking account of himself as a person of the “experimentalist” type who has a “disposition is to think of everything just as everything is thought of in the

² In the course of this essay, I freely draw on some of his most important philosophical papers, including, but not limited to, the following: *The Fixation of Belief*, *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*, *On A New List Of Categories*, *What Pragmatism Is*, *Pragmatism in Retrospect: A Last Formulation*, *Critical Common-sensism*, *Synechism*, *Fallibilism*, and *Evolution, & Evolutionary Love*. (Available in Peirce, 2022.)

³ In 1892, Peirce tellingly writes that “the atmosphere of Cambridge held many an antiseptic against Concord transcendentalism; and I am not conscious of having contracted any of that virus. Nevertheless, it is probably that some cultured bacilli, some benign form of the disease was implanted in my soul, unawares, and that now, after long incubation, it comes to the surface, modified by mathematical conceptions and by training in physical investigations.” (Brent, 1993: 46)

laboratory, that is, as a question of experimentation.” (Peirce, 2022: 251) Nonetheless, he goes on to describe his later metaphysical awakening as a *supplement* to his life as an experimentalist:

“That laboratory life did not prevent the writer (who here and in what follows simply *exemplifies the experimentalist type*) from becoming interested in methods of thinking; and when he [i.e., Peirce] came to read metaphysics, although much of it seemed to him loosely reasoned and determined by accidental prepossessions, yet in the writings of some philosophers, especially Kant, Berkeley, and Spinoza, he sometimes came upon strains of thought that recalled the ways of thinking of the laboratory, so that he felt he might trust to them.” (Peirce, 2022: 252, my italics)

Peirce himself acknowledges that his main character type is that of “laboratory-men.” (*ibid.*) Elsewhere, in *The Fixation of Belief*, he cites the chemist Lavoisier as an influence due to the latter’s ability “to carry his mind into his laboratory, and literally to make of his alembics and cucurbits instruments of thought, (...) manipulating real things instead of words and fancies.” (Peirce, 2022: 6) This type is closely aligned with that of the critical scientist, committed to critical realism, occupied with the phenomenal world, and intellectually satisfied with observable and actionable results. This experimentalist trait pertains to his early years as a practising scientist, but the trait runs through his whole career. In his diverse scientific endeavours - for example, during his many years of service in the Coast Survey (Peirce, 2022: 110-111) - he exhibited a kind of *lab ethic* that can be traced back to his early interests in logic, inquiry and science. Although his “realism” was clearly of a more reflexive, metaphysical, and speculative kind than the average scientist’s, since it acknowledged, among other things, the reality of universal concepts (in line with the metaphysics of Duns Scotus), he affirmed the importance of *critical common-sense realism* (Peirce, 2022: 290-301). Reality is tested in everyday practice, and powerfully verified (or at least provisionally belief-fixed) in the experimental confrontation between the scientist and the natural event or laboratory experiment. Scientific work can be arduous, and it only bears fruit through the painstaking labour involved. Nonetheless, with the rise of scientific speculation and philosophical reasoning, experimental realism comes to include, and indeed depend upon, the realm of *concepts, ideas, hypotheses, and interpretations*. Science reveals a world of events, habits, and natural laws, which are categorizable and explicable in terms of semiotic categories and logical relations between concepts. Ontologically, reality is neither wholly materialistic nor subjectivistic. Peirce affirms the reality of both things and ideas/signs. Moreover, he affirms a level of “thirdness” in the semiotic mediation through signs, as encapsulated in the famous triadic sign relation consisting of the *object*, the *sign*, and the *interpretant*. Peirce embraces a middle way between materialism and idealism where the *realm of ideas* and the *realm of things* form a cosmological continuum. This flowed out of his *synechism*: the supposition of a continuum in both the cosmic order of nature and in the experimental process of inquiry. He considered the hypothesis of synechistic continuity “a regulative principle of logic” that motivated scientific inquiry. (Peirce, 2022: 355) He was not a monist, nor a dualist, but always a triadist. Importantly, he believed that a consistent application of the principles of triadic semiotics could create a methodological bridge between different domains of scientific inquiry.

In the Age of Reason, the scientific face of Peirce has tended to elevate his general prestige among professional philosophers and scientists. Peirce is often remembered as a very scientific (which is “good”), although quirky, quixotic, and obsessively system-prone (which is “bad”) philosopher. He combined the attitudes (or “faces”) of the hard-nosed natural scientist, the Renaissance polymath, and the metaphysically inclined philosopher. There are many reasons to applaud Peirce’s contributions to science and philosophy of science. He gave us good reasons to think that science, at its best, is the most reliable, satisfying, and productive form of belief-establishing practice: “Experience of the [scientific] method has not led us to doubt it, but, on the contrary, scientific investigation has had the most wonderful triumphs in the way of settling opinion” (Peirce, 2022: 19). So, he believes in the scientific method because it *works* (following the pragmatic maxim). His philosophy often takes the appearance of “serious science” because science to him is largely synonymous with both the *attitude of truth-seeking* and, as shown by evidence, *practical success in truth-fixing*. Other methods - such as those based on *authority, a priori* beliefs, or simple *tenacity* - come to be seen as less productive from the pragmatic point of view. (Peirce, 2022: 5-22) Nonetheless, limiting his achievements to his contributions to philosophy of science and formal logic would be to see his work too narrowly. In the prestige-driven world of Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he struggled to find professional acceptance or permanent job, “he was personally notorious and considered by many influential academics and prominent men in other professions as something of a charlatan in his philosophical and religious pretensions, while at

the same time he was highly respected as a scientist and logician.” (Brent, 1993: 11) Against such worries, I shall argue, in the next two sections, that his “philosophical and religious pretensions” - whatever their flaws in practice - stemmed, in part, from his methodological commitment to open semiotic inquiry. They are, indeed, an indispensable part of the many faces of Peircean semiotics. The Peircean semiotician must, to begin with, model their “character type” after the lab scientist, but they must also be ready to embrace diverse modes of complementary inquiry, including those of the philosopher and the metaphysician.

3. Peirce as Philosopher (Pragmatist)

The second category, or face, of Peirce, is the pragmatist philosopher. Peirce the philosopher extends the experimental method of the laboratory man to the evaluation of *concepts, hypotheses, ideas, and beliefs-in-action*. The pragmatic imperative, here, entails an unceasing commitment to testing our philosophies: “[W]hat is more wholesome than any particular belief is integrity of belief, and to avoid looking into the support of any belief from a fear that it may turn out rotten is quite as immoral as it is disadvantageous.” (Peirce, 2022: 21) We must evaluate and test every belief, concept, idea, hypothesis, and philosophical system on the basis of its future pragmatic effects. This constitutes Peirce’s core contribution to the long pragmatic lineage from William James and John Dewey all the way to the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty. *Peirce-the-Philosopher* was thus the father of *Pragmatism* (or *Pragmaticism*), whose core doctrine is encapsulated in the following maxim: “The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally upon all the possible different circumstances and desires, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol.” (Peirce, 2022: 290)

This aspect of Peirce emphasises his theoretical contributions in the realm of *pragmatic sign-dynamics* – the *effects* of our beliefs, and the effects of all triadic sign-relations, *as beliefs-in-action* (what James would later call their *cash value*). This aspect of Peirce mediates between the Firstness of experience, the Secondness of causal efficacy, and the Thirdness of philosophical interpretation. The pragmatic maxim highlights *the dyadic impact and triadic mediation of signs*, exemplified by the complex chains of *action-belief-habit* reactions, such as *belief* → *action*, *action* → *result*, and *result* → *habit* (→ *new belief*, etc.). There is a direct connection between his *philosophical and conceptual theory* (metaphysical system-building) and *pragmatic action theory* (the pragmatic maxim). For Peirce, there is little separation between everyday beliefs and practices, where metaphysical speculations are minimal or non-existent, and highly systematised and architectonic theories where they are at the front and centre of analysis.

His architectonic and systematic attempts at *systematic, cosmic philosophy* - however ephemeral and schematic they may be - represent the effort to unify the seeming diversity and chaos of human intellectual endeavour (“Logic,” in the broad Peircean sense). These theories elevate him above a mere scientist and put him in the company of Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Comte, Spencer, and other great systematic thinkers. He considered such great system-builders among the respectable “ancestry of pragmatism” (Peirce, 2022: 269). This poses a dilemma for interpretation. As we have seen, Peirce modelled himself as a laboratory scientist. So, how could he have seen himself as a metaphysical system building? Indeed, *Peirce-the-Scientist* claimed that one “advantage” – and perhaps even the “*raison d’etre*” – of pragmatism is that it “will serve to show that almost every proposition of ontological metaphysics is either meaningless gibberish (...) or else is downright absurd.” (Peirce, 2022: 259) Peirce argued for a kind of purification of philosophy in the positivistic spirit: “all such [metaphysical] rubbish being swept away, what will remain of philosophy will be a series of problems capable of investigation by the observational methods of the true sciences.” (*Ibid.*) However, the key difference between *Peirce-the-Philosopher* and many of the (other) positivists lies in the openness of Peircean semiotics to the pragmatic utility (and thus philosophical legitimacy) of experimentally grounded systematic and architectonic speculation (i.e., metaphysics) that employs abstract concepts and symbols. In the spirit of his cosmological synechism, and necessitated by the ambitious scope of his semiotics, he saw a connection between the mundane practices of the lab scientist and the cosmic speculations of the philosopher. This renders Peircean philosophy capable of extension to areas seemingly outside the bounds of the scientific, experimentalist method, narrowly conceived. Peircean philosophy holds that there is no contradiction between the scientific method and the embrace of the full breadth of human experience:

“[I]nstead of merely jeering at metaphysics, like other prope-positivists, (...) the pragmaticist extracts from it a precious essence, which will serve to give life and light to cosmology and physics. At the same time, the moral applications of the doctrine are positive and potent.” (Peirce, 2022: 260)

So, the purification of philosophy of metaphysical gibberish clears the way, not for science purified of metaphysics, but for a new kind of metaphysics continuous with the scientific spirit. At the same time, Peirce’s embrace of the metaphysical and cosmological side of inquiry also makes his system vulnerable to criticism: “My life is built upon a theory; and if this theory turns out false, my life will turn out a failure.” (cited in Brent, 1993: 51) Peircean system building, even when architectonic, was powerfully geared towards *dynamic architectonic processes (semiosis)*. He saw the structures of the world as not fixed but in constant flux and reorganisation. Even his most “realist” texts embody a form of *pragmatic dynamism* that is future-looking, speculative, and emergentist. This dynamism underlies all mundane and celestial phenomena. For Peirce, learning, adaptation, and evolution are crucial concepts. In *The Essence of Pragmatism*, Peirce explains that pragmatic dynamic change (or evolution) requires time, or *diachronicity*: “The rational meaning of every proposition lies in the future. How so? The meaning of a proposition is itself a proposition.” (Peirce, 2022: 261) Time, for him, was not only a source of doubt, but of promise and hope: it explains processes of learning, growth, adaptation, belief, experimentation, diversification, and evolution. Ultimately, it yields metaphysical insights - but metaphysical insight in the service of our scientific and everyday practices.

Given the openness of Peirce, and Peircean semiotics, to *experimentally grounded system building*, metaphysical speculation needs to be integrated into, and be continuous with, science, logic, and philosophy. Within such limits - when the “meaningless gibberish” of empty metaphysical speculation has been stripped away - the methodological boundaries between science, commonsense, philosophy, and religion are blurred. This opens the door, not merely for secular metaphysical speculation, but also religious speculation. This realm - let us call it metaphysics or religion - is populated by Peircean concepts such as *tychism (the doctrine of chance)* and *synechism (the doctrine of continuity)* (Peirce, 2022: 339). Ultimately, this leads to his articulation of an *evolutionary cosmology* whose key normative concept is *agapism (the doctrine of evolutionary love)*. (Peirce, 2022: 364) This makes Peircean philosophy friendly to certain religious and mystical doctrines. Indeed, the open-endedness of Peircean semiotics seems to contain an ineluctable logic that leads inquiry into the concept of the divine. This point has been highlighted by Søren Brier: “Seen from mysticism’s perennial philosophy, there is no absolute difference between the two viewpoints of science and religion; on the contrary, they supplement each other.” (Brier, 2008: 38) In the next section, I show how Peirce’s infamous religious texts, whatever their flaws, fit into his intellectual project. Rather than contradicting, they are surprisingly continuous with his more scientific, “down-to-earth” approaches.

4. Peirce as Metaphysician (Semiotician)

Arguably the most esoteric Peirce can be found in the Monist series lectures from 1890’s (especially *Evolutionary Love*). (Peirce, 2022: 361-374) I am not interested in tracking Peirce’s spiritual development, here. My only interest lies in the philosophical import of these texts, and their continuity (or lack thereof) with his scientific and semiotic writings. My contention is that these texts are, all things considered, part of his scientific *oeuvre*. The reception of Peirce’s theological writings has been mostly negative. As Brent writes, Peirce’s article *Man’s Glassy Essence*, in particular, was seen by some as “clear evidence that he was losing his mind.” (Brent, 1993: 211) However, let me offer a more sympathetic reading. As an atheist philosopher, I am only interested in his theological doctrines as they pertain to his methodological commitment to open-ended semiotics. Although Peirce’s speculations about God and cosmic evolution are sometimes underdeveloped, vague, and highly speculative, I tend to agree with Søren Brier that Peirce embraces the doctrine that “mysticism does not—as so many believe—have to be a contradiction of science or philosophy; it is on the contrary a theory of their cognitive and existential basis.” (Brier, 2008: 39) Peircean philosophy suggests that entertaining pragmatically useful spiritual and mystical concepts, symbols, and beliefs, and seeking to integrate them into our common-sense habits, is a legitimate exercise - if done right.

Whether Peirce managed to avoid his own injunction against “metaphysical gibberish” is an interesting and unresolved question. However, what is clear is that Peircean semiotics does *not* contain a general injunction against mystical inquiry. The evidence is strong in favour of the *continuum* hypothesis in Peircean

semiotics: his spiritual and religious speculations are continuous with his scientific and philosophical writings, much like spiritual and religious beliefs are (or at least can be) continuous with scientific and philosophical beliefs (at least when properly integrated into a scientifically grounded semiotic framework). I do not wish to claim that his spiritual and mystical theories are among his best works. Nor do I wish to argue that they “hold the key” to what is important in Peirce’s theories. Nonetheless, we have good reason to see them as *well-motivated efforts at systematising our scientific and philosophical insights* into the realm of theology that are fully consistent with Peircean semiotics and pragmatic philosophy. Some of his key metaphysical concepts, like *tychism* and *synechism*, are straightforwardly continuous with the semiotic enterprise, while others, like *agapism*, remain more speculative. But they are all fully explicable as well-motivated efforts at expanding pragmatic philosophy into the practice of *explaining* and *reforming* religious and spiritual belief. In *The Fixation of Belief*, he argued that “the greatest intellectual benefactors of mankind have never dared, and dare not now, to utter the whole of their thought.” (Peirce, 2022: 20) On this basis, perhaps we can speculate that, in his religious writings, Peirce sought, in an act of dare, to make the “whole of his thought” more visible - even at the cost of subjecting it to ridicule.

It is important to stress how the scientific side of Peirce *constrains* and *guides* his metaphysical beliefs. In Peirce’s review of Henry James’s book on Swedenborgian mysticism, Peirce makes clear what kind of a mystic or religious thinker *he is not*: “It can make no difference whatever whether a thing is or is not, if it is never to any mind to give any sign of its being.” (quoted in Trammell, 1973: 203) Peirce thus denies the possibility of a *God without appearance*, or a *divinity that stands outside of semiosis*. This rebuttal of supernaturalism is, of course, thoroughly pragmatic: why believe in something that makes no difference in our lives? However, if theological and spiritual phenomena *do give* (credible) “signs of being,” they are legitimate part of the *cosmic semiotic process*, ultimately continuous with the more mundane hermeneutic space of books, lamps, and ducks. And Peirce clearly believed that theological and spiritual concepts had pragmatic import. This underlines the presence of the *deep continuity* (or *synechism*) of Peirce’s philosophy. To the extent that Peirce had a spiritual side, it consists in the idea that one could, with the right frame of mind, and with the right pragmatic attitude, *discover credible signs of the spiritual and the divine in (and through) nature*.⁴ The discovery of spiritual signs, which speaks to the richness of the signs of the cosmos, is a credible motivation for Peircean religious speculation. However, this spiritualism must be pragmatically achieved and subjected to philosophical and scientific oversight. His spirituality is thus scientific, sceptical, and pragmatic. At the same time, in line with people like Einstein and Spinoza, and the American Transcendentalists, he seems to embrace the universal timelessness of perennial philosophy. He shared their belief in the existence of eternal principles accessible to thinkers of all ages, whatever their denomination or vocation. Indeed, although the exact nature of Peirce’s religious or spiritual views (to the extent that he had them) remains somewhat opaque, his ideas find powerful resonance in other mystical thinkers. Combining the scientific attitude with dogma-free, institution-agnostic religious feelings is perhaps best elucidated by Albert Einstein, in a short piece called *Religion and Science* that is worth quoting at length:

“The religious geniuses of all ages have been distinguished by this kind of religious feeling, which knows no dogma and no God conceived in man’s image; so that there can be no church whose central teachings are based on it. Hence it is precisely among the heretics of every age that we find men who were filled with the highest kind of religious feeling and were in many cases regarded by their contemporaries as atheists, sometimes also as saints. Looked at in this light, men like Democritus, Francis of Assisi, and Spinoza are closely akin to one another.” (Einstein, November 9, 1930)

Add to that list Charles Sanders Peirce. Although neither a saint nor an atheist, Peirce had an inkling of what Einstein meant by “cosmic religious feeling.” This is nowhere more evident than in that curious scientific-mystical essay, *Evolutionary Love*, which espouses a form of love-ism, or *agapism*, that attempts to combine a sense of cosmic love, inspired by a rather idiosyncratic reading of “the gospel of Christ,” with the naturalist processes of Lamarckian and Darwinian evolution. (Peirce, 2022: 362) This is encapsulated by the “Golden Rule” and its new interpretation: “Sacrifice your own perfection to the perfectionment of your neighbour.” (*ibid.*) Peirce offer a counter-voice to the prevalent 19th century emphasis on evolution as a doctrine of “greed,” as arguably sanctified by Spencer’s doctrine of the survival of the fittest, according to

⁴ This is close to Newton’s or Bacon’s scientific-empirical religiosity; and indeed of Spinoza’s pantheism.

which “greed is the great agent in the elevation of the human race and in the evolution of the universe.” (Peirce, 2022: 363) The pragmatic maxim recommends engaging in theological speculation to serve the pragmatic needs of morality. The evolution of the universe becomes an object of speculation, legitimately so, when political economists, moralists, and philosophers think about humanity’s palace in the cosmos.

Although Peirce fails, in my view, to offer coherent logical and semiotic justifications for his *agapism*, it is clear that he is motivated by the *practical effects* of metaphysical and spiritual doctrines. He worries about the impact that evolutionary ideas have had on sanctifying the “gospel of Greed.” To counter this tendency, he believes that scientific and spiritual speculations that can challenge existing power and wealth inequalities become powerful means of rectifying earthly affairs. Engaging in religious speculation in the service of social justice and fraternal love serves two main purposes: a) allowing for a better integration of evolutionary ideas into sustainable moral practices (*the pragmatic needs of social morality*), and b) helping to bridge the methodological boundaries between scientific, philosophical, and religious inquiry (*the pragmatic needs of experimentalism*). The promise of moral improvement (or decay!) is only one of the many effects that spiritual and religious beliefs can have on social affairs. Peirce believed that science and religion were *continuous semiotic domains* that would have to be integrated in our beliefs and practice. So, he believed it worthwhile - both scientifically and philosophically - to contribute to the development of a *pragmatic, semiotic view of the cosmos as an integrated “system.”* To this extent, and to this extent alone, it is true that “religious spirit was always present in Peirce’s work, whether overtly expressed or not, and was an important factor in determining his philosophy.” (Brent, 1993: 36) In a short essay called *The Concept of God*, he affirmed his faith in God on the basis of such pragmatism: “So, then, the question being whether I believe in the reality of God, I answer, Yes.” (Peirce, 2022: 375) However, he makes it clear that his only motivation lies in the salutary (moral and methodological) “principles of conduct” that can arise from “the contemplation and study of the physico-psychical universe” in which the religious concept of the “mind of God” is allowed to play the pragmatic role of motivating faith in the intelligibility of the universe. (Peirce, 2022: 376) In a passage reminiscent of the “nature’s God” of Einstein and Spinoza, he writes:

“[T]he 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.” (Peirce, 2022: 375)

Integrating Peirce’s theological and religious writings into his broader *oeuvre* reinforces my central hypothesis that the “many faces” of Peirce reveal surprising continuities of thought. If my continuum hypothesis is correct - which is consistent with Peirce’s *synechistic* cosmic vision - we can discern continuity between Peirce’s scientific writings and his speculative essays. Peirce saw the entire universe as an experimental playground that needed to be prodded, explored, played with, tested, and ultimately integrated in holistic semiotic inquiry. There is thus constant feedback, or back-and-forth motion, between his *Scientific mode of inquiry* (with its peculiar attitudes, habits, practices) and his *Philosophical, Semiotic, and Religious modes of inquiry* (with their own peculiar attitudes, habits, and practices). This constant oscillation - or semiotic spiral - between Peirce’s “many faces” (and the many “character types” that correspond to them) is not the result of mere haphazard inconsistency, but a *logical extension of Peirce’s ambitious philosophical edifice*. Whether the exercise is ultimately *fruitful* remains debatable, but its methodological motivations are crystal-clear. Religion is not only *continuous* with science - but one of its final frontiers.

What are the takeaways from this analysis? We can learn from Peirce’s example. Semiotic openness that traverses disciplines, domains, and modes of inquiry is not an optional methodological luxury, or an external normative constraint on science, but an *integral part of good semiotic practice*. This openness is compatible with, and indeed calls for, a systematizing attitude. So, Peirce calls for openness that is rigorously guided by the best form of belief-formation, namely, the scientific method. The scientific method serves as a filter against religious dogma and other forms of metaphysical gibberish, but it also constitutes a platform for the analysis and perfection of rigorous metaphysical, spiritual, and mystical concepts. One of the key insights of Peircean philosophy is that the fixation of belief is an ongoing process of embodied, communal intellectual practice that involves open-ended learning, adaptation, and evolution. Peirce’s rejection of metaphysical “gibberish” did not make him a full-blown reductionist. On the contrary, he bravely bridged the scientific, philosophical, logical, and spiritual domains of experimental inquiry. He believed that semiotics can make sense of the “many faces” of human praxis. Taking Peirce seriously means combining his scientific rigour with his *semiotico-logical openness to the vastness of human experience*.

This also has import for exegetical interpretation. The sculpting of the truth - including the sharpening of our collective Peirce-image - is communal. In my paper, I have tried to persuade the reader that the best way to interpret Peirce is to move from the “mere” experimentalism of *Peirce-the-Scientist* and the “mere” pragmatism of *Peirce-the-Philosopher* towards the metaphysical, spiritually-aware triadism of *Peirce-the-Metaphysician-cum-Mystic*. Although the evidence remains inconclusive, it suffices to motivate my claim that the seeming irreconcilability between the many faces of Peirce leads to “doubt” that can be alleviated by rejecting (or at least tempering and downgrading), narrowly scientific and anti-metaphysical readings of Peirce. This gives way to a more satisfactory “fixation of belief” in a renewed Peirce-image that emphasises the holistic methodology of his open-ended semiotic praxis. This kind of holistic interpretation of Peircean semiotics is intellectually satisfying because it allows semioticians to contain multitudes, and even enter into the dangerous terrain of metaphysical and religious speculation, without falling into relativism or dogmatism. Needless to say, this should not be used as an excuse to embrace anti-scientific worldviews. Despite his metaphysical and mystical side, Peirce remained a scientist at heart. Indeed, all good metaphysicians, following Peirce, should remain scientists at heart.

5. Conclusion

This paper has offered a semiotic and hermeneutic reading of Peirce's different "poles of inquiry" or scholarly "faces" as they harmonise with and sometimes collide with each other. Peirce saw himself (and was seen by others), intermittently, as a man of science, a man of philosophy, a man of logic, and a man of metaphysical - even religious - speculation. I have explored the question: Is it possible to integrate Peirce's different scientific, philosophical, semiotic, and even mystical interests together? Or are they, in fact, pulling in hopelessly contradictory directions? In the spirit of *synechism*, I have sought to highlight continuities (or *unity-in-diversity*) in his thinking. At the same time, there are clearly different faces that Peirce exhibited at different times, and one should not pretend to have reached some hidden “truth” that unifies them all, or eliminates all lingering tensions or contradictions. Nor should we throw up our hands and pretend that “anything goes.” One of Peirce’s most enduring beliefs, and most enduring habits, was his conviction that the *experimental method* - exemplified by the character type of the lab scientist - was the key to mapping out the cosmos. It should be possible to cherish *the breadth and depth of Peirce as a semiotic web of meaning* without embracing reductionism, dogmatism, or relativism. One response would be to embrace a kind of *hermeneutic pluralism*, as exemplified by Peirce’s near-contemporary, Walt Whitman:

“Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)” (Whitman, 1892)

Such multitudes are an expression, literally enough, of magnanimity, or “great-soul-ness.” However, Peirce’s embrace of multitudes sought to be *semiotically integrative*: his “multitudes” are not left lying around - scattered, schizophrenic – but they are brought into an (imperfect but pragmatic) union. Peirce believed in the possibility of developing a unified method (we can call it science, philosophy, or semiotics, since it contains them all) that integrates, and makes sense of, the multitude of the human experience. The Peircean “community of inquiry” can seek to achieve, in a piecemeal fashion, the intersubjective fixation of belief through the experimental testing and integration of all (semiotically meaningful) human knowledge. In this task, the scientist, the philosopher, and the (experimentally minded) mystic are key allies. They are odd and unexpected bedfellows in the common fight against credulity, idle speculation, and dogma.

My project has been motivated by the suspicion that the spiritual, mystical and cosmological side of Peirce is too frequently tossed aside, underrated, or insufficiently integrated into our comprehensive Peirce-image. A narrow reading of Peirce has coincided with an underappreciation of the cosmic, spiritual, and religious openness of Peircean semiotics. Whether or not my paper has any effect on the interpretation of Peirce, at least I have taken part in the Peircean truth-seeking, belief-forming, and practice-informing process. In the end, my paper recontextualizes the well-established interpretation of Peirce as a scientifically minded pragmatic philosopher prone to metaphysical system-building. Highlighting the continuity between his “many faces” puts into clearer light what is most important (and constant) in his thought, namely, his articulation of *the open-ended and cosmic scope of unified science, philosophy, and semiotics*.

Reconciling the different faces of Peirce helps to make sense of the versatility and open-endedness of semiotics as a bridge between different modes, domains, and purposes of inquiry. Semiosis knows no rigid hermeneutic or disciplinary bounds. It thus forces us to be open to new horizons, wherever they lead. Every inquiry points to the next inquiry that tests, challenges, and surpasses it. Peircean pragmatism is a holistic enterprise that embodies the spirit(s) of science, philosophy, and semiotics without being reducible to any of them. Sustained belief in this kind of pragmatic methodology - whether in the realm of scientific practice or metaphysical speculation - is the only *ortho doxa* (lit. correct belief) that we need, not because it reveals Platonic truths, but because it sustains, nourishes, and revitalises our open inquiry.

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