Habit, Habit Change, and Conversion in C. S. Peirce

Placing a thinker like C. S. Peirce in context with Jonathan Edwards yields a striking result. Edwards is so closely identified with traditional Christianity that we cannot separate his thought from the community within which it took shape. Although there is no similar identification of Peirce with a community of religious practice, his philosophical researches are widely accepted as full of nutrition for religious speculation. Peirce worked largely on his own. What is striking is the symmetry, maybe even the agreement, between Peirce and Edwards about the central problems of inquiry and the soul.

Peirce is a transitional figure in the American tradition of reflection. Although no enemy of religion, he critiques metaphysically corrupt pietism and dry theological wrangling over the doctrine of predestination. His philosophical consciousness seems to appear out of thin air, marking a dramatic new movement in American thought. His community became the philosophical community in America, and Peirce demonstrates an ability to draw on philosophical resources for answering his deepest questions. But focusing on this philosophical eruption may obscure the religious tenor of the questions that prompted his inquiry. We mistake Peirce, I think, if we fail to consider the impetus of his thought, and such a consideration will suggest that we reconnect Peirce and Edwards by virtue of what they can tell us about conversion.

I begin this chapter by evaluating several avenues of connecting Peirce's philosophical program and religious conversion. Next I turn to an exposition of Peirce's understanding of habit and habit change. This position of an ultimate habit change incorporates the conclusions of three essays in an argument for a holistic orientation of the thinker fully engaged in self-controlled inquiry. These include the change represented by personality and a belief in a personal creator in "The Law of Mind," the argument for emulating agapistic inquiry in "Evolutionary Love," and the belief and logical testing of the reality of God in "A Neglected
Argument for the Reality of God.” I conclude with a criticism of Peirce’s habit change to a “super-order,” as he describes it, and examine several ways to advance Peirce’s approach to conversion.

**PEIRCE AND CONVERSION**

Because Peirce wants to know the fullest measure of reality by knowing the fullest measure of human belief and action possible in self-controlled change, I take up conversion as a theme in Peirce’s pragmatism. Let me briefly outline some reasons why conversion appears attractive as a conceptual theme for understanding Peirce and some of the reasons it may appear not so helpful.

Connecting Peirce to conversion makes some sense simply based on the likeness of his thought to Edwards. Edwards and Peirce stand pretty evenly in terms of intellectual power, reinterpreting their traditions and producing epochal shifts in the thinking of their time. They also share a conviction that ultimately determining decisions and self-criticisms entail the integration of the head and heart, intellect and will, thought and faith. The similarity of their “heart” language is a strong linking clue. Edwards finds the affections of the heart connected to transcending the natural functioning of reason and the will. Peirce perceives reasons of the heart illuminating an opposition to self-critical reason. He says, “the heart is more than the head, and is in fact everything in our highest concerns” (CP 4:654) so that the leadings of the heart are properly followed despite not having worked out conceptual problems. This is Peirce’s ground for adopting habits based on vague leadings. The opposition of head and heart does not cancel the need for reason so much as it kindles the spirit of fallibilism and humility for the inquirer. Leadings of the heart are significant in Peirce’s search for conclusions about the meaning of the self, God, and the object of inquiry. Although trained as a scientist and concerned most immediately with issues of scientific inquiry and logic, Peirce excludes neither divinity nor grace from the realm of reality. He wants to know what is in a person that leads to the conclusion that divine life and grace are real possibilities. For if “God Really be, and be benign,” he says in “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” “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. What God means for human life must be articulated in terms of an inquiry that develops into a self-critical awareness of personality through of a self-conscious exercise of thought, the power of which becomes knowable in the self-controlled action of habit change.

The primary argument for conversion arises from the way Peirce’s philosophy leads up to the expectation for an ultimate habit change. Several related lines of thought suggest such a habit change. One aspect of this thought is his suggestion about the integration of the personality in all its parts that is achieved only by perceiving the law of continuity that connects all mind. A second line is Peirce’s argument for the evolution of the universe, which he calls agapism. This evolution entails a developmental teleology of the person’s habits—a continuing character of growth. I think these lines of developmental teleology and the continuity of mind are brought to their final test in the discovery of the reality of God. The continuity between habits of thought and action ensure for Peirce that the object of inquiry is not just to know God as an intellectual exercise, but also to reflect God by participating in the ordering principle of reality. My claim that Peirce’s thought leads to an image of conversion draws primarily on this argument for the connectivity between Peirce’s conclusions about personality, evolutionary love, and God as components of an ultimate habit change. I think such a claim makes sense of many of Peirce’s discussions concerning religion, like this one from an address in 1863:

Before a man can hear the voice of God or even comprehend an example of religion he must have a notion of what religion is, and that implies he must have had an inward revelation of religion. . . . After the inward revelation comes the objective revelation, and the latter must be the culmination of the former, for bearing as it must a higher message it must itself act suggestively so that its meaning may be perceived. This culminating point will be the phenomenon of perfection in such a form that man can see and know it; that is, it must be perfection in human form. The first condition, therefore, the enunciation of the predicate, was fulfilled at the birth of Christ. (CE 1:110)
Peirce approaches an account of these “phenomena of perfection” in the logic of inquiry that leads not only to belief in God, but to the process of perfecting all one’s habits and of the opinions of science through discovering the normative control implicit in thought and the conclusions of this evolving control.

A second reason that conversion coheres with Peirce’s thought relates to several broad disjunctions he identifies. There are forms of orientation that represent a deep-seated error, such as greed, or the focus of practical minds and philosophical nominalism. These errors are destructive to the development of self-controlled inquiry. In order to succeed, self-understanding must identify and overcome these attitudes. He characterizes this opposition in the essay “Evolutionary Love”:

The Gospel of Christ says that progress comes from every individual merging his individuality in sympathy with his neighbors. On the other side, the conviction of the nineteenth century is that progress takes place by virtue of every individual’s striving for himself with all his might and trampling his neighbor under foot whenever he gets a chance to do so. This may accurately be called the Gospel of Greed. (CP 6:294)

The disjunction between these two gospels represents an orientation in a person’s habits that is proceeding toward the discovery of self-control and thought that is not. Avoiding the collapse of reason depends on following signs within thought that identify errors through self-criticism and moves beyond them. This ability to perceive the error of an orientation and adjust the direction of thought in response to it reflects the possibility of a conversion like change.

One last reason conversion is a useful suggestion for understanding Peirce is that it more clearly places his thought in relation to the tradition of productive religious inquiry. Peirce desires to serve the truth he discovers about the universe not for his own aims of success or notoriety, but because the discovery reflects a response to the character and movement of the universe toward deeper community with God. He is deeply connected to the ideals of his community and to demonstrating the ways these ideals translate into august practicality for the conduct of life, even if he often failed to conform his practice. Peirce strives to enter “the process whereby man, with all his miserable littlenesses, becomes gradually more and more imbued with the Spirit of God, in which Nature and History are rife” (CP 5:339n) in order that he becomes a sign of the movement toward an “intimate
union of humanity and Deity” (CE 1:110). There is no more apt term for this desired movement then conversion.

Conversion, of course, is not a term Peirce uses in relation to himself or his philosophy. There are several ways that conversion appears to work against Peirce’s understanding of metaphysics and inquiry. First, Peirce would reject any notion of epiphenomenal change by virtue of an act of will, a dramatic experience, or an “intuitive” revelation. None of these moments constitutes the ground for real change in a person; that is, they cannot be the ground for developing a habit of response. Instead, Peirce suggests that only changes productive of conceptual interpretation have any purchase on the self-control or self-consciousness mentioned earlier. I agree with Peirce in this criticism of conversion, as does Edwards, and attempt to incorporate this demand for an awareness of “general terms” into a more satisfying notion of conversion.

A second challenge is that conversion implies a focus on the will. Peirce was suspicious of the power of volition, as he makes clear in response to James’s “Will to Believe,” “which pushed this method to such extremes as must tend to give us pause. The doctrine appears to assume that the end of man is action” (CP 5:3). Rather, Peirce holds that we can respond only to what is experienced, and no act of willing can create experience or make a satisfying account of meaning. Another side of this claim is that we cannot fabricate doubt either, so that genuine inquiry cannot begin by virtue of an effort of an individual that is not in continuity either with the limits of inquiry, some phenomenal resistance, or the presence of a tradition. Kelly Parker quotes Peirce’s dictum, “Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts.” Again, I think these are valid and useful criticisms. I also think that this criticism places Peirce in clear agreement with Augustine’s doctrine of conversion, at least in terms of the need for a resistant notion of God in a tradition and the inability of human will to generate the content necessary to effect a real transformation.

There are several ways that this proposal of conversion provides an advance on Peirce. These will be taken up more fully in the conclusion of this chapter, but let me point ahead just a bit. The primary advance conversion offers in examining Peirce’s philosophy is gaining the sense of a holistic power of his system. This holism moves two ways, first as a challenge to claims that Peirce was fundamentally fragmented in his philosophical views of science and religion, as Thomas Goudge claims.
and second, it moves toward a criticism of that holism by raising the question whether or not his pragmatism is satisfactory as an argument for understanding an ultimate change of character for persons.

The second advance a consideration of conversion may enable regards focus on inquiry as the principal function of transformation. Can such a discovery be confined to inquiry? The most significant aspect of this question turns on whether Peirce’s use of negation as the principal drive of inquiry allows for the image of freedom and creativity that he suggests is necessary for the fullest expression of human thought.

One last advance conversion may allow in relation to Peirce’s thought is to more fully engage the connection of inquiry and tradition. While Peirce claims that the church is essential for the understanding of God emerging within the continuity of thought, it is not clear if the church can become anything other than a beginning or reminder of the divine, an archai but not a telos for action and transformation.

**HABIT AND HABIT CHANGE**

The opening into the criticism of beliefs, even the most incorporative belief, is habit. “The essence of belief is the establishment of a habit,” Peirce says, and “the whole function of thought is to produce habits of action” (CP 5: 398, 400). Access into a critical understanding of inquiry is possible through an understanding of what constrains action and what makes changes in action necessary and possible. A habit is a law governing practice, but a law that can be altered. In this way, habits reflect the power of response through self-control and the discovery of an order both in experience and in habits. Habits are never final or unchangeable, but they are the only indication of the end at which action aims. Bringing the aims of the person to clearest expression entails the critical awareness of habits and the tendency to take habits.

Habits and habit change integrate Peirce’s logical categories of First, Second, and Third. As a First, habits are perceived as a quality without determination. As a Second, habits are the resistant features in action; as he says, “each habit of an individual is a law; but these laws are modified so easily by the operation of self-control, that it is one of the most patent of facts that ideals and thought generally have a very great influence on human conduct” (CP 1:351). The tendency to take habits and to change
them reflects the condition that a habit is a mediation between one thing and another. This is a habit as a Third (CP 6:32).

The integrative power of habits is manifest in the variety of phenomena Peirce associates with the concept of habit. Through habit feeling is bound into thinking, thought is bound into action, and unconditioned variety is bound into uniformity. Habit and habit change are equally inclusive of all levels of consciousness. The cosmic form of habit taking is expressed in Peirce’s “Law of Mind.” Communities take habits that bind the many into one (where the “one” is the unified purpose of inquiring after the final object). But the level of habit taking closest to the heart of Peirce’s philosophy is that of the person. Like a train station, a person’s habits integrate the lines of impression flowing into that consciousness, which then opens out into a multitude of reflections of that moment in action or would-be action. Unlike a train station, there are no finally fixed habits. To carry the metaphor forward we would need to have a dynamic station, one that is capable of moving and changing while still integrating the dynamic lines that meet and disperse there.

Establishing this modal point of habit integration as a character that can become a point of refinement of meaning and criticism brings us to Peirce’s notion of habit change. For it is only the change of habits by some other aspect of habit life that makes it a suitable platform for critical inquiry. Peirce seeks a “final logical interpretant” of the effect possible through mental effort. He says,

It can be proved that the only mental effect that can be so produced and that is not a sign but is of a general application is a habit-change; meaning by a habit-change a modification of a person’s tendencies toward action, resulting from previous experiences or from previous exertions of his will or acts, or from a complexus of both kinds of cause. It excludes natural dispositions, as the term “habit” does, when it is accurately used. (CP 5:476)

Exceeding “natural dispositions” is important for Peirce, since what he is after can be discovered only if the fullest power of mental effect as a result of self-control is perceived. A tendency to take habits cannot be a response to any material condition, but can arise only from the consideration of other habits, and particularly, habits taken as signs of some other relation of meaning distinct from what may be present in the person. This desire for an ascending character of habit change is absolutely crucial for Peirce’s entire conception of pragmaticism.
In order to focus our discussion on habits and habit changes that illuminate this character of ascendancy we will shortly consider Peirce’s descriptions of habit change related to agapism. In order to show this difference, however, it is important to see how habit change works more generally.

**Habit Change**

Peirce outlines three possibilities for the instigation of habit change: a striking experience, muscular effort, and imagination. Experience may surprise us with an unexpected fact, like a stone in our shoe, but involuntary experience cannot be the origination of an entirely new habit. Experience can break up habits, but there is no extension of inquiry into “stone in my shoe” that leads beyond the immediate experience. Likewise, muscular effort may produce a habit of response, but “nothing like a concept can be acquired by muscular practice alone” (CP 5:479). Imagination is more vital to habit change. Faced with suggestive experience, and able to differentiate which possible actions are performable, the imagination “traces out alternate lines of conduct” (CP 5:481) that eventually develop into a habit of thinking and action. Fancied irritation yields real habits; “We imagine ourselves in various situations and animated by various motives; and we proceed to trace out alternate lines of conduct. . . . The logical interpretant must, therefore, be in a relatively future sense” (CP 5:481; CP 3:154–166). Peirce recounts a striking example of the effectiveness of imagination on habit formation. During supper one day, a woman spilled some burning liquid on her skirt. His brother Herbert, just a small boy at the time, quickly smothered the fire with a rug. Herbert’s quick response astounded the entire family. They asked how he had thought so quickly what to do. He answered, “I had considered on a previous day what I would do in case such an accident should occur.” Herbert’s action was an example of an imaginary line of conduct giving general shape to future conduct (CP 5:390).

Imagination holds the key to forming new habits, but imagination operates only on the condition of suggestive experience. Herbert had apparently had occasion to imagine someone catching his or her clothes on fire. It might have been a newspaper story or a friend’s imaginary tale that presented the occasion for his imagining his action in that situation. But once an experience initiates the active imagination, the limits of
physical performance narrow the range of habits that appear possible in
that imagination. Herbert’s small size allowed him to imagine picking up
a rug or a towel to smother a fire, but maybe not a large urn of water.
Although neither experience nor muscular performance alone is suffi­
cient for producing a habit change (repeatedly lifting the rug would
never have prepared Herbert for his action), Peirce says both are never­
theless necessary elements in that change. What evolves out of such a
change is itself another habit, a general concept of action or determina­
tion to act in certain ways should a certain situation arise. Pure action is
not the interpretant of the concept, since it is not a general rule but only
finite to the immediate conditions (CP 5:491).

Even with this open-ended picture of habits, it might appear that
Peirce regards habit change as a quasi-mechanical process that does not
rely exclusively on conscious control, a “habit of the nerves.” We might
think habit change is a sophisticated future-orient ed reflex to premeditate
responses to expected stimuli as a result of experiences that crash into our
consciousness. This is not the case. Peirce’s notion of habit change is much
more human and organic. It is human because deliberation is incorpo­
rated into the process of every habit change, which means that by consid­
erations dependent only on the mind, habits are adopted or not. It is
organic because the principle of continuing change is present in every
habit. No habits are fully unconscious and are therefore always involved
in the refinement of self-conscious awareness. The notion of this active
determination of habit change is related to Peirce’s claim that a habit is
the essence of the logical interpretant of any concept.

Concepts that direct choices of behavior are themselves dynamic and
resist determinate articulation, just like habits. If we were to rank the
concepts that govern our actions at any moment of our lives, we would
notice that the most pervasive concepts, the ones that affect the widest
range of our behavior, are also provisional and subject to change. But
these concepts are the foundation of deliberation about less general
habits. These concepts provide concrete direction in the habit-change
process via deliberation, but they are of a piece with the same process.
The same is true in analyzing a habit’s fit in the surroundings. The analy­
sis is contained in the essence of what habits are. There is no external
process responsible for taking and laying aside habits other than the ten­
dency to take habits. Peirce calls this the “self-analyzing” of habits. “The
deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit—self-analyzing because formed
by the aid of analysis of the exercises that nourished it—is the living def-
inition, the veritable and final logical interpretant” (CP 5:491). Getting
to the “final logical interpretant” of the self, of himself, which appears to
be Peirce’s distinct aim in the three essays mentioned earlier, would be
possible only through describing the ultimate beliefs that act as the prin-
ciples of habit change. Describing the principle behind a person’s habit
change, which can finally be seen as a sign of the principle of the uni-
verse, makes the person’s action the final interpretant to the person’s
future thought and to the thought of the community. Concretizing these
principles in a person’s practice also becomes a sign of the meaning of
the universe as the logical interpretant of God, since the self is an aspect
of the development. Peirce’s dynamic process of habit change removes
any chance of duplicity in self-definition, since the totality of a person’s
habits, including the future potential to act in certain ways in particular
situations, completely defines the conceptual framework operating in
that person’s thought. There are no other recesses in which a “self” can
hide. This dynamic process also eliminates a hidden God, or at least a
God who resists any logical interpretation. The church is essential or
“penessential” for this reason. A logical interpretant must be in the his-
tory of thought. Michael Raposa notes that “Peirce perceived in the
Christian faith the essential ingredients for the development of an ideal
community.”

Peirce expresses his vision of the church this way in an
1893 essay published in _The Open Court_: “It
is the idea of the whole
Church, welding all its members together in one organic, systemic per-
ception of the Glory of the Highest—an idea having a growth from gen-
eration to generation and claiming supremacy in the determination of
all conduct, private and public” (CP 6:429).

From this view of habit change, the furthest limits of Peirce’s philoso-
phy are in view. The logical interpretant of the person, as a sign, implies
a habit change that is affected by thought working on itself, albeit in
accord with a “suggestive experience.” We cannot manufacture a con-
cept of God out of whole cloth, Peirce would say, since this would have
no continuity with any other practice. But neither can a miraculous
occurrence or a forced bending of knee generate a conception of God
that is the logical interpretant of the object God. God, in Peirce’s system,
becomes the resistance to false ideas of ultimacy, and also the key to
descrying the limits of suggestive experience. The signs we are able to
interpret into habits reveal the full character of our habit-taking tendency.
Making sure that the habits we form are valid, that they do have an object besides our hopeful thinking, is a worry that we will look at in the conclusion of this chapter. Maintaining this validity depends on the retention of the self as separated by negation from that which it is not, so that God will be a possible conclusion only if it is clear that the inquirer is in some real sense not-God. Peirce wants to be sure that any complete habit change, what I am denominating a conversion, is to the real thing and not some simulacra of Holiness.

**Ultimate Habit Change and the Neglected Argument for the Reality of God**

What is surprising to Peirceans and non-Peirceans alike in the Neglected Argument is that Peirce brings his thought to a conclusion around one belief, albeit hypothetically, in God. If this belief is that toward which all thought tends, as Peirce says, then this one habit of belief is a striking argument about the collective character of human thought and habit. The force of this generality is why Raposa says it “will prove to be important, in interpreting Peirce’s Neglected Argument, to determine the precise role that instinctive beliefs or habits of thought play in that argument, their nature, source, and the extent to which they can be formulated as premises, if at all.”

Raposa is certainly correct about the need for this precision concerning premises. But for a moment I want to turn this focus around and look backward through the Neglected Argument into the “Law of Mind” and “Evolutionary Love.” The Neglected Argument sets the stages of inquiry, but the content on which this argument turns depends on these other arguments. How this collection of arguments arrives at an ultimate conception of a single habit change is a further question, since no intuitive grasp of God is implied. It is important to keep instinctive ideas from welling up into intuitive ones. Peirce’s fundamental claim is that the content necessary for the conclusion of God’s reality in “a form directly applicable to the conduct of life, and full of nutrition for man’s highest growth” (CP 6:457) is available to the inquirer. But without relying on a doctrine of revelation, where does that content come from? Only from inquiry itself becoming substantial as the content for further inquiry. This is why this argument is “odd” in Peirce’s own opinion, and why it is significant for an understanding of conversion and what makes such a change possible. Clearly, the God
hypothesis attains the place of ultimacy in Peirce’s thought or nothing else will.

Peirce conducts a brief rehearsal of the Neglected Argument before he introduces the examination of its “logicality.” The logicality of the argument turns on three stages of inquiry that relate to the one conclusion of the reality of God, and these stages are in fact elements of habit change that construct the final logical interpretant of the God hypothesis. So the stages are no preambles to the conclusion that results in an ultimate change; the stages are themselves the fiber of that change being concretized in thought and action. To use a biblical phrase, the stages of inquiry are the temporal structure for “working out” one’s conversion.

First Stage of Inquiry: The Hypothesis of God’s Reality

“Enter your skiff of Musement, push off into the lake of thought, and leave the breathe of heaven to swell your sail” . . . 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. (CP 6: 461, 465)

Musement is Peirce’s term for finding an agreeable occupation of the mind that is unproductive in terms of other impulses or practical cares. From undirected observation and its associated experience, the attractiveness of the idea of God abductively emerges in thought as an explanatory hypothesis. This idea of God—not yet a conjecture but a phenomena of some observation from one of the three universes of experience—has an originality in comparison with the other habits of the person. “But a portion of mind almost isolated, a spiritual peninsula, or cul-de-sac, is like a railway terminus. Now mental commissures are habits. Where they abound, originality is not needed and is not found; but where they are in defect spontaneity is set free” (CP 6:301). Peirce seems to suggest that this space of play is available to all inquirers, whether they are willing to let go of other overarching concepts or not.
Whether such freedom is universally available forms into one of the more compelling challenges of Peirce’s argument that we will take up later. But at this stage it is clear that the play Peirce is aware of evinces an orientation for an ascending awareness of an ordered character to thought and experience.

Despite the emphasis on play and aesthetic attraction, Peirce uses the term *God* in all its abruptness. Anderson and others associate this use with both the classical arguments for the existence of God and Peirce’s scholastic tendencies. Peirce takes care, however, to maintain a critical distance from these arguments by paying strict attention to the emergence of this idea in experience. Peirce is also careful to avoid the case that this argument is theologically driven by emphasizing its dependence on a “vital spark of inspiration” (CP 6:438). What is at stake here is the continuity between thought in its most natural (or unaffected state) and the reality of God. This continuity does not mean that thought produces this idea. Thought is not that reality, and this means at some point the realization of the distinction between the two must emerge clearly. Peirce’s connection with the Scholastics and his critical difference turns on this point of establishing a continuity of thought that does not usurp the reality of what it discovers. This is the reason Peirce avoids the language of existence, which he takes as referring to a reaction among like things. Since there is no like to God, there is no ground for existence, but there is for reality: “I define the real as that which holds its characters on such a tenure that it makes not the slightest difference what any man or men may have thought them to be, or ever will have thought them to be, here using thought to include, imagining, opining, and willing (as long as forcible means are not used); but the real thing’s characters will remain absolutely untouched” (CP 6:495).

The emphasis in this first stage of inquiry on experience and play excludes the role of the will in developing a content like the hypothesis of the reality of God. In a review of Josiah Royce’s *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, Peirce comments on Royce’s suggestion that the Will can direct its acts to the attainment of universal harmony: “It is absurd to speak of choosing an original and ultimate aim. That is something which, if you haven’t it, you have nothing to do but wait till the grace of God confers it on you” (CP 8:52). This act of having an ultimate aim “conferred” implies a dual condition for Peirce, which is completely at odds with what we ordinarily call direct intuitive revelation. In the first
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place, habits are possible only from a position of need highlighted by a “suggestive experience.” Peirce illustrates this point:

If walking in a garden on a dark night, you were suddenly to hear the voice of your sister crying to you to rescue her from a villain, would you stop to reason out the metaphysical question of whether it is possible for one mind to cause material waves of sound and for another mind to perceive them? If you did, the problem might occupy the remainder of your days. In the same way, if a man undergoes any religious experience and hears the call of his Savior, for him to halt till he has adjusted a philosophical difficulty would seem an analogous sort of thing, whether you call it stupid or whether you call it disgusting. If on the other hand, a man has had no religious experience, then any religion not an affectation is as yet impossible for him; and the only worthy course is to wait quietly until such experience comes. No amount of speculation can take the place of experience. (CP 1:655)

We have already seen the element of experience in Peirce’s general account of habit change and his insistence that it alone is not sufficient to attain a concept. Somehow the experience Peirce has in view here comes with some other kind of generality that makes it a suitable ground for an explanatory hypothesis on the scale of the reality of God.

I think this force of experience and generality in the abductive emergence of the idea of God is clearest in Peirce’s writings in relation to the Christian church. Although I do not think his argument is anything like a Christian apologetic, I do think that the observations on which Peirce often muses are the instinctive character apparent in religious activity and organization. For instance, Peirce remarks about a meeting in New York,

When the thirty thousand young people of the society for Christian Endeavor were in New York, there seemed to me to be some mysterious diffusion of sweetness and light. If such a fact is capable of being made out anywhere, it should be in the church. The Christians have always been ready to risk their lives for the sake of having prayers in common, of getting together and praying simultaneously with great energy, and especially for their common body, for “the whole state of Christ’s church militant here in earth,” as one of the missals has it. This practice they have been keeping up everywhere, weekly, for many centuries. Surely, a personality ought to have developed in that church, in that “bride of Christ,” as they call it, or else there is a strange break in the action of mind, and I shall have to acknowledge my views are much mistaken. Would not the societies for
psychical research be more likely to break through the clouds, in seeking evidences of such corporate personality, than in seeking evidences of telepathy, which, upon the same theory, should be a far weaker phenomenon? (CP 6:271)

The phenomena he observes as the “evidence of corporate personality” and the influence of “greater persons” are the kind of connection between universes of thought that would suggest a hypothesis on the order of God.¹⁵ Too much focus on the logical character of abduction as a strictly categorial reality may lead us to exclude observations like this one, but Peirce often refers to the church as a sign of a character within human thought that challenges other explanations. Sympathy with other minds is obviously one of the curious phenomena in the universes of experience on which Peirce muses.

The depth of this musement on the suggestive character of mental sympathy is clear in “The Law of Mind,” where Peirce conjectures about three ways this attraction can function. It can affect an entire community, so that anyone in “sympathetic connection” with that community will appreciate the attractiveness of the idea. It can “affect a private person directly, yet so that he is only enabled to apprehend the idea, or to appreciate its attractiveness, by virtue of his sympathy with his neighbors, under the influence of a striking experience or development of thought. The conversion of St. Paul may be taken as an example of what is meant.” In other words, sometimes a person has to have a cold slap in the face in order to be abductively awakened to the attractiveness of an idea. Third, and apparently more rare, is the “divination of genius” in which an individual, isolated of other human influences, is struck by the attraction of an idea “before he has comprehended it” simply due to the continuity between his mind and “that of the Most High” (CP 6:307). An example here may be a musical genius, like Mozart, or a religious figure like Abraham who was called out of Haran by Yahweh. Abraham’s novel belief in the promised land occurred, according to Genesis 12, even though there was no community present that associated its existence and hope with Yahweh like he did. Abraham was able to hear Yahweh’s call, abductively forming the uncomprehended hope of a promised land. The “call” of God is the expression of the obvious continuity of Abraham’s mind with God’s.

I return to the first two cases. Peirce describes that result in finding an idea attractive, since the third is bound to be obscure since it relies on
genius. In these examples, the community is able to manifest the attractive idea without the comprehension of that idea. This precognitive condition, where the possibility is present by virtue of the collection of like minds, is handled here as a striking experience that Peirce attempts to understand with his doctrine of synechism—not the other way around. Peirce describes this same phenomenon working in the context of moral alternatives: “Now, it is not necessary for logicality that a man should himself be capable of the heroism of self-sacrifice. It is sufficient that he should recognize the possibility of it, . . . [b]ut all this requires a conceived identification of one’s interests with those of an unlimited community” (CP 2:654). The community spirit, the identification of one’s interests with those of the community, invokes the continuity of mind in a way adequate for transmitting the ideas that support agapistic evolution without the cognitive act of some one mind comprehending those ideas. My point here is that the abduction to the idea of God may have much more stable ground in the observation related to communities than on instinct considered as a tendency of an individual’s thought in isolation from the community.

As an aside, I wonder where Peirce would place himself in this trifold delineation. I think he would eschew the first, simply by virtue of the fact that he did not feel party spirit. The second, St. Paul’s example, may be closer, except that Peirce overlooks the persecution that precedes the striking experience and conversion. I think Peirce is right that even in this persecution Paul had drawn near in something like sympathy with the desire for a revealed Messiah, but the dependence on brute experience to reveal this sympathy does not seem like a way Peirce would identify himself. It is most likely that Peirce would claim the third position of a lonely genius as most indicative of his own experience and most explanatory of the origin of his ideas. What this means for Peirce’s larger argument concerning the naturalness of this discovery of God’s reality will come more to the fore in the conclusion.

Second Stage: Deductive Explication of the Hypothesis

The hypothesis of God is a peculiar one, in that it supposes an infinitely incomprehensible object, although every hypothesis, as such, supposes its object to be truly conceived in the hypothesis. This leaves the hypothesis but one way of understanding itself; namely, as vague yet as true so far as it is definite, and as continually tending to define itself more and more,
and without limit. The hypothesis, being thus itself inevitably subject to the law of growth, appears in its vagueness to represent God as so, albeit this is directly contradicted in the hypothesis from its very first phase. But this apparent attribution of growth to God, since it is ineradicable from the hypothesis, cannot, according to the hypothesis, be flatly false. Its implications concerning the Universes will be maintained in the hypothesis, while its implications concerning God will be partly disavowed, and yet held to be less false than their denial would be. Thus the hypothesis will lead to our thinking of features of each Universe as purposed; and this will stand or fall with the hypothesis. (CP 6:466)

The second stage of inquiry is deduction. Inquiry in this stage collects, apart from experience, consequences of the hypothesis. Scientific theism becomes exercised as an edge tool, since there is no dwelling place for habits here, only the anticipation of critical advances by explicating possibilities. The hypothesis of God puts logic to the ultimate test because it is very hard to say what deductively follows from God. “The hypothesis can only be apprehended so very obscurely that in exceptional cases alone can any definite and direct deduction from its ordinary abstract interpretation be made. How, for example, can we ever expect to be able to predict what that behavior would be?” (CP 6:489). Not only is there an incomprehensible object to deal with, there is also the problem of conjoining the consequences of a growing conception of reality with God, since God is thought to already include all in its reality. Despite these problems of drawing deductive consequences, the inquiry moves into this stage with full speed. The most significant logical worry is that deduction is accomplished apart from experience, and so it is liable to become disconnected with the living and breathing power of its object. This is a risk that Peirce argues can be handled only by drawing the prior stage and the following stage, inductive probation, closely around it.

The expansion possible from this second stage of inquiry, then, is most dependent on concepts that are directly connected to the first and third stages. This is where Peirce’s argument seeks a content that can become a “platform” for inquiry. The lion’s share of the emphasis on Peirce’s Neglected Argument focuses on the retroduction of the first stage of this argument, since if a conception of God makes it to the point of inquiry independent of experience it is clear that the argument takes on a much different character. Successfully challenging Peirce’s argument for the
God hypothesis depends on draining the first stage of its power, and Peirce is confident that this is not a logical possibility.

Peirce’s confidence in the Neglected Argument grows dramatically at the second stage of inquiry, since to doubt it now would involve the critic in a challenge of several arguments that are held together in this one hypothesis. Of course, this also means that if the argument for the reality of God proceeds to the second stage on questionable premises, then the likelihood of error and invalidity multiplies. For this reason, Peirce trains his thought on critical common-sensism in order to either dispel this erroneous conclusion or bolster it with sufficient arguments to silence critics.

With respect to the difficulty of drawing deductive consequences from the God hypothesis, Peirce answers with two characteristics of inquiry. First is the upshot from “The Law of Mind.” “[T]o say that mental phenomena are governed by a law does not mean merely that they are describable by a general formula; but that there is a living idea, a conscious continuum of feeling, which pervades them, and to which they are docile” (CP 6:152). Any deductive consequence of the God hypothesis would at least have this character of a living idea that provides for continuity of thought. A second character already mentioned is the character of evolution by creative love. “The philosophy we draw from John’s gospel is that this is the way mind develops; and as for the cosmos, only so far as it yet is mind, and has life, is it capable of further evolution. Love, recognizing germs of loveliness in the hateful, gradually warms it to life, and makes it lovely. That is the sort of evolution which every careful student of my essay ‘The Law of Mind’ must see synechism calls for” (CP 6:289). These two principles are symmetrical, in a sense. The presence of a law in mind entails that there is a character that makes such a coordinating law possible. And a coordinating evolutionary process, especially one characterized by love, would require that the increase of love between members would be holistically powerful, reaching to all elements of mind. Continuity is a necessary condition for evolution. These two principles together, then, construct a form of consequence to which the God hypothesis would refer. An early indication of Peirce’s attraction to the ideas of growth and continuity taken in relation to God appears in an address from 1863 titled “The Place of Our Age in History.”

If therefore we are Christians it seems we must believe that Christ is now directing the course of history and presiding over the destinies of kings,
and that there is no branch of the public weal which does not come within the bounds of his realm. And civilization is nothing but Christianity on the grand scale. . . . True religion, [this age] will think, consists in more than a mere dogma, in visiting the fatherless and widows and in keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. It will say that Christianity reaches beyond even that, reaches beyond the good conscience, beyond the individual life; must transfuse itself through all human law—through the social organization, the nation, the relationships of the peoples and the races. It will demand that not only where man’s determinate action goes on, but even where he is the mere tool of providence and in the realm of inanimate nature Christ’s kingdom shall be seen. (CE 1: 108–109, 113)

In this statement, Peirce brings out two themes; that there is a connective law pervading all determinate human action, the basis for his later development of a more explicit continuity in mind; and that there is an irrepressible force of realization in consciously and unconsciously directed action. Taking this early locution as a beginning of Peirce’s understanding of God’s reality, however, clearly has import for understanding much of his later philosophical work as an effort to bring such a conception to a deductive explication so that it can become an object of inquiry.

The principle of growth Peirce refers to here as “the kingdom of Christ” does not seem to admit of partial acceptance, but rather carries the weight of a universal and universally affective idea. I think Peirce means that any personal relation to God is grounded on the evolutionary universe since the possibility that God can exhibit something like a personality depends on the same evolutionary development. And in just the same way that the whole of the universe is imbued with the motion of agapistic evolution, it only makes sense that a person’s whole rank of habits would similarly become imbued with the evolutionary spirit once the association has been broached.

One critical aspect of the “conversion” to the hypothesis of God is worth restating before we draw some further implications of this change in terms of personality. The logical interpretant of any concept is not energetic action, but the habit or general rule that determines how a person will behave in certain situations. So, for instance, the degree to which a person self-critically adopts the teleological harmony of the law of mind (by virtue of adopting the God hypothesis), that person’s conduct will replicate that principle in the continuous action of life. Therefore, the openness and association present in the law of mind, that “celestial and living harmony,” will be manifest in the person’s conduct.
The principle that makes this living harmony so powerful is the unifying nature of this principle. Like the God hypothesis, the law of mind is that most general of principles that incorporates all aspects of experience into a unified whole while maintaining an open-ended view toward future experience. “A general idea, living and conscious now, it is already determinative of acts in the future to an extent to which it is not now conscious” (CP 6:156).

Developmental teleology is Peirce’s *sine qua non* of personality, as Colapietro remarks “during any moment of its life, the self is first and foremost a process in which some species of meaning is evolving.” It marks the ability to initiate self-control and self-analysis in respect to conduct which is especially significant in choosing an ultimate principle that governs the formation of all other habits. The ability to criticize one’s own habits is an imitation, in the good sense of that word, of the law of mind. The individual’s representation of the action of the law of mind indicates (and is constitutive of) the presence of developmental teleology. Directly following from the developmental nature of personality is Peirce’s claim that personality is an idea that, like all ideas, resists final definition. In concrete terms, the idea of the personality is cashed out in the person’s habit, that is, in the general rule of the tendency to take habits that lead to particular actions in certain situations. A notion of personality must affirm the developmental growth of an individual’s telos in order to account sufficiently for our experience of the phenomenon of continued growth that persists in personality.

The representation of the law of mind is not only present in the coordination of ideas that constitutes the personality, but it also initiates that coordination as the attractive precognitive idea that draws the mind into the process. Besides meaning that the personality is only completely apprehended when considered in its totality, which includes the entire range of possible actions in all possible situations (CP 6:158), this notion also means that the personality is fundamentally dependent on an initiating moment of precognitive communication. Peirce does not use the term *grace* philosophically, but it would seem appropriate to use it in relation to this precognitive condition of the law of mind that is a kind of origin that makes the development of personality possible. Also, given that the fullest realization of personality depends on a self-controlled habit change of the most general principles governing the soul consistent with the agapistic character of the universe, the elements that Peirce
combines in describing the personality seem to draw up to something very much like a conversion of the person.

Peirce says that a difficulty confronts the synechistic philosopher: “In considering personality, that philosophy is forced to accept the doctrine of a personal God; but in considering communication, it cannot but be admit that if there is a personal God, we must have a direct perception of that person and indeed be in personal communication with him. Now if that be the case, the question arises how it is possible that the existence of this being should ever have been doubted by anybody” (CP 6:162). God, then, if our description of developmental teleology has been sufficiently universal, must resemble a person, and so be a “personal God” or “personal creator” as Peirce says. Although our language has been somewhat abstract in the discussion of the law of mind and evolutionary teleology, Peirce’s comment here may enable a reconstruction of this account using the metaphor of personal relationship in a way that reflects Martin Buber’s language of “I and Thou.” The heart of Buber’s work, and Peirce’s, describes a place of communication between persons that resists objectification on either hand. The activity of communication implies continuity between individuals for the communicative act to obtain, but all communication must reflect an orientation toward semiotic expansion in order for it to cohere into a developing ideal. Developmental teleology, which links God and the human person in this ideal sense for Peirce, is present in its most ideal form in the community. From a practical standpoint, Peirce’s argument from personality rests on the presence of a community that expresses developmental teleology. An expectation of this developmental force in a community is, therefore, an aspect of Peirce’s argument for the reality of God.

Let me draw out one or two more possible deductive consequences of the hypothesis of the reality of God. From this discussion of the development of the personality, the consequence may be derived that Peirce would expect a conformity of all practice, all of a person’s practice and all of a community’s practice, with a normative ideal. Such conformity would follow by virtue of Peirce’s articulation of growth and continuity. Practice, if growing in connection, would necessarily move into conformity with other practices—be they personal practices or communal practices. And since no part of the mind is discontinuous from the rest, no habit will ever be independent, that is, have a different developmental orientation from any other habit. This evolutionary growth in conformity of
action is the only sufficient sign that habits are in fact connected in a law-like way one to another. So, conformity of practice is a deductive consequence of the meaning God.

A third deductive consequence of the reality of God would be to follow out Peirce’s confession that this reality claims a passionate “judgment of the Sensible Heart” (CP 6:295). Such a sensible heart would appear, much like Edwards argues, as a sign of the influence of this reality in its affective power. The conclusions concerning the agapistic character of the universe would not be a matter of calculation or indifference. Hence Peirce, like Edwards, expects that if God is real and really benign, passionate sensible hearts would give confessional evidence of this.

The question of the heart, for Peirce, is not a factor that limits the appeal of the reality of God, but is rather an indication of its catholic nature:

The esthetic ideal, which we all love and adore, the altogether admirable, has, as ideal, necessarily a mode of being to be called living. Because our ideas of the infinite are necessarily extremely vague and become contradictory the moment we attempt to make them precise. But still they are not utterly unmeaning, though they can only be interpreted in our religious adoration and the consequent effects upon conduct. This I think is good sound solid strong pragmatism. Now the Ideal is not a finite existent. Moreover, the human mind and the human heart have a filiation to God. That to me is the most comfortable doctrine. (CP 8:262)

The living mode of being is the most complete explication of the God hypothesis, and it follows now to ask what evidences may be possible to suggest that this living obtains for the inquirer. For only this living would constitute the proof of the hypothesis.

Stage Three: Probation of the Hypothesis of God

I will only add that the third man, considering the complex process of self-control, will see that the hypothesis, irresistible though it be to first intention, yet needs Probation; and that though an infinite being is not tied down to any consistency, yet man, 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 Pragmatism, 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 N.A. 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. (CP 6:480)
The last stage of inquiry brings Peirce’s argument for God directly to issue in the conduct of life. Relating Peirce’s notion of habit change in light of the God hypothesis makes the most intuitive sense of conversion in this stage. What proves or disproves the God hypothesis is the “commanding influence over the whole conduct of life of its believers” (CP 6:490). Peirce takes this risky position in relation to three types of “men.” First is the person who is persuaded by the humble argument for the reality of God and finds an acceptable place in the cosmos in light of this persuasion. The test Peirce proposes is a confirmation of that life, even though that person may not seek it. Second is the “man” who neglects the humble argument for logical reasons. Persuading this person (taking special aim at theologians) seems to be Peirce’s focus in presenting the Neglected Argument with its logical back up. The final “man” is most like Peirce himself, skilled in observation and logic—and yet this type also needs the testing or probation of the God hypothesis. This may be Peirce’s apologia pro vita sua in a logical key. For all these purposes, however, bringing the hypothesis to a test requires transforming an infinite object into finite observations, or finite observations into an infinite character. The issues here are what the conduct of life is that demonstrates this finite-infinite transformation and what kind of inquiry avails here to make this transformation evident. Anderson summarizes this aspect of inquiry in terms of Peirce’s pragmaticism. “If one is to test the hypothesis, then, one must move to pragmaticism and the third grade of clearness. That is, one must turn to discovering “just what general habits of conduct a belief in the truth of the concept . . . would develop: that is to say, what habits would ultimately result from a sufficient consideration of such truth.”  

I think Peirce’s focus may be more idiosyncratic than persuasive at this stage of his argument. That is, I think he realizes that his discovery of the meaning of himself and his place in the cosmos needs confirmation like the first “man.” He has at least articulated the ground he needs confirmed—his logic—so that he is clear about the upshot of this enterprise. If his logic does not issue in the self-controlled development of the conduct of life, if it fails to attain the very generality his realism is based upon, he will collapse into the second “man” he is trying to persuade.

What Peirce means to describe is the living probation of this hypothesis such that the conduct of life is sign of a change in light of the deductive consequences mentioned earlier. These are a complete critical
understanding of habits and habit change and the character of evolutionary love as the principle of that habit change. Every habit must be coordinated with this principle, only now this coordination is the focus of inductive inquiry. The conduct of life is not limited to normative ethical practice since there are qualitative as well as quantitative aspects to this conduct. In response to Royce, Peirce says, “To me, it plainly appears that such a person, if he have a clear head, will at once reply, right and wrong are nothing to me except so far as they are connected with certain rules of living by which I am enabled to satisfy a real impulse which works in my heart; and this impulse is the love for my neighbor elevated into a love of an ideal and divine humanity which I identify with the providence that governs the world” (CP 8:47). Ethics is an aspect of this probation only to the extent that it yields this generality of habit coordinated with God’s providence.

What is most clear from the brief description of the probation in the Neglected Argument is that the results of this change would be the instantiation of a kind of inquiry, and that this inquiry would have its ultimate consideration in the God hypothesis. First, this hypothesis bespeaks a power of generality that comes in the form of “very highest Plausibility” that reaches an unparalleled height among deliberately formed hypotheses. This plausibility is a limit of sorts for Peirce’s pragmaticism, since the “would be” character of the habits that follow from this hypothesis would have strength to resist all but the strongest doubts. Second, the instinct that grounds this hypothesis makes critical evaluation of that belief all the harder since it appears to have its origin not in any action but only the continuity between his mind and “that of the Most High.” Third, the hypothesis of God is extremely hard to doubt after it is acquired because it anticipates an order to thought and nature that stand as limits to the conception of the generality of terms. It is not clear how such generality or order can ever become an instantiated doubt that is not “paper doubt.” The definition of God as \textit{Ens nesciacium} entails a “character that is a generalization of order, and that, in the lack of any word for it, we may call for the nonce, ‘Super-order.’ Pure mind must appear as having a character related to the habit-taking capacity, just as super-order is related to uniformity” (CP 6:490). Pure mind just is this ordering; hence, habit change, in all its forms, is an expression of this order that is “sufficient for the conduct of life.” This demand for sufficiency in conduct focuses the claim for authority by
concretizing the order of mind without reducing it to the level of positive verificationism, while at the same time maintaining the ideal nature of the character appearing in conduct. The question of character as a superorder raises a fundamental question about habit change that Peirce is unclear about. What is the origin of the authority evident in habit change? Examining this authority discriminates critical common-sensism from its older form.

These considerations lead me, quite naturally, to mention another mark of the Critical Common-sensist that separates him from the old school. Namely, he opines that the indubitable beliefs refer to a somewhat primitive mode of life, and that, while they never become dubitable in so far as our mode of life remains that of somewhat primitive man, yet as we develop degrees of self-control unknown to that man, occasions of action arise in relation to which the original beliefs, if stretched to cover them, have no sufficient authority. In other words, we outgrow the applicability of instinct—not altogether, by any manner of means, but in our highest activities. The famous Scotch philosophers lived and died out before this could be duly appreciated. (CP 5:511)

Complete control of the conduct of life entails striking on the authority for change that is absent in terms of instinct. To be bound by instinct would amount to the nominalism that eliminates the possibility of genuine self-control. Peirce leans his logic and metaphysics toward an authority that appears only as a provisional origin of the ordering that yields character. Peirce is correct that it is hard to disprove this origin, and yet its absence does not make sense of the positive individuation that appears in the first “man” who seeks neither confirmation nor provisional ground. What is reserved for Peirce and the third “man” is the realization of the permanent incompleteness of character conjoined with the demand for a proof of the compete control of habits by virtue of a critical apprehension of the authority necessary for self-controlled change. Personality is tested not by its immediate products but by the assurance that its character would, in the long run, come clear as an expression of complete self-control. But there can never be sufficient grounds to make the final determination of the person’s character. Conversion, in this way, appears as the ultimate challenge for Peirce’s notion of personality.

The dynamic of this provisional but unsatisfactory inductive test of conduct shows up in a comment earlier in the Neglected Argument.
Peirce says, “It is that course of meditation upon the three Universes which gives birth to the hypothesis and ultimately to the belief that they, or at any rate two of the three, have a Creator independent of them” (CP 6:483).

The question is, what “universe” does he mean that does not have a Creator independent of it? Anderson cites Donna Orange: “Even if God is self-creating, God as third has no independent creator.” Anderson disagrees, saying that “it is not reason or Thirdness that enjoys an element of freedom from an independent creator but the initial firsts.”20 Both miss the point somewhat because Peirce is not suggesting which universes are complete without consideration of an independent creator, but from which universe can a God not be discerned. It is clear that for Peirce this is the universe of Secondness, reaction. This corresponds to the “second man” who neglects the humble argument for God just as the gospel of Greed suggests the same in principle. “Men of action” have no care for what they ultimately produce, and from a platform such as this no meaning concerning a creator is possible. But this denigration of secondness becomes an abyss that keeps pulling Peirce back. Individuation in finite practice can never be general, but firstness lacks power and thirdness rests precariously on provisional symmetries, only ever expecting perfection in the long run. The second, an immediate experience of the self, can never be fully productive of an idea of a personal creator, according to Peirce.

Peirce’s emphasis on the third stage of his argument can be more clearly described from this point. The provisional testing of the God hypothesis is not an addendum to make the argument strong; it is the very essence of Peirce’s self-understanding. Testing this argument makes human freedom into a test. There is no “want to” or wish for a higher meaning in practice. The Neglected Argument is a challenge thrown down on the road of inquiry. There is not a potential growth into the conclusions of the Neglected Argument. Inquiry either rises to this challenge, integrating induction, deduction, and abduction into this one moment of orientation, or it fails to demonstrate the power necessary for complete self-control. Only in this stage of provisional testing of the God hypothesis can inquiry become a sufficient sign of both the character of the inquirer and the character of the object of inquiry. To establish this habit as a way of life requires a submission to inquiry that is also a submission to the object of inquiry, and the only evidence of this
developing control of action is the heartfelt discovery of the object of
God. This inquiry, seeking its own overcoming, is the creative obedi­
ence of the life of conversion. In “The Law of Mind” Peirce says,

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 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 insep­
arable from that idea; while a necessitarian religion is in an altogether
false position and is destined to become disintegrated. But a pseudo-evo­
olutionism 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. (CP 6:157)

Relation to God is the only way to retain the creative development of
habit and habit change that could possibly serve as the ground for con­
firming the God hypothesis, the character of the person that finally
escapes negative individuation. Conversion means this asymmetrical
dependence on creative advance that is made at the risk of collapsing
into determinism or into secondness where no light is possible.

CRITICISMS AND ADVANCES ON CONVERSION

In the process of this presentation I have made some suggestions about
aspects of Peirce’s thought that need more attention. One of these
points concerns the role of the church in Peirce’s thought, especially in
the first stage of the Neglected Argument. Another point concerns
Peirce’s struggle with negative individuation and how this challenges his
conclusions about how to determine the character of one’s “conduct of
life.” Before I turn to these two points, however, it is important to raise
the critical issue about the use of conversion as a general theme or a
general critique, especially since I have not laid down an explicit defini­
tion of conversion. I have retained a vagueness concerning conversion
so far in this book, a vagueness that I think is essential to uncovering its
richest potential meaning, although we can point to some more firmly
established elements.
One of the firmer aspects of conversion that comes to light through this analysis is the sense of holism that holds together both the transformation of a thinker and the transforming reality that sponsors that movement. I think Peirce lacks this holism in one sense and finds it in another. The way he lacks holism is in terms of sustained argumentation concerning the principal outcomes of his philosophical musings. I do not think this demonstrates a fragmentation in Peirce’s thought, nor do I think that Peirce changed significantly in terms of his more ultimate commitments. Rather, what Peirce lacks is an overarching metaphor from which there is clear access to all aspects of his thought. I think this is why studies of Peirce are so fruitful in terms of broader philosophical connections, but why Peirce the man appears more and more elusive even in the course of these studies. “Conversion” may be a possible way to incorporate Peirce’s thoughts, and I think a bit of Peirce the man as well, into a more holistic account of his thought. Whether or not conversion is the best platform for a holistic approach to Peirce, I think it is clear that Peirce was profoundly engaged in the issues of God, the soul, and transformation.

The way that Peirce does evince a holism is in terms of his inquiry. The continuity of inquiry becomes Peirce’s steed for running through (and sometimes over) reflective problems emerging in a variety of contexts. Kelly Parker has demonstrated this aspect of continuity in Peirce’s mathematical and epistemic thought. But this source of holism compromises Peirce’s inquiry in several ways. First, it is difficult to make continuity the ground for an argument for an independent creator. Second, Peirce’s notion of continuity as identified through resistance undermines any account for positive individuation, despite the fact that Peirce himself seems to have gained a sense of this positive attitude. As he writes to Russell, “Every man sees some task cut out for him. Let him do and feel that he is doing what God made him in order that he should do” (CP 8:138 n.4). The ontological limits of absolute continuity and negative individuation become roadblocks to his inquiry, and much of Peirce’s metaphysics is required to move around or past these problems.

My interest in conversion as a platform for appropriating and criticizing Peirce’s thought is driven by this observation of his need for an incorporative platform and his clear attempts to find this through the continuity of inquiry. Let me take up two issues then in response to this observation.
The primary issue between Peirce and conversion is his insistence that inquiry is both the sign and product of personal transformation. While his reasons for this are evident, since through inquiry he can collect philosophers, theologians, and scientists in terms of a logical analysis, it also becomes evident that what Peirce could not do was live as a result of that inquiry. Inquiry becomes an end in itself, and in fact, becomes the ground for itself in the Neglected Argument. The proof of his logic stands on the provisional ground of an infinitely developing argument. His reasons for rejecting the pragmatic nominalism of Dewey and James are sound, as we will see next, but what remains absent from Peirce is the sense of a stable platform, a satisfying conclusion, or a spirit of judgment that is really continuous with making discoveries about the universe, the self, and God. This is most evidently a problem in the Neglected Argument, where Peirce’s own condition of “influence over the whole conduct of life” comes up looking rather empty when the answer is “but only conduct that always remains future is meaningful.” I do not think Peirce was blind to this need, for it occasionally peeks out through his offhanded comments and his struggle with his religious identity, but that makes his philosophical searches all the more surprising inasmuch as these elements do not crash in as the kind of doubts arising in practice his theory of inquiry aims to address.

I have referred to a letter Peirce wrote to the rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in New York. Peirce recounts an experience of “receiving permission” to receive communion, although he is aware that he is not intellectually prepared to do so. Nonetheless, he responds and takes communion. My point is not Peirce’s inconsistency or a “hidden” conversion. There is not much Peirce hides, and his language of obedience, submission, service, and adoration concerning the church and the object of the church have always appeared to me as signs that he found a resistant, enlivening, and demanding origin in the Christian tradition. Again, these indicate an awareness of his own need for conversion, and without putting things into language like that, I think Peirce strove to realize his own transformation to this reality. What kept him apart from that realization is difficult to say, but I may conjecture that he had more in common with Saint Augustine in terms of the will than he wanted to admit. What I find strikingly absent, therefore, is Peirce’s active commitment to the church from which he takes such confidence in the developing character of civilization and such discoveries as the call of the
Savior. I wonder what development of Peirce's thought would be possible if the church he refers to became the place in which his thought could dwell, where his inquiry would find purchase not only in terms of justifying itself but in terms of sustaining the reflective work of bringing creative transformation to bear for the good of all minds, high and low alike. I think this absence is a clue.

Where this clue leads me is to Peirce's difficulty in making sense of the ultimate habit change associated with both the ultimate identity of the character of the individual and the success of his method of inquiry. What is unclear to me is the doubt that sponsors this inquiry—is there a doubt associated with the God hypothesis of equal moment in terms of ultimacy? If there is not, then how does the Neglected Argument develop any differently than Descartes' claim that he discovers an idea of God in his thinking that resolves his problem of the external world. And if there is a doubt behind this inquiry, then it would behoove Peirce to begin with that negation. Regardless of this origin, however, there is another element of absence lurking in Peirce's thought that must be brought to light.

From the broadest consideration of Peirce's claims about the person and God, it is evident that God can only be in the end the ultimate source of negation. To be not God is to be really distinct, and Peirce is unequivocal at this point. There is God, a creator, unlike any other. There are you and me, inquirers, existent and like many others, continuous in thought and action, able to discover this unlike-us God. Agapism as a character looks like a bridge that is crossed through inquiry that yields a kind of mind-meld with God. So, either Peirce becomes a finite-infinite creature—like God, only not able to comprehend his own infinity—or Peirce becomes aware most clearly of his character as not-God. On the first alternative, there is no reason why the identification with God should not be continuous, except that we have a limitation of time (and Peirce never says we do not have the will to be fully self-controlled). But this means that the infinite character is never possibly realized in our thought. It always remains a source of negation for us, if not for the community. And on the second alternative, that we are not-God means that no matter what changes or products of inquiry we achieve or self-critically develop we always remain not-God.

This disjunction reveals an opening for an orientation in Peirce's thought that mediates this split, something like a pragmaticistic model of
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What Peirce seeks is a position where the creative function of a personal and provisional inquiry is a full-blooded representation of the power of the church in full awareness of its limit that it is not-God but that it is God’s possession. This inquiry, from the platform of the church, can understand God—in fact, grace is God in this finite form—and yet the person by virtue of the community remains distinct from God.

This conjecture of a pragmaticistic incarnation should be viewed in this context as a product of musement, striking upon an attractive idea that needs explication and probation. Taking Peirce as the context for this casting around may make sense of the sign of his thought in terms of what we need to explore to validate his character, which is one of the more open-ended characters in terms of willingness to explore strange worlds of thought. This character is clear when he says “In order that science may be successful, its votaries must hasten to surrender themselves at discretion to experimental inquiry, in advance of knowing what its decisions may be. There must be no reservations” (CP 1:57). To make Peirce’s scientific theism critically productive, then, conversion must be examined experimentally and without reservations.

Conversion would mark a dramatic shift in the way Peirce is understood philosophically, and so it is likely that this suggestive proposal will not be well accepted by philosophers familiar and committed to understanding Peirce’s thought. But I hope to sustain this argument in order to bring a level of critical analysis to Peirce’s thought that it otherwise will not have. In what follows my goal is to realize more clearly the confessional depth of Peirce’s recommendation that a person who inquires in scientific singleness of heart, 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, however long the conscious classification of it under that head be postponed. (CP 6:467)

I invoke conversion here to dramatize the transformation of the “springs of action” through self-control realized in the belief in God. Peirce’s pragmaticism, Doug Anderson says, “underwrites the possibility of the
indirect testing of a vaguely conceived God by way of the habits of persons and the habits of the cosmos. If Peirce were reduced to working only with immediate perception of possible actions, no real God could possibly be understood to emerge in museum or to be testable in induction.”22 This power of testing is connected to Peirce’s notion that a “latent tendency toward the belief in God is a fundamental ingredient in the soul” (CP 6:487). The conversion Peirce seeks is a conversion to the criticism of one’s ultimate beliefs, and this is a conversion that can and should become catholic in its application and power.

NOTES


2. Sang Hyun Lee, The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards (Princeton University Press, 1988), 66. Lee gives an account of Edwards as an objective idealist, and in this sense, a precursor to Peirce. I would extend this connection beyond their shared conceptions of the real nature of Law to include the fragility of disposition by which the reality of the soul as a general term or a habit, is reconstructed through an interaction with an opposing general term or habit. Where they separate is the ontological character of the divine disposition.


5. In his 1892 letter to the rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in New York, Peirce acknowledges that on a recent visit to the church he was “given permission” to approach and take communion by the “Master.” This act of taking communion contravened his problems with the creed that had been the cause of many a “bitter reflection.” In this instance, however, Peirce says he was “carried up to the altar rail, almost without my own volition.” This, I think, is a case in point of a habit that is adopted on the basis of a vague leading.


8. Brent, Charles Sanders Peirce, 246.
11. Raposa, Peirce's Philosophy of Religion, 94.
12. Ibid., 11.
13. Ibid., 24.
16. Ibid., 104. Peirce distinguishes logica utens, a “whole system of opinions and habits of thought that produce bad inferences as well as good ones. Such a system is a precondition of the study of logic and warrants constant and rigorous criticism.”
18. Raposa, Peirce's Philosophy of Religion, 12.
20. Ibid., 176.
21. Parker, Peirce's Philosophy of Continuity.