FOREWORD

At the time of his death, Father Vincent Potter, in addition to translating Saint Thomas Aquinas's *De malo*, was preparing for publication his essays on the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce. He had virtually completed the task, although there were minor revisions and, in Chapter 1 at least, slight expansions that he wanted to make. He had selected essays ranging from his earliest publications on Peirce to his most recent; for example, "Peirce's Analysis of Normative Science" appeared in the *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* in 1966, while "Peirce on 'Substance' and 'Foundations'" appeared in *The Monist* in 1992. As a way of rounding off the collection, he had chosen a few of his unpublished papers, though his chief objective was to gather together in one place those interpretive pieces that had been subjected to the critical review of scholarly colleagues.

The two opening sentences of "Peirce on 'Substance' and 'Foundations'" help us put into focus Father Potter's work as an interpreter of Peirce:

Charles S. Peirce has a great deal to contribute both to understanding and to solving many of the philosophical problems that puzzle contemporary thinkers. In fact, it is probably true that in some ways philosophers of our time are in a better position to understand Peirce's thought than those of his own day.

The opening sentence obviously concerns the contemporary relevance of Peirce's philosophy;¹ the second, the advantages that we—in contrast to his contemporaries—have in comprehending that philosophy. Father's deep, abiding conviction was that "Charlie" (as he was wont to call Peirce) can help us think through traditional philosophical issues in a manner that, at once, drives deeper roots into our intellectual tradition and demands critical engagement with contemporary developments.

We can learn much by attending to what is implicit in Father's practice as an interpreter, much about this particular interpreter and, of greater significance, much about the difficult art of philosophical interpretation.² The uncritical traditionalist (that is, the
thinker so thoroughly immersed in a tradition that he fails ever to attain a critical distance from his own intellectual inheritance) and the deracinated contemporary (the thinker who prides himself for standing apart from any and every intellectual tradition) were, for Father Potter, woefully inadequate models of the intellectual life. In their place the ideal of the critical traditionalist—the thinker engaged in a painstaking, ongoing critical dialogue with ancestors as well as contemporaries—is the one he defended and, indeed, exemplified. The dead weight of tradition is felt as such only by those lacking the intellectual resources to appropriate critically the insights and wisdom inherent in their own tradition; but for thinkers possessing such resources, it would be more suitable to speak of the wings of tradition.

Such, at least, was Father Potter's attitude; in this as in many other matters, we see the influence of Bernard Lonergan, for whom tradition and innovation are a dialectical pair. Properly appreciated, tradition is a source of innovation, and innovation, in turn, is the outgrowth of tradition. The unimaginative repetition of past patterns of thought or conduct is not characteristic of a truly vital tradition; nor is the automatic (in a sense, mechanical) rejection of such patterns the mark of a truly innovative mind. Such rejection is characteristic of a mind excessively anxious about its own originality. The imaginative, critical appropriation of past patterns of thought and conduct marks off the critical traditionalist from both the blind traditionalist and the uprooted contemporary. In opposition to uncritical defenders of an intellectual tradition, the critical traditionalist insists that the vitality of any tradition requires engagement with contemporary developments; in opposition to the deracinated intellectual, s/he stresses that anti-traditionalism is itself a tradition (albeit a relatively recent one, at least in its militant contemporary form) and that contemporary thought alone does not provide us with the critical distance needed to address effectively contemporary concerns. In referring to classic literature, Albert Einstein astutely suggested that:

Somebody who reads only newspapers and at best works of contemporary authors looks to me like an extremely near-sighted person who scorns eyeglasses. He is completely dependent on the preju-
dices and fashions of his times, since he never gets to see or hear anything else.4

For Father Potter, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Peirce were exemplars of a long, rich intellectual tradition; to scorn their texts would be tantamount to scorning powerful lenses by which a sharper, fuller vision of our world might be attained.

Peirce was, for him, a resource, a source he could go to again and again for insight and direction. Father Potter's interpretations of Peirce's texts aimed, above all, at deepening our philosophical comprehension of some important issue (the ontological status of ideals, for example). They were, most certainly, aimed at getting Peirce right, interpreting him in light of his actual assertions and avowed intentions. But the value of getting Peirce right was ultimately subordinated to thinking through some set of issues (the issues to which the texts being interpreted were devoted). If this is perhaps not always so obvious as it might be, that is because Father was convinced that Peirce had gotten some things fundamentally right; so that, in getting Peirce right, we are led to think aright.

Above, I have tried to suggest what manner of interpreter Father Potter was. Below, I will consider what manner of man C. S. Peirce himself was and what manner of activity the philosophical interpreting of philosophical texts is. Before I do so, however, let me say a word or two more about the status of this manuscript at the time of Father's death. Even though the principal focus of his final weeks was on his translation of Saint Thomas, he had written the first chapter of his essays on Peirce and (even more recently) a note "To the Reader"; moreover, he had compiled a Table of Contents, arranging his essays in an order that made the most sense to him. Hence, this collection of essays owes its content (what has been included) and its arrangement to the author.

At this point, it would be instructive for us to consider carefully the way in which Father Potter proposed (1) to introduce Charles S. Peirce to contemporary readers and (2) to arrange his essays. These provide clear clues for how this important contemporary expositor approached the always challenging, often enigmatic, texts of Peirce.
WHAT MATTER OF MAN IS THIS?  
WHAT MANNER OF ACTIVITY IS INTERPRETING?

Let us begin, then, at the beginning—with Father Potter's first chapter. First, he introduced the man; then, the realist; and, following this, the pragmaticist. There is warrant in Peirce's own writings for making the acquaintance of the author one is about to read, for, as the youthful Peirce put it:

Each man has his own peculiar character. It enters into all he does. It is in his consciousness and not a mere mechanical trick, and... it enters into all his cognition, it is a cognition of things in general. It is therefore the man's philosophy, his way of regarding things; not a philosophy of the head alone—but one which pervades the whole man. (7.595)

The validity and fecundity of the cognitions that a philosopher defends are, of course, not secured by the personality or character of that philosopher. But one of the most admirable forms of personal agency is that involving a resolute will to subject one's own beliefs and judgments to impersonal standards of rational criticism. At its best, reading a philosophical text involves the exercise of such agency: it involves squarely confronting one's thoughts with the assertions and implications encountered in another's text. If the process is to be something more than the clash of the arbitrary wills of reader and author, an appeal to shared and in some respects impersonal standards (the laws of logic, for example, or the facts of experience) is needed. We can, of course, read for the purpose of simply confirming our preconceived opinions (1.2), but reading in this way exhibits a disrespect born of arrogance. Reading for the purpose of evaluating the strength of our opinions reveals, in contrast, a willingness to grant the author the status of interlocutor.

But it would be imprudent to grant any and every author such status, just as it would be foolish to elevate every randomly encountered individual into one's intellectual guide. Peirce is quite explicit about this:

The reader has a right to know how the author's opinions were formed. Not, of course, that he is expected to accept any conclusions which are not borne out by argument. But in discussions of extreme difficulty... when good judgment is a factor, and pure ratiocination
is not everything, it is prudent to take every element into considera-
tion. (1.3)

Immediately after noting this, Peirce offers a brief autobiographical
sketch, thereby providing his readers with a sense of not only the
process by which he formed his opinions but also the purpose
animating his conduct.

In fact, it is for Peirce—quite apart from autobiographical con-
siderations—nothing less than “the primary rule of the ethics of
rhetoric that every prose composition should begin by informing
the reader what its aim is, with sufficient precision to enable him
or [her] to decide whether to read it or not. If the title can do
this, all the better.” For a pragmatist especially, the notion of aim
or purpose is central. For a pragmatic approach to philosophical
hermeneutics, purpose is likewise pivotal. As a way of appreciating
Father Potter’s distinctive approach to the Peircean texts, it will
be helpful to highlight some features of this approach, for it is the
one he so ably adopted.

A passionate commitment to dispassionate inquiry—a personal
espousal of the impersonal criteria on which rational critique is
alone possible—may appear paradoxical, but it is not incoherent
or contradictory. (Along these same lines, Peirce himself claimed
that in order to enjoy science, “it will be needful to have one’s
heart set on something remote from enjoyment” [2.15]). We ought
to appreciate that: “The dry light of intelligence is manifestly not
sufficient to determine a great purpose: the whole man [or woman]
goes into it” (7.186). Yet, we need to realize that a great purpose
defines in its own way the whole person inspired by it. A great
purpose such as dispassionate inquiry or compassionate conduct
is, for the agents animated by it, something at once constitutive of
their identity (it is among the ways they define themselves) and
transcendent of their accomplishments. It is the way these agents
define themselves, but it is simultaneously the way they refine—
criticize and correct—themselves. The purpose is not only some-
ting to which they are committed but also something by which they
are regulated or, more exactly, by which their own efforts at
self-regulation are made possible. Apart from a resolute commit-
ment to what Peirce calls a great purpose, there are only meanness
and superficiality; resulting from such a commitment are the large-
ness and depth of spirit that we find so compelling when concretely encountered in, say, the passionate inquirer (Albert Einstein, for example) or the compassionate individual (Mother Teresa).

To make the acquaintance of a person worth knowing, then, involves glimpsing the transcendent purposes animating and inspiring that person. These purposes are, as we have already implied, trans-personal: not private property or so much subjective clay to be molded into whatever form whimsical selves happen to desire, but the beacons by which all too easily misled selves try to chart their course.

Our assessment of any philosopher concerns, in the end, not a purely technical cleverness but a radiantly transcendent purpose. In general, the "great use of a life is," as William James observed, "to spend it for something that outlasts it." But the manner in which one spends one's life, however exalted a purpose, matters; the nobility of the purpose does not itself secure the nobility of the life. This aspect is brought into sharp focus by James himself when he asserts that: "The solid meaning of life is always the same eternal thing,—the marriage, namely, of some unhabitual ideal, however special, with some fidelity, courage, and endurance; with some man's or woman's pains." Still, James's characteristic stress on the uniqueness of the ideal ought not to distract our attention from what is most relevant for our purposes: what renders life meaningful is admirable service to admirable ideals, be these ideals habitual or not. Ordinarily, these ideals provide means for assessing the manner in which they are being, or have been, served. Hence, fraudulent research marks an essential failure, as does wrathful Christianity. The norms by which conduct is appraised are generally linked to the ideals by which that conduct is animated; thus, the norm of truthful exchange is linked to the ideal of truth itself, just as the norms of charitable conduct are linked to the ideal of self-sacrificial love.

Father Potter's brief biographical sketch of Peirce (a sketch avowedly dependent on Paul Weiss's contribution to the Dictionary of American Biography) is intended to illuminate the great purposes animating this singular thinker and, beyond this, the progressively constrained circumstances in which Peirce struggled to serve these purposes. That is, it is intended to convey something of the transcendent ideals and tragic circumstances of Peirce's life. Even from
this very brief sketch, one glimpses something of the “fidelity, courage, and endurance” of one who, despite his isolation and poverty, spent his time and energy on pushing further both his first-order investigations into the cosmos and his second-order investigation into the most reliable methods of inquiry.

Very quietly in this first chapter, Father Potter in effect acknowledges the postmodern character of the present moment. He suggests that Peirce can still speak to us “whose world is perhaps even more dramatically different from his than his was from the Middle Ages.” In other words, the discontinuity between Peirce’s and, for example, Duns Scotus’s time is perhaps not so deep as the discontinuity between Peirce’s time and our own: the modern epoch might be closer to the medieval period than our own postmodern moment is to later phases of the modern epoch. In general, Father Potter is acutely aware of the ruptures, fragmentations, displacements, etc., which are such prominent features of human history. In particular, he is conscious of the chasm that yawns between those living in the first decades of this century (Peirce died in 1914; James, in 1910) and those living in its last decades.

Though appreciative of the historical ruptures which opened the chasm separating such late-modern thinkers as Peirce and ourselves, Father Potter was skeptical about the currently fashionable forms of postmodern thought. While for Roland Barthes “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author,” Father Potter refused to purchase his rights as a reader at the expense of the author’s own life! This was especially true in those cases where the author happened to be dead! While for Richard Rorty, in his advocacy of “strong misreading,” it is legitimate for readers to beat the text into whatever shape serves their momentary purpose, Father Potter advocated imaginatively re-enacting the enduring purposes embodied in a particular text. He saw the advocacy of strong misreading as a license for textual violence (though the advocates themselves would readily admit this, countering the criticism by charging that it makes a fetish of the text). Fidelity to the text is possible only through imaginative participation in the embodied purposes of some deliberative agent, including the embodiment of these purposes in the text itself.

Authorial intention is not some inaccessible reality. Like every other human purpose, it is in principle something that can be felt
as well as understood, however imperfectly or incompletely. If there is always more to any text than an author consciously puts there, it is because the purpose animating the author transcends the control and consciousness of its proximate source. Hence, while the meaning of a text is not reducible to an authorially ascribed significance, the purposes embodied in that text cannot be safely ignored. What is true of texts is true of every other case of human striving: human agents are, at once, competent actors and unwitting playthings of largely hidden forces (for example, the individual unconscious or engulfing currents of historical developments). We are neither completely clueless nor fully competent; in virtually all our exertions, we exhibit a degree of competence, while revealing ourselves as not knowing fully—perhaps even adequately—what we are doing. Authorial agency is a distinctive form of human agency, susceptible to the same limitations and liabilities as other forms (in particular, this pattern of competency and ineptness). If it is always the case (except in the most trivial exercises) that our purposes, especially our great purposes, transcend our performances or productions, then it is the case that the purposes embodied in a text are frustrated as well as fulfilled by that specific textual incarnation. Even so, the presence of purposes in texts as well as other artifacts is, simultaneously, palpable and problematic. The responsible interpreter is thus the responsive reader—responsive, above all, to the tangle of manifest and hidden purposes, of avowed intentions and disclaimed, but nonetheless operative, intentions, of realized and frustrated objectives.

While Father Potter recognized the postmodern character of the present time, he resisted postmodern fashions, especially the fashion of celebrating the so-called death of the author. Texts are not series of traces in which meaning and its comprehension are endlessly deferred, but rather enactments and embodiments of purposes in which those purposes are frustrated as well as fulfilled, concealed as well as revealed. They are not to be beaten into the idiosyncratic shape desired by any and every whimsical interpreter; rather, they are, in some measure, the stable and even stubborn expressions of evolved and evolving purposes. As such, they have the force of invitations to participate in the further articulation of shared purposes.

This, at least, is how Father Potter approached philosophical
texts. Above all, he desired to join as a co-inquirer Peirce and a handful of other authors (most notably, Thomas Aquinas, Bernard Lonergan, and John E. Smith). A community of purpose makes possible a community of understanding; it also makes possible significant, fruitful disagreement. Both in terms of his own painstaking interpretations of philosophical texts and in terms of his methodological reflections on his interpretive practices, he made a compelling case for what might be called the classical ideal of hermeneutics—understanding the other as other because one, even if only provisionally, imaginatively identifies with that other.

But, in the case of Peirce, the identification was greatly facilitated by the deep intellectual affinities between author and interpreter. The deep distaste for cant and the equally deep desire for rigor proportionate to the subject matter animated both.

CONCRETE FALLIBILISM AND FALLIBILISTIC THEISM

We have considered Father’s introductory chapter to this collection as an aid in glimpsing some key features of his hermeneutic approach. It is also illuminating to note how Father Potter organized the chapters of this volume, in particular, how he placed his studies of Peirce’s theism as the culmination of this study. One of Peirce’s best accounts of human knowing is to be found in “The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God”; in turn, one of his most instructive engagements in the form of self-controlled inquiry he so painstakingly analyzed is precisely this attempt to discern the presence of the divine in the quotidian. No doubt, many followers of Peirce are less than enthusiastic about what some do not hesitate to describe as a failure of nerve—a failure to think through the possibility of a self-propelled universe for which a transcendent Creator is superfluous. But Father Potter insisted upon seeing Peirce’s philosophical project as a signal achievement within the grand tradition of Western metaphysics. The thinkers within this tradition were and, indeed, are unembarrassed about the task of articulating a vision inclusive of the divine and, beyond this, a conception of divinity continuous with the major emphases of the traditional notion of a personal God. Not only was Father Potter himself such a thinker, but he took Peirce to be one as well. Of course, it might
be insinuated that the interpreter is surreptitiously making the
texts of another do the interpreter's own bidding. But the texts of
Peirce simply do not allow for such an insinuation to stand. How-
ever unpleasantly Peirce's theism is to some of his followers, it is—
for good or ill—simply an integral part of his philosophical
perspective.

So, from the focal question of Chapter 1—What manner of
thinker, indeed, what manner of man, is this?—we move ultimately
to the focal question of the final chapters: What manner of world
is this? Or, alternatively put, what can we responsibly say about
the character not only of the reality encompassing us, but also of
the reality by which we were generated in the first place and, at
every turn, are sustained as well as threatened? For Peirce, it is a
world in which the signs of divinity are discernible.

Between these two termini (between the first chapter, on the
one hand, and the last three chapters and the Appendix, on the
other), there are eight papers. Chapter 2, "The British Connec-
tion," takes up an important strand in Peirce's intellectual life and,
in effect, continues the task of making Peirce's acquaintance (of
specifying just what manner of philosopher he is); it also prepares
the way for the following several chapters by highlighting both
Peirce's concern for methodology and the roots of his pragmatism.
Chapters 3 through 6 form something of a unit, being concerned
with either the normative sciences in general (esthetics, ethics,
and logic) or the logical maxim for which Peirce is perhaps still
best known. The pragmatic maxim is a logical doctrine, and logical
inquiry is (for Peirce, at least) one of three normative sciences
whose character is ultimately comprehensible only in reference
to the two other normative sciences (esthetics, conceived as the
investigation of ultimate ends, and ethics, conceived as the investi-
gation of self-controlled conduct). In these chapters (as they have
been arranged by their author), we move from a general considera-
tion of the normative sciences to specific questions concerning a
particular doctrine in but one of these sciences (questions concern-
ing the pragmatic maxim precisely as a logical doctrine in Peirce's
distinctive sense).

From these considerations, we turn to several questions in fun-
damental ontology. questions concerning substance, continuity, and
chance. One novel feature of Father Potter's interpretation of
Peirce is the attribution of a substance ontology to a thinker who is ordinarily supposed to opt for process instead of substance. While *synechism* (the doctrine of continuity) and *tychism* (the doctrine of objective chance) are familiar topics in Peirce scholarship, Father Potter’s handling of these doctrines helps us approach these central but difficult topics afresh. From the ontological issues just noted, we turn in Chapters 10 through 12 to another set of such issues, ones bearing directly upon the reality of God.

In this context, an understanding of human experience as a medium of objective disclosure is defended. Drawing upon insights from Bernard Lonergan, Father Potter articulates a notion of *cognitive* experience as an ongoing process in which distinct levels are “interrelated cumulatively and incrementally.” Three such levels are presentation, understanding, and judgment. Though dependent on Lonergan’s insights, this notion is, at the very least, congruent with Peirce’s assertions about experience; Father Potter turns to Lonergan only after explaining experience in terms of Peirce’s own categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. He does so as a way of making clearer just what is at stake in the fuller recovery of human experience championed by Peirce and, indeed, by the other pragmatists as well. From cognitive experience, he turns to religious experience or, more precisely, experiencing the world religiously. Here Father Potter defends not an *adjectival* model of religious experience, according to which such experience constitutes a clearly demarcatable species of human experiences, but an *adverbial* model (experiencing the world religiously). What emerges from this discussion is a subtle and suggestive account of what John E. Smith calls the religious dimension of human experience. While indebted to Smith no less than to Lonergan for bringing out the religious implications of Peirce’s notion of experience, Father Potter is nonetheless not in complete agreement with Smith’s own reconstructed understanding. The critical dialogue between the two on this topic is one deserving careful attention, for their differences are illuminating precisely because their agreement is so fundamental.9

It would be an understatement to say that Peirce did not think of himself primarily as either a theologian or a philosopher of religions. In fact, he had quite disparaging things to say about both. For Father Potter as well, Peirce’s theism was in a sense secondary;
For this expositor, Peirce was first and foremost a realist, but a realist of a distinctive cast. (The very formulation of Peirce's theism is colored by his realism, for rather than speaking of the existence of God Peirce insists upon speaking of reality in this context.) The cast of Peirce's realism is best conveyed by describing it as scholastic, fallibilist, and pragmaticist. Peirce's robust ontological and methodological commitments (his insistence that generals are real and that inquiry responsibly conducted can disclose the contours and structures of reality) separated him from both William James and John Dewey. Thus, while Father Potter was a quick champion of Peirce's pragmaticism, he was ordinarily never more than a reluctant defender of certain aspects of James's pragmatism or Dewey's instrumentalism.

Against nominalism, Peirce advocated scholastic realism. Against subjective idealism, he advocated commonsensical realism (over against finite human consciousness stands a world not of its own making, resistant to its cognitive no less than its muscular exertions, and yet—in some manner and measure—accessible to that consciousness). Against theoretical skepticism, even (perhaps especially) when it masqueraded as pragmatism, Peirce championed a theoretical fallibilism according to which the possibility of error is ineliminable and ubiquitous, yet the limits of the knowable are never fixed once for all. As conceived by Peirce, this contrite fallibilism is interwoven with a "high faith in the reality of knowledge." Against moral skepticism, he unabashedly championed a "sentimental conservatism" (1.661): "The mental qualities we most admire in all human beings . . . are the maiden's delicacy [or sensitivity], the mother's devotion, manly courage, and other inheritances that have come to us from the biped who did not yet speak; while the characters that are most contemptible take their origin in reasoning" (1.627). At least implicit in such sentimental conservatism is a moral realism: the sensitive person is responding to some actual suffering that but for the blindness of others would be seen as irreducibly real; the courageous person is responding in behalf of a threatened reality in the face of a real threat. The sensitive person does not take herself to be projecting her feelings onto others, but rather to be discerning what others feel, sometimes despite their protestations. The courageous person does not
take herself to be projecting her fears upon the world but to be responding to dangers really there.

The world is not a blank screen upon which we project our fantasies, though infantile fantasies do obstruct even adult perceptions. It is not an amorphous mass out of which we construct a purely human artifact, though human imagination does enable us both to discover objective truths and to devise a human habitat. The skeptic and the anti-realist in their own ways fail to give reality its due. In contrast, the strong foundationalist and other defenders of incorrigible knowledge fail to appreciate the extent of our fallibility and the significant degree to which human knowledge is an imaginative construct (a patchwork woven out of abductions).

Reality is directly encountered in our experience and partially disclosed in some of our investigations. Those who deny this conceive of reality as something recondite and, then, deny either our access to that reality or the relevance of any notion of reality for explaining, say, knowledge or some other process or practice. For Peirce and (following him) for Father Potter as well, "the realist is simply one who knows no more recondite reality than that which is represented in a true representation" (5.312). What is truly represented is authentically real; and what is truly represented or, more accurately, representable is what would be ultimately discovered by an infinite community of self-critical investigators. As Father Potter stresses, then, "Peirce's account of truth and reality requires the explicit recognition of the role of the community" (see below, p. 113). Apart from our personal participation in the ongoing efforts of critical inquirers, our claims to know are largely suspect and frequently unreliable. Apart from the ideal of an infinite community, the idea of objective truth is inadequately understood; for while truth can never be simply identified with an actually attained consensus on some question, truth means, for all practical purposes, what unlimited and uncoerced inquirers, given sufficient time and resources, would discover.

In the hands of Peirce, pragmatism was not designed to foreclose theoretical inquiry, or to discredit the very idea of objective truth, or, finally, to preclude the possibility of metaphysics. It was designed to assist theoretical inquirers in approximating objective truth about questions of traditional metaphysics no less than questions of special sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology. In
sum, its function was essentially heuristic: Peirce’s methodological reflections on the successful practice of objective inquiry were undertaken for the sake of facilitating such inquiry, for goading it along promising paths and guiding it in effective ways.

In a letter to James, Peirce himself stressed that: after all pragmatism solves no real problem. It only shows that supposed problems are not real problems. But when one comes to such questions as immortality, the nature of the connection of mind and matter (further than that mind acts on matter not like a cause but like a law) we are left completely in the dark. The effect of pragmatism is simply to open our minds to receiving any evidence, not to furnish evidence. (8.259)

While it is imperative to appreciate that, regarding such questions, our minds are almost completely in the dark, it is equally crucial to affirm the possibility that, regarding at least some of these theoretical questions, inquiry might progress. The marked tendency of both James and Dewey is to foreclose the possibility of theoretical investigation into ultimate questions. Peirce strenuously resisted this tendency, even though he was acutely aware of the severe limitations of human intelligence.

The first rule of reason is, according to him, that “in order to learn you must desire to learn, and in so desiring not be satisfied with what you already incline to think” (1.135). An important corollary following from the first rule of rational inquiry “deserves to be inscribed upon every wall of the city of philosophy,” to wit, “Do not block the way of inquiry.” One of the ways in which the path of investigation might be blocked results from “maintaining that this, that, and the other never can be known” (1.138). To suppose that some aspect of reality is forever beyond the reach of inquiry effectively arrests and, in time, will atrophy that reach. But this is just what James and Dewey accomplish in the name of, respectively, pragmatism and instrumentalism. But, for the theoretical investigator, such despair is suicide. Hence, between the extreme of a facile confidence of the human mind’s theoretical reach and the extreme of an invincible skepticism, Peirce steered a middle course—one always mindful of human reason’s utter puniness, yet ever hopeful of its unpredictable resourcefulness. Some of his most distinctive doctrines—pragmaticism, anthropomorphism, fallibi-
lism, and sentimentalism—need to be interpreted as part of his efforts to steer just such a course. These doctrines provide guidelines for framing our questions more responsibly than we have done so thus far and opening ourselves more fully to the range of potentially relevant evidence than we have considered to date.

Peirce confessed that “out of a contrite fallibilism, combined with a high faith in the reality of knowledge, and an intense desire to find things out, all my philosophy has always seemed to me to grow” (1.14). It grew into a comprehensive vision of the empirical world, understanding empirical in its broad, Peircean sense rather than in its severely circumscribed, “empiricist” sense. Integral to this vision was a conception of God wherein the reality of this Being is depicted “vaguely like a man.” The reality of God is not so much established by argumentation as rooted in “sentiment, or obscure perception.” This sentiment is nothing less than

deep recognition of something in the circumambient All, which, if an individual strives to express it, will clothe itself in forms more or less extravagant, more or less accidental, but ever acknowledging the first and last, the A and the O, as well as a relation to that Absolute of the individual’s self, as a relative being. (6.428; slightly modified)

From a Peircean perspective, there is no coercive proof for the central doctrine of classical theism or, for that matter, for the contemporary variations of the theistic outlook (in this as well other contexts, the “demonstrations of the metaphysicians are all moonshine” [1.7]). The claims of theists are, like all other substantive claims made by human beings, fallible. Even so, Peirce was convinced that the irreducibly vague utterances by which we give expression to our obscure perception of the divine presence are not utterly vacuous; nor did he suppose that they were completely false. In sum, out of his contrite fallibilism ultimately grew a fallibilistic theism in which the logic of vagueness was enlisted to ensure the meaningfulness of our inescapably vague, anthropomorphic utterances about God. The force and subtlety of this distinctive form of theism are illuminated by Father Potter in the concluding chapters of this book. Like Peirce himself, he was a man with his feet on the ground yet one disposed to muse upon the heavens. He was a critical commonsensist thoroughly committed to the wisdom
enshrined in ordinary language and the realities attested by our every experience; yet he refused to be imprisoned in the circle of ordinary usage. He also resisted being deflected from the depth of meaning inherent in what mistakenly we suppose to be ordinary experience. For him, mystical experience is not something other than ordinary experience, but rather ordinary experience grasped in its true character as an extraordinary phenomenon. When it is not taken for granted—when it is viewed afresh with the eyes of a child (1.349)—profound depth is intimated, and the divine presence discerned, in our everyday experience. Our task is not to look beyond such experience, but to interpret it with sufficient sensitivity, to read it with adequate resources (rather than the crudest vocabulary of the most narrowly practical terms).

It was the exemplary figure of Charles Peirce as a humble, yet hopeful theoretical inquirer to whom Father Vincent Potter was drawn, again and again. “Charlie” was one of his most trusted co-inquirers. The note of familiarity always conveyed to me the sense of rolling up one’s sleeves and putting one’s hands to the same tasks as the ones to which Peirce devoted himself. For how we ourselves might join Peirce in investigating a staggering array of complex issues, it would be difficult to find a better guide than Father Potter. In a sentence quoted at the outset of this Foreword, we encountered the suggestion that we today are in a better position to understand Peirce’s philosophy than were his own contemporaries. One important reason why this is so is because of the work of Vincent G. Potter, S.J. His earlier study, *Charles S. Peirce: On Norms and Ideals*, is still one of the most important contributions to Peirce scholarship, even though it was published almost thirty years ago; and the present collection promises to stand shoulder to shoulder with that earlier study. But, for Father, Peirce scholarship all too quickly degenerates into an inconsequential exercise if it is not animated by philosophical *eros*, the passionate desire to discover what is not yet known. Accordingly, the essays collected in this volume are best conceived as, at once, invitations to join the ongoing work of theoretical inquiry and instructions for how such inquiry is responsibly conducted.

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Notes

1. In 1989, there was a sesquicentennial international congress held at Harvard University celebrating Peirce’s birth in 1839. Significantly enough, it was called “Charles Sanders Pierce Sesquicentennial International Congress.” Father Potter was a speaker at one of the plenary sessions; his paper, a Peircean rejoinder to Charles Hartshorne’s process critique of Peirce’s theological “musements,” appears as an Appendix to the present volume.

2. Though he himself did not write much about either philosophical or theological hermeneutics, two thinkers who influenced him (Bernard Lonergan and John E. Smith) have. His own practice seems closely to accord with the approach to interpretation defended and, indeed, exemplified by these two thinkers, especially Smith.


7. Ibid.
