

**Community *Unlimited***  
**A Peircean Analysis of Otherness, Inquiry, and Individualism**  
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**Introduction**

‘Charles Peirce was, and to a degree still is, an enigma’ (Smith 1966, 3). Appearing sometimes as an idealist, at other times as a metaphysical realist, Peirce was an empiricist critical of empiricism; an empiricism that, as Ernest Nagel said, was so profound that ‘no account of the development of contemporary empiricism is adequate which neglects the writings and influence of Charles Peirce’ (Nagel 1940, 69). And yet, despite his enigmatic tendencies, there is no single figure in the unfolding history of American pragmatism that doesn’t acknowledge his or her debt to Peirce’s incalculable philosophical achievements and readily recognize him as the founding figure of their dynamic, multi-faceted philosophical school.<sup>1</sup>

Peirce was just as diverse in his philosophical interests as the school of thought that now bears the name ‘pragmatism,’ for just like pragmatism itself, Peirce’s work encompassed logic<sup>2</sup>, science<sup>3</sup>, and phenomenology,<sup>4</sup> to name but a few of the myriad branches of philosophy that piqued Peirce’s boundless interests.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a point of some contention, since it was William James who popularized the term “pragmatism.” But I would agree with Richard Mullin who notes, “Peirce stands out as the acknowledged father of pragmatism” (Mullin 2007, 199).

<sup>2</sup> “As the outstanding American logician of his day, his contributions helped to initiate the exciting advances in mathematical logic” (Bernstein 1961, 15). Further, “Peirce was one of the creators of the logic of relations, the extension of classical logic and Boolean algebra that was needed for a full system of symbolic logic” (Burks 1996, 324).

As Smith notes, however, it would be ‘an error to suppose that [Peirce] developed no clear doctrine whatever,’ despite his myriad interests, diverse projects and unfinished theories, ‘if we considered the whole range of his thought there emerges a unity which is as remarkable as it is unexpected’ (Smith 1966, 5). Feibleman would heartily agree with Smith’s assessment, making explicit what he maintained was Peirce’s nascent architectonic left relatively unfulfilled due to the diversity of Peirce’s interests and his turbulent academic career,<sup>6</sup> noting that ‘implicit in his isolated papers is the outline of a system. The fact that he never got round to presenting his system explicitly does not mean that it is not present in his writings’ (Feibleman 1970, 24). As Bastion notes, too, ‘the various elements of Peirce’s philosophy, whether they be called the pragmatic and realistic, or the naturalistic and transcendental, can and ought to be reconciled with one another’ (Bastion 1953, 246).

It is my contention here that, regardless of the period of his career, whether he was investigating the semiotic nature of thought or the metaphysical categories that comprise our phenomenological experience, Peirce was first and foremost interested in explaining and refining the ways in which humans engage in inquiry. ‘What’ we

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<sup>3</sup> As pragmatists Josiah Royce and Fergus Kernal note: “Peirce was fond of saying that he grew up in a laboratory. Later, he did some good work in the observatory. Still later, he was busy with the conduct of a good many statistical researches in connection with the Coast Survey. He was early and long familiar with exact measurement, and with the theory and practice of the determination of the errors of measurement in the measuring sciences. So, when he spoke of being a scientific philosopher, he was not without a really close knowledge of what scientific method in philosophy ought to mean” (Royce and Kernan 1916, 701 – 702).

<sup>4</sup> What Peirce called “phaneroscopy.”

<sup>5</sup> “If we were to draw up a list of ideal requirements for a philosopher, we would certainly want to include an intimate knowledge of the empirical sciences and the formal disciplines such as logic and mathematics. Our philosopher should also have a subtle knowledge of the philosophic tradition, preferably one gained from original sources. But knowledge of the sciences, logic, and the history of philosophy is not enough. A philosopher must also combine careful analysis with a curiosity and imagination that ranges over the totality of human experience. The degree to which Charles Sanders Peirce was proficient in all these respects...is unique, and it would be difficult to name another American who was as erudite and original as Peirce” (Bernstein 1961, 15).

<sup>6</sup> Peirce was inspired by Kant “to see that he could not consider philosophy in the English empirical or piecemeal manner only, as a series of assorted subjects to be carefully approached. He must come to it in the grand manner of the best of the German metaphysicians: as a self-consistent body of knowledge, excluding nothing and applicable to everything” (Feibleman 1970, 34 – 35).

know about our world was just as important to Peirce as ‘how’ we come to know it. And the ‘how’ of knowledge acquisition, for Peirce, perhaps more than any other American philosopher, was intimately and irrevocably interwoven with the theme of Otherness. Peirce was alive to the reality that knowledge is not acquired in the vacuum of solipsism.

Instead, Peirce would forward one of the most extreme, hyperbolic forms of social individualism ever articulated by an American philosopher, an individualism that not only demands dialogical engagement with the Other as a prerequisite for *any* progress towards the Truth but, too, that our sense of self is derivative off a more fundamental sense of community beyond limits.

Indeed, Peirce’s conception of philosophy, in general, most readily identified with his famous ‘method of inquiry’ articulated in his essay, ‘The Fixation of Belief,’ ties together all of the major threads in his diverse and massive corpus: his adherence to ‘fallibilism,’ his conception of ‘Truth’ as that which lies in wait at the end of the ‘long run’ of inquiry’s unfolding upon which all inquiries are ‘destined’ to converge, his conception of ‘Reality’ as that which inquiry reveals, his ‘first rule of logic’ which demands that nothing block the road to further inquiry, and, above all else, Peirce’s commitment to a most unique and extreme form of ‘social individualism.’

My purpose in this paper is to draw together these diverse threads and demonstrate how Peirce’s conception of the ‘self,’ specifically, the self’s relation to the Other, is central to his entire philosophical enterprise and provides what may be the most hyperbolic form of individualism ever articulated by an American philosopher. I argue that Peirce takes up the Socratic project, highlighting the necessarily dialogical nature of inquiry and knowledge acquisition, that ‘Truth’ is not the province of any single inquirer, but a collective project that not only demands solidarity and an embrace of the Other, but such an extreme form of solidarity-in-Otherness the likes of which has rarely, if ever, been seen before. In so doing, I hope to illuminate the critical significance of Otherness in Peirce’s robust philosophical system.

### **Error and the Other: Peirce's Conception of the 'Self'**

It would be no exaggeration to say that Peirce's primary philosophical nemesis was René Descartes who presented, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, a methodology of hyperbolic skepticism meant to undermine the skeptic's position on the possibility of knowledge acquisition by forwarding the most extreme and robust form of the doctrine and demonstrating that even in such a form it was untenable. As Tom Rockmore notes, Peirce's critique of Descartes was 'crucial to the formulation of his own position' (Rockmore 1999, 173).

'Doubt,' for Descartes, was the greatest obstacle to 'Truth,' and doubt arose in the quiet confines of his bed chambers as he ruminated on his past beliefs, dismissing them as less than apodictically certain until at last he arrived at his famous *Cogito*: the certainty of his own existence. We note, of key significance to our investigation here, Descartes brought his beliefs into doubt in the complete and total absence of another living human being. Indeed, even in his 'reconstructive' phase as he builds upon the *Cogito* and the existence of God, the existence of other *people* is never established with the same degree of certainty that he established for his own. As De Waal notes:

This again puts Peirce on a direct collision course with Descartes... according to Descartes, we are much more familiar with our own mind than we are with the world in which we live. Peirce turns Descartes' approach literally inside-out. According to Peirce, we *first* learn about the so-called external world, and *then* derive from our interaction with this external world that we have a self and what this self entails. Hence, for Peirce, our knowledge does not progress, as with Descartes, from the inside out, but from the outside in (De Waal 2005, 9).

Peirce took umbrage at Descartes' method for a variety of reasons beyond the scope of our investigation here, but central to our inquiry at the moment is Peirce's adamant insistence that Descartes had the relationship between the self and Other entirely the wrong way around: the self is only established *as* a self from a more

primary, holistic conception of a community in what is perhaps the most extreme form of *social* individualism ever established.

At base, Peirce conceived the human self as fundamentally social in character. Indeed, as Mullin notes, Peirce went so far as to claim that the ‘individual self, apart from other selves is an *illusion*’ (Mullin 2007, 127). Implicitly, Peirce rejected the conception of the self as ‘atomic’<sup>7</sup> or ‘rugged,’ advocating, instead, a ‘social individualism’ that he felt better reflected the reality of his semiotic conception of cognition as well as the necessarily communal aspect of inquiry. As we’ll see, inquiry, itself, must be *social* and not the idle speculations of a reclusive hermit in solipsistic seclusion from his or her fellows: inquiry must be communally verified, beliefs must be brought to bear on the beliefs of others, and only *together* can we progress to greater heights of Truth.

The genesis of the conception of the self as ‘atomic,’ isolated and self-sustaining may be traced back not only to Descartes’ philosophical investigations but, too, to the rise of modern forms of democracy and capitalism. As Mullin observes,

Political democracy and the system of capitalism and private ownership developed on the assumption that the individual first subsists, and then enters into arrangements with other individuals for their mutual benefit. The preeminence that each of us bestows on our separate selves bolsters the belief in the reality of separate individuals. Each of us seems to be self-contained and self-centered, and our cooperation and communication take place among ready-made selves (Mullin 2007, 127).

Thus, for Peirce to claim that the separate self is nothing more than an illusion in light of its preeminence throughout western political democracies and systems of capitalism, he must both convince his readers of the alternative while simultaneously accounting for the prevalence and popularity of the illusion itself. Peirce explores his conception of the individual self in saying:

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<sup>7</sup> Michael notes that, “in terms of the concept of an atomic individual... Peirce consistently denies exists” except in the most confused and contrived manner, always derivative off the primacy of a social collective (Michael 1976, 321).

A person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is ‘saying to himself,’ that is, is saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. The second thing to remember is that the man’s circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism (Peirce 1931-1936, CP 5.421).<sup>8</sup>

A person is not ‘absolutely an individual,’ that is, for Peirce, a person is not atomically isolated from the rest of his or her society. We note that the conception of ‘dialogue,’ so fundamental to Peirce’s method of inquiry, runs deep; even an individual in conversation with his or herself is in some internal manifestation of dialogue which necessarily is thought in signs and language which, in turn, is forged of communal engagement to great those signs and language meaning and purpose (the notion of a private language is chimerical, for Peirce, as for Wittgenstein<sup>9</sup>). Indeed, Peirce sees the entirety of a society (‘however widely’ one wants to understand this, that is, to include even all of humanity in a truly *unlimited* community) as a whole organism<sup>10</sup> of which the individual is but one aspect or cell, defined only in coordination with the whole, though nevertheless unique.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I will use the traditional reference for Peirce’s *Collected Papers*, “CP,” to indicate this collection from here on.

<sup>9</sup> For a fascinating comparison between Peirce’s pragmatism and Wittgenstein’s philosophy, see Robin Haack, “Wittgenstein’s Pragmatism” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> Altshuler, however, notes the following: “while there is a clear sense in which Peirce’s view of truth is anti-individualistic, it does *not* seem essentially to depend on a community of different individuals. For if we define truth as the limit of opinions resulting from repeated applications of the scientific method of ‘fixing beliefs,’ then there does not seem to be any theoretical reason for preferring a community of distinct people to a single individual with an infinite lifespan and resources”. (Altshuler 1980, 121), even citing a few passages from an 1871 article in which Peirce seems to “admit that this distinction between individual and community is not crucial for his theory” on these grounds. I would argue against such a reading of Peirce, however, noting that humans are *not*, in fact, immortal with limitless resources and, as a good scientifically-minded individual, this is clearly not what Peirce had in mind, even if it does logically follow in some sense. Further, this reading eschews the significance of his conception of the community as a kind of “mega-organism,” wherein the individual plays an integral, social role as a cell that makes up a larger body. That community therefore *is*, in a sense, Altshuler’s immortal with limitless resources, without the need to even consider an *actual* individual possessing of both.

<sup>11</sup> As DeMarco notes: “A person originally was the locus of the thought process. As such, a person participates in, and derives his reality from the community of agreement. The community thus becomes the essential person” (DeMarco 1971, 28).

Consider Peirce's ruminations of the gospel of Christ that reflect, in no small part, his position on social individualism in general. Peirce notes that the gospel reflected an inherent quality of love, not for oneself, but for others, and that it teaches 'that growth comes only from love, from – I will not say self-*sacrifice*, but from the ardent impulse to fulfill another's highest impulse' (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 6.289). It is this unitary vision of a humanity in which individuals achieve their highest impulses not through the 'Gospel of Greed'<sup>12</sup> but through concerted, communal effort and a deep solidarity with the Other, by placing one's own needs as secondary to fulfilling the needs of the Other and the Other, in turn, reciprocates in kind, humanity, in total, may be uplifted. Further, as Anderson suggests, Peirce's critique of the 'Gospel of Greed' seems to demonstrate that Peirce 'was not an advocate of what seem to many to be the worst demons of American capitalism' (Anderson 1997, 223), pitting Peirce against the sort of 'atomic' or 'rugged' individualism championed in modern capitalistic societies, namely, the belief that one can 'make it on one's own,' a sort of Horatio Alger 'bootstrapping' that he thought was chimerical at best, and horribly detrimental to intellectual progress of any kind at worst. As Mullin notes:

The embodied human self exists in communion with other selves, and only in illusion does the self exist separately from other embodied selves. According to this view, I do not completely constitute myself; my neighbor, to some extent, *is* myself, and I *am* my neighbor's self (Mullin 2007, 128).

Indeed, rather than atomic individuals entering into a community additively, Peirce takes the opposite stance: our conception of self is determined by subtracting ourselves as individuated from a more fundamental conception of the community.

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<sup>12</sup> "Here, then, is the issue. The gospel of Christ says that progress comes from every individual merging his individuality in sympathy with his neighbours. 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 neighbour under foot whenever he gets a chance to do so. This may accurately be called the Gospel of Greed" (Peirce 1931-1936, CP 6.294).

As Mullin notes:

According to Peirce's theory, each of us consists of a cell in a social organism. Before any other characteristic, our particular array of faults and limitations distinguishes us, as individuals, from the social organism ... common childhood experience reminds us that we most easily call attention to ourselves by being out of step with social expectations (Mullin 2007, 128).

Individuation does not take place prior to the construct of the community. Our very thoughts, for Peirce, are, after all, sign-thoughts given meaning through use and language constructed not in *isolation* but through our *participation* in the greater community. We draw attention to ourselves by being 'out of step' with that community through fault, error or general limitation, thereby defining individualism only secondarily through subtracting one particular cell of a great social organism from the whole. Nor is error the sole constituent of individuality, merely as aspect of it. As Muoio notes, 'Peirce states that man's separate existence is *manifested* by ignorance and error, not that it *consists* of them' (Muoio 1984, 173 – 174).

The self is *distinct* from others but does not exist separately from them... we *discover* ourselves through our own ignorance and error, but ignorance and error do not *constitute* the self. We err if we think of the self as a separate entity, but not if we think that the self is distinct. An aspect of the self stands out as unique (Mullin 2007, 129).

Although we distinguish ourselves from the community through error, that does not mean that there is not something, some 'self,' that is unique and not reducible to the whole. As Mullin notes, 'we derive self-consciousness from interacting with other minds' (Mullin 2007, 129). In stark contrast to a Cartesian solipsistic conception of the self, for Peirce, consciousness of one's own self requires the recognition of an 'Other,' in a move that he no doubt acquired from his close reading of Hegel. Mullin gives us a practical example of how this discovery of self-consciousness unfolds:

The child perceives itself as being distinct from others by being aware of the differences in perception between itself and other people. This mostly occurs



as a result of errors on the part of the child. For example, if parents tell the child that the stove is hot, he might not believe it until he learns from a painful experience. Then he discovers the error of his own judgment and the truth in the words that that adults expressed. The child therefore discovers itself through communication with others (Mullin 2007, 129s).

Vincent Colapietro affirms this aspect of Peirce's conception of the self in saying, 'the self is truly something unique and irreducible in itself, but what it is in itself is only revealed or, more accurately, realized through its relation to others' (Colapietro 1989, 74).

How does Peirce define man? He distinguishes two aspects of man's nature; one is essential and the other is negative: man is both essentially communal and negatively individual. Accordingly, Peirce attempts to show that man is identified, by nature, with the thought process as it moves to increasingly unified information. When men are in agreement, they derive their communal nature from the reality of the agreement (DeMarco 1971, 26).

As we are individuated from the communal whole through error so, too, do we find ourselves back in line with our fellows through productive inquiry forged of progressive dialogue. Our beliefs become increasingly unified over time through inquiry, the once antagonistic beliefs that placed us at loggerheads with our compatriots become dissolved as we, communally, ascend to greater approximations of Truth. Further, this relationship between the ideal community and the individual reflects Peirce's quest to discover the pure, rational inquirer freed from his or these individual biases and idiosyncrasies<sup>14</sup>:

The chaotic impressions belonging to the private man are unified in agreement through the necessary operation of thought. Insofar as impressions are private and part of the chaos to be unified, man is a limitation on the final, communal reality of Peirce's ... cognitionism. And as

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<sup>14</sup> As DeMarco notes: "Peirce locates man's positive essence in what he calls the transcendental unity of pure apperception, that is, the community of agreement. Identification with the transcendental unity of pure apperception can be reached only when man is able to transcend his own idiosyncrasies and his personal interests; this is accomplished by using the process of induction and hypothesis" (DeMarco 1971, 26). As Peirce himself notes, "Pure apperception is the self-assertion of THE *ego*; the self-consciousness here meant is the recognition of my *private* self. I know that *I* (not merely *the I*) exist," Peirce, *Op. Cit.*, CP: 5.225 and, further, that "ignorance and error are all that distinguish our private selves from the absolute *ego* of pure apperception" (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.235).

a participant in the community ... man finds his positive nature. Thus man's concept of himself as an individual is an illusion (DeMarco 1971, 26).

This notion becomes increasingly clear if we turn to Peirce's essay, the 'General Law of the Mind.' There, Peirce notes, 'ideas tend to spread continuously and to affect certain others which stand to them in a peculiar relation of affectability' (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 6.104). The more we develop through engaging in inquiry, the more our ideas spread to those other within that community of inquirers as their ideas, in turn, spread to infect of our own. As Mullin notes, 'this law explains the development of personality. For example, 'as we develop from childhood toward adulthood, our various and sometimes conflicting feelings, thoughts and desires become more integrated to form a sense of personal identity' (Mullin 2007, 129).

As we will discuss in our analysis of Peirce's positive theory of inquiry, feelings, thoughts and desires in conflict are tested and resolved successfully only in relation to the feelings, thoughts and desires of others. As Mullin says, 'the self remains always in dialogue ... thinking involves dialogue' (Mullin 2007, 129 – 130). Thus, 'the self cannot be understood as an entity apart from other selves and apart from its future and the future of other selves' (Mullin 2007, 130).

### **Against Descartes: Solipsism vs. *Hyperbolic* Social Individualism**

The 'central theme of pragmatism,' as De Waal notes, 'is that philosophical research is a profoundly social enterprise' (De Waal 2005, ii). Whether it was his semiotics, his logic, his phenomenology or his metaphysics, Peirce focused his philosophical investigations on the nature of human inquiry and the ways in which the methods of investigation can be improved and the types of beliefs that inquiry can forge, not in *isolation* from one's fellows, but through a necessary and dynamic interrelationship *with* them.

Rejecting any theory in which a singular individual could come to determine Truth in isolation from his or her society, Peirce articulated an experimental model of human inquiry in which hypotheses are tested communally. As such, his writings

likewise demonstrate a powerful distrust of any theory, philosophy or society that advocates individual isolationism and any socio-political entity that would forcibly determine the ‘truth’ *for* the individual.<sup>15</sup>

The entirety of Peirce’s ethical theory is based on a conception of not only a *global* community, but an ‘*unlimited* community,’ shades of which we’ve already seen in his analysis of the gospel of Christ juxtaposed with his critique of the so-called ‘Gospel of Greed.’ As Peirce notes, ‘no man can be logical whose supreme desire is [limited to] the well-being of himself or of any other existing person or collection of persons’ (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 2.661) but, rather, one must identify one’s interests ‘with those of an unlimited community’ (Peirce 1931 – 1936, 2.654) of which ‘you and I’ are ‘mere cells of a social organism’ (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 1.673). If Truth is the goal of philosophy, and Truth can only be achieved through a method of inquiry that is necessarily social in character, we must not place our faith in ourselves but in the *unlimited* community of *all* inquirers, of which individuals are but a single (though critical) aspect or cell. Indeed, as Bernstein rightly suggests, ‘the community of inquirers is the basis for defining both truth and reality’ (Bernstein 1961, 18) and lies at the heart of Peirce’s entire enterprise. This conception of the unlimited community places Peirce solidly (perhaps even hyperbolically) in the camp of adherents to social individualism and democratic egalitarianism in the communal coordination of inquiry towards a common goal: the flourishing of all through ever-increasing approximations of the ‘Truth’ awaiting us at the end of the ‘long run.’

By demanding a social component to inquiry’s success, Peirce places himself in direct opposition to Descartes’ the method of hyperbolic skepticism. Though ‘Peirce and Descartes agree that inquiry is a struggle to attain a belief unassailable by doubt; they disagree, however, on the nature of doubt, what constitutes a reason for doubting, and the process of inquiry’ (Friedman 1999, 729) itself. As Haack notes,

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<sup>15</sup> His scientific method of inquiry was not only a methodological suggestion, it was a socio-political stance against any hegemonic, totalitarian structure that would forge the “truth” in its own image and that utilized methods of authoritarian control to keep individuals separate enough that communal discourse would be dissolved and, with it, any hope of authentic inquiry would be lost. This is most clearly articulated in Peirce’s critique of the so-called “method of authority” which I will discuss shortly.

‘Peirce complains that Descartes makes the acquisition of knowledge an individual venture when really it is a community enterprise’ (Haack 1982, 172). Peirce offers four substantive reasons for rejecting the Cartesian possibility that knowledge can be gained in isolation from the community. First, Peirce ‘stresses the ways in which individuals learn from each other’ (Haack 1982, 172), a necessarily dialogical process between initially antagonistic beliefs held by different parties.<sup>16</sup> Second, Peirce ‘urges that the individual’s consciousness of himself is derived from interactions with others’ (Haack 1982, 173), leading to a type of hyperbolic social individualism which we will explore further, a radical intersubjectivity absent entirely from Descartes’ meditations. Third, ‘what the individual believes, according to Peirce, is linguistically expressed (‘all thought is in signs’), and language is essentially public’ (Haack 1982, 173). Finally, ‘the criterion of the truth of what the individual believes, according to Peirce, is the long-run agreement of the whole community of inquirers’ (Haack 1982, 173). These four articles will inform the bedrock of Peirce’s philosophy, all of which stem from his robust critique of Descartes’ methodology.

### **Otherness and Inquiry: The Failure of the Three Counterproductive Methods of Belief Formation**

In ‘The Fixation of Belief,’ Peirce articulates his positive method of belief formation, ‘the scientific method of inquiry,’ by juxtaposing it with three, specific, counterproductive methods of belief formation that individuals regularly engage in, whether they realize it or not. In each of the three counterproductive methods (which he calls ‘the method of tenacity,’ ‘the method of authority,’ and the *a priori* method, respectively), we note a failure to engage with the Other in inquiry’s long quest to ascertain the Truth.

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<sup>16</sup> “Descartes marks the period when Philosophy put off childish things and began to be conceited young man. By the time the young man has grown to be an old man, he will have learned that traditions are precious treasures, while iconoclastic inventions are always cheap and often nasty” (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 4.71).

As Rockmore notes, Peirce's method of inquiry is meant to *be* 'scientific inquiry as it actually occurs' (Rockmore 1999, 173), a method that demands communal verification and evaluation. For Peirce, contra-Descartes, inquiry always begins with whatever beliefs we currently have of which we could not divest ourselves if we wanted (as Descartes believed we could). So situated, a problematic situation occurs wherein our beliefs (which Peirce equates with 'guiding principles' along the path to inquiry) fail to lead to the conclusions we expect. This failure of our beliefs to correspond with our expectations throws us into a state of doubt, a state so naturally repugnant to the human organism that inquiry (and investigation into the nature of the problem drive by a desire to reestablish a working belief) is engaged until resolution of that problem is achieved. This resolution, then, becomes a new belief, 'new' in the sense that it becomes either an entirely reformulated belief that now leads to the conclusions we expect or else the 'same' belief as before now reaffirmed and strengthened in light of new information having been incorporated into the inquirer's pool of knowledge.

Unlike Descartes, who saw 'doubt' as the ultimate obstacle to Truth that must be eradicated at all cost, Peirce maintained that doubt was the necessary tension instigating inquiry's unfolding: doubt is the *engine* of cognitive progress, without which all inquiry would cease instantaneously. If we were all hermits, attempting to achieve Truth in the comfort of our bedchambers, as Descartes would have it, what is to determine whether or not our guiding principles are, in fact, leading us closer to that ongoing approximation of the Truth? Certainly on some beliefs (as if we adamantly refused to believe that fire would not burn us), we need not necessarily appeal to the Other to determine that that particular belief needs to be reformulated. But on countless other occasions, the beliefs we may forge in solipsistic seclusion may lead to no problems that we, by ourselves, could notice, leading us to the flawed assumption that those beliefs are 'true.' Any number of beliefs may *appear* to correspond to Reality if a lone inquirer is limited in his or her scope of inquiry and limited in the ideas and tools that inquirer has at his or her disposal. But, in coming into contact with the Other, another inquirer that has *different* tools, *different* ideas

and, most important of all, *different* beliefs, I am thrown into the doubt requisite for cognitive development via inquiry precisely because my initial beliefs are in tension with the beliefs of another. Only together, through productive dialogue, in mutual inquiry and experiment, by sharing data and presenting our beliefs to the communal table of verification, can we even hope to move closer to the Truth.

There is no clearer example than this than the Socratic method of *elenchus* utilized throughout Plato's vast corpus. Consider, for example, Socrates' run-in with Euthyphro before the courts of Athens. Euthyphro was so thoroughly convinced of his belief that he had the correct definition of 'piety' that he was prepared to bring his own father up on charges of manslaughter. Whether or not he was right to do so, it wasn't until he ran into Socrates who promptly bombarded him with alternative beliefs that he realized the errors of his own and through dialogue was able to expose those errors and reformulate his beliefs productively. Socrates effectively exposed Euthyphro's flawed assumption of apodictic certainty as to the definition of 'piety,' instilling in Euthyphro a newfound openness to the revision of his beliefs and, with it, a new openness to inquiry and cognitive development, in general.

Fallibilism's positive role is found as an attitude of the inquirer and it is required for genuine inquiry. If inquirers are not fallibilists, then they will not be open to questioning their beliefs, and thus they will not be open to new and worthwhile areas of inquiry. Indeed the possibility of novel scientific discoveries will be thwarted (Cooke 2006, 29).

By adopting what Peirce calls 'the first rule of logic,' more a guiding a principle or 'attitude' than a specific 'rule,' the inquirer allows for the possibility for revising his or her beliefs in light of new information. As Staab notes, for Peirce, according to the first rule of logic, 'one has the responsibility both to learn from and to speak to fellow inquirers within one's social context' (Staab 1994, 939). Indeed, it is the very essence of Socratic<sup>17</sup> *elenchus* and the definition of wisdom Plato forwarded through his iconic protagonist: 'I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows

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<sup>17</sup> Peirce notes, in discussing "the rivulets at the head of the river of pragmatism" that "Socrates bathed in these waters" (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.11).

anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know' (Plato 2002, 26). As soon as apodictic certainty has been achieved (only ever a chimera, for Peirce), inquiry ends, for what reason does the inquirer still have to inquire further if he or she believes that he or she already knows everything there is to know about the topic at hand?<sup>18</sup> Peirce defines the first rule of logic as follows:

Thus it is that inquiry every type, fully carried out, has the vital power of self-correction and of growth. This is a property so deeply saturating its inmost nature that it may truly be said that there is but one thing needful for learning the truth, and that is a hearty and active desire to learn (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.582).

As Cooke summarizes, 'in order to learn, one must desire to learn' (Cooke 2006, 30). To assume that one is apodictically certain and has the 'truth' prior to engaging in dialogue with the Other is to, conversely, assume that the Other must necessarily be wrong. Fallibilism, and its complement, the first rule of logic, guards against this blockade to inquiry by formulating a method of inquiry that may *begin* with antagonistic beliefs between different inquirers, but that sets for its goal a method that is not, itself, antagonistic: distinct beliefs maintained by unique individuals are brought into a productive dialogue with the mutual goal of ascertaining the Truth rather than, say, simply proving that one is 'right' and the Other must, necessarily, be 'wrong.' The adoption of the first rule of logic, hand-in-hand with the principle of fallibilism at the heart of Peirce's philosophy, gives rise to what Peirce calls the 'experimentalist' model of philosophy; an attitude of open-mindedness that embraces alternative beliefs of the Other, and shuns claims to apodictic certainty that might derail the process of inquiry.

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph Ransdell made an exhaustive study of this precise topic, going so far as to claim that "there is a philosophical tradition that can be identified as distinctively Socratic, which had no major heirs after Plato until Peirce" (Ransdell 2000, 341). After dismissing several spurious interpretations of Socratic "wisdom" found in *The Apology*, Ransdell equates it with the realization of the limits of one's knowledge, as I've indicated here, the incompleteness of inquiry as impetus to learn more, noting that this is akin to Peirce's sense of "fallibilism" in opposition to skepticism (see p. 343).

It's important to note that Peirce is not advocating an elite class of scientists and limiting the community to such a small pool. As Liebhafsky notes:

The reader should not make the mistake, as some writers have, of thinking that Peirce called for the replacement of Plato's philosopher-kings by 'scientist-kings.' Careful reading ... clearly discloses that he assigned the role of 'fixation of belief' to scientific *method*, not to scientists or to an elite scientific community. The method is *impersonal* and *objective* and involves the experimental verification of predictions contained in theories (Liebhafsky 1986, 9).

This 'unlimited community constituted the environment within which unlimited intellectual activity could occur' (Liebhafsky 1986, 15). Individual scientists are not the measure of the success of the method but it is the method, itself, as self-correcting and informed by fallibilism and the first rule of logic that guards against the monopolization of truth by any individual or specific social group for, as Talisse notes, Peirce 'denies that proper ... deliberation could be exercised by a small group of experts' (Talisse 2004, 28). DeMarco notes of some Peirce scholars that 'they seem to assume that for Peirce the community is a group of individuals dedicated to scientific pursuits ... that this is not what Peirce means should be apparent from the denial of the positive status of individuality that is pervasive throughout his writings' (DeMarco 1971, 24). The only prerequisite for membership in Peirce's ideal, *unlimited* community of inquirers is the active desire to learn (the first rule of logic). As such, Peirce locates the failure of three counterproductive methods of belief formation to reach towards the Truth precisely in a failure to engage with the Other.

The first of these counterproductive methods, what Peirce calls 'the method of tenacity,' is the method of belief formation wherein individuals cling to the beliefs that they already have, fearing an undecided mind and preferring to linger in the safety and security of firm beliefs, no matter how wildly incorrect they may be. At base, the problem is that an 'instinctive dislike of an undecided state of mind, exaggerated into a vague dread of doubt, makes men cling spasmodically to the views they already take' (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.377). As he says, we find ourselves 'constantly reiterating [our belief] to ourselves, dwelling on all which may conduce to



that belief, and learning to turn with contempt and hatred from anything that might disturb it' (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.377).

Though an 'immovable faith'<sup>19</sup> yields great peace of mind precisely because it ignores the potential for problematizing one's beliefs and staves off the irritation of doubt, as a result, no significant cognitive progress can be made nor can it avoid the inevitable practical consequences for adopting such a method, for as Peirce notes comically, 'when an ostrich buries its head in the sand as danger approaches, it very likely takes the happiest course. It hides the danger, and then calmly says there is no danger; and, if it feels perfectly sure there is none, why should it raise its head to see?' (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.377).

Yet the method of tenacity, like the other two counterproductive methods identified by Peirce, is doomed to fail under the fundamental structures of its own principles:

But this method for fixing belief, which may be called the method of tenacity, will be unable to hold its ground in practice. The social impulse is against it. The man who adopts it will find that other men think differently from him, and it will be apt to occur to him, in some saner moment, that their opinions are quite as good as his own, and this will shake his confidence in his belief (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.378).

Implicitly, the method of tenacity is based upon the requirement of a certain degree of individual isolationism, a monologue of a single belief monotonously repeated over and over to drown out any potential for dialogue between one individual and another who may hold an opposing belief. As De Waal notes, this first method 'only works up to a point. Our confidence in our own beliefs is too easily shaken when interacting with others' (De Waal 2005, 12). For, implicitly here, one of the most efficient ways to problematize a belief is to encounter another individual with an opposing belief whose 'opinions are quite as good' as one's own. This tension between the tenacious

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<sup>19</sup> "The man feels that, if he only holds to his belief without wavering, it will be entirely satisfactory. Nor can it be denied that a steady and immovable faith yields great peace of mind. It may, indeed, give rise to inconveniences, as if a man should resolutely continue to believe that fire would not burn him...but the man who adopts this method will not allow that its inconveniences are greater than its advantages" (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.377)..

individual's belief and the belief of the Other is precisely the sort of recipe for the irritation of doubt, at least in those 'saner moments.' Thus, just as we demonstrated the importance of problematizing one's belief as the impetus for cognitive development in general, so too does there to be an equally important aspect of a rejection of individual isolationism and the fostering of communal discourse and public verification.

This conception, that another man's thought or sentiment may be equivalent to one's own, is a distinctly new step, and a highly important one. It arises from an impulse too strong in man to be suppressed, without danger of destroying the human species. Unless we make ourselves hermits, we shall necessarily influence each other's opinions (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.378).

Thus, if individual, self-imposed isolationism is insufficient to fix one's belief just as it was before without problematizing it and forcing the pragmatic circuit of development, 'the problem becomes how to fix belief, not in the individual merely, but in the community' (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.378), bringing us to the second of the counterproductive methods which Peirce calls *the method of authority*.

Rather than an individual isolating him or herself from the community, tenaciously clinging to the beliefs the individual already has, an authoritarian power dictates the beliefs *for* a populace, invariably beliefs conducive to the perpetuation of power of that authority. The authority ensures that no two individuals will have diametrically opposed beliefs thereby ensuring no doubt and, thus, no inquiry, effectively negating the possibility of radical social change that might undermine the authority's hold on power. 'Otherness' is reduced to inconsequentiality: individuals are distinct entities in complete, indoctrinated agreement and with the dissolution of authentic Otherness, inquiry's trajectory is aligned with the beliefs proliferated by the authority itself.

Let the will of the state act, then, instead of the individual. Let an institution be created which shall have for its object to keep correct doctrines before the attention of the people, to reiterate them perpetually, and to teach them to the young; having at the same time power to prevent contrary doctrines from being taught, advocated, or expressed (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.379).

Rather than individual self-isolation, as in the method of tenacity, we shift the arena to the state in general, and Peirce suggests an ‘institution’ may be created to effectively accomplish what the first method could not by eliminating the problem the method of tenacity ultimately faced: the beliefs of other people.

As Talisse notes, ‘we might say that the method of authority is simply the method of tenacity writ large’ (Talisse 2004, 23): rather than the individual blockading any conceivable problem (effectively, the beliefs of other people) from transforming that state of belief into a state of doubt and forcing the pragmatic circuit of development to advance, in the method of authority, a governing power or institution does so *for* the individuals within its jurisdiction. As De Waal notes, ‘the individual no longer needs to shield itself from contrary evidence, as with the method of tenacity, but contrary evidence is here purposely withheld from people by a regulating institution through censorship and the oppression, or even elimination, of so-called subversive elements’ (De Waal 2005, 13). Key here is that the former method, the method of tenacity, failed precisely because (if we’re not all hermits) one individual will invariably run into another with a different belief that will likely throw both individuals’ beliefs into doubt and force inquiry and cognitive development. The method of authority undermines the major flaw in the method of tenacity, that which demonstrated how it would be undermined by its own fundamental principles, by ensuring that no two individuals within a society would have different beliefs. Thus, when two individuals meet, for example, it can ensure that they’d have precisely the same beliefs and, thereby, no conflict would arise in their conversation that would upset their equilibrium and throw them into a state of doubt.

Let all possible causes of a change of mind be removed from men’s apprehensions. Let them be kept ignorant, lest they should learn of some reason to think otherwise than they do. Let their passions be enlisted, so that they may regard private and unusual opinions with hatred and horror. Then, let all men who reject the established belief be terrified into silence (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.379).

Part of the mechanism employed by the institution to invoke this method of authority is not only to keep the populace ignorant of any doctrine that would conflict with whatever it paraded before its citizens but, too, to instill in its citizens something even greater than the 'vague dread of an undecided mind' in the method of tenacity: outright hostility towards any member of that populace that would dare to question the status quo by the other members of that same populace. In this way, a mechanism is in place for self-regulation by the citizens themselves, namely, that their hostility towards alternative doctrines, an hostility itself imparted by the institution, will deter even the desire to seek out alternative possibilities for fear of retribution not only from the institution itself but from one's own neighbors. A type of Orwellian dystopia is conjured in the images here of a single institution forwarding a monolithic design of 'one truth,' namely, *its* truth, and a populace willingly accepting that 'truth' and spying upon one another to ensure that not even one's own neighbors, one's own family, perhaps, would dare undermine that 'truth.' Thus, once again, cognitive progress in the form of the pragmatic circuit of belief formation is unable to get off the ground, as it was in the method of tenacity: without the onset of a problem to disrupt the initial belief, there is no irritation of doubt to stimulate the inquiry requisite for resolution and development.

The third and final counterproductive method Peirce calls the *a priori* method allows for a nominal form of inquiry, but one based upon assumed premises that are, themselves, not forged of communal inquiry. 'Otherness' is negated before inquiry can even get off the ground: if one is relying on premises not forged in dialogue with the Other, when these beliefs are brought to bear upon the beliefs of the Other, dialogue is dissolved in favor of a repetitive 'monologue' wherein distinct camps of inquirers are merely talking past one another.

Let the action of natural preference be unimpeded, then, and under their influence let men, conversing together and regarding matters in different lights, gradually develop beliefs in harmony with natural causes ... the most perfect example of it is to be found in the history of metaphysical philosophy. Systems of this sort have not usually rested upon any observed facts, at least not in any great degree. They have been chiefly adopted

because their fundamental propositions seemed ‘agreeable to reason’ (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.379).

Looking specifically at the problematic in the method of authority in which guiding principles were given by an institution rather than discovered for oneself in communal discourse, this third method attempts to improve upon that deficiency by allowing their choice of guiding principles to remain ‘unimpeded’ and allowing, further, the ability for them to converse together and bring together ‘different lights’ to ‘develop beliefs in harmony with natural causes.’ The emphasis here, however, is on fixing those guiding principles, those beliefs, as ‘fundamental propositions’ that are ‘agreeable to reason’ but do not (on the whole) rest on any necessarily ‘observable facts’ that are public and open to scrutiny in the type of productive dialogue that champions engagement with the Other.

As such, I argue, each of the three counterproductive methods, in its own way, fails to account for the necessarily communal aspect of inquiry by eschewing the critical component of Otherness without which there is no hope for cognitive progress towards Truth.

### **The Method of Inquiry: Truth, Solidarity, and the Long Run**

In Peirce’s only positive method of belief formation, what he calls ‘the method of inquiry,’ the process of belief formation via the overcoming of problematic situations and the cessation of doubt through inquiry is necessarily communal. The inquirer doesn’t base his or her beliefs on any unanalyzed *a priori* principles, doesn’t succumb to an authority forcing beliefs upon the individual, and does not solipsistically isolate him or herself from the community of Others. Instead, beliefs are challenged by the beliefs of the Other, not antagonistically, but productively, as individuals within this ideal community of inquirers work together to greater heights of Truth and knowledge. As Peirce said, lest we all make ourselves hermits, we invariably influence one another’s beliefs through productive dialogue.

Yet a problem remains:

But it may be said that this view is directly opposed to the abstract definition which we have given of reality, inasmuch as it makes the characters of the real depend on what is ultimately thought about them. But the answer to this is that, on the one hand, reality is independent, not necessarily of thought in general, but only of what you or I or any finite number of men may think about it; and that, on the other hand, though the object of the final opinion depends on what that opinion is, yet what that opinion is does not depend on what you or I or any man thinks (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.408).

This harkens back to Peirce's demand for some standard beyond the tenacious beliefs of the individual, beyond the authoritarian ideologies of the institution, and beyond the intuitions of the philosophers. As Smith notes,

Insofar as he took science to be a standard critical procedure to for fixing belief, Peirce wanted to go beyond the habits or behavior of any one individual. His theory of science as a self-correcting way of arriving at beliefs goes beyond individual psychology; it points instead to a community of investigators committed to a method of arriving at critical conclusions (Smith 1966, 22).

Peirce was attracted to the notion of the community of inquiry, 'for both it provided a means of taking individual beliefs into account at the same time that such belief is subjected to a critical standard' (Smith 1966, 22). Thus, 'all claims to truth and knowledge must have a public character' (Smith 1966, 22). As Eco notes, this 'process of verification' is 'based on slow, collective, public performance by what Charles Sanders Peirce called 'the Community.' It is thanks to human faith in the work of this community' (Eco 1999, 19) that genuine progress can be achieved. Indeed, as DeMarco notes 'the commonality of the community is cognitive, having nothing essential to do with physical location, occupation, or practical concerns' (DeMarco 1971, 25). This ultimately *unlimited* community becomes the site of knowledge claims rather than, as traditionally conceived, the unique individual. As Nagel notes, 'knowledge thus becomes identifiable as the product of overt behavior involving cooperative effort in a community of inquirers, rather than as the outcome of a purely subcutaneous mental activity' (Nagel 1941, 75 – 76). Thus, both the

method itself and objective reality (objective in the sense that it's the achieved 'object' of the inquiry of a community of inquirers) act as standards of communal measurement for the belief. As Goudge notes, 'Peirce makes frequent references to the co-operative nature of inquiry' (Goudge 1950, 25). For example, Peirce says, 'the progress of science cannot go far except by collaboration; or, to speak more accurately, no mind can take one step without the aid of other minds' (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 2.220).

As Peirce himself notes:

Some mystics imagine that they have such a method in a private inspiration from on high. But that is only a form of the method of tenacity, in which the conception of truth as something public is not yet developed. Our external permanency would not be external, in our sense, if it was restricted in its influence to one individual. It must be something which affects, or might affect, every man (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.384).

Whatever else Truth may be, it must be 'something public,' not 'restricted in its influence to one individual,' and it must be something that affects, or could affect, 'every man.' As such, it repudiates the fundamental principles of the method of tenacity, in particular, with its emphasis on individual isolationism, as well as harkens back to his critique of Descartes' method wherein the meditator was capable of finding 'truth' in the isolation of his bedchambers. Likewise, it hints at the disruption of the fundamental principle of the method of authority in its call for a necessarily 'public'<sup>20</sup> form of truth, strongly implying a demand for communal inquiry and debate within a public forum (what was clearly lacking in the method of authority).

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<sup>20</sup> "Since we all have the capacity to deceive ourselves as well as others, belief must have some overt and public signs attached to it; it must be subject to a test. It cannot exist only in the inner and private recesses of consciousness; we need to have some public way of finding out whether we really do believe a given idea or doctrine" (Smith 1966, 18).

As Dewey notes:

The appeal in Peirce is essentially to the consensus of those who have investigated, using methods which are capable of employment by all. It is the need for social agreement, and the fact that in its absence ‘the method of tenacity’ will be exposed to disintegration from without, which finally forces upon mankind the wider and wider utilization of the scientific method (Dewey 1916, 715).

One of the primary failures of these first three methods is precisely this lack of any public character to belief formation. In the method of tenacity, individuals isolate themselves from the beliefs of others. In the method of authority, the institution sees to it that public discourse over important issues is stifled by imposing on a populace whatever beliefs support that institution’s agenda. In the *a priori* method, truth lies in the taste and intuition at the base of the philosopher’s system.

Peirce, thus suggests that ‘though these affections are necessarily as various as are individual conditions, yet the method must be such that the ultimate conclusion of every man shall be the same. Such is the method of science’ (Peirce 1931 – 1936, CP 5.384). The object of inquiry must be something that affects every inquirer, that is, something public, communally accessible, and open to public debate and verification. Yet, what Peirce is advocating is not a sort of metaphysical relativism, for he maintains that the ultimate conclusion of every inquirer, in the long run, ‘shall be the same.’ Given enough time, debate, discourse, inquiry and communal investigation, the same conclusion about Reality can be discovered by each individual inquirer in conjunction with the community at large.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as some commentators note, the hypothetical end of the ‘long run’ is the culmination of both the epistemological quest for truth as it is the ideal unification of the community itself.

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<sup>21</sup> “It is characteristic of the best established sciences that though individuals may pursue researches in them independently of one another, the conclusions reached tend to support each other and to converge toward a common stream of sound beliefs; and such convergence is indeed the sole identifiable warrant for the confidence that some measure of the truth has been attained” (Nagel “1940, 69 – 70).



As Mahowald notes, for example:

Absolute truth or fullness of reality is the gauge of the degree to which the community approaches unity, and in fact the continuing investigation presupposes the 'hope, or calm and cheerful wish, that the community may last beyond any assignable date' (2.654). In other words, this community is the means to the perfect unity which is also a community of ideas and of inquirers. It is the means through which the ideal community is realized (Mahowald 1973, 180).

Though Peirce was a fallibilist, 'Truth' exists as the hypothetically postulated end result of inquiry's unfolding over the long run, and 'Reality' is that which inquiry would ultimately reveal. Over time, as initially diverse beliefs come together through Peirce's prescribed method, unified consensus continues to increase as that 'Truth' and that 'Reality' are better approximated, though only ever hypothetically achieved fully. Critical here is that not only are 'Truth' and 'Reality' necessary hypothetical postulations for Peirce but so, too, can these ultimate goals be seen as necessitating both the perpetuation of the community into an indefinite future as well as an increasing solidarity with the Other, and *unlimited* Other, all working towards a common goal.

In sum, not only was Peirce's conception of individualism necessarily social in character, eschewing any unbridgeable gap between the self and the Other by insisting on their primary, fundamental unity prior *to* individuation, but so, too, was his method of inquiry, the heart of his entire philosophical enterprise, necessarily communal. Peirce advocated a method of philosophical inquiry that demanded a wholesale embrace of the Other, subjugating the needs of the self for the greater community throughout the ongoing pursuit of greater heights of knowledge. Indeed, Peirce went so far as to postulate an ideal, *unlimited* community of inquirers, fallible and open to the reevaluation of their beliefs not in *opposition* to the Other, but in harmonious concert with the Other. In so doing, Peirce forwards what I contend is not only one of the most dynamic manifestations of social individualism ever assembled, but one every bit as useful to socio-political critique as any forwarded by

his pragmatic successors.<sup>22</sup> I maintain that without a clear understanding of Peirce's conception of the Other, and its critical role in his method of inquiry, there can be no full appreciation of Peirce's remarkable philosophical endeavors

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<sup>22</sup> For an excellent exploration of why Peirce's version of pragmatism is more dynamic than his pragmatic successors in terms of socio-political critique, see James Hoopes, *Community Denied: The Wrong Turn of Pragmatic Liberalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). Hoopes argues that it is precisely because of Peirce's realism and objective metaphysics (as opposed to a nascent subjectivism that neither James nor Dewey were ever able to shake), the relationship between society and the individuals that comprise it leads to a more dynamic and robust social individualism in Peirce than anywhere else in pragmatism. Peirce, he argues, "offered a sounder basis for the liberal dream than Dewey did or does" (Hoopes 1998, 2), to which I heartily agree.

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