Overcoming the Evidentialist's Challenge: Peirce's Conjectures of Instinctive Reason and the Reality of God

Some philosophers consider belief in God to be rational if and only if there is sufficient evidence to support the belief and the strength with which one holds the belief is proportional to the evidence that supports it. This view is called evidentialism. Much of the contemporary discussion concerning rationality and religious belief has focused on evidentialism. Why has evidentialism been so pervasive and influential? One could argue that evidentialism is supported by common sense, or by a long philosophical tradition going back as far as Plato. It may also be argued that some versions of evidentialism have been the guiding methodology responsible for the success and progress of science. Whatever the reason, what cannot be denied is that evidentialism is to be taken seriously in religious epistemology. The extent of evidentialism's influence in our understanding of rationality is so substantial that it has become the standard by which beliefs are measured to be epistemically rational or irrational. Hence, the notion "the evidentialist's challenge" has become standard usage in the philosophy of religion, and in evidential apologetics, standard work. Wolterstorff says: "Scarcely anything has been more characteristic of the modern Western intellectual than the conviction that *unless one has good reasons for one's theistic beliefs, one ought to give them up.*"[1]

In this paper I will present Peirce's "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God"[2] (henceforth NA) as an argument that represents a departure from classical and contemporary evidentialist's logic. I will argue that Peirce's argument does not satisfy either the classical or contemporary evidentialist's criteria for rationality and yet the conclusion of his argument, God is Real, is rationally justified. As a consequence, if one finds Peirce's argument persuasive, then the classical and contemporary evidentialist's criteria for determining what is to be considered a rationally justified belief in the reality of God is undermined.[3] First, I will explain what evidentialism is. Second, I will explain some Peircean philosophical notions that are essential for a genuine understanding of the NA.

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This background information is intended to provide a phenomenological analysis of the nature of the doxastic state present in the humble argument. This analysis, I argue, while essential for a proper understanding of the argument, is absent from the existing literature on Peirce's "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God."[4] Part of the reason for this absence is that the right emphasis has not been placed on Peirce's theory of knowledge for an accurate phenomenological description of his understanding of a belief, rational belief, and secure belief. Third, I will present a sketch of Peirce's three stages of inquiry and explain each stage's relevance to the NA. Finally, I will analyze Peirce's first stage of inquiry, also known as the ***humble argument*** for the reality of God (henceforth HA) and show how this incomplete inquiry can provide a rationally justified belief in the reality of God.

1. Evidentialism

There are many versions of evidentialism. In this paper, I am interested in the atheistic versions of evidentialism. This is not to suggest that theistic philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, William Alston, and William Wainwright are not evidentialist; they are evidentialist.[5] However, their evidentialism differs from the atheistic versions. For one thing, most theistic evidentialists give religious experience epistemic value. Moreover, Plantinga argues that belief in the existence of God is properly basic and thus is a foundational or a self-evident belief. More importantly, however, since the purpose of this paper is to show how Peirce's argument for the reality of God overcomes the evidentialist's challenge, it makes sense to focus on the atheistic versions of evidentialism.

While I cannot discuss all of the different forms of atheistic evidentialism, I will select a small group of philosophers that represent the mainstream varieties of atheistic evidentialism in classical and contemporary religious epistemology. From this sample, I will construct a generic evidentialist view that represents the essential characteristics of both classical and contemporary views. I will call this generic evidentialist view "the evidentialist thesis." The evidentialist thesis, therefore, may be considered as the essence of the kind of evidentialism atheist philosophers have defended in religious epistemology. The list of philosophers from which I intend to extrapolate the evidentialist thesis is the following: W.K. Clifford, Brand Blanshard, Antony Flew, Michael Scriven, William Rowe, Michael Martin, and J.L. Mackie.[6] What do all of these atheistic evidentialists have in common?

There are two essential properties that all classical and contemporary atheistic evidentialist theories have in common. The first is that every belief must be supported inductively or deductively by evidence. From a strong or weak foundationalist perspective, every belief must be either self-evident or supported inductively or deductively by self-evident beliefs. From a coherentist perspective, all beliefs must be supported inductively or deductively by a coherent set of

beliefs. Moreover, one's belief is rationally justified to the extent that it coheres with one's set of beliefs. The second property the above atheistic evidentialist philosophers have in common is that the strength with which a person holds a belief should be proportional to evidence in support of the truth of the belief.

The evidentialist thesis, therefore, can be formulated as follows: the belief that God exists is rational if and only if 1) the belief is supported inductively or deductively by some other belief(s), and 2) the strength with which one holds the belief is proportional to the evidence in support of the truth of the belief. The first criterion means that if a person, *p*, believes in the existence of God but has no objective evidence to support such a belief, then *p* is unjustified and has, in a sense, neglected his epistemic duties. Moreover, according to the evidentialist, *p*'s belief in the existence of God is irrational, or at least non-rational. Atheistic evidentialism does not consider religious experience to have epistemic value and thus subjective religious experiences do not constitute evidence for the existence of God. As a consequence, we may assume that the evidential challenge refers to objective evidence. Moreover, atheistic versions of evidentialism do not consider belief in God to be a foundational belief or properly basic belief. Whether or not the belief that God exists is true will not affect the evidentialist's position, since, according to the evidentialist, a true unjustified belief is irrational (or at least non-rational).

The second criterion of the evidential thesis originates from Hume's idea that one should proportion the strength with which one believes a given proposition in accordance with the evidence. Hume advocated a balance between commitment and evidence. He says "A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence."[7] Furthermore, this view assumes that the more evidence in support of a belief the more *secure* the belief, i.e. the safer the belief is of being false. As a consequence, the justification for a belief should be proportional to the security of the belief. It would then follow that the strength with which one holds a belief should fluctuate in accordance to the security of the belief. A rational belief, therefore, is one that balances commitment with justification and with security.

It may be thought that fideism is an alternative to evidentialism, and thus if one is a fideist, the evidential challenge does not apply. This view assumes that fideism and evidentialism are contraries; but this is incorrect. Evidentialism is a view about what constitutes a rational belief. Fideism is a view about the scope and limits of knowledge. Fideists claim that belief in God is not a result of evidence, either because the existence of God cannot be demonstrated or because such demonstrations do not have the effect of producing belief in God. According to the fideist, belief in God is a leap of faith, a trust in something that cannot be shown or proven. Evidentialism, on the other hand, is a view about the nature of rationality. It is plausible, therefore, that there be an evidential-fideist, one who believes that his or her belief in God cannot be supported with objective evidence and thus is not rational. Thus, fideists do not elude the evidentialist's

challenge.

2. Peirce's Epistemology and his Rejection of Modernity

In this section I want to present a sketch of three aspects of Peirce's theory of knowledge that are relevant for an understanding of the NA: 1) his notion of certainty; 2) his notion of objectivity, and 3) his notion of argument. Peirce's views on these three issues develop as a result of his sharp criticism of Cartesianism and the commonly accepted epistemological maxims of modernity. Peirce says: "In some, or all of these respects, most modern philosophers have been, in effect, Cartesians. Now without wishing to return to scholasticism, it seems to me that modern science and modern logic require us to stand upon a very different platform from this."[8] Part of the new platform that Peirce is alluding to involves a rethinking and a renewing of the notions of certainty, objectivity, and argument.

2.1 Certainty

There are at least two ways to approach Peirce's view of the notion of certainty. One way is through his phenomenological understanding of belief and doubt; another is through his notion of fallibility. The central tenet of Peirce's[9] pragmaticism[10] lies in the interconnection between doubt, thought, belief, and action. In analyzing how Peirce envisioned these relationships, two major distinctions between belief and doubt are clarified: 1) their phenomenological difference and 2) their practical difference. The phenomenological difference refers to the distinct mental sensations caused by the different states of mind corresponding to believing and doubting. Peirce says, "We generally know when we wish to ask a question and when we wish to pronounce a judgment, for there is a dissimilarity between the sensation of doubting and that of believing."[11] The practical difference refers to doubt's and belief's connections to actions. Peirce says, "Most frequently doubts arise from some indecision, however momentary, in our action."[12] With respect to belief he says, "... it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action, or, say for short, a habit."[13]

In this paper I am interested in analyzing the phenomenological facet of belief and doubt. Peirce viewed doubt as a state of irritation. According to Peirce, doubt is a state in which a former belief is disrupted. Peirce considered doubt a state of mind that is uncomfortable and involuntary.[14] Thought or inquiry is motivated by doubt, insofar as it arises to satisfy the irritable and uncomfortable state of doubt. As a consequence, thinking, according to Peirce, has one and only one function: the production of belief.[15] Belief, on the other hand, is a state of mind that is satisfying.

If certainty can be described as the sensation of knowing our beliefs to be true, then what is the phenomenological difference between being certain and firmly believing? Is there a sensation over and above that of a firm belief that refers to an assurance of the truth of the belief? Peirce hints at this possibility:

> We may fancy that this [belief] is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief is true or false. And it is clear that nothing out of the sphere of our knowledge can be our object, for nothing which does not affect the mind can be the motive for mental effort. The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall think to be true. But we think all our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so.[16]

Peirce's comment suggests that there is no qualitatively distinct sensation corresponding to certainty other than the sensation of belief. Peirce argues that this misunderstanding stems from a misconception of proof that can be traced to the Cartesian Meditations. Descartes conceived of a demonstration as a proof that rests on indubitable premises or premises that are *impossible* to doubt. Contrary to this, Peirce argues that a demonstration only requires a proof with premises that are not doubted in *actuality*.[17] In conclusion, according to Peirce, to ask whether one is certain about what one firmly believes is redundant.

A second way of coming to understand Peirce's view of certainty is through his doctrine of fallibilism.[18] Fallibilism is the view that even though a proposition may seem certain at a given moment in time, it may still be false. Our supposed knowledge, therefore, is liable to error, and thus the idea of certainty must be approached with prudence. Falliblism is partly embedded in a metaphysical view of human finitude and limitation. At the age of twenty-four, Peirce says in an address to his old high school: "Human learning must fail somewhere."[19] Another example of this view is expressed in the following passage: "we are, doubtless, in the main logical animals, but we are not perfectly so."[20]

According to Peirce, fallibillism is an essential notion of science and must be understood alongside of Peirce's idea of the scientific method. Peirce believed that science requires neither truth nor method but only an attitude or "spirit." Science is the spirit that tirelessly seeks truth and is relentless in that search. He says:

> That which constitutes science, then, is not so much correct conclusions, as it is a correct method. But the method of science is itself a scientific result. It did not spring out of the brain of a beginner: it was a historic attainment and a scientific achievement. So that not even this method ought to be regarded as essential to the beginning of science. That which is essential, however, is the scientific spirit, which is determined not

> to rest satisfied with existing opinions, but to press on to the real truth of nature.[21]

Adopting the fallibillistic attitude facilitates and nurtures the scientific spirit, since it calls for taking scientific conclusions as provisional. While much more can be said about Peirce's notion of fallibilism, the point I want to emphasize in this paper is that Peirce's fallibilism is an essential part of his conception of the scientific spirit and keeps our conception of certainty in check.

2.2 *Objectivity*

It is important not to misrepresent Peirce's view as relativistic. Instead, Peirce viewed epistemology as the process of arriving at beliefs that ***are true.*** Moreover, Peirce's embracing of scholastic realism leaves no room for doubt on these matters.[22] Nevertheless, Peirce's epistemological realism varies significantly from that of modern philosophy. More specifically, his major point of disagreement consisted in his rejection of some neutral, absolutely objective epistemological starting point. Pierce thought we must begin the knowledge process from "what we already know" that includes all kinds of beliefs we already have, and thus possibly many false beliefs and biases. Peirce says: "The object of reasoning is to find out from the consideration of what we already know, something else which we do not know."[23] In response to Descartes, he says: "We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which it does not occur to us can be questioned."[24] Peirce believed that the scientific method was self-correcting and thus that no matter how many false beliefs one begins with, if one applies the scientific method correctly one will eventually shed the false beliefs and reinforce the true ones. This aspect of Peirce's understanding of knowledge gathering is important for advancing the view that one should not remain at the first stage of inquiry or at the stage of the HA.

2.3 Argument

Finally, Peirce rejects Descartes' narrow conception of reasoning as deductive argumentation. Peirce says of philosophical and scientific reasoning: "Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibers may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected."[25] Peirce distinguishes between arguments and argumentation. An argument is wide and includes "any process of thought reasonably tending to produce a definite belief."[26] Argumentation, on the other hand, "is an argument proceeding upon definitely formulated premises."[27] This distinction is important because the conclusion of the HA, namely, that God is real is a result of argument and not argumentation. Retroduction or abduction is a form of argument and not argumentation. Moreover, as I shall argue below,

Peirce attributes a kind of validity to retroduction that allows us to say that one can have a rationally justified belief in the reality of God. Indeed, the strength of the justification for the conclusion of the HA is proportional to the strength of the validity one is willing to grant to Peirce's first stage of inquiry.

3. Three Stages of Inquiry

According to Peirce, a thorough and complete scientific inquiry has three parts: 1) the positing of a hypothesis (retroduction); 2) the explication and the deductive consequences of the hypothesis (deduction); and 3) the comparison of the consequences of the hypothesis with experience (induction) and the determination of the hypothesis's truth. I will present a succinct description of each of these stages. This will provide the context of Peirce's HA.

Every inquiry, Peirce believes, arises from some object of surprise or wonder, an experience not expected. The circumstances will lead to possible explanations and subsequently to the choosing of the most plausible one. This first stage of inquiry and the establishment of the hypothesis, according to Peirce, is a form of argument and not argumentation. It is characterized by reasoning from the consequent to the antecedent. Peirce's description captures the essence of this first stage. He says:

> The whole series of mental performances between the notice of the wonderful phenomenon and the acceptance of the hypothesis, during which the usually docile understanding seems to hold the bit between its teeth and to have us at its mercy, the search for pertinent circumstances and the laying hold of them, sometimes without our cognizance, the security of them, the dark laboring, the bursting out of the startling conjecture, the remarking of its smooth fitting to the anomaly, as it is turned back and forth like a key in a lock, and the final estimation of its plausibility, I reckon as composing the First Stage of the Inquiry.[28]

According to Peirce, all three stages must be considered together and as parts of one inquiry. While it may be tempting to end one's inquiry at the end of the first stage, and in fact many people do, Peirce emphasizes that doing so undermines the search for truth. Peirce says: "Retroduction does not afford security. The hypothesis must be tested."[29] How do these three stages of inquiry relate to Peirce's NA?

Peirce argues that there is "a nest of three arguments for the Reality of God...." The first is the HA. Peirce intends the HA to be simply the termination of the first stage of inquiry, and thus it represents an argument for the hypothesis of the reality of God.[30] The second argument is a defense of the HA. This second

argument is the NA. There is still a third and final argument, namely, the testing of the hypothesis of the reality of God, which "consists in a study of the logical methodeutic, ..."[31] We now have a better understanding of how to interpret Peirce's HA. For one thing, it is evident that the HA does not represent a complete inquiry since it does not come at the end of the three stages of inquiry. But if the HA does not afford a secure belief in the reality of God, how can it offer a rationally justified belief in the reality of God?

4. Peirce's HA and his Conception of Spontaneous Conjectures of Instinctive Reason

We need to take a closer look at the first stage of inquiry, that makes up the HA. In doing so, I want to focus on two concerns: 1) the human faculty at work at this stage of the argument and its contribution to the knowledge process, and 2) the validity attributable to the conclusion derived from this stage of the inquiry.

4.1 The Humble Argument for the Reality of God

To understand Peirce's HA, we have to take into account a major presupposition that Peirce considers. Peirce says:

> If God Really be, and be benign, then, in view of the generally conceded truth that religion, were it but proved, would be a good outweighing all others, we should naturally expect that there would be some Argument for His Reality that should be obvious to all minds, high and low alike, that should earnestly try to find the truth of the matter; and further, that this argument should present its conclusion, not as a proposition of metaphysical theology, but in a form directly applicable to the conduct of life, and full of nutrition for man's highest growth.[32]

Peirce argues, therefore, that if there is a God, then our belief in God is to be expected from some natural and simple reflection.

Peirce describes an activity of mind that he calls "Pure Play." One is in pure play when one's thoughts are not devoted to any serious matter or purpose. Peirce says: "it involves no purpose save that of casting aside all serious purpose."[33] It may occur, he suggests, when one takes a stroll. The essential part of pure play is freedom; "it has no rules, except this very law of liberty. It bloweth where it listeth."[34] Peirce claims that this pure play will exert a great amount of mental activity that may take four distinct forms: 1) aesthetic contemplation; 2) distant castle building; 3) consideration of some wonder of the universe; or 4) some combination of two of the three, with speculation

concerning its cause. Peirce calls the latter "Musement." He argues that with sufficient time it will flower into the NA. It is important to notice and emphasize that Peirce envisions Musement as having no preconceived religious intentions. If one begins pure play with the hope of being convinced of the reality of God, then it is no longer pure play. Instead Peirce argues: "But let religious meditation be allowed to grow up spontaneously out of Pure Play without any breach of continuity, and the Muser will retain the perfect candour proper to Musement."[35] Peirce concludes:

> ...in the Pure Play of Musement the idea of God's Reality will be sure sooner or later to be found an attractive fancy, which the Muser will develop in various ways. The more he ponders it, the more it will find response in every part of his mind, for its beauty, for its supplying an ideal of life, and for its thoroughly satisfactory explanation of his whole threefold environment.[36]

This is Peirce's HA and it is the first stage of inquiry. The HA, therefore, is the process that is responsible for deriving the hypothesis of the reality of God. Peirce argues that the hypothesis of God is posited by the *spontaneous conjectures of instinctive reason.* The importance attributed by Peirce to *instinctive reason* should not be underemphasized, since it is the faculty responsible for introducing all new forms of knowledge; it provides new scientific hypotheses. Peirce says: "Observe that neither Deduction nor Induction contributes the smallest positive item to the final conclusion of the inquiry. ... Yet every plank of its [science's] advance is first laid by Retroduction alone, that is to say, by the spontaneous conjectures of instinctive reason and neither Deduction nor Induction contributes a single new concept to the structure."[37]

But is it not paradoxical to view a faculty belonging to instinct as rational? Is not "instinctive reason" an oxymoron? On the contrary, according to Peirce, it is precisely because this faculty is purely instinctive that we should include it within our conception of the rational. Even though, as Peirce realizes, there is no other option since it is the sole provider of hypotheses. Peirce says;

> Yes; it must be confessed that if we knew that the impulse to prefer one hypothesis to another really were analogous to the instincts of birds and wasp's [flying], it would be foolish not to give it play, within the bounds of reason; especially since we must entertain some hypothesis, or else forego all further knowledge than that which we have already gained by that very means.[38]

I have argued that, according to Peirce, Retroduction is an argument that deserves to be taken seriously, and, moreover, that for science and epistemology it is indispensable. In addition, I have argued that, according to Peirce, the reality of God is a conclusion of Retroduction when one begins in Musement. Nevertheless, I have also argued that the conclusions of Retroduction are not necessarily true nor are they the product of a complete process of inquiry. Therefore, how are we to evaluate the validity of belief in the reality of God?

4.2 Confidence Attributable to the Spontaneous Conjectures of Instinctive Reason

Since the argument for the reality of God is simply the positing of a hypothesis of God, a question arises as to the validity of such a hypothesis. Moreover, the validity of such a hypothesis will dictate the confidence that Peirce believes one can have in the truth of the hypothesis. What kind of validity can be attributed to the hypothesis of the reality of God? Or, as Peirce puts it: "What sort of validity can be attributed to the First Stage of Inquiry?"[39]

There is no reason to deviate from a standard definition of justification as evidence for the truth of a proposition. A proposition, x, is a source of justification for the truth of another proposition y if and only if the truth of x increases the probability of the truth of y. If this is so, then how can the simple positing of a hypothesis be justification for the truth of the hypothesis?

Peirce argues, following Galileo, that progress in science has shown that the simplicity of the hypothesis is a positive evidential property, inasmuch as the simpler the hypothesis the more likely it is to be true. This observation resembles Ockham's razor and does not seem too novel. Indeed, if the meaning of the principle of simplicity were interpreted as equivalent to the meaning of Ockham's razor, it may be argued that simplicity has a negative evidential effect on the hypothesis of a creator God, because it is not the logically simplest hypothesis.

Peirce, however, argues for a very different interpretation of the principle of simplicity. He argues, instead, that simplicity should be understood as that which seems to us to be most congenial and agreeable. Peirce argues that human nature is in tune with the natural world and that it is this harmony that explains why humans have been able to unlock the hidden secrets of nature. Peirce says:

> Modern science has been builded after the model of Galileo, who founded it, on *il lume naturale.* That truly inspired prophet has said that, of two hypotheses, the simpler is the preferred; but I was formerly one of those who, in our dull self-conceit fancying ourselves more sly than he, twisted the maxim to mean the logically simpler, the one that adds the least to what has been observed; ... It was not until long experience forced me to realize that subsequent discoveries were every time

> showing I had been wrong, while those who understood the maxim as Galileo had done, early unlocked the secret, that the scales fell from my eyes and my mind awoke to the broad and flaming daylight that it is the simpler Hypothesis in the sense of the more facile and natural, the one that instinct suggests, that must be preferred; for the reason that, unless man have a natural bent in accordance with nature's, he has no chance of understanding nature at all.[40]

Peirce goes one to say: "I don't mean that logical simplicity is a consideration of no value at all, but only that its value is badly secondary to that of simplicity in the other sense."[41] We can describe how Peirce's theory of simplicity serves as evidence or justification as follows: The fact that a subject is inclined to believe a hypothesis to be true is itself a reason for the subject to believe that it is true. Moreover, the greater the strength with which one believes the hypothesis to be true the greater the justification that it is true. Peirce believed that there was a spectrum of plausibility one could have towards an initial hypothesis. Thus one's initial response to a hypothesis may range from "a mere expression of it in the interrogative mood, as a question meriting attention and reply, up through all appraisals of Plausibility, to uncontrollable inclination to believe."[42] Therefore, if from the HA the plausibility of the reality of God arises with a high degree of strength, and belief is uncontrollable, it follows that the strong inclination towards one's believing the hypothesis serves as justification for the truth of the belief.[43] When describing the difference between the stage of retroduction in the HA and other scientific inquiries, Peirce says:

> In the first place the Plausibility of the hypothesis reaches an almost unparalleled height among deliberately formed hypotheses. So hard it is to doubt God's Reality, when the Idea has sprung from Musements, that there is great danger that the investigation will stop at this first stage, owing to the indifference of the Muser to any further proof of it. At the same time, this very Plausibility is undoubtedly an argument of no small weight in favor of the truth of the hypothesis.[44]

Why shouldn't we stop at this first stage? If Peirce seems to agree that one is justified in believing in the reality of God, why does he insist that this belief is not secure? What is the difference between a secure belief and a justified belief?

It may be difficult to understand Peirce's thought concerning the difference between a secure belief and a justified belief because the modern epistemological

maxim that the strength with which one holds a belief should be proportional to the evidence available oversimplifies Peirce's epistemology. We need to consider once again Peirces' understanding of certainty. According to Peirce, if person *P* firmly believes *x*, then to ask if *P* is certain of *x*, makes no sense or is simply redundant. On the other hand, it is quite possible that *P* believe *x* at T1, be rationally justified in doing so, and yet at T2 have more evidence for the truth of *x* without an increase in the strength with which *P* believes *x*. Moreover, it would be correct to say that, given the strengthening of the evidence, *x* is a more secure belief at T2 than at T1. For Peirce, therefore, there is a distinction between the phenomenological state of having a rationally justified belief and a proposition (the content of a belief) being secure. Peirce does not believe that *P* has violated any epistemic duties; instead Peirce believes *P*'s belief forming process to be within the bounds of proper reasoning. Therefore, according to Peirce, an increase in evidence for the truth of a belief may increase the belief's security without increasing the strength with which one holds the belief. On the other hand, Peirce realized that although the force with which one holds a belief may be great and the belief may be rationally justified, it may not only be false but also insecure and thus the search for truth is not satisfied and must continue.

5. *Conclusion*

Evidentialism claims that a belief is rational if and only if 1) the belief is supported inductively or deductively by some other belief(s), and 2) the strength with which one holds the belief is proportional to the evidence in support of the truth of the belief. In this paper I have argued that, according to Peirce, one can have a rationally justified belief in the reality of God without meeting the evidentialist's criteria. Peirce's argument doesn't satisfy the evidentialist's first criterion for two reasons: first, because conjectures of instinctive reason are neither deductive nor inductive; and second, because the evidentialist does not consider conjectures of instinctive reason to be objective evidence. Peirce's argument doesn't satisfy the evidentialist's second criterion because Peirce claims that one could rationally believe in the reality of God with great force and yet lack a high degree of security for the truth of the belief. Peirce's view on how a subject comes to believe a given hypothesis as "uncontrollable inclination to believe"[45] alludes to the idea that beliefs are not completely under a subject's control. Some beliefs are involuntary so that no matter how much I desire to rid myself of them, I will be unsuccessful. Nevertheless, Peirce does advocate that the scientific person ought to demonstrate self-control and restraint in his or her belief forming process, similar to the way an ethical person shows self-control and restraint in their behavior. Peirce claims, however, that the uncontrollable inclination to believe provides good reason to believe. The idea, therefore, that one should proportion the force of a belief with the evidence assumes incorrectly that I have complete and total dominion over my beliefs. Moreover, it assumes that belief formation occurs at the end of an inquiry. Instead, for Peirce, a belief

may arise spontaneously and in the early stages of inquiry and not in the final stages. I have argued that it is consistent to view the belief in the reality of God as being a rationally justified unsecured belief. The security of the belief in the reality of God can only come about by the further logical development of the last two stages of inquiry.[46]

Barry University
bcantens@mail.barry.edu

NOTES

1. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Migration of the Theistic Arguments: From Natural Theology to Evidentialist Apologetics," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, edited by Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press., 1986).

2. All notes on Peirce refer to *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. C. Hartshone and P. Weiss, vols. 1-6 and ed. A. Burks, vols. 7-8 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-1968). Numbers refer to volume and paragraph.

3. What I mean by saying that the classical and mainstream contemporary evidentialist's criteria are undermined is not that they lose all significance and importance as epistemological doctrines or that they are false, but rather they fail to provide the minimum threshold for determining what we may consider as evidence for a rational belief.

4. See Roger Ward, "Experience as Religious Discovery in Edwards and Peirce." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 36 (2000): 297-309; Kerry S. Walters, "A Note on Benjamin Franklin and Gods," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 31 (1995): 793-805; Douglas Anderson, *Strands of a System: The Philosophy of Charles Peirce* (Lafayette: Purdue West University Press, 1995); "Peirce's Agape and the Generality of Concern," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37 (1995): 103-112; "Realism and Idealism in Peirce's Cosmogony," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1992): 85-192; "Three Appeals in Peirce's Neglected Argument," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 26(3) (1990): 349-362; "An American Argument for Belief in the Reality of God," *Philosophy of Religion* 26 (1989): 109-118; John E. Smith, *Experience and God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1995); "The Tension Between Direct Experience and Argument in Religion" *Religious Studies* 17 (1982): 487-498; Robert Reuter, "Peirce and Testing the God Hypothesis," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 32 (1994): 289-302; C.F. Delaney, "Peirce on the Hypothesis of God" *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 28(4) (1992): 725-739; Andrea Croce Birch, "Peirce's Three Arguments for the Reality of God," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1990): 203-210; Kelly Parker, "C.S. Peirce and the Philosophy of Religion," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28 (1990): 193-212; Michael L. Raposa, *Peirce's Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Ralph Powell, "Degenerate Secondness in Peirce's Belief in God," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 62 (1988): 116-123; John E. Smith, "The Tension Between Direct Experience and Argument in Religion." *Religious Studies* 17 (1982): 487-498; Dennis Rohatyn, "Resurrecting Peirce's 'Neglected Argument' for God," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 18 (1982): 66-74; Robert H. Ayers, "C. S. Peirce On Miracles,"

Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society 16 (1980): 242-254; Mary Mahowald, "Peirce's Concepts of God and Religion," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 12 (1976): 367-377.

5. For some primary sources of these philosophers's evidentialism see: William J. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); William P. Alston, *Perceiving: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); *Is There a God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Alvin Plantinga, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, edited by A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

6. W.K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" Lectures and Essays, 1874 in *Philosophy of Religion* 3rd Edition, edited by William L. Rowe and William J. Wainwright (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998) pp. 456-461; Brand Blanshard, *Reason and Belief* (London:Allen & Unwin, 1974); Anthony Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism* (London: Pemberton, 1976) ; Michael Scriven, *Primary Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966); Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); *The Case Against Christianity* (Philadephia: Temple University Press, 1992); and J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

7. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 2nd edition, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993) p. 73.

8. *CP* [5.265]

9. I use Peirce's word "Pragmaticism" to emphasize that the notions of pragmaticism that I am relying on in this paper are strictly Peircean. Peirce says," So, then, the writer, finding his bantling 'pragmatism' so promoted, feels that it is time to kiss his child goodbye and relinquish it to its higher destiny; while to serve the precise purpose of expressing the original definition, he begs to announce the birth of the word 'pragmaticism,' which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers" *CP* [5.414].

10. The general idea of pragmaticism (as a systematic philosophical method) was first expressed in Peirce's article "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" in January of 1878 in *Popular Science Monthly*. Before this, in the 1877 November issue of *Popular Science Monthly*, Pierce published "The Fixation of Belief," in which he articulates what a belief is and what is the proper method of attaining and fixing beliefs. For further reading on Peirce's pragmaticism see Karl-Otto Apel, *From Pragmatism To Pragmaticism*, translated by John Michael Krois (New Jersey: Humanity Press International, 1995); Beth Singer, "John E. Smith on Pragmatism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 16 (1980): 14-25; John E. Smith, "Comments on Beth J. Singer's 'John E. Smith on Pragmatism,'" *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 16 (1980): 27-33.

11. *CP* [5.370].

12. *Ibid* [5.394].

13. *Ibid* [5.397]. In "The Fixation of Belief" Peirce provides a similar definition of Belief: "the feeling of believing is a more or less indication of there being established in our nature some habit which will determine our actions" [5.371].

14. *Ibid* [5.376]. Peirce says, concerning fake doubts: "Some philosophers

have imagined that to start an inquiry it was only necessary to utter a question whether orally or by setting it down on paper, and have even recommended us to begin our studies with questioning everything! [Referring to Descartes] But the mere putting of a proposition into the interrogative form does not stimulate the mind to any struggle after belief. There must be a real and living doubt, and without this all discussion is idle" *CP* [5.376].

15. *Ibid* [5.394]. Peirce says, "We have there found that the action of thought is excited by the irritation of doubt, and ceases when belief is attained; so that the production of belief is the sole function of thought" *CP* [5.394].

16. *Ibid* [5.375].

17. Peirce says, "It is a very common idea that a demonstration must rest on some ultimate and absolutely indubitable propositions. These, according to one school, are first principles of a general nature; according to another, are first sensations. But, in point of fact, an inquiry, to have that completely satisfactory result called demonstration, has only to start with propositions perfectly free from all actual doubt. If the premises are not in fact doubted at all, they cannot be more satisfactory than they are" *CP* [5.376].

18. See Robert Almeder, "Peircean Fallibilism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 18 (1981): 57-65.

19. Peirce says: "Place of our Age in the History of Civilization," in *Charles S Peirce: Selected Writings*, edited with an introduction and notes by Philip P. Wiener, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1958), p. 11.

20. *CP* [5.366].

21. *Ibid* [6.428-6.434].

22. See Susan Haack, "Extreme Scholastic Realism: Its Relevance to Philosophy of Science Today," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 28 (1992): 19-50; Douglas R. Anderson, "Realism and Idealism in Peirce's Cosmogony," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1992): 185-192; Bruce Altshuler, "Peirce's Theory of Truth and Revolt Against Realism." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 18 (1982): 24-55.

23. *Ibid* [5.365].

24. *Ibid* [5.265]. Peirce drives home this idea by saying: "Philosophers of very diverse stripes propose that philosophy shall take its start from one or another state of mind in which no man, least of all a beginner in philosophy, actually is. One proposes that you shall begin by doubting everything, and says that there is only one thing that you cannot doubt, as if doubting were 'as easy as lying.' Another proposes that we should begin by observing 'the first impression of sense,' forgetting that our very precepts are the results of cognitive elaboration. But in truth, there is but one state of mind from which you can "set out," namely, the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do "set out," a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed, of which you cannot divert yourself if you would; and who knows whether, if you could, you would not have made all knowledge impossible to yourself?" *Ibid* [5.416].

25. *Ibid* [5.265].

26. *Ibid* [6.456].

27. *Ibid* [6.456].

28. *Ibid* [6.469].

29. *Ibid* [6.470].

30. For a clear explanation of Peirce's three arguments, see Andrea Croce

Birch, "Peirce's Three Arguments for the Reality of God," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1990).

31. *CP* [6.488].
32. *Ibid* [6.457].
33. *Ibid* [6.458].
34. *Ibid* [6.458].
35. *Ibid* [6.458].
36. *Ibid* [6.465].
37. *Ibid* [6.475].
38. *Ibid* [6.476].
39. *Ibid* [6.475].
40. *Ibid* [6.477].
41. *Ibid* [6.477].
42. *Ibid* [6.469].
43. Peirce's view on the strength of abductive reasoning is intimately connected with his metaphysical doctrine of synechism, which is a synthesis of Tychism and Pragmatism. Peirce says: "We here reach a point at which novel considerations about the constitution of knowledge and therefore of the constitution of nature burst in upon the mind with cataclysmal multitude and resistlessness. It is that synthesis of tychism and of pragmatism for which I long ago proposed the name, Synechism,..."[4.584]. Elsewhere Peirce says: "The tendency to regard continuity, in the sense in which I shall define it, as an idea of prime importance in philosophy may conveniently be termed synechism" *CP* [6.103].
44. *Ibid* [6.488].
45. *Ibid* [6.469].
46. This paper was presented in a symposium at the American Philosophical Association Annual Meeting 2003 in Washington D.C., where it was awarded the William James Prize. I am grateful to Paul Draper, Susan Haack, Forrest Woods, John Capps, Douglas Anderson, Nicholas Rescher, Peter Hare, and James Swindal for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.