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Peirce and Jung: Modern Gnostics in Search of Soul

C. W. Spinks

It would seem, at first glance, that Carl Jung and C. S. Peirce would have little in common. Jung was a romantic corrective to a scientific Freud, and Peirce was a scientific corrective to a romantic James. Jung was fascinated by the mystical, and Peirce distrusted it. Jung relied on dreams, and Peirce thought of them as "lacking all Thirdness". Jung stressed compensation over Freud's causation despite Freud's prohibition about mysticism, and Peirce persistently articulated the Categories and Firstness even if James defined the pragmatic method as "*The attitude of looking away from first things, principles, categories, supposed necessities*" (1948:146). Yet Jung was a psychologist interested in alchemy, and Peirce was a chemist interested in the processes of Mind. Moreover, the constructs of both, the psychological for Jung and the semeiotic for Peirce, were concerned with the representation of the infinite. Their life-time studies were given over to how human beings articulated their responses to the infinite, and both found themselves drawn into the vortex of divinity and origin in trying to articulate their own understandings of the role and function of human mentation.

What first drew me to the similarity of Jung and Peirce was the fact that both used the same odd term to describe their understandings. That term was "tohu bohu" -- a Hebraic phrase translated as "without form and void" and meaning the unspecified potentiality of Chaos or infinity, and as I looked more closely I found there were a number of similarities between the Jungian outlook on Infinity and the Peircean notions of Firstness. First, both see the area of infinity as an area of growth and spirit, and both used established systems to investigate that growth -- Peirce using the trichotomous structures of surveying and Jung the emblematic nature of alchemy. Two, both saw growth as fundamental to understanding the universe -- Peirce seeking "the principle of growth of principles" and Jung articulating the process of individuation. Third, both thought of infinity as a complete openness to all possibility with Peirce thinking in terms of Firstness, evolutionary love, and Pure Freedom and with Jung thinking in terms of the compensatory nature of the psyche and the Pleroma. Fourth, both saw the edges of representation of infinity in the pictorial and the visual with Peirce defining the Icon as the initial sign of Firstness and Jung pursuing the pattern of the archetype as a kind of open-ended diagram. Lastly, both sensed something of the gnostic in their systematic understanding of totality with Jung clearly owning his gnostic sources, and Peirce stressing that mentality was a process of growing knowledge and discovery. In fact, both make the same kind of distinction between "knowledge" and "belief" -- there is a growing consciousness of the process of representation and a kind of entelechy operating in the development of our representation of the Universe. So I want to look at some of the conceptual similarities of Jung's and Peirce's concepts to try to fathom something of their gnostic visions about representation, their concepts of infinity, the Godhead, and the growth of

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human mentation.

In discussing the three Categorical Universes, Peirce distinguishes between Doubt, Truth, and Belief and between Reality and Existence. Despite his critique of Cartesian doubt, Peirce's understanding is that doubt is a fundamental biological fact and not some guiding principle of argumentation; it, like the uncertainty of surprise, "is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief " (5.371) It is, thus, part of the process of discovering truth and belief. Whereas Truth is the results of Scientific Endeavor, subject to the proofs of logic, mathematics, and reasoning, Belief is, for Peirce, something considerably more vague even if equally important, for he returns to the 1877 "Fixation of Belief " (5.358-387) Peirce several times, in 1893, 1903, and 1910, to make it clear that belief has "the nature of a habit. " (5.377) As for "existence," Peirce uses that term "in its strict philosophical sense of "react with the other like things in the environment." (6.495) Although his concept of existence is a concept of Secondness, the more philosophically First term of "reality " is "... that which holds its characters on such a tenure that it makes not the slightest difference what any man or men may have **thought** them to be, or ever will have **thought** them to be, (6.495) Thus he obviously defines reality in terms of its teleological purpose, and as part of the complex of purpose, habit, growth in Firstness.

Although Peirce might object to being called a gnostic, (6.102) he still pursues spiritual implications in the Semeiotic. To see the universe as "a great symbol of God's purpose " is an idea common to both Christianity and science when one recognizes that the "readable world " is the common element in both. But more importantly, the additional idea of that purpose being "worked out ... in living realities" is a distinctly gnostic idea, and given Peirce's categorical understanding of Firstness, God as a/the Sign is God as the Semeiotic; it is part and parcel of a gnosis of discovery and the articulation of the process of becoming. Moreover, the examination of the principle of growth of principles (6.585) is a pursuit of gnosis of the Semeiotic. It is a process of an anthropomorphic microcosm of the Mind operating in our understanding of the Stuff of the Universe; it is the paradoxical epistemology of the Knowable Unknown framed by the Dynamic and Immediate Objects, the laws of Interpretance, and the Categories. Thus, Peirce's concept of Firstness is parallel to the Gnostic principle of the Pleroma, the fullness, which Jung describes as "A thing that is infinite and eternal hath no qualities, since it hath all qualities. This nothingness or fullness we name the PLEROMA. Therein both thinking and being cease, since the eternal and infinite possess no qualities. In the pleroma there is nothing and everything. It is quite fruitless to think about the pleroma, for this would mean self-dissolution. " (Storr, 1983:342) The similarities between Jung's definition of the Pleroma and Peirce's definition of Firstness are clear. The Zero infinity of Firstness is total potentiality, a fullness of all possibilities which admits the concretizing web of the Semeiotic as a complexus of qualia leading eventually to the fullness of Thirdness. Such a Thirdness is what Gregory Bateson, responding to Jung, refers to as the Creaturae, the "world of explanation in which the very phenomena to be described are among themselves governed and determined by difference, distinction, and information. " (1986:18) In fact, the semeiotic is aimed exactly at patterns of explanation as Logic and Semeiotic. The very mode of semiosis

operation is to avoid the surprises of Brute Secondness in a Universe of possibility by explanation. Thus in gnostic terms, the function of the semeiotic is to avoid the "errors" of the creation which further reduce organisms to "stony sleep" of positivism.

I would argue that Peirce's notion of the Personality of God is also gnostic. In fact despite the distortions of error, the Peircean notion of a growing, personal godhead has been generally a gnostic, or at least theistic, one which holds it all together as First Cause, Pure God, The Cosmos, Cosmic Consciousness, or the God Sign. Peirce was eager to establish an evolutionary theory that accepted both the notion of nothingness and a principle of growth of principles, and it was essential to Peirce's concept of the Categories that both respected the known laws of physical science and the yet-to-be-discovered laws of a psychological science. Thus, many of his examples and arguments are representations of a law of association operating within a nothingness which is truly infinite -- A Zero Infinity that contains an infinity of infinities. Of course, this is no simple mathematical conundrum for Peirce, rather it is fundamental to his articulation of both a semeiotic and a metaphysic that one understands that "We cannot ourselves conceive of such a state of nility; but we can easily conceive that there should be a mind could conceive it." (6.490)

Implicit in Peirce's Categories is the concept of Zero -- either as the Absolute frame outside the Categories or as the digital concept from Secondness as NO \square thing. The proto-creative potential of the Semeiotic lies in the interface between an analog reality and a digital sign system; the frictions between the two systems in the multiple meta-transformations at their boundaries fuel the generative power of the Semeiotic, but Peirce obviously attributes the same kind of generative power to a purposive Universe. The paradox of a Knowable Unknown, as distinct from an Unknowable Known, godhead is the paradox of the Immediate and Dynamic Objects, and the evolutionary development of the Absolute Final Interpretant is parallel to the gnostic self-realization of the godhead. Both are the conceiving mind "working out its conclusion in living realities."

However, there are two ways to look at the hypothetical conceiving mind. One, of course, is a kind of Peirceo-Berkleyian God who hears the droppings of nada trees even in the nada forest, but Peirce is too much the mathematician to accept such a pseudo \square Idealism. The problem of Infinities is the problem of God as a Firstness, and thus the Gnostic pattern is quite a natural one for demonstrating what Peirce wishes to demonstrate: that the human mind can critically discuss the kinds of operations without resort to the tenacity of solipsistic belief or the brute forces of social belief. In addition, the whole notion of discussing the totality of Firstness as Zero Infinity is crucial to the semeiotic and the metaphysic as God, Freedom, or Immortality (1.192) under the triad of Philosophy. (1.186) So for Peirce to describe the spatio-temporal Universe(s) topologically as he does in 6.211 or to describe the logic of the Universe as dimensionalities of continuities as he does in 6.203f, or to discuss a principle of growth of principles as the association of habit is little different than a discussion of how God is the ultimate paradox of something coming from nothing.

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The second way of looking at "conceiving mind" is in terms of the human mind itself, and Peirce often follows this tact. On the one hand, such a concept has to do with the anthropomorphic quality of ideas and the Universe of Ideas, but on the other hand, the very construction of the habit-forming mind is itself that which forms hypotheses, for "man's mind must have been attuned to the truth of things in order to discover what he has discovered. It is the very bedrock of logical truth." (5.476) Thus, the very human mind/brain is a hypothesizing organ designed by natural selection on the basis of the principle of growth of principles echoing the process of the creation if not the creator.

The Logic of Discovery and consequent operations of Firstness often lead Peirce to contemplate the godhead and the problems of cognition, reason, and Semeiotic, but what is crucial for him is the principle of growth and increase of self, and it is a systemic problem, perhaps of a mind which can contemplate mind conceiving of nothingness, perhaps of the origin of things, perhaps of the Reality of God, but such shifts are at the margins of Firstness. The systemic and semiotic principle of growth is a play principle concerned with beauty, and the vividness of the qualia work on the sensory mechanisms to move the psychological aspects of perceptual judgment into being the process of cognition. In the co-territory of abduction and Firstness, the infinite degrees of vividness hypostatically and prescissively become the complex predicates which replace simpler predicate complexes and then are replaced, in turn, by new predicates on the road to propositions, arguments, and beliefs.

Peirce's portrayal of the semiotic path as being between an absolute Firstness of inconceivable infinity and an absolute Secondness of totally particularity is based on his argument that "all Being involves some kind of super-order." As he argues, "In that state of absolute nility, in or out of time, that is, before or after the evolution of time, there must then have been a **tohu bohu** [my emphasis] of which nothing whatever affirmative or negative was true universally. There must have been, therefore, a little of everything conceivable. There must have been here and there a little undifferentiated tendency to take super-habits. But such a state must tend to *increase itself*. [emphasis Peirce's] (6.490) Thus, the phrase Peirce uses to describe this "order" of increasing existence is "tohu bohu," which he uses to refer to an undifferentiated state of stuff in which no distinction has occurred. A similar use of this term may be found in Jung's "Answer to Job," where Jung is discussing the process of differentiation of the Godhead and its human creation: "The ominous happenings ... at the beginning of a seemingly successful and satisfactory Creation ... catch our attention, and one is forced to admit that the initial situation, when the spirit of God brooded over the **tohu bohu** [my emphasis], hardly permits us to expect an absolutely perfect result. What happened on that day was the final separation of the upper from the lower waters by the interposed "plate" of the firmament." (1971:557)

Thus, the Creation Jung describes is parallel to the one described by Peirce. The issue is one of a contradictory totality and infinity being differentiated by a process of distinction, or "individuation." Jung's theological process here is one of sign particularization -- a principle of growth of theistic principles in a pleromatic order which contains every possibility. The process of individuation is, thus, a separating maturation from a collective into a full personhood certainly for the individual human, but also, in the gnostic terms of "Job," for

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the godhead as well. The gnostic godhead separates gradually from the Pleroma, dealing continually with its unarticulated "evil" and coming in stages to the full personhood of a personal god. Thus, Jung's individuated deity, in a gnostic fashion, is a godhead "working out its conclusion [in personhood] in living realities" of both a macrocosmic deity and a microcosmic human.

As Peirce's arguments about personality suggests, the godhead does become personal. In the Jungian sense, the godhead individuates. It separates from a Transcendent Unconsciousness to become an Immanent authoritarian father and then to become god incarnate-- first as a Christos and then as god within. From Eros to Logos to Individuation, the process of growth is one both for the human and the divine; the Pleroma is an undifferentiated fullness, which, in Peircean terms, differentiated by a process of association. Such patterns are as easily theological constructs (even if a nasty methodology for Peirce) as they are semiotic ones. Firstness Pleroma is by its very nature transcendent potentiality, and Secondness is a Immanent occurrence of hecceiticity, but Thirdness is Incarnation -- literally the embodiment of Firstness which has a replica existence as a Secondness. Finally these concepts are as physical as they are psychical, for Pleroma, as the immanent universe can be read either as a Tennysonian nature "red in tooth and claw" or as some interstellar sense of cold infinity -- a Freudian backdrop for Eros/ Thanatos no doubt -- which finds a Reconciliation of bloody error and cold impersonal infinity in the articulation of a spiritualized Selfhood. The matho-mythical constructs of Heat Death for physical systems and the Wormy Grave for psychical living systems find a resolution in the Incarnation of Heaven's Body in the fully realized and articulated Individual. The growing connective increasingly becomes the personhood which by a time-line of future oriented purposiveness creates hypothesis and the semiotic complexi that approaches the Final Interpretant even though human knowledge never reaches a full articulation of the Pleroma, and even if that knowledge only attains an approximation, the conceiving mind can still conceive of a replica of itself which can incorporate nility.

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