Three Appeals in Peirce's Neglected Argument

The more time one spends with C.S. Peirce's "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God," the more one realizes that there are few essays in the American tradition that can match its richness. It is in a class with Emerson's "Nature" and James' "Will to Believe." This richness is illustrated in a wealth of interpretive essays each of which is able to say something both different and true about the "Neglected Argument." In particular I have in mind articles by John E. Smith, Richard Trammell, Mary Mahowald, Bowman L. Clarke, and Vincent Potter. My aim in this paper is therefore not to take some radically new approach to the "Neglected Argument," but to uncover a bit more of the richness hidden within it. Specifically, I want to display what I see as the organic interdependence of the three stages of Peirce's argument; and I shall do this by linking the stages to Peirce's categoriology of persons.

Before moving to my account of the essay, however, let me establish for those less familiar with it an overview of its structure. Briefly, the argument for belief in the Reality of God begins when a thinker "muses" or lets her or his mind play freely with some notion in one of the three universes of experience. Under such play, the Muser becomes attracted to the idea of a loving creator or God. This attraction then flowers into a willingness to act on the assumption of God's Reality and, finally, into the realization that the idea of God's Reality can serve as a scientific hypothesis. If we turn to Peirce's 1910 "Additament" to the article we get an even closer description. There he states that the argument is really a "nest" of three arguments (hereafter I shall refer to the whole nest as "the Argument"). The first argument of the nest Peirce calls the "Humble Argument" (hereafter "HA"), and it "is that entirely honest, sincere and unaffected . . . meditation upon the Idea of God, into which the Play of Musement will inevitably
sooner or later lead, and which by developing a deep sense of the adorability of that Idea will produce a truly religious Belief in His Reality and His nearness" (6.486). This argument is experienced; it is immediate and direct for the muser. The second argument Peirce identifies as the "neglected argument" proper (hereafter "NA"). This argument, which Peirce believes to have been overlooked by theologians, is the description of the universality and naturalness of the experience of the HA. In Peirce's words, it is "a vindicatory description — of the mental operations which the Humble Argument actually and actively lives out" (6.487). The third and final argument of the nest I shall call the scientific argument (hereafter "SA"). This argument identifies the HA as an instance of abduction, the first stage of scientific inquiry, so that, as Trammell puts it, this "argument shows that the same course of meditation which for practical purposes, produces a living belief in God, from another point of view is the first stage of theoretical inquiry."2

With this description in mind, let me turn now to the works of Smith and Trammell who together provide a foundation for the project at hand. Smith employs the "Neglected Argument" as an example of how to integrate experience and reason in the context of religious belief: "the dyadic alternative (that is, the claim that either experience or reason produces belief)," he says, "is an error because each is required and the task is to see that they are related in a way that does full justice to both."3 Trammell, in a similar fashion, uses the article to demonstrate Peirce's intent to resolve the apparent antinomy between "theoretical inquiry and practical belief."4 The "Neglected Argument" suggests the continuity of the two by showing that instinct, which grounds practical belief, is also the bedrock of reason, the tool of scientific inquiry. Both articles point to Peirce's attempt to bring together apparently disparate aspects of human life; and the attempt no doubt reflects the synecchism at the heart of Peirce's work. However, there is a mild irony here, for both Smith and Trammell illustrate the synthesis of two elements: experience and reason, and practice and
theory, respectively. And yet, as we can notice in the description of the Argument above, in concert with Peirce's general categoriology, the Argument is divided into three arguments or stages. Smith makes the reduction to two elements by incorporating the NA and the SA under his notion of "reason." Trammell is less certain how to handle the reduction and simply leaves a loose end: "The extra argument," he says, "is the second one, which is neither practical nor strictly scientific."  

Both, I think, are in part correct, and it is not my purpose here to take them to task. For their purposes, they seem to have used the "Neglected Argument" both accurately and properly. Nevertheless, my project involves taking a short step beyond where they leave us. I want to maintain their focus on the synthesizing nature of the "Neglected Argument," but I want to examine how the synthesis develops among the three stages of the Argument, rather than getting at it through some higher level opposition or dichotomy. In order to do this, I want to call on a categorial distinction that is important to Peirce's work throughout his career: the categoriology of persons. Not only does Peirce suggest the categoriology of persons in both the tenor and the logic of the "Neglected Argument" and the "Additament," but his focus on the ideas of belief and argument in these essays argues for the appropriateness of using this categoriology as a way of getting at the interdependence among the stages of the Argument.

Peirce categorizes persons in two related ways that are relevant to the "Neglected Argument." First, and most significant, is his description of what he sometimes calls "the categories of consciousness" (1.375ff.). These, which Peirce says he obtained by way of Kant, are Feeling, Willing (acting and undergoing), and Thinking (knowing). They are clearly reminiscent of the divisions of the soul found earlier in the history of philosophy. While Peirce is not committed to these as scientific, psychological categories, he does hold them to be vaguely accurate in describing persons insofar as they are phenomenologically determined (see MS 649, p. 39). Perhaps more importantly, his belief in the cate-
consciousness is evidenced by the influence they bear in many corners of his philosophy. An excellent example of this influence is the second, and ancillary, categorization of persons Peirce uses. On a number of occasions Peirce argues that there are in general three kinds of persons: 1) "those for whom the chief thing is the qualities of feeling," 2) "practical men," and 3) "men to whom nothing seems great but reason" (1.43). In short, for Peirce, kinds of persons are determined by the emphases persons place on one or another of the categories of consciousness.

The categories of consciousness are important insofar as they describe a whole person. All persons are endowed with all three categories — that being what it means to be a person — despite the fact that any given person might emphasize one or another of the categories in his or her experience. Artists, for example, as exemplars of those who emphasize feeling, are not somehow entirely arational: they reason, though, Peirce suggests, their reasoning is often "warped" (MS 604, p. 1). This becomes significant when we ask what it means for a belief to be a "living belief" and when we ask what it means for an argument to be convincing or effective. It would seem, at least at first glance, that a belief that did not satisfy all aspects of one's being would be something less than "living"; and it would seem that an argument that did not appeal to all aspects of one's being must be less than consummately effective.

If we now turn back to the Argument, we can see how its stages parallel the categories. The HA relates to Feeling, the NA to Willing, and the SA to Thinking. And these relations are relations of appeal. That is, the HA comes to us by feeling — it appeals to our feeling; the NA appeals to our need to act in the world, to be "willing;" and the SA appeals to our critical thinking, our pursuit of truth. Let us take a quick look at each of these individually.

It would be a mistake to exclude the HA from the realm of reasoning since Peirce expressly includes it under his notion of "argument." However, it is just the point that it is not an argumentation — not a logical deduction. The HA works as felt rea-
soning, or reasonable feeling. This is manifest in Peirce's various appeals to the use of the heart in talking about the HA. In MS 845, for example, Peirce states that if one "allows instinct to speak, and searches his own heart, he will at length find that he cannot help believing" that there really is a God (p. A 19, see also 6.493, MS 861, p. 1). Moreover, the entire section on muse-ment in the "Neglected Argument" points to the notion of felt reasoning, for the muser is required by way of action to put her or his mind into a way of being that is open to the impact of a satisfaction (see MS 843, p. 7). Since the muser's control of his or her reasoning is merely "play," the limits of self-control, and thus reasoning, are approached. For Peirce, this gives us cause to talk of a kind of reasoning whose force is felt. Indeed, in the fourth of his 1903 Harvard Lectures Peirce talks about the "rea-sonable Feeling" one can achieve in the esthetic enjoyment of a work of art (5.113); and esthetic contemplation is one of the oc-casions of musement that Peirce describes (6.458). What is most convincing of the HA's appeal to feeling, however, are some di-rect claims. In the "Additament" Peirce describes the HA by say-ing that "every heart will be ravished by the beauty and adorabili-ty of the Idea" of God's Reality (6.487); in a secondary draft of the "Neglected Argument" he argues of the HA that "every mind can feel its force" (MS 842, p. 11); and in a manuscript fragment from 1911 he states explicitly what he elsewhere suggests, that "Religion must begin in feeling" (MS 850, p. 1). It is precisely because of its appeal to feeling that the HA is the core of the nest and the first stage of the Argument. Inasmuch as feeling is imme-diately accessible to all, it is the HA that "appeals to every mind from the most uncultured boor to the most powerful analytic phi-losopher" (MS 844, p. 1x).

The second argument, the NA, seems the toughest to handle. Indeed, somewhat ironically, its apparent awkwardness within the essay has resulted in the kind of secondary neglect suggested by Trammell's claim that it is "the extra argument." Clearly, in standing between the HA and the SA, it must play a transitional
and linking role: it facilitates a transition from immediate experience to reason proper and it builds a bridge between feeling and thinking. However, its transitional role should not be understood to lessen its importance, for without it its cohabitants in the nest remain both sundered and incomplete.

If the NA is to meet Peirce's categorial scheme, as I suggest, then it ought to speak to the category of willing — to our dealings with the actual world of experience. Now, as we saw above, insofar as the NA is an apology (defense) for and a vindicator description of the HA, it is secondary to an immediate religious feeling. It is not itself the feeling of God's Reality, but it talks about that feeling. At the same time, as Trammell rightly argues, the NA is not quite scientific or theoretical. What then is its place in the Argument? The key, I think, can be found at the very outset of the "Neglected Argument" when Peirce describes the kind of "argument" a benign God should make available to His creatures. The first requirement is that the argument be "obvious to all minds," and this condition is met by the HA itself. However, it is also requisite 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" (6.457). It is the presentation in a form applicable to the conduct of life that concerns us here. The HA, in itself, "naturally results in the most intense and living determination (Bestimmung) of the soul toward shaping the Muser's whole conduct into conformity with the Hypothesis that God is Real and very near . . ." (6.486). However, it seems clear if we look carefully that this determination cannot be complete as a result of the HA alone. Rather, as Peirce's language in the "Neglected Argument" suggests, this determination is a result of growth or development that involves the NA.

The HA, because of its basis in reasonable feeling, is a remarkably personal or individual argument; it is immensely persuasive in a very private fashion. Indeed, it is not capable of secondary "presentation" precisely because of its individuality; it "is a living
course of thought of very various forms" (6.484). However, as Peirce rightly points out in MS 862, "divine inspiration" is equally subjectively satisfying and convincing. Yet, he views the HA as worthwhile and "divine inspiration" as extremely dangerous and "unscientific." What is the difference? Very simply, the HA appears to be an instance of instinctive belief and divine inspiration does not. Objectively examined, it bears the traits of instinct or common sense: natural persuasiveness and universal appeal. Peirce says: "Its persuasiveness is no less than extraordinary; while it is not unknown to anybody" (6.457). Thus, the vindicatory, apologetic role of the NA is neither insignificant nor superfluous. Rather, it draws the HA out of its subjectivity and "presents" it by describing its instinctiveness. This is just what Peirce accuses the theologians of neglecting:

But they might and ought to have described it, and should have defended it, too, as far as they could, without going into original logical researches, which could not be justly expected of them. They are accustomed to make use of the principle that that which convinces a normal man must be presumed to be sound reasoning; and therefore they ought to say whatever can truly be advanced to show that the N.A. [my HA], if sufficiently developed, will convince any normal man.

If this description be made, then the muser, already under the sway of the HA, has his or her feeling vindicated. Unlike an appeal to divine inspiration, an appeal to the HA is a normal and natural instinct of a human being: "a latent tendency toward belief in God is a fundamental ingredient of the soul . . ." (6.487). Under this vindication the determination to conduct one's whole life according to the belief in God's Reality becomes firmer as a practical belief. The NA, in describing and defending the HA, warrants the ordering of our conduct (our willing) according to the felt belief established by the HA. It is in this way that the NA makes its appeal to the category of willing. In recognizing the in-
Distinctiveness of the HA, we are able to will in conjunction with our feeling for God's Reality as we do with our feelings that murder and incest are wrong (see 1.151). It is the development into the NA that distinguishes the HA from other kinds of belief that present themselves to our living will.

Despite its moving the HA to the community beyond the individual muser and despite its being in part a judgment on the HA, the NA is not itself scientific. On the one hand, it does not acknowledge its own fallibility; on the other hand, it makes no general assessment of the role of instinct in inquiry. In short, it neither makes nor presumes a general "study of logical methodeutic" (6.488). The NA is a judgment of experience, not of science. Nevertheless, in vindicating, or completing, a belief for the will, it beckons the SA as its critical or theoretical complement.

This stage of the Argument is the one most often discussed by interpreters because it is where Peirce appears to "scientize" religion and vice versa. While this emphasis is probably not misplaced in view of the history of thought, it is important to remember that for Peirce the SA is the third element in the nest. It cannot be taken in divorce from the HA and the NA, nor should it be thought of as "superior" to them in any simple sense. What Peirce does in this stage is to argue that the HA, when viewed fairly from the perspective of science, serves as an instance of abduction. God's Reality is a hypothesis capable of explaining the reality of the three universes of experience. Moreover, according to Peirce it serves as a hypothesis for explaining why abduction and the whole of scientific inquiry are effective; "the hypothesis of God's Reality," Peirce says, "is connected so with a theory of the nature of thinking that if this be proved so is that" (6.491). In seeing the HA as an instance of abduction, the SA displays the hypothesis of God's Reality for critical examination. Thus, while the HA appeals to feeling and the NA to willing, the SA's primary appeal is to the category of thinking — to a critical pursuit of the truth.

Having developed the threefold comparison between the Argu-
ment and Peirce's categories of consciousness, it would be easy to let the matter rest. Peirce has constructed an argument for God's Reality that is unique in its three-partedness, though in its particular elements it is reminiscent of the cosmological and design arguments as well as of mysticism. However, I think Smith and Trammell are correct in focusing on Peirce's "nesting" of the arguments. It seems clear that Peirce wants to hold the arguments together in much more than an accidental association: the Argument "consists of three arguments one involving and relating to another" (MS 844, p. 1x). In what follows, then, I shall try to show that Peirce intends the arguments of the nest to be organically interdependent, such that a belief begun with the HA is not consummated until it "flowers" or develops into both of the other two stages. Only when all three are working together do we have an Argument; only then does one have a living, comprehensive — though not final — belief in the Reality of God.

It is easy to go astray in this at the outset because of the way Peirce locates "religious belief." He is quite clear in asserting that the HA, in itself, leads to religious belief (6.486). This seems to make the NA and SA merely interesting, academic supplements — mere addenda to the process of attaining religious belief. However, in treating religious belief in this context Peirce is intending to emphasize the emotive, spiritual nature of religion. Religion, for Peirce, is in fact identified by its emotiveness: "In each individual it is a sort of sentiment, a deep recognition of a something in the circumambient All . . ." (6.429). But religious belief thus understood is, by itself, as I shall show at somewhat more length below, a degenerate sort of belief capable of developing "dark" and "cruel" elements (MS 850). For a better sense of what Peirce accepts as a consummated belief, we need to recall his critical common sensism.

The HA is itself an instance of instinct or common sense. And since these constitute the "bedrock" of all reasoning, the HA comes highly recommended for both practice and theory (6.475,
Nevertheless, common sense and instinct are fallible and, in their best case, ought to inform practice and theory only insofar "as they issue from the cupelfurnace of measured criticism" (6.480). In view of this, and in light of Peirce's claim that religion begins in feeling, religious belief in God's Reality should not remain at the level of felt reason. Indeed, if we look at the negative aspects of the arguments taken by themselves, we can see that Peirce was serious in his claim that the arguments of the nest must "involve" each other.

The degeneracies of each of the arguments taken by itself were apparent to Peirce. While Peirce recognized the importance for religion of the HA, he also acknowledge its potential danger. Instinctive religious belief is tremendously persuasive to the point, Peirce argued, that "there is great danger that the investigation will stop at this first stage" (6.488). Such persuasiveness, however, lacks any level of criticism and in being tenacious becomes a potential breeding ground for personal fanaticism and self-righteousness. Peirce indicates this understanding of the kind of religious belief produced by the HA in a variety of places, but nowhere more forcefully than in MS 867:

But religion if not taken in moderation leads to insanity and that not as is sometimes said, because it is adulterated, but because of the element of it that is most essential — the mystical element.(p. 1)

Religious belief is in need of the NA to soberly assess its claim as a common sense guide to the conduct of human affairs. And it is in need of the SA to demand a full criticism of its claim to truth and its living development, so that aberration and abuse are limited to whatever extent possible (see 6.480 and MS 843, p. 7).

The NA is likewise degenerate in two respects. Most obviously, a belief that is generated solely by the objective assessment of the HA as an instinctive argument will lack any properly religious element. This of course, as Peirce points out, is the central problem
with most theological argumentations for God's existence: they provide us with no spirituality whatsoever. As Peirce puts it, "the arguments called cosmological, a posteriori, etc are just like this [the Argument] except not taking account of the spiritual and sentimental sides, they become regular 'arguments' at the expense of missing the religious element of the conclusion" (MS 861, p. 2). At the other end, of course, although the NA is reasoning of a sort, it is not scientific reasoning. As we saw above, it lacks, and therefore requires, a full critical assessment of instinct, of itself, and of scientific inquiry in general.

The SA, despite its consummatory role in Peirce's account, is no less degenerate when taken alone. Whereas the HA lacks sufficient development and the NA lacks both development and its necessary condition, the SA, in a sense, lacks its two necessary conditions. On the one hand, like the NA, the mere scientific hypothesis of God's Reality lacks any spirituality or religious vitality. As Peirce argued in 1898, no "genuine religion could come from the head instead of from the heart" (1.665). On the other hand, without some link to the world of experience, the SA cannot produce a living belief. As Smith argues: "The conceptual development [of religious experience] in the form of argument, moreover, cannot be made to function as a surrogate for experience thus rendering it unnecessary." Since all scientific inquiry begins in abduction, and since abduction requires common sense and instinctive beginnings, the SA needs both the HA and the NA. The HA provides the experience and the NA assesses its instinctiveness; for Peirce, to suppose that the SA could appear or function independently is to misunderstand the nature of scientific inquiry.

The upshot of these considerations, and I hope it is apparent by now, is that Peirce's Argument is to be taken as an organic whole. Its stages, like Peirce's categories in general, are in a state of reciprocal dependence. Regardless of how one comes to consider the question of God's Reality, her or his belief in such Reality will be neither living nor whole until it is understood in terms of all three of the arguments: the HA, NA, and SA. The importance of
Peirce's contribution should not be overlooked here.

On the one hand, as Smith maintains, Peirce is picking up the Anselmian thread and attacking a number of philosophical and theological traditions that are bent on holding feeling, faith, and reason to be mutually exclusive in the realm of religious belief. As Smith argues, these traditions operate on the mistaken assumption that in grounding religious belief "there is no other alternative but the dyadic one of either direct experience (immediacy) or argument."7 The "Neglected Argument" presents another alternative: religious belief in its fullest sense demands an appeal to each of our categories of consciousness. Our being "whole" depends on it. It is in this sense, not in a narrower logical sense, that the SA "encloses" and "defends" the inner arguments of the nest.

On the other hand, in presenting this alternative Peirce has subtly and radically addressed a question central to his later work: the marriage of science and religion (in both its personal and social aspects). In the marriage that the Argument effects, religion and science are not merely peaceable coexistents, nor are they parallel and incommensurable realms artificially brought together. Rather, they are made continuous elements (or aspects) of persons and societies. They are organically related such that one is not what it is without the other. Science without religion in its emotive and experiential forms is mere scientism — an uninspired and ineffective theoria. And religion without science becomes tenacious individually and authoritative communally — it becomes blind and incapable of growth.

While I believe my assessment of the reciprocal dependence of the arguments of Peirce's "Neglected Argument" is correct, it certainly will not solve all problems. There remain tensions in the essay that are not easily overcome. But I think Peirce was well aware of these. In 1911 he still maintained that "no two spirits (tendencies) not downright conflicting can well be more opposed than the spirit of science and the spirit of religion" (MS 851, p. 1). That is the way human life is built. But the difficulty of the project made it no less compelling for Peirce. We need our felt
reason, sentiment, and instinct for such "vitaly important topics" as our belief in God's Reality; we need a nod from experience and community consensus to confirm our "willingness" to conduct ourselves in accord with our felt beliefs; and we need a scientific spirit both to check the potential dangers of "excessive" belief and to direct our belief toward a real concern for the truth. Peirce's instinct seems right; he cannot take the measure of a God who would create beings whose categorial structure involved superfluous, ineffective, and fundamentally conflicting elements. It is in this spirit that the threefold Argument of the "Neglected Argument" presents a belief in God's Reality that makes three appeals, one that "will find repose in every part of his [the muse's] mind, for its beauty, for its supplying an ideal of life, and for its thoroughly satisfactory explanation of his whole threefold environment" (6.465).

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NOTES


2. Trammell, p. 19.
4. Trammell, p. 17.
5. Trammell, p. 19.
7. Smith, pp. 489-90.