I. PURE ETHICS

The writings of Peirce on ethics are scattered throughout his papers, where they are often set forth explicitly as ethics, but often concealed or imbedded in other connections. This essay presents a systematic account of his ethical theory. We must consider pragmatism technically as a theory of the verification of truth, and therefore as a doctrine of methodology, but it is one in which there is considerable emphasis on goodness. Hence pragmatism not only anticipates the ethics to some extent but even supplants it, and as a consequence the present essay, in which pragmatism is omitted, must be somewhat thin. But this cannot be taken as any indication of its lack of importance. Such immediate implications as pragmatism may have to ethics are to practical rather than to pure ethics, but then practical ethics is by no means exhausted by such implications. The doctrine of the unlimited community, which occurs in the practical ethics, is in many ways central to Peirce's system, or at least to that part of it which centers around value studies. The pure ethics, as some of the footnotes indicate, refers to experience (phenomenology) and to logic.

A. DEFINITIONS AND AIDS

In the matter of deciding where ethics, "one of the subtlest of studies" (II.120), belongs in the general scheme of things, Peirce followed the tradition of his day in placing it with logic and aesthetics among the normative sciences (I.191). "A normative science is one which studies what ought to be" (I.281), and a science which thus is concerned with "the theory of the ideal itself, the nature of the sumnum bonum" (I.573), is "the very most purely theoretical of purely theoretical sciences" (I.281), in that it sets up "norms, or rules which need not, but which ought, to be followed" (II.156). Ethics, Peirce defined as "the science of right and wrong, . . . . the theory of self-controlled, or deliberate conduct" (I.191). It is "the study of what ends of action we are deliberately prepared to adopt" (V.130). "Ethics—the genuine normative science of ethics, as contradistinguished from the branch of anthropology which in our day often passes under the name of ethics—this genuine ethics is the normative science par excellence, because an end—the essential object of normative science—is germane to a voluntary act in a primary way in which it is germane to nothing else" (V.130).

By judging ethics to be the theoretical science of ideals, Peirce has admitted that it is "the philosophy of aims" and has succumbed to the same temptation that beset Socrates, namely, to suppose that ethics is a branch of logic (IV.240). But this is not to vary with its normative character, for every science which is founded in logic must be an exact science. Peirce admitted no conflict between normative and exact science. A normative science, in his view, is one which must answer all the empirical requirements of an
exact science and yet be oriented in the pursuit of an ideal as well. He said of logic, another "normative science," that "it thus has a strongly mathematical character." But to say that a science has a mathematical branch is only to say that it is a science. For "so much may be said of every science." This, of course, does not mean that the ideal will be found tomorrow or that it can be worked out mechanically. "Pure ethics has been, and always must be, a theatre of discussion, for the reason that its study consists in the gradual development of a distinct recognition of a satisfactory aim" (IV.243).

But what is the ultimate aim of ethical conduct? A great many alternatives have been suggested by various ethical theorists. Peirce considered that he had described most of them under the following headings. A man may act for the sake of momentary satisfactions (I.582), the prompt satisfaction of instincts (I.583), provision for the satisfaction of future instincts (I.584), pleasure (I.603–5), "from persuasion, or from imitative instinct, or from dread of blame, or in awed obedience to an instant command; or he may act according to some general rule restricted to his own wishes, such as the pursuit of pleasure; or self-preservation, or good-will toward an acquaintance, or attachment to home and surroundings, or conformity to the customs of his tribe, or reverence for a law; or, becoming a moralist, he may aim at bringing about an ideal state of things definitely conceived, such as one in which everybody attends exclusively to his own business and interest (individualism), or in which the maximum total pleasure of all beings capable of pleasure is attained (utilitarianism), or in which altruistic sentiments universally prevail (altruism), or in which his community is placed out of all danger (patriotism), or in which the ways of nature are as little modified as possible (naturalism); or he may aim at hastening some result not otherwise known in advance than as that, whatever it may turn out to be, to which some process seeming to him good must inevitably lead, such as whatever the dictates of the human heart approve (sentimentalism), or whatever would result from every man's duly weighing, before action, the advantages of his every purpose (to which I will attach the nonce-name, "entelism"), or whatever the historical evolution of public sentiment may decree (historicism), or whatever the operation of cosmic causes may be destined to bring about (evolutionism); or he may be devoted to truth, and may be determined to do nothing not pronounced reasonable, either by his own cogitations (rationalism), or by public discussion (dialecticism), or by crucial experiment; or he may feel that the only thing really worth striving for is the generalizing or assimilating elements in truth, and that either as the sole object in which the mind can ultimately recognize its veritable aim (educationalism), or that which alone is destined to gain universal sway (pancratism); or, finally, he may be filled with the idea that the only reason that can reasonably be admitted as ultimate is that living reason for the sake of which the psychical and physical universe is in process of creation (religionism)."

In general, Peirce maintained, there are three broad classes of ends. "The enumeration [above] has been so ordered as to bring into view the various degrees of generality of motives," but they fall

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2. Also V. 355.
into one of three groups according as they serve the subjective feelings of the individual, the objective purposes of society, or the rationalization of the universe (I.590). Of the first two groups, Peirce concluded that they fell far short of constituting the ultimate ethical aim. “All motives that are directed toward pleasure or self-satisfaction, of however high a type, will be pronounced by every experienced person to be inevitably destined to miss the satisfaction at which they aim.

“On the other hand, every motive involving dependence on some other leads us to ask for some ulterior reason. The only desirable object which is quite satisfactory in itself without any ulterior reason for desiring it, is the reasonable itself.”5 This, Peirce maintained, “is an experiential truth. The only ethically sound motive is the most general one.” “The ultimate good lies in the evolutionary process in some way. If so, it is not in individual reactions in their segregation, but in something general or continuous” (V.4).

A good aim is one which can be pursued (V.133). But an aim which can be achieved in a finite time and space is one which cannot be indefinitely pursued and is hence a bad aim, for “an aim which cannot be adopted and consistently pursued is a bad aim. It cannot properly be called an ultimate aim at all. The only moral evil is not to have an ultimate aim.” Hence, according to Peirce, only he who has an infinite aim can be said to be acting in accordance with moral good. The final aim for Peirce is the sumnum bonum, and this direction is by no means confined to human beings, since it is that toward which being itself is aimed (II.116–18). Finally, however, ethics “must appeal to esthetics for aid in determining the sumnum bonum” (I.191), since the ideal of ethics must be drawn from “the science of ideals, or of that which is objectively admirable without any ulterior reason.”

B. PROBLEMS AND METHODS

Ethics is divided by Peirce into the pure and the practical, or normative. Normative science presupposes pure science, and in much the same way normative ethics presupposes pure ethics. The primary question asked by ethics is, “What is good? Now this is hardly a normative question: it is pre-normative. It does not ask for the conditions of fulfillment of a definitely accepted purpose, but asks what is to be sought, not for a reason, but back of every reason. . . . Pure ethics, philosophical ethics, is not normative, but pre-normative” (I.577). It presupposes the answer to the question which governs practical action in asking “not what is but what ought to be” (V.39). Thus ethics, pure ethics, if it is to have any utility in the sense of producing something that can be applied to practice as a norm of conduct, must be approached as though it were “as useless a science as can be conceived” (I.667). “A useless inquiry, provided it is a systematic one, is pretty much the same thing as a scientific inquiry. Or at any rate if a scientific inquiry becomes by any mischance useful, that aspect of it has to be kept sedulously out of sight during the investigation or else . . . . its hopes of success are fatally cursed” (I.668).

Although the central problem of pure ethics, which is “to ascertain what end is possible” (V.134), should become an exact study, it must not be “thoughtlessly supposed that special science could aid in this ascertainment.” There is nothing worse, either for the special sciences or for conduct, than to look upon the former

5 Ibid.
as a guide to the latter (I.55). An absolute aim cannot be affected by the findings with regard to contingent facts, for an absolute aim is that "which would be pursued under all possible circumstances." In pragmatism the translation of a proposition into action involves an endless future as well as the present. But the future more than the present can be influenced by self-control. Hence pure ethics which is concerned with possible conduct rather than with practical action has its emphasis on the future (V.427). "The pragmaticist does not make the sumnum bonum to consist in action, but makes it to consist in that process of evolution whereby the existent comes more and more to embody those generals which were... said to be destined, which is what we strive to express in calling them reasonable" (IV.547). "In its higher stages, evolution takes place more and more largely through self-control" (V.433). Pragmatism thus involves pure ethics in evolution and takes it out of the sphere both of the immediately practical and of the discretely factual.

It must not be supposed that because Peirce separated pure from practical ethics that he was also opposed to a connection between them. "The point of view of utility is always a narrow point of view" (I.641). On the other hand, a pure study which did not issue in practical utility would be a waste indeed. It so happened that Peirce believed in "the eternal life of the idea [of] Right" (I.219), but, on the other hand, he felt that this "despised idea has all along been the one irresistible power" (I.251)—a power that concerns the practical sciences, such as law, politics, and economics. That justice, for example, is "a very great power in the world is no figure of speech, but a plain fact to which theories must accommodate themselves" (I.348). The exclusion of the findings of pure ethics from such practical pursuits has been an "immense folly." We do not escape the consequences of ignoring pure ethics in everyday conduct, for, "notwithstanding the horrible wickedness of every mortal wight, the idea of right and wrong is nevertheless the greatest power on this earth, to which every knee must sooner or later bow or be broken down" (I.217).

The danger of confusing theory and practice in ethics is one which threatens not only them but their interrelations. "The effect of mixing speculative inquiry with questions of conduct results finally in a sort of half make-believe inquiry which deceives itself in regard to its real character" (I.56). "Men continue to tell themselves they regulate their conduct by reason; but they learn to look forward and see what conclusions a given method will lead to before they give their adhesion to it. In short, it is no longer the reasoning which determines what the conclusion shall be, but it is the conclusion which determines what the reasoning shall be. This is sham reasoning. In short, as morality supposes self-control, men learn that they must not surrender themselves unreservedly to any method, without considering to what conclusions it will lead them. But this is utterly contrary to the single-mindedness that is requisite in science. In order that science may be successful, its votaries must have to surrender themselves at discretion to experimental inquiry, in advance of knowing what its decisions may be. There must be no reservations" (I.57).

"It is notoriously true that into whatever you do not put your whole heart and soul in that you will not have much success. Now, the two masters, theory and

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6 Pragmatism is defined in terms of the "conception of effects" (V.2), which, of course, involves also those which could occur. See also V.18.
practice, you cannot serve. That perfect balance of attention which is requisite for observing the system of things is utterly lost if human desires intervene, and all the more so the higher and holier those desires may be” (I.642). The extraordinary behavior of the Greek philosophers comes from the Hellenic error of mixing philosophy with practice. The Greek philosophers endeavored to apply to their own conduct the conclusions of their ethical speculations (I.616–18). But the philosophical investigator who does not stand aloof from all practical applications will not only obstruct the advance of pure ethics but will also endanger his own moral integrity (I.619). Scientists seek the truth; theologians want to affect the lives of others. Hence the development of pure ethics must be conducted by scientists (I.620).

“It may very easily happen that the over-development of a man’s moral conception should interfere with his progress in philosophy. The protoplasm of philosophy has to be in a liquid state in order that the operation of metabolism may go on. Now morality is a hardening agent. It is astonishing how many abominable scoundrels there are among sincerely moral people. The difficulty is that morality chokes its own stream. . . . . We are too apt to define ethics as the science of right and wrong. That cannot be correct, for the reason that right and wrong are ethical conceptions which it is the business of that science to develop and to justify. A science cannot have for its fundamental problem to distribute objects among categories of its own creation; for underlying that problem must be the task of establishing those categories. The fundamental problem of ethics is not, therefore, What is right, but, What am I prepared deliberately to accept as the statement of what I want to do, What am I to aim at, What am I after? To what is the force of my will to be directed?” (II.198).

C. THE MEANING OF PRACTICE

The solution of these problems in ethics will have to appeal to a principle already established by Peirce in the course of his methodological investigations. We should expect that pragmatism, as the relation of meaning to practicality, would have an important bearing upon ethical problems, and so it has. In this section we shall examine the bearing of this relationship from the point of view of meaning. The bearing from the point of view of practice will be treated in the next section.

One, at least, of the functions of intelligence is “to adapt conduct to circumstances, so as to subserve desire” (V.548). “Thereupon it follows that the concept has a capability of having a bearing upon conduct; and this fact will lend it intellectual purport.” “Right and wrong are expressly volitional” (I.330), but that volition has an external object toward which it is directed. Since the very “existence of things consists in their regular behavior” (I.411), we may well ask whether volition is not to be judged on the basis of that behavior toward which it leads. The ethical criteria of good and bad are predicates of objects. They are not subjective feelings; or, rather, like all subjective feelings, they refer to objects (V.247).

Now, “moral goodness . . . . may be possessed by a proposition or by an argument” (V.141). The maxim of pragmatism can be translated into the moral sphere by qualifying it. We can say that in order to ascertain the ethical meaning of an intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences to conduct might conceivably result by ne-
cessity from the truth of that conception; and the sum of these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception (V.9). The moral goodness of a proposition consists in all the good consequences which might conceivably follow from its application. But since this pragmatic conception is couched in terms of conceivable consequences, it reaches "far beyond the practical." "Those whose sentiments I share abhor certain doctrines of certain writers upon Ethics—say, for example, those who make action the ultimate end of man" (II.15). Hence the ethical version of the doctrine of pragmatism belongs in the province of pure ethics. In other words, if pragmatism is applicable to all conduct, that is, to conduct understood in the widest sense (VI.481), then it must be applicable to the narrower range of moral conduct as well. From the point of view of pure ethics, pragmatism allows conduct to become an experimental test for hypotheses concerning conduct; the emphasis is placed not on conduct but on propositions. This is not to say that men must act out their lives in order to prove or disprove ethical hypotheses; from the point of view of practical ethics, the moral conduct is more important than the propositions from which it follows. But in the study of pure ethics conduct plays the role of experimentation, and its allowance or rejection of ethical hypotheses is carefully noted.

Peirce has said that according to pragmatism "purport consists in a conditional proposition concerning conduct, [and that] a sufficiently deliberate consideration of that purport will reflect that the conditional conduct ought to be regulated by an ethical principle" (V.535). If it is true that "any kind of goodness consists in the adaptation of its subject to its end" (V.158), and satisfaction consists in having an action congruous to its end (V.560), then abduction, which is the logic of pragmatism (V.195), is "the only possible hope of regulating future conduct rationally" (II.270). Therefore, the theories that one ought to entertain are only those which are conducive to a certain end. "That ought to be done which is conducive to a certain end. The inquiry therefore should begin with searching for the end of thinking. What do we think for?" (V.594). This is a question which will have to take us into certain psychological inquiries, and other matters concerning practical ethics, but which will hardly end there. The conclusion will demand a program of moral conduct and therefore belong in practical ethics, but it will reveal that this demand issues from an ethical principle which was implicit in pure ethics all the while.

II. PRACTICAL ETHICS

A. THE TRANSITION TO MORALITY

In this and the following sections we shall see how a study of practical action leads inevitably to the principle of pure ethics. If pure ethics is meaningless without some application, application itself requires something to be applied. Peirce named practical ethics "antethics" or "practics" and described it as "the conformity of action to an ideal" (I.573). "Ethics is not practics; first, because ethics involves more than the theory of such conformity; namely, it involves the theory of the ideal itself, the nature of the summum bonum; and secondly, because in so far as ethics studies the conformity of conduct to an ideal, it is limited to a particular ideal, which . . . is in fact nothing but a sort of composite photograph of the conscience of the members of the community."

In the above sense, "morality is a
means to good life, not necessarily coextensive with good conduct. Morality consists in the folklore of right conduct. A man is brought up to think he ought to behave in certain ways. If he behaves otherwise, he is uncomfortable. His conscience pricks him. That system of morals is the traditional wisdom of ages of experience. If a man cuts loose from it, he will become the victim of his passions. It is not safe for him even to reason about it, except in a purely speculative way. Hence, morality is essentially conservative” (I.50). “Some men have not a sense of sin; and there is nothing for it but to be born again and become as a little child” (I.219). “Men of the purest heart and best intentions in the world have been known to commit actions contrary to their own moral principles simply because nothing in their lives had ever called their attention to the moral bearing of the kind of actions in question” (II.153).

The discussion of morality in the abstract, however, despite the personal limitations of individuals, is likely to lead toward some sort of solution and settlement of the moral problem. “In regard to morals we can see ground for hope that debate will ultimately cause one party or other to modify their sentiments up to complete accord” (II.151). Casuistry, or “the determination of what under given circumstances ought to or may be done” (I.557) can be an aid in this regard. The reason for this is that the basis of morality is objective and constitutes a constant upon the discovery of which men must find agreement. “It is true that the majority of writers on ethics in the past have made the root of morals subjective; but the best opinion is very plainly moving in the opposite direction” (II.156). “Lofty moral sense consists in regarding, not indeed the, but yet an, ideal world as in some sense the only real one; and hence it is that stern moralists are always inclined to dual distinctions” (III.529). “Morality insists that a motive is either good or bad. That the gulf between them is bridged over and that most motives are somewhere near the middle of the bridge, is quite contrary to the teachings of any moral system which ever lived in the hearts and consciences of a people” (I.61). “The very simplest and most rudimentary of all conceivable systems of quantity is that one which distinguishes only two values. This is the system of evaluation which ethics applies to actions in dividing them into the right and the wrong” (IV.368). Morality, as the application of ethical principles to conduct, must be an affair of approaching more or less closely to but not of attaining absolute limits. Thus it requires a many-valued system and not merely a two-valued one. “The rule of ethics will be to adhere to the only possible absolute aim, and to hope that it will prove attainable. Meantime, it is comforting to know that all experience is favorable to that assumption” (V.136). With this understanding, we may now turn to an analysis of the mechanism whereby the purpose of ethics is pursued in morality.

B. THE PRACTICE OF MEANING

The practice of meaning, so far as human action is concerned, may be summed up in the one word “conduct,” and conduct may be described as the “phenomena of controlled action” (I.601). “Self- control of any kind is purely inhibitory. It originates nothing” (V.194). Action is controlled so that it may better conform to an ideal (I.573); but, while all actions have motives, only controlled actions have ideals (I.574). There are three ways in which conduct appeals to a man as
ideal: he thinks the conduct fine; he
thinks it consistent with his other ac-
tions; and he desires its consequences
(I.591). Reflecting upon these ideals, he
seeks to make his own actions conform
to them with the aid of rules of conduct.
He first forms a resolution of how he
would act upon a certain occasion. This
resolution is a mental diagram or formu-
la, but by a mental act it is converted
into a determination (I.592). A peculiar
feeling accompanies the first steps of this
process, but later there is no direct con-
sciousness of it. When the determination
is sufficiently pent up, we are made aware
of its presence as a strain: a need for de-
sire (I.593). But, in all events, all action
from determination is felt as the pleas-
ures of anticipation and, afterward, of re-
laxation of need (I.595). After the action
has been performed, three self-criticisms
take place. This is by means, first, of a
comparison of the conduct with the orig-
inal resolution. The resolution was a
mental formula; the memory of the ac-
tion is an image. How does the image
conform to the formula? (I.596). The
second self-criticism asks how the con-
duct accords with general intentions
(I.597). The third self-criticism asks
“how the image of my conduct accords
with my ideals of conduct” (I.598). Each
of these self-criticisms is accompanied by
a judgment, which, if favorable, is felt as
pleasurable. Such self-criticism is “the
only respectable kind, which will bear
fruit in the future. Whether the man is
satisfied with himself or dissatisfied, his
nature will absorb the lesson like a
sponge; and the next time he will tend to
do better than he did before.”

“In addition to these three self-criti-
cisms of single series of actions, a man
will from time to time review his ideals.
This process is not a job that a man sits
down to do and has done with. The ex-
perience of life is continually contribut-
ing instances more or less illuminative.
These are digested first, not in the man’s
consciousness, but in the depths of his
reasonable being. The results come to
consciousness later. But meditation
seems to agitate a mass of tendencies and
allow them more quickly to settle down
so as to be really more conformed to what
is fit for the man” (I.599). It is true that
“we base our conduct on facts already
known, and for these we can only draw
upon our memory” (V.460), but “future
facts are the only facts that we can, in a
measure, control” (V.461). “It cannot be
denied that acritical inferences may refer
to the past in its capacity as past; but ac-

cording to Pragmatism, the conclusion of
a reasoning power must refer to the fu-
ture. For its meaning refers to conduct,
and since it is a reasoned conclusion must
refer to deliberate conduct, which is con-
trollable conduct. But the only controll-
able conduct is future conduct” (V.461).
Hence ethical reasoning is for the sake of
future conduct. “Conduct controlled by
ethical reasoning tends toward fixing cer-
tain habits of conduct” (V.430).

There are certain implications from
this description of the analysis of con-
duct to problems of belief and of self-con-
trol, and in one place or another Peirce
has himself drawn them. As to belief, it
is “the principle upon which we are will-
ing to act” (I.636). Resolutions are made
and judgments determined to a very
large extent by the ethos. “Conscience
really belongs to the subconscious man,
to that part of the soul which is hardly
distinct in different individuals, a sort
of community-consciousness, or public
spirit, not absolutely one and the same in
different citizens, and yet not by any
means independent in them. Conscience
has been created by experience, just as
any knowledge is; but it is modified by
further experience only with secular slowness” (I.56). The distinction between resolutions and the ethos as determinants of conduct is similar to that described in another sort of way by Peirce as the distinction between categorical and conditional habits (V.517, n. 1).

The inhibition of uncontrolled action makes conduct possible. “It is self-control which makes any other than the normal course of . . . action possible; [which] gives room for an ought-to-be-of conduct” (IV.540). “In the formation of habits of deliberate action, we may imagine the occurrence of the stimulus, and think out what the results of different actions will be. One of these will appear particularly satisfactory; and then an action of the soul takes place which is well described by saying that the mode of reaction ‘receives a deliberate stamp of approval’ ” (V.538). Another name for this stamp of approval is expectancy, “the act of recognition as one’s own, being placed by a deed of the soul upon an imaginary anticipation of experience” (V.540). The only difference between belief and this kind of expectancy is that “the former is expectant of muscular sensation, the latter of sensation not muscular.” “It now begins to look strongly as if perhaps all belief might involve expectation as its essence” (V.542).

“Self-control seems to be the capacity for rising to an extended view of a practical subject instead of seeing only temporary urgency” (V.339, n. 1). There are modes of self-control which are quite instinctive, others which result from training, still others which follow from the control of self-control, etc. (V.533). The only distinction between human beings and other animals is that in the case of human beings there is “a greater number of grades of self-control.” For even thinking is a faculty which is “a phenomenon of self-control.” (V.534). Self-control means that “a process of self-preparation will tend to impart to action (when the occasion for it shall arise) one fixed character, which is indicated and perhaps roughly measured by the absence (or slightness) of the feeling of self-reproach, which subsequent reflection will induce. Now, this subsequent reflection is part of the self-preparation for action on the next occasion. Consequently, there is a tendency, as action is repeated again and again, for the action to approximate indefinitely toward the perfection of that fixed character, which would be marked by entire absence of self-reproach” (V.418). Self-control “is the only freedom of which man has any reason to be proud” (V.339, n. 1). The inference which follows from approval must be voluntary (V.130). We can will nothing where there is no freedom. Peirce maintained that his account of conduct thus “leaves a man at full liberty, no matter if we grant all that the necessitarians ask. That is, the man can, or if you please is compelled, to make his life more reasonable” (I.602).

“We can perceive that good reasoning and good morals are closely allied” (I.576). Nevertheless, “in the conduct of life, we have to distinguish everyday affairs and great crises. In the great decisions,” said Pierce, he did “not believe it is safe to trust to individual reasoning” (I.623). In practical matters reasoning can be exaggerated (I.626). We ought not hastily to change our conduct to fit a philosophy of ethics (I.633). It is instinct rather than reasoning which must serve as the dependable guide to crises. With dumb animals, instinct guides in little as well as in large affairs. But “while human instincts are not so detailed and featured as those of the dumb animals, yet they might be sufficient to
guide us in the greatest concerns without any aid from reason" (I.638). “Invariably follow the dictates of Instinct in preference to those of Reason when such conduct will answer your purpose: that is the prescription of Reason herself” (II.177). But when we do reason, we must reason with “severely scientific logic” (II.178). The direction of ethics as a theoretical study is away from instinct and toward reason, but, until its findings reach a dependable stage, instinct must still be the guide to conduct, at least in its most vital decisions and actions.

C. THE UNLIMITED COMMUNITY

We come now to the enunciation of Peirce’s great ethical principle: the doctrine of the unlimited community. In order to introduce this doctrine, it will be necessary to begin by bridging the gulf between pure and practical ethics in the way of practice as well as of theory. This is done by examining “the principle end of inquiry, as regards human life. What is the chief end of man? Answer: to actualize ideas of the immortal, ceaselessly prolific kind” (II.763). “We are all putting our shoulders to the wheel for an end that none of us can catch more than a glimpse at—that which the generations are working out. But we can see that the development of embodied ideas is what it will consist in” (V.402, n. 2). “To that end it is needful to get beliefs that the believer will take satisfaction in acting upon, not mere rules set down on paper, with lethal provisos attached to them” (II.763). Peirce here called our attention to the principle of Locke,9 that to assent to a proposition is to “receive it for true” (II.649), so that the foundation of assent is the probability of truth. Moreover, truth has a certain force, so that to be put in the way of it is in a sense to be compelled by it. Hence the rules that the believer will take satisfaction in acting upon must rest on logic, and it is from the logic of probabilities that Peirce derives the chief doctrine of ethical action.

The doctrine is derived by going back to the ideal of exact science and to the conception of probability as the exact science of logic (II.647). Probability can be applied to topics to which it has not been applied previously, by virtue of the new maxim of pragmatism (II.648). Peirce elsewhere described probability as the proportion of cases that carries truth with it (II.650).10 Probability consists in a relationship, “a fraction whose numerator consists in the number of times in which both A and B are true, and whose denominator is the total number of times in which A is true, whether B is so or not” (II.651). Thus we can say that “if A happens, B happens. But to speak of the probability of the event B, without naming the condition, really has no meaning at all.” Probability clearly belongs to “a kind of inference which is repeated indefinitely. An individual inference must be either true or false and can show no effect of probability; and, therefore, in reference to a single case considered in itself, probability can have no meaning” (II.652). Hence “there can be no sense in reasoning in an isolated case at all.”

Now, with regard to probability, the individual human being is “an isolated case.” “Taking all his risks collectively, then, it cannot be certain that they will not fail” (II.653). No matter how certain human affairs may be, they are in the same predicament as all other actual things. There is always a chance that each one will be destroyed, given a long

10 See also II.669
enough run of time, "and no matter how little that chance may be, as far as this decade or this generation goes, yet in limitless decades and generations, it is pretty sure that the pitcher will get broken, at last. There is no danger, however slight, which in an indefinite multitude of occasions does not come as near to absolute certainty as probability can come" (V.587). The conclusion of this stage of the argument is obvious. "All human affairs rest upon probabilities, and the same thing is true everywhere. If man were immortal he could be perfectly sure of seeing the day when everything in which he had trusted should betray his trust, and, in short, of coming eventually to hopeless misery. He would break down, at last, as every great fortune, as every dynasty, as every civilization does. In place of this we have death. "But what, without death, would happen to every man, with death must happen to some man. At the same time, death makes the number of our risks, of our inferences, finite, and so makes their mean result uncertain. The very idea of probability and of reasoning rests on the assumption that this number is indefinitely great. We are thus landed in the same difficulty as before, and I can see but one solution of it. It seems to me that logicality inexorably requires that our interests shall not be limited. They must not stop at our own fate, but must embrace the whole community." This community, again, must not be limited, but must extend to all races of beings with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation. It must reach, however vaguely, beyond this geological epoch, beyond all bounds. He who would not sacrifice his own soul to save the whole world, is, as it seems to me, illogical in all his inferences, collectively" (II.654). "So the social principle is rooted intrinsically in logic" (V.354). "Now, it is not necessary for logicality that a man should himself be capable of the heroism of self-sacrifice" (II.654). "But just the revelation of the possibility of this complete self-sacrifice in man, and the belief in its saving power, will serve to redeem the logicality of all men" (V.356). "It is sufficient that he should recognize the possibility of it, should perceive that only that man's inferences who has it are really logical, and should consequently regard his own as being only so far valid as they would be accepted by the hero" (II.654). "But so far as he has this belief, he becomes identified with that man. And that ideal perfection of knowledge by which we have seen that reality is constituted (V.506) must thus belong to a community in which this identification is complete" (V.356).

"This would serve as a complete establishment of private logicality, were it not that the assumption, that man or the community (which may be wider than man) shall ever arrive at a state of information greater than some definite finite information, is entirely unsupported by reasons" (V.357). But still it "makes logicality attainable enough. Sometimes we can personally attain to heroism. The soldier who runs to scale a wall knows that he will probably be shot, but that is not all he cares for. He also knows that if all the regiment, with whom in feeling he identifies himself, rush forward at once, the fort will be taken. In other cases we can only imitate the virtue" (II.654). The point is that "no man can be logical whose supreme desire is limited to the well-being of himself or of any

11 Cf. the identity in effect between cool "self-love" and "Benevolence" in the ethics of Bishop Butler.
other existing person or collection of persons” (II.661). “Now, there exists no reason . . . for thinking that the human race, or any intellectual race, will exist forever. On the other hand, there can be no reason against it. . . . and, fortunately, there is nothing in the facts to forbid our having a hope, or calm and cheerful wish, that the community may last beyond any assignable date. . . . But all this requires a conceived identification of one’s interests with those of an unlimited community” (II.654).

"Now you and I—what are we? Mere cells of the social organism” (I.673). “There are those who believe in their own existence, because its opposite is inconceivable; yet the most balsamic of all the sweets of sweet philosophy is the lesson that personal existence is an illusion and a practical joke. Those that have loved themselves and not their neighbors will find themselves April fools when the great April opens the truth that neither selves nor neighborhood were anything more than vicinities; while the love they would not entertain was the essence of every scent” (IV.68). What seem to be vitally important topics only concern ourselves and our narrowest interests and thus prove to be the merest trifles. “Not in the contemplation of ‘topics of vital importance’ but in those universal things with which philosophy deals, the factors of the universe, is man to find his highest occupation” (I.673). For “the very first command that is laid upon you, your quite highest business and duty, becomes, as everybody knows, to recognize a higher business than your business, not merely an avocation after the daily task of your vocation is performed, but a generalized conception of duty which completes your personality by melting it into the neighboring parts of the universal cosmos.”

We cannot leave an account of Peirce’s ethics without a word for the problem of evil. The command to love one’s neighbors more than one’s self, and their neighbors more than them, and so on in an ascending hierarchy of love which eventually must embrace the entire universe of being, makes love the over-all deontological requirement. Hence hatred and evil, in this scheme, must become, as they do, “mere imperfect stages of love and loveliness” (VI.287), and through the struggle against evil, which “it is man’s duty to fight” (VI.479), we are enabled to increase the amount of love in the actual world. Evil is thus the adaptation of means to ends, and it is, after all, as great a thing as the law of growth which imposes fighting upon man. He will not despair to see the things for which he fights perish, since, according to the doctrine of the unlimited community, he must expect it, “accepting his little futility as his entire treasure” and understanding that “though his desperate struggles should issue in the horrors of his rout, and he should see the innocents who are dearest to his heart exposed to torments, frenzy and despair, destined to be smirched with filth, and stunted in their intelligence, still he may hope that it be best for them.” Thus in Peirce’s system, just as logic leads to ethics, so ethics in turn leads to the discernment of reasons and values which lie beyond human comprehension but which demand human allegiance and even sacrifice, and hence to the province of religion.

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

12 Italics mine.
13 See also V.317.