

Peirce's Wagers: Pragmatism, Semiotics, and Theisms

By Johannes Iemke Bakker

ABSTRACT

Shorter version (120 words)

This essay transforms Pascal's Wager into Peirce's Wagers. Pascal did not consider the question from a Semiotic perspective. Belief in a meaningful universe may be a matter of more than a one time decision by an isolated individual. When we act in the world we make "wagers." We "bet" that life is meaningful and that in some sense "God" does exist. C. S. Peirce's approach to epistemology can be read to imply a "scientific" approach to everyday life questions. Essentially, Peirce takes the scientific method as a standard for all activities. We make decisions on the basis of what we think we know. We "experiment." An understanding of the function of religious institutions helps to consolidate this Peircean Pragmatist notion.

Longer version

This essay transforms Pascal's Wager into Peirce's Wagers. Pascal's Wager is a once in a life-time bet. You decide whether or not you believe in God. Believing in God will do you good if God exists and probably will not do you any harm if it turns out God does not exist. However, Pascal did not consider the question from a Pragmatist and sociological Semiotic perspective. Belief in a meaningful universe may be a matter of more than a one time decision. When we act in the world as individuals or as members of collectivities, small and large, we make "wagers" practically every moment. We "bet" that life is meaningful and that in some sense "God" does exist. C. S. Peirce's approach to epistemology, which is fundamental to American Pragmatism and to global semiotics, can be read to imply a "scientific" approach to everyday life questions, where abduction, induction and deduction are on-going activities. Essentially, Peirce takes the scientific method as a standard for all pragmatic activities. We make decisions on the basis of what we think we know and "experiment" with our everyday lives. The question of the existence and reality of something called "God" can be examined in the light of what will hopefully be seen by others as "Peirce's Wagers." An anthropological and sociological understanding of the function of religious institutions (e.g. the later Durkheim) helps to consolidate this essentially Peircean Pragmatist notion that every time we make a decision, great or small, we literally "bet our lives."

Biographical Statement:

Professor Johannes ("Hans") Iemke Bakker was born in Friesland in the Netherlands (1947) and grew up in the United States. He moved to Canada to do a Ph.D. at the University of Toronto (1979). He spent one year as a Ford Foundation scholar with the Gandhi Peace Foundation (1979-80) and has been teaching at the University of Guelph since 1980. He has frequently been involved in rural development work in Sulawesi, Indonesia. He has published about fifty articles and has edited three books and several newsletters. His single-authored book (1993) *Toward A Just Civilization* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press) concerns the relevance of Gandhi's social philosophy for development.

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I. Introduction to the Question:

It can reasonably be argued that there can never be a definitive answer to any strictly scientific question. If we are dealing with “natural philosophy”, in the eighteenth century sense, then we must always be open to more evidence from the newer disciplines of anthropology, psychology and sociology. The only once and for all answer is a dogmatic one that is imposed through the authority of an ecclesia. The advanced capitalist countries do not allow for the utilization of dogmatic theology as a major part of the shaping of public policy, but there are some nations in the world that do still, of course, still officially hold to dogmatic theological perspectives.

What I want to write is not about Iran or Saudi Arabia. It is not relevant to countries whose governments have still not progressed intellectually beyond Pre-Enlightenment ways of doing theology and philosophy. What I wish to say is more relevant to countries like India and Indonesia, two increasingly democratic new nation-states. But it is especially relevant to industrialized nation-states. I will be thinking mainly of English-speaking, industrialized countries and to those European countries where English is widely used for philosophical discussion. (My detailed knowledge of non-English scholarship is, unfortunately, insufficient.) Most of the Nordic and Mediterranean countries have extensive scholarly literature in English.

I believe that too many social sciences have avoided direct consideration of questions related to ontology and epistemology because those ideas are relegated to another side of the campus, where “they” do philosophy. Even specialists in sociological theory often do not carefully consider fundamental assumptions about secularism. Marxist and Neo-Marxist thinkers often do not have the philosophical sophistication that the Young Hegelian philosopher Karl Marx himself definitely did have.¹ The education of many young scholars has become

¹ Irving Zeitlin, op cit., pp. 12-52 on Hegel and Marx in the context of a discussion on the religious experience. Hegel and Marx stressed the social and sociological nature of human beliefs. Human consciousness is often treated by psychologists as if it can exist apart from what they often relegate to the analytical level of “demographic variables.” But race, ethnicity, class, status, power, sexual identity, gender identity, occupational identity and many more aspects of psychological self-esteem and motivation are very much influenced by the societal parameters. The society sets the framework. Being a slave in Ancient Athens was not the same as being a blue collar worker in Alabama, despite how glibly we say that workers are ‘slaves’ in the capitalist marketplace.

more a matter of training in techniques and less a matter of confronting texts within a solid hermeneutic framework for understanding. Each discipline tends to isolate itself from others. While specialization serves a valid function in raising the level of expertise, there is also a point of diminishing returns. At some point the true scholar has to take a broader look at the more general aspects of human knowledge than just the most recent research studies in her discipline.

Yet few graduate students are encouraged to read a good philosophical journal. A sociology graduate student is not likely to read *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* (*NoMe*) or a journal like *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Each issue of *NoMe* and *TPQ* has articles which could be directly relevant to formulating better sociological theory. A young man or woman who does social science should not be discouraged from directly confronting questions like those associated with the idea of semantic minimalism² or Indo-Tibetan epistemology.³ Yet, sadly, most of my colleagues would see such reading as leading the student too far astray.

I have taught courses on the sociology of religion and comparative religious studies for three decades.⁴ When I say to a group of students that we are all *poly-atheists* it often gets a chuckle. Some students seriously engage me about the idea. I make it clear that there are many gods and goddesses that most of us do not believe in today in Canada. That is, we do not go out of our way to worship them in churches, temples and synagogues. We do not really celebrate All Hallow's Day in the ways the Roman Catholic Church taught we should in the tenth century. We do not think of Zeus or Woden when we ask a god for help with our exam. We do not stop to think about Isis or Freya when we face a crisis. A very small minority might think about some god or goddess that we have vaguely heard about, but we are not obliged to accept all gods and goddesses as our spiritual companions. In a secular society all religious beliefs, including agnosticism and atheism, are given a degree of tolerance. Our general conviction is that we can be somewhat apathetic about holy days like Yom Kippur or Id el Fitr, as long as we do not interfere with anyone's freedom to worship. The Christ Mass holy day is largely a secular event and has more to do with little pagan rituals and shopping than with a celebration of the birth of a man who some believe was THE messiah.

Canada is a very multi-cultural nation-state, with immigrants from many parts of the world, particularly from different parts of the Commonwealth. The British Empire left an important legacy in terms of secularism and tolerance. While there is an official state religion in the U.K. it is not really enforced. It is a remnant, a reminder of the past, like the royal family. The Brits and the Scots and the Irish have seen no need to get rid of the

² Mat Carmody, 'Insensitive Semantics,' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 57 (228) (July, 2007), pp. 472-478.

³ Jonathan Stoltz, 'Gettier and Factivity in Indo-Tibetan Epistemology,' *The Philosophical Quarterly* (228) (July, 2007), pp. 394-415.

⁴ A good textbook for undergraduate students that stresses theorists within the general framework of sociology as a discipline is the one by Irving M. Zeitlin, *The Religious Experience, Classical Philosophical and Social Theories* (Pearson, Prentice-Hall, 2004). Professor Zeitlin was my dissertation advisor at the University of Toronto (1979). See, especially, Chapters Five, Six and Twelve on Friederich Nietzsche, pp. 53-75, Max Weber, pp. 76-134, and Emile Durkheim, pp. 192-209. Weber was influenced by Nietzsche, but came to quite different conclusions. There is on-going debate as to whether the later Durkheim converges with the later Weber in terms of fundamental assumptions about religions.

royal family and in general there is some lip service paid to the continuation of traditions regarding the organizations we call “churches.”

The reason the term church should be put in quotation marks has to do with the original meaning of the word *ecclesia*. It was once felt that one nation had one church, one *ecclesia*. That *ecclesia* was a centre of worship for one consistent theological system, often, in terms of Judeo-Christian-Islamic “Abrahamic” faiths, one *Theós* (Greek θεός) or “G-d” (YHWH, Allah). One “Lord” was the spiritual and sacred expression of an order of the cosmos that stood above the “Lord” of the realm, the primary ruler (or, oligarchic aristocracy). One nation; one church. During a short period of time the Holy Roman (Catholic) Empire and the Holy Roman Catholic Church were in that kind of relationship, but it was always a bit problematic as long as imperial rulership did not accord with papal rulership. The Holy Roman Emperors of Europe wanted to utilize the Roman Catholic Church for administration but they did not want the Pope and his prebendary officials to dictate what could or could not be done politically and militarily.

The rise of the secular nation-state, like the U.K., U.S., France, Germany, Canada, India, Indonesia, and probably more than a hundred others, has led to a situation where there is a certain degree of tolerance for those who hold to agnostic or atheistic views. There is also tolerance for Neo-Paganism and witchcraft, with wiccan covens being recognized as legitimate sources of spirituality. While some decry the cults, others see the ways in which cults lead to sects which lead to denominations. There are no real Medieval-style churches in the advanced, capitalist industrial nation-states today, although, as stated, there may still be vestiges. What are called churches are in fact denominations. The Roman Catholic Church in the U.S., for example, is one denomination among others. That is what made it possible for John Fitzgerald Kennedy to be elected. It was not longer a real political issue. Now a Mormon is running for the Republican party leadership. He has a fighting chance. Even if he is not nominated or elected Mitt Romney has proven that a member of the Church of Later Day Saints can aspire to “the highest office in the land.” (The U.S. Presidency, of course, combines the office of King and the role of Prime Minister, so it is a rather unique kind of role.) However, it would probably be impossible for a declared atheist to be nominated as a candidate for President for one of the two major political parties. There is a great deal of prejudice against those who hold to staunch atheistic beliefs. In the U.S. it is customary to say that one believes in God, even if in one’s heart one does not.

When a citizen goes to court and is asked to swear on the Bible to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God,” the phrasing does not deter outright atheists from going ahead and making the pledge. After all, if there is no God, what does it matter? Very few people pause to really think about that to which they are being asked to swear. There is not much room for questioning the epistemological assumption that anyone can know “the truth,” much less “the whole truth.” Moreover, it is pretty clear that no one knows “nothing but the truth.” Even the greatest scientists have believed in many erroneous ideas. Newton and Darwin seem to have captured the essence of some important truths, but they also added many things that we now believe are not necessarily epistemologically warranted. The same, of course, goes for dedicated philosophers, both before philosophy became a clearly delimited academic discipline separate from theology, medicine and law (e.g. Aristotle), and after (e.g. Kant). The ordinary citizen cannot know “nothing but the truth” about everything. But it is assumed

that she or he can know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about a specific event. All of the psychological evidence on eye witness testimony seems to point to the opposite direction. We are often deceived by our eyes; seeing is believing, but we may very well believe something we want to believe.

II. Belief in a god, goddess, God or God-head:

One way that people may be deceiving themselves is by believing in some kind of theism. Since it is clear that there have been many gods, goddesses, Gods and God-heads, it is also clear that there must be some reason for that. Some jump to the conclusion that since there are so many candidates for theistic belief systems then they must all be false gods. But that is not logical. The fact that there have been many images of gods does not mean that all forms of theism must be incorrect and that we should all become atheists. What needs to be added to the equation is the fact that human beings are social.

The function of belief by individuals can be considered to be part of the general social order. That can be said in many ways. The relative degree of order that exists in any society often has a great deal to do with a commonly held set of cultural beliefs and practices. The general, societal worldview has in the past often been a sacred one and has frequently involved belief in some kind of theism. But even in those societies where sacredness is downplayed and where secular value systems are emphasized, as in the former Soviet Union, there is still a kind of “civic religion.” That is, the unifying principle need not be belief in a theistic principle. Nevertheless, throughout much of human history societies have often been predicated on common belief in a common symbol of the sacred.

Since the emergence of the modern nation-state in the course of hundreds of years, perhaps starting around 1500, the main societal unit has been the national state. When we think of societies today we commonly think of nation-states. It is only in history classes and anthropology classes that people start to actively think about forms of social organization structure that preceded the sixteenth century and that still exist in various forms around the world today. If a small tribe of people living deep in the Amazon river basin is considered an anthropological society then that kind of society is somewhat different from the modern nation-state as a society. But what both have in common is the idea of a collectivity that is unified by something. That “something” is often called “culture.” But there we have to be very careful what we mean. Culture is used in such a manner as to explain everything, and therefore actually explain nothing.

More than a decade ago I did fieldwork among the Bajo people of the province of Southeast Sulawesi in Indonesia. The Bajo are often called “sea nomads,” and various kinds of sea nomads exist throughout Southeast Asia. In the village I studied most of the people were nominal Muslims. But the form of Islam they practiced was influenced by the teachers who were willing to go to an isolated village, far from any kind of small town or established centre. When I spoke with villagers they often revealed that they knew even less about Islam than I did. As a university professor I had read some books and had some discussions with sophisticated scholars. Most of the Bajo people I lived with for three months simply believed. They believed because in that village the right belief was whatever form of Islam was the one being advocated that day by a visiting preacher. Historically Indonesia was heavily influenced by Sufi beliefs, but many of the

people in “my village” did not even know about Sufism. The village was (and is) a kind of miniature “society.” No one in the village can simply choose to be a Christian. Interestingly, in terms of the governmental belief system of the Five Principles (Pancasila) all Indonesians have a menu of five religions: Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and ... Roman Catholic! (The term “Christian” is used to mean Protestant.) In the U.S. today there are many Evangelical Christians who believe that the Indonesian system for classifying religions is quite apt. but they would add that even Lutherans and Episcopalians (or, Anglicans) are not “real” Christians.

My colleague William Shaffir⁵ at McMaster University has been studying ultra-orthodox Jewish groups like the Lubavitcher Chassidim. The Rebbe (Heb. *Admor*) had given permission for his research. He was speaking with a group of young men. Suddenly one of the boys said, in Yiddish, “Oh my, you are not a Jew!” Yet, Professor Shaffir considers himself a Jew and, indeed, is probably more devoted to a good understanding of Judaism than many people. But he does not fit inside the community; he is not a member of the limited “society” of Hassidic Jews. He is not an immediate follower of Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572) and Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1698-1760). For the young man, however, if one is not a Lubavitcher (or, Chabadnik) then one is not a Jew, full stop. Again, it is a matter of in-group loyalty. You do not believe what I believe therefore you are different from me and from those who are members of my “society” or “community.” You are not part of my cult, sect or denomination. But, ultimately, you are not part of my ecclesia, since the very notion of cults, sects and denominations implies tolerance concerning variety and “wrong beliefs.” There is no Jewish ecclesia today, of course, but in biblical times there was.

So the real question that one must ask about theism is the function of any theological and/or philosophical belief that is held by members of a collectivity of some sort. What does it mean to share a common world view (*Weltanschauung*) or world picture (*Weltbild*)? Is society conceivable without a widely shared set of basic beliefs? Have there ever been any human collectivities which did not have some kind of belief system widely shared by all who were considered full members? Does it really matter if the belief is in theism, deism, pantheism, panentheism, agnosticism, atheism, dualism, monism, qualified dualism, or something else? In terms of practical consequences, it might. It depends on historical and societal context. In any specific time or place not believing in X, Y or Z might be dangerous. It was only a few hundred years ago that people who proclaimed their atheism in Great Britain could be executed for the crime of blasphemy, which was considered traitorous. When President George Walker Bush speculated about the question of whether those who are atheists are citizens he was echoing a very old sentiment. In terms of belief, up until only about a hundred years ago, one was either “for us” or “against us.” That sentiment has been echoed by President George Bush in the “war against terrorism.” To be a “real American” means to “support our troops” and accept the basic American civic religion, flags and all.

One difficulty with many philosophical arguments, either inside the discipline of theology, or outside of the context of theology as a university discipline, is that such arguments are often poised in a very abstract manner. That is, philosophical problems are

⁵ Professor Shaffir has an unpublished manuscript entitled *Fieldwork Among Hassidic Jews: Moral Challenges and Missed Opportunities*. Hamilton, Ontario: McMaster University. See URL <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/sociology/shaffir.htm>

frequently discussed as if we are still living in an era before the invention of those academic disciplines commonly called history, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, psychology, geography, linguistics, and so forth. The specialized academic discipline of philosophy is quite different now from the general philosophical discipline that formed a basis for further study in Medieval universities. Even the invention of “natural philosophy” is often overlooked in philosophical discussions that are not disciplined by a strict adherence to a specific framework. Meaningful work in philosophy is often a matter of making a small contribution to a very specialized group of scholars who all belong to the same community of discourse. Hence, to tackle a question like “theism,” with all of its ramifications, is extremely difficult unless one knows one’s audience. But to know one’s audience it is necessary to have some idea who is listening. So who actually reads *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* or *The Philosophical Quarterly*? Who is likely to be influenced by an article in those journals? What would it mean if someone provided a very articulate argument about theism in the pages of one of those journals? What is the interpretive network (IN) that surrounds *No-Me*? What is the IN involved with *The Philosophical Quarterly*? Who are the key decision makers now? In what sense does either of those journals constitute a “community of discourse” or “scientific community”?

III. *The Philosophical Quarterly* as an Interpretive Network:

There are many thousands of academic journals. Some of them are printed and have existed for a long time. One such community of discourse or “Interpretive Network” (IN) would be all those persons who read *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Another would be all of those who read *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*.

Perhaps I should say, all those scholars who read *No-Me* or TPQ regularly. Those who are really members of the in-group would be authors who have actually contributed an article to *No-Me* or TPQ, or perhaps served as an outside reviewer or associate editor. Ultimately, of course, each journal has an organizational structure. Those of us on the outside do not know the intimate details of how the journal is edited and sustained. But those on the inside do know. Part of what determines insider status is precisely a detailed knowledge of the working of the collectivity to which one is considered to belong. Insider status is often revealed by key semiotic signs.

Without too much difficulty one can obtain copies of articles and book reviews that have been published in *No-Me* and TPQ in the last decade. Many of the articles are intriguing. Many touch on such questions as the nature of Thomist philosophy and “realism” versus “anti-realism.”⁶ Others are concerned with other specific thinkers.

For example, there is a contribution by Jorge Secada (2003) entitled “Learning to Understand Descartes.”⁷ It is labeled a “Critical Study” and one could call it an extended critical book review of two books. One of those books is by Broughton (2002)⁸ and the other is by Almog (2002)⁹. Both books were published by prestigious university presses

⁶ Stephen J. Boulter, “Could Aquinas Accept Semantic Anti-Realism?” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, (1998).

⁷ Jorge Secada, ‘Learning to Understand Descartes’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 53 (212)(2003), pp. 437-445.

⁸ Janet Broughton *Descartes’s Method of Doubt*. (Princeton U. P., 2002).

⁹ Joseph Almog, *What Am I? Descartes and the Mind-Body Problem* (Oxford U. P., 2002).

(Princeton and Oxford). Secada himself is at the University of Virginia. When he wrote this book review he had already published his (2002) *Cartesian Metaphysics*¹⁰. Indeed, his Ph.D. is from Cambridge and his B. Phil. is from York University in England (i.e. not the York University in Canada).

Professor Jorge Secada is a member of the Interpretive Network (IN) of scholars who read *The Philosophical Quarterly*, if not regularly, at least from time to time. He is Chair of a prestigious philosophy department, has deep links to the U.K., and is a successful scholar. No doubt many of those in the IN have heard of him. In all likelihood he has had face to face conversations with many people in the network.

But I had never heard of him. I had to look him up. Indeed, at first I mis-spelled his name as “Segada.” He is not a contributor to the discipline of sociology, which is my specialization. His name has never come up in conversation. Were I not interested in Descartes I would probably have skipped his book review. So our link is the topic of Descartes’ thought. I am now inspired to go and read Secada’s (2002) *Cartesian Metaphysics*. No doubt reading that book would help me to write about the issue of theism, since that question is often thought of as primarily a metaphysical one. The key thing to note now, however, is that if I had never looked at TPQ I probably would never have encountered Professor Segada’s work.

Similarly, the articles that have been published in *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* (<http://nome.unak.is/>) are available to all those who have web access. It is published exclusively in electronic format in order to be easily available and to keep costs down. It is a venue for the exploration of the ties between the Nordic countries (particularly Iceland) and the Mediterranean European countries (especially Italy). Most of the members of the editorial board live and work in Iceland or Italy, but there are also others (e.g. Dr. Valerio Lintner from London Metropolitan University).

IV. Attention Space in Interpretive Networks:

At the same time, many philosophers who belong to the IN of TPQ have probably never heard of Professor Randall Collins of the University of Pennsylvania. He is a very prominent sociological theorist. But he is not a philosopher. That is, he is not a regular contributor to philosophy journals. He does not regularly attend philosophy conferences. Those in North America (i.e. the U.S. and Canada) who are interested in the sub-disciplinary specialization of sociological theory have definitely heard of Randall Collins. Some have even read one or more of his articles and books. His C.V. is extensive. But there are probably not more than a handful of people associated with TPQ who have ever heard of him, much less read any of his work.

The key book that I find extremely heuristic is his *Sociology of Philosophies*.¹¹ Even though the term “philosophies” is used in the title, the book is not restricted to modern European and North American philosophies. Instead, it also examines philosophical views held within the framework of religious traditions. He writes about Indic and Sinitic civilizations and points to many details of the enormous philosophical ferment that took place in what is now the nation-state of India and the nation-state of China over

¹⁰ Jorge Secada, *Cartesian Metaphysics: the Scholastic Origins of Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge U.P. 2000). A pbk was issued in 2005.

¹¹ Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies* (Belknap/Harvard U.P., 1998).

thousands of years. He also writes extensively about Ancient Greece and Medieval and early Modern Europe. But this is not the place for an extended review.

My main point is that any outstanding scholar who works at a major university in the twenty-first century is likely to not be well known outside of his own disciplinary framework. Moreover, it is not the case that all sociologists know all other sociologists or that all philosophers read all other philosophers currently still living.

Ironically, when Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were writing they were not always contributing directly to a specific Interpretive Network (IN) of professional philosophers. They were searching for truth, beauty, goodness, faith, meaning, and many other things. But what takes place in the twenty-first century is no longer what took place in the seventeenth, eighteenth or even nineteenth centuries in terms of intellectual labour.

Today scholars tend to work within their own disciplines and do not attempt to move outside of those disciplines. That means that those who read TPQ will probably have some nodding acquaintance with some of the work of others who also read the same academic journal. But it also means that other philosophers at other locations may not have any more than a mere passing interest. They have their own IN's. Moreover, no one can effectively be a member of more than a few IN's. We are members of "communities" in the sense that "everyone knows your name." When Spinoza published his highly radical ideas the intellectual community at the cutting edge of panentheistic speculation was fairly small. The universities often resisted the ideas of radicals like Spinoza. This was in an era when the idea of a separate discipline of philosophy had not yet been fully invented. Philosophical discourse was always in the broader context of theological assumptions. Those assumptions were considered to be Christian.¹²

The difficulty with Interpretive Networks, of course, is that while there may be a great deal of wisdom among members of an IN, it is also quite possible for any specific IN to be isolated from new ideas. Outside of academia there are very few people in the so-called educated public who seriously read more than one or two academic journals on a regular basis. Almost all the information that the ordinary citizen (who is at the same time not an academic) obtains is from the mass media. What popular books say on a subject is often taken to be the final word. The attention space of the ordinary "man" or "woman" on the street is limited to a small cast of characters. A few persons who have made their reputation in some academic field, for example, have gone on to write popular books on topics like theism.

V. Richard Dawkins' Delusions and Pascal's Wager:

One person who fancies himself expert enough on the topic is a Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University: Richard Dawkins. He has written

¹² Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment, Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford U.P., 2001). Israel makes it clear that we tend to think of the more modern Enlightenment when we speak of the European Enlightenment. Popular Spinozism became a radical sect. Oxford and Cambridge "seemed hopelessly obscured in obscurantist lethargy" and according to Bishop Berkeley (*Alciphron* I, 313), as cited by Israel on p. 619, were little better than "nurseries of prejudice, corruption, barbarism and pedantry."

and published a four hundred page book entitled: *The God Delusion*.¹³ A delusion is a belief that is incorrect in some way. Dawkin's beliefs are delusional. He seems to feel that whatever expertise he has in popularizing aspects of biological theory are sufficient grounds for speculating about matters which he has no scholarly acquaintance with at all. The writers who work for the popular media have given his book glowing reviews. But scholars have been more cautious.

In Chapter 3 he goes through arguments that have been presented by people like Thomas Aquinas to prove the existence of "God." He also mentions Pascal's Wager. It is that brief discussion in Dawkin's rambling book that I would like to focus on. I wish to extend the concept of Pascal's Wager. Below I will explain how. But for now it is sufficient to note that the title I have given this essay is "Peirce's Wagers." So what does Dawkins write about Pascal? He states that the wager is only an argument for feigning belief in God, for a dishonestly faked belief in something that one does not really believe in at all. In any case, Dawkins is not keen on the idea that one should use the criterion of belief. He accuses Blaise Pascal of "cowardly bet-hedging" and contrasts that with Bertrand Russell's "courageous skepticism." The most interesting comment, and the one that is most relevant for my argument here, is contained in the last two paragraphs. The key sentence is:

"Then again, suppose the god who confronts you when you die turns out to be Baal, and suppose Baal is just as jealous as his old rival Yahweh was said to be. Mightn't Pascal have been better off wagering on no god at all rather than on the wrong god? Indeed, doesn't the sheer number of potential gods and goddesses on whom one might be vitiate Pascal's whole logic?"

Dawkins then goes on to say he is rally just joking in his dismissal of Pascal's wager, but at the same time he is dead serious. He offers "a sort of anti-Pascal wager."

"Suppose we grant that there is indeed some small chance that God exists. Nevertheless, it could be said that you will lead a better, fuller life if you bet on his not existing, than if you bet on his existing and therefore squander your precious time on worshipping him, sacrificing to him, fighting and dying for him, etc."

That is almost precisely what I would like to propose, but not quite. Dawkins is merely thinking of an "anti-Pascal wager." His intent is to make light of the wager. He even feels that perhaps Pascal himself was joking when he wrote about his wager. I would like to propose a more positive solution, a series of wagers that I will call Peirce's wagers. But first it is necessary to say just a few more words about the question of Pascal's wager.

¹³ Richard Dawkins., *The God Delusion* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006). There are 374 pages of text and then there is an Appendix which lists "friendly addresses, for individuals needing support in escaping from religion."

Alan Carter wrote an article in TPQ which was published in 2000.¹⁴ His argument is not altogether dis-similar from Dawkin's joking argument in a popular book. But since Carter published in TPQ and is linked to the Interpretive Network, perhaps his words carry a bit more weight. For example, Carter actually cites the specific translation of Pascal's essay that he used.¹⁵ It is a fundamental hermeneutic principle that at the very least one should obtain the best possible translation. It would be even better to have a copy of the single sheet of paper upon which Pascal wrote his argument. The link with a discussion of the concept of "infinite numbers," for example, is completely ignored by Dawkins in his popular account. (Since Pascal's essay is not cited in the end notes or listed in the references it is even quite possible that Professor Dawkins of Oxford University did not take the elementary step of actually reading what Pascal wrote. He may very well have simply relied on a tertiary account, or faculty gossip.) Carter summarizes Pascal's argument about the idea that it is rational to believe in the existence and reality of God.

If it is reasonable and rational to believe in the idea of infinite numbers then perhaps it is also reasonable to believe in the idea of an infinite creator. Our passions may not dispose us to believe in such a way that we also act morally and ethically, but our rational abilities can convince us. That is, we can use the Faculty of (Pure) Reason. Of course, Pascal wrote this before Kant had published his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Pascal might have thought about the issue somewhat differently if he has read Kant's first critique. On the other hand, we know that Pascal was a brilliant mathematician and logician. We cannot simply take his argument lightly. Of course, if we are willing to deny the insightfulness of Pascal's wager about the existence and reality of God then we should also not hesitate to question the idea of infinite number series. It would not be the first time that a fundamental axiom of geometry was questioned to good effect.

Those members of the Interpretive Network of readers and contributors will remember that Carter argues in his brief essay that one fundamental mistake that Pascal may have made is to assume that God is benevolent. What if God is actually malevolent? What if God really enjoys human suffering and depravity? In other words, an axiom left out of Pascal's geometrical reasoning is the notion of a God (or god) that does not conform to the standard view of the Christian God. The Thomistic Roman Catholic God, for example, is considered to be not only omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, but also essentially "Good." A God who is not good is conceivable, but such a god is not the standard Christian God of the theologians of the fourteenth century onward.

Carter mentions that Diderot asked the same question that Dawkins asks. Pascal's wager seems to not specifically indicate which of many models of a god

¹⁴ Alan Carter, 'On Pascal's Wager, or Why All Bets Are Off.' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (198) (January, 2000), pp. 22-27. It was reading this short article that prompted me to attempt a contribution to *The Philosophical Quarterly*. I immediately sensed the lack of a Peircian Pragmaticist perspective.

¹⁵ Blaise Pascal, 'Infinity Nothingness', in *Pensées and Other Writings*, tr. Honor Levi (Oxford UP, 1995), pp. 152-8. Carter states in a footnote on p. 22 'This fragment (680) seems to have been added over a period of time. It is not surprising, therefore, that is various paragraphs, jumbled together on a single sheet of paper, are not, or so it appears, wholly consistent with one another. Nevertheless, at least the argument which constitute the wager is usually taken to be consistent and often felt to be compelling.'

or goddess, God or God-head, we should accept. Should we be Manicheans and believe that actually there are two Forces in the Universe, one Good and the other Evil? Well, that was a heresy, and with good reason. Such a polarized view of good and evil makes us uncertain. A God who is Good is a God we can rely on in our moments of need. The wager, of course, is based on the idea that not only is God Good but God will reward us for our own human goodness. When we die we will go to Heaven, if God so chooses. If God exists and we do not believe in him, and consequently act in an evil manner, then God would have every right to punish us, just like a patrimonial-feudal or a patrimonial-prebendal absolute ruler (e.g. a “King” or an “Emperor”).¹⁶

It is entirely possible that the seventeenth century Christian God of Western Europe exists, is real, and is Good. If that is the case then Pascal’s wager makes sense. It is also entirely possible that such a God does not exist. But what would it mean to say that the conceptualization of God that was standard among the Interpretive Networks of European scholars in the seventeenth century does not exist? Would it mean that we need to change our conceptualization? It might. For example, we have changed our conceptualization of mathematics, too. In the twenty-first century there are aspects of mathematics that Pascal did not know about and could not have known about. On the other hand, if Pascal were born in France in 1947, then his Interpretive Network would have been different. His statement of the wager would also have been different. That is what I would now like to explore. The IN of a mathematician and philosopher in the twenty-first century could include the American founder of Pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914).¹⁷ So, let me introduce my idea concerning Peirce’s Wagers.

VI. Peirce’s Wagers and Sign Systems:

Peirce rejected Descartes’ dualism of subject and object. He argued instead for a complex triadic epistemology which includes a key mediating component: the sign.¹⁸ The sign is always intermediate between the subject and the object. Indeed, the only way we can even begin to talk about an object is to use a sign or a sign system. If we wish to express that a certain kind of animal is different from other animals we can use a word like “dog.” If we are not speaking English we can also use another word, like “chien,” “Hund,” or “anjing.” The critter remains the same; the sign used to de-sign-ate that object is arbitrary, to a great extent. If we are

¹⁶ Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (California UP, 1968).

¹⁷ John Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the twenty-first Century* (Toronto UP, 2001). This magnum opus summarizes argument that John Deely has made over several decades in many publications. The most directly relevant chapter is Chapter fifteen: ‘Charles Sanders Peirce and the Recovery of *Signum*,’ pp. 611-668. Peirce is the hero of the narrative since Peirce recovers that which had almost gotten lost as the result of the way in which the Enlightenment thinkers dismissed the late Scholastic philosophers and theologians. I have chosen to not repeat Deely’s main points about Peirce in my present essay since that would require several thousand words.

¹⁸ There are thousands of books on semiotics. Two standard sources are Nöth and Bouissac. Winfred Nöth, or Noeth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Indiana UP, 1995), especially pp. 39-47 on Peirce and pp. 79-143 on sign and meaning. Paul Bouissac (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Semiotics* (Oxford UP, 1998), especially pp. 474-479 on Peirce and pp. 572-575 on signs. The two introductory treatments do not agree on all details.

speaking English it is not arbitrary to use the sign “dog” rather than “Hund.” Similarly, if we are speaking the language of Indonesia (*Bahasa Indonesia*) then we use the word “anjing” as the sign. Moreover, the Interpretive Network of English and German speakers may have a very similar kind of dog in mind, a dog that is a pet and that is treated very well. The Indonesian speaker may have an image of the mangy street or village (*kampong*) dog, which exists by scrounging scraps of food and will never see a veterinarian.

Each time we use a sign within the context of a sign system we are making a wager! Each and every time we make an utterance we are “signaling” something to someone. When we publish an article in a refereed academic journal we are signaling something different than when we publish a popular book with a non-academic press. The public intellectual and the university intellectual are often wearing two different hats, but in so far as they do have those two *persona* they are split. What passes for acceptable use of jargon in an academic discussion among others in the same Interpretive Network will be utterly confusing for people who are not privy to the same insider information. As soon as we say anything we mark ourselves as coming from a certain class background; we betray our cultural capital, or lack of it.

Peirce would probably say that if we consider Pascal’s Wager as a one time event then it may get us into trouble. Why stake everything on one and only one wager? Why take our whole capital and throw it on the roulette table? That would not be a rational choice. But what might very well allow us to utilize goal-rational utilitarian and instrumental thinking is to bet every moment of every day. If today I decide to return a wallet I have found, then I am acting according to a generally accepted ethical norm in industrial societies. The person who has lost his wallet will likely be grateful, but if he is not, then virtue will still be its own reward. The sum total of a lifetime of rational activity may be beneficial. For example, if I do not smoke cigarettes and I live a few years longer then it may have been a good, rational and reasonable choice. What I am here calling Peirce’s Wager is the Pragmaticist maxim to always examine any question from the standpoint of the effects of our actions. The objective fact is we cannot do everything. Economists write about considerations related to opportunity costs. If I decide to smoke two packs of cigarettes a day, drink heavily every night, and be unfaithful to my spouse, then I may have a long and happy life. Or I may have a short and happy life. But I may also be hurting myself and others.

Now in what sense do the pragmatic choices that we make every day relate to Pascal’s Wager concerning our ultimate fate in the hands of God? The idea of God that Pascal had was not necessarily the same idea of God that pre-rabbinical Hebrews had of the God of the *Torah* (*Tanakh*) and that rabbinical Jews had of the *Talmud*. Pascal had a very European and early modern idea of God. God, him-, her- or it-self, may not change; but, our conceptualization of God does change. Just as our mathematics changes, our theology and philosophy changes. So if we wish to think about the logic behind Pascal’s Wage we also have to think of the fundamental logic of any argument about the conceptualization of theisms in the twenty-first century.

VII. Peirce's Wagers in the Context of Secular Nation-States and Theism

Our contemporary context is that of the secular nation-state. By using the word "our" I am attempting to indicate the Interpretive Network of those who might conceivably read articles in *The Philosophical Quarterly*. It is not too likely that non-academic individuals from societies greatly different from largely secular societies like the U.K., Canada or India will be reading *No-Me* or TPQ regularly. Readers of *No-Me* or TPQ may be members of a recognized denomination, like the Lutheran Church. They may also be secular humanists or atheists who communicate with others of like mind. But it is guaranteed that the probability will be that readers will be well educated and interested in opening up discussion rather than closing it down.

So what would a reader of *No-Me* or TPQ gain by believing in God? Basically nothing, since almost all readers will have constantly made decisions that amount to a life-time of wagering that human life has enough meaning to be relatively good. It is highly unlikely that brutal dictators read *No-Me* or TPQ. Serial killers are also not known to look to *No-Me* or TPQ for their world view. Terrorist cells in Afghanistan and the hills of Pakistan do not subscribe to *No-Me* or TPQ. There is no Al Qaeda link, as far as I know. The Interpretive Networks are most likely benign.

The question is not really whether readers of any academic journal can be persuaded to accept the notion of some form of theism, deism, pantheism, panentheism, atheism, monism, dualism, or whatever. What is really at issue is a much broader sociological question. What is the value of betting on being a good person in one's daily life? If there is no reward in an afterlife (or another life) for doing what I do then is there any reason to do it? The simple answer is: Yes!

When Alan Carter asks whether we are born "depraved" and therefore, since we would have been created by God, we should act the way God made us, he is assuming a lot. He is taking arguments about Original Sin, which had an entirely different meaning in their original context, and applying them to a notion of depravity that is far different. If we wager on something we call God and we act according to moral and ethical principles that we associate with that belief then, of course, we could be in for a big surprise, like the dyslexic who arrives at the Pearly Gates only to find that god really is DOG after all. But the *Gedankenexperiment* flounders on the very notion of what the Christian God is supposed to be, and has been. We can bet on a good God, if we are going to bet on God at all, since that is the God that we are being asked to bet on. The God of the societies we live in is the modified version of the early modern God. We benefit from several hundred years of considerable discussion about that God. We also benefit from being able to actually read the relevant literature ourselves.

So when we bet each and every day on acting one way rather than another we are demonstrating our belief in some underlying principle. What we call that basic, underlying foundational principle is a matter of which Interpretive Network we belong to and of which we are a member in good standing. If I am an immigrant from India and I continue to practice my Saivite form of Hinduism in Scotland then my belief in Siva is not necessarily counter to your Jewish belief in

YHWH. If my neighbor practices Tibetan Buddhist initiation ceremonies involving chanting of Tibetan translations of Sanskrit and Mandarin texts but acts morally as a member of his own community then his belief in *sunyata* is just as real as my belief in my Neo-Pagan celebration of the Goddess.

God exists in the eye of the beholder, where the beholder is never just one person but a whole collectivity. At the very least it is a relatively long-term Interpretive Network. At the most general level it is a nation-state “community” of people who can communicate in a similar language, like Anglo-Indian English and upper class English. As David Emile Durkheim pointed out long ago, the “reality” of any aspect of the collective consciousness is intimately linked to the existence of the collectivity. Whatever we think of when we speak or write of “God” (Allah, Dao, Brahman, Sanghyang Tuan, etc.) has to do with what our collective representations are.

VIII. Pragmaticism, Semiotics and Theisms:

The menu of theisms is not about belief in something that is “real.” It is about something that exists. It exists pragmatically in terms of real life consequences. If I choose to be a theist I am not necessarily more ethical than if I choose to be an atheist. But if I belong to no collectivity and speak merely a private language then I will very likely become anomic and separated from society altogether. Those who speak Italian are likely to view the world in a slightly different way than those who speak Icelandic. If the speakers have some language in common then communication will be facilitated. But some nuances are likely to be lost. If there is an English-language conversation about “God” between a Roman Catholic from Genoa and a Lutheran from Reykjavik there may well be many misunderstandings.

Peirce’s semiotics is quite complex and he seems to have changed his mind several times about several fundamental points. But nevertheless it helps us to understand the status of a sign like the word God. My Polish-American father-in-law, who spoke some Polish, used to say: “Olah Boga!” I thought it was just an interjection. But it turns out that the Polish word for God is something like Bog. (Polish is highly inflected, so the word changes according to its use in a sentence.) He was not just using nonsense syllables. Yet if I ask a friend, “Do you believe in Bog?” my friend is likely to respond with a blank stare. We are back to the dog, Hung, chien, anjing question. The same “object” can have different labels.

But in the case of theisms it is not at all clear that if one speaker says God and a second speaker says Allah that they are saying the same thing. Both come from the Abrahamic religions. But they very likely have a different way of viewing the abstraction of God/Allah. Add a Feminist discussing the Goddess and the situation changes again. Then add someone from China or India. So the English word God tends to mean what English speakers means when they use that word. It is not a universal symbol for a universally shared conceptualization.

For Peirce the ultimate semiotic sign could just as well be X or Y. The Big Sign in the Sky could be X. It may be that X holds it all together. Do you believe in X? Do you believe in Y? At some level you have to believe in some version of

a meaningful Universe if you lead a half-way regular life. If you do not spend most of your time killing people for no reason, other than your own pleasure perhaps, then you believe in some kind of ethics and morality. If, for example, you are a soldier and you kill an enemy then that is not literally first degree murder, unless the shooting was of a civilian, perhaps a child, and was entirely unprovoked in every way. Acting as a soldier does not necessarily mean circumventing the Biblical commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” But ethical boundaries are very complex and casuistic arguments abound. Nevertheless, most people on Earth act in what is frequently thought of as an ethical manner. What keeps normal people from doing bad things is not necessarily Pascal’s Wager in the strict sense, but a kind of Peircian Pragmaticist set of Wagers that are linked to semiotic signs within the context of a semiotic sign system. The honor that exists among thieves, or terrorists, is the honor of the group, the collectivity, the Interpretive Network.

In the pure abstract space of mathematical thinking about philosophical questions it is ‘rational’ to attempt to be entirely consistent, but it is not entirely reasonable to do so. It is possible to really believe in something, an X, that does not exist, assuming that it just might, but it would not be very reasonable to do so. So our Faculty of (Pure) Reason, which may be useful in solving mathematical problems related to the concept of infinity, may not be all that pragmatic and reasonable when dealing with more ordinary concerns, like a friendship or a marriage. An evil God might approve of corrupt actions. But belief in an evil God (or god, or God-head) of that kind would be a kind of private language wager. Pascal does not seem to have thought entirely in a solipsistic manner. God is good by definition, not “**merely** by definition.”¹⁹

I myself do not believe in the theologically precise version of the Christian Trinity. I do not believe that a man who lived in what is now Israel was the one and only Messiah, the *christos*. Nor do I literally believe in the Holy Ghost in either the Roman Catholic or the Eastern Orthodox versions of that concept. I have chosen to attend a Unitarian congregation and to participate in various Unitarian and Universalist ceremonies. I fully understand that those rituals are part of a context of the dialectical negation of the previous Trinitarian and Pre-deterministic (e.g. predestinationist) theologies of another era. As is often said, Unitarians is the last refuge of a Protestant who refuses to give up on spirituality altogether. But I do not consider the Unitarian-Universalist Church of the United States (or the Unitarian Church of Canada) to be the final answer. Far from it. I have attended many kinds of religious rituals and found inspiration in various ways of seeing the world. There is a grain of truth to the beliefs of all sincerely

¹⁹ Alan Carter, op cit., p. 26, with emphasis added. The idea that something is ‘merely’ a definition begs the question. It is part of the Christian definition of God that He is Good. Jesus is considered the Christ because He is Goodness personified. The tri-une God is Good in every way. The Holy Spirit is not an Evil Spirit. To believe in some private form of Christianity and suddenly re-assemble the whole of the Christian theological heritage into a heretical notion of a Manichean or Purely Evil God is good abstract thinking, but not really part of the on-going dialogue, except as a negation. It may be a useful contribution to force scholars to think of all of the ramifications of a belief like Pascal’s Wager, but if we are going to truly consider ALL of the ramifications then let us also consider completely dismantling mathematics.

spiritual people who belong to a spiritual community and yet do not entirely reject those who are not members of the in-group (i.e. the IN).

The way in which it is possible to keep a kind of open mind to many different and even logically contradictory belief systems is to keep in mind that each and every one of them is a sign system, nothing more and nothing less. The absolutely noumenal reality, as Kant informed us, is probably beyond our grasp. If we are not Emanuel Swedenborg then we cannot easily walk along the streets of Heaven and find where the bakery is located. We can think about the spiritual dimension in various ways, but we truly are epistemically blind and all trying to climb to the top of the mountain along different paths on which we happened to find ourselves. We quest for the sacred pink elephant in the room (and in the hills) but we are limited in our ability to see. Our horizon is rarely wide and full enough.

One way to definitely broaden our mental horizon is to begin to think about theisms using Peirce's triadic epistemology and his semiotics. God is a sign. X is a sign. God is X. X is God. As Gandhi said, he used to believe that God is Truth and then he started to believe that Truth is God. Similarly, we could say that God is Goodness or we could with equal merit point out that Goodness is God.

IX. Are There Any Errors in My Argument?

The essential argument here is that when we consider the menu of different types of theisms (Christian theisms, Jewish theisms, Islamic theisms, Hindu theisms, atheisms, pantheisms, panentheisms, monisms, pluralisms, dualisms, and so forth) we make choices. But in those societal contexts where we have a choice – and the choice is not dictated to us by rulers – we do not have to make that wager once and for all. In the twenty-first century we have the luxury – at least in the more 'liberal' societies – to make the choice over and over again. We can experiment with truth. We can take a loosely equivalent form of the rudiments of the scientific method and test our hypotheses through our personal, phenomenological experiences of everyday life experiences.

In my own life I have experienced this several times. I have made good decisions and I have made bad decisions. For example, in relationship I have sometimes done those things which on much later reflection were neither in my own best interest nor in the best interest of the community. But we live and learn and, as the saying goes, "We get too soon old und too late Schmart." But a big part of acquired wisdom is understanding how contextual each and every statement has to be in order to be a statement at all. To convey meaning we have to use a sign system, a language (e.g. religious icons and symbols, mathematical signs, musical notes, words in sentences and paragraphs, essays, arguments).

When we do so, we always have to interpret the signs in the context of the Interpretive Networks of those who are using those signs. If a contemporary Jesuit philosopher is speaking about God he may have something different in mind than when a Sufi mystic speaks of God. It is even true that when the Jesuit writes about God he may not please the Evangelical Christian who believes in that nineteenth century invention, the Rapture. When Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote he was a radical and it took a long time for the authorities in the Roman Catholic Church to

start considering him the main ‘catholic’ philosopher. It is a matter of semiotic signs all the way through. Even the words we use to designate an object are a matter of sign systems. When the “object” that is being considered is not corporeal and when that object is often considered in various ways even by the most subtle thinkers and commentators then the ordinary scholar who is not a professional theologian must pause. We must consider to what extent we really even begin to understand, say, Thomas Aquinas and Roman Catholic dogmatic theology if we have not spent decades learning to read Latin fluently and working with great scholars like Norman Kretzmann.

According to Kenny’s review of the book on Aquinas by Eleonore Stump, mentioned above, the version of Thomas Aquinas provided by Stump (2003) is quite different from the interpretation of Aquinas’ philosophical arguments made by Robert Pasnau, and others. Part of the reason well qualified commentators can disagree fundamentally is that Aquinas left a vast output of over eight million words and his Nachlass poses a daunting challenge to those not absolutely fluent in Latin. Moreover, it is very easy to assume that a Latin term used by Aquinas has a very similar meaning in English, but it may be a false friend. Words have subtle shifts in meaning over time. Take the example of the Latin word *actus* used by Aquinas to mean the actuality of the intellect and of the will. Kenny makes it clear that for Aquinas *actus* can mean kicking a ball or being the color blue but it can also mean thinking to oneself ‘Q-R6 is the best move for me to make’ in this game of chess. It may be the case that a somewhat misleading interpretation of the Latin word *actus* leads Stump to over estimate the importance of the inner life and introspection and to underplay the other kinds of social actions or activities that could also be meant. Stump, Kenny argues, imagines the mind as merely an internal apparatus, ‘a spiritual machine whose processes are commonly available to consciousness, but may sometimes go too fast to be observed, or may go totally underground.’²⁰

The disagreement between Stump and Kenny concerning ‘philosophical psychology’ will not be settled easily. But it is absolutely clear that there is a huge gap between the Interpretive Network that would even consider ‘philosophical psychology’ relevant and the Interpretive Network that would only spend significant amounts of time pondering theory and evidence within the discipline of psychology. A disciplinary-based knowledge of psychological phenomena like cognition is quite different from a philosophical discussion of cognition based on a certain amount of professional expertise concerning Thomas Aquinas. Unless we try to make Aquinas as much like Howard Gardner or some other famous psychologist still alive today, it is not likely that a paper on Aquinas’ theory of cognition will be widely recognized outside of the most philosophical sub-groups within the community of professional, academic psychologists. I have given a paper at the American Psychological Association on Peirce, but that was to a

²⁰ Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 459. The review essay is very detailed and the overall conclusion is that Stump’s version of Aquinas is well done but can stand further improvement. What is absolutely clear from the tone of Kenny’s review, however, is that “equally learned and scrupulous scholars can find such different teachings in St Thomas,” p. 458.

group of people who are members of the division on theoretical psychology. Most of the psychologists at the APA conference were probably uninterested.

There are probably many weaknesses in my argument. I can already think of a few areas that it would be nice to explore. It would be wonderful, for example, to carefully read everything that is known about Pascal. I would like to study his mathematics and how his mathematics relates to his philosophical assumptions. Peirce was also a mathematician and it would be interesting to know more about the relationship between expertise in mathematics and the accomplishment of recognized philosophical work. For example, the generalizations could be tested on Whitehead, Russell, Frege, Husserl and Wittgenstein. It would also be good to utilize every relevant article in TPQ that I have found in examining the last decade of publication. There are many articles on Aquinas' realism and on the concept of nominalism that it would be productive to explore. But I believe that this somewhat telegraphic communication of the basic ideas will either make others in the Interpretive Network want to think more deeply, or it will not.

What I wish most of all to convey is that a Peircian semiotic analysis of the ways in which God talk is accomplished within certain Interpretive Networks would be heuristic. A Pragmatist approach is one in which the objective reality of a situation is evaluated according to the practical consequences of holding a belief. What is the consequence of believing A rather than not A? How many options are being considered? Are we discussing A versus not A or are we really talking about A versus B and C? Peirce was not altogether happy with William James' more psychological version of pragmatism and that is why he invented the more awkward term Pragmaticism. Peirce felt that by coining somewhat ugly words it would be less tempting for shallow thinkers to adopt those terms. There are certain a number of key signs in social science which are not adopted by the mass media or the general public since they are 'too ugly for words.'

Peirce's contribution to philosophy is still being explored and there are many interpretations of his work. Whenever three Peircian semioticians are at a conference there are at least four opinions being expressed. Peirce's thinking was dialectical in the sense that he was constantly shifting focus and re-arranging his materials and his technical terms. But I believe that I have sensed at least one major part of Peirce's thinking. His theory of the Interpretant, Representant and constantly changing shape of sign systems is clearly very useful for understanding the actual process of scientific investigation as well as everyday life dialogue. I have chosen to invent a new term, the Interpretive Network. The IN concept may be a creative misappropriation of what Peirce meant by the Interpretant as a sign. But it helps to avoid the facile conclusion that the Interpretant is the Interpreter, conceived as the Cartesian subject. There is never any situation (except in a kind of logical abstract space) where there is only one person doing the cognition or having the feelings. We are all part of larger social units. We play multiple roles and have many role-sets and identities. In each of the many parts we play on the stage of life we utilize different sets of signs in different languages. Those sign systems are often very subtle and only a member of the 'community' can fully grasp the shifts in emphasis.

Do I believe in God? Well, who is asking? Why is the question being raised? What will be the consequences of answering one way rather than a dozen other possible ways? Will I be killed? Will I be ostracized or excommunicated? Will believing or not believing mean that I will not be able to earn a living? Will someone take my passport away? What are the real life, pragmatic consequences of holding that belief? Will believing that God exists and is real mean that I will be likely to be a more moral person? Will being a moral person hinge on my conceptualizing God in such a way that my thinking is not purely private but somewhat overlaps with the last hundreds of years of thinking about the reality and actuality of God? Moreover, if I come to the very end of my bio-physical existence as a corporeal body on this beautiful planet, will there be any part of my “self” (psyche, soul, anima, Spirit, Geist, etc.) left? Will that disembodied spirit then face some kind of judgment made by some kind of Eternal Emperor? There are no easy answers to any of those questions. There never will be. But the dialogue about them can lead to pessimism or optimism. I remain optimistic that utilizing Peirce’s insights about the importance of God as the ultimate Sign, the ultimate basis of all human consciousness of symbolic communication, is a reasonable working hypothesis. It will allow me to continue to make a kind of hourly wager as to how to spend my time. I will continue to make Peirce’s Pragmaticist Wagers until someone clearly indicates that there is a clear reason to assume that making any pragmatic decisions in the here and now is useless. I do not think I will easily become a total cynic or skeptic in the sense of an ordinary person who completely gives up trying. I will not, for example, commit suicide simply because life does not make sense. I will not actively promote anything that might harm another human being, even if ultimately my doing so would not have affected anything but the immediate situation for that other person. The Buddhist Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path provides one moral framework for those who do not necessarily believe in a God or God-head of any kind.

I am not an expert on the philosophical and theological ideas characteristic of such well known charismatic thinkers as Moses, Mohammed, Siddhartha Gautama, Sankaracharya, Tsong Kapa, or Joshua ben Joseph of Nazareth. But I tend to think of them as not qualitatively different in some ways from Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, whom many called the Mahatma and whom many others hated.²¹ In other words, I do have difficulty accepting the idea that God himself came to earth in the person of someone commonly called Jesus the Christ. On the other hand, when I read John Caputo (2000) on the hermeneutics of belief I start to think quite differently about the empty tomb, and other mysterious narratives.²²

²¹ J. I. (Hans) Bakker, *Toward A Just Civilization: the Gandhian Perspective on Human Rights and Development* (Canadian Scholars’ Press, 1993). Mahatma literally means “*maha -atman*” or great soul. Those who blamed Gandhi for the terrible loss of human life during Partition did not see him as a great soul but as a Hindu apologist. Ironically, it was a fanatical Hindu who felt that Gandhi was too ecumenical who shot and killed him. Many of the Gandhians I met while in India with the Gandhi Peace Foundation and the Ford Foundation were very moral and ethical in their personal lives. Many were Hindus of various kinds. Some were Muslims. Some declared themselves atheists. No doubt the religious tolerance that is often displayed by many people in India is somewhat clouded by the frequent sectarian violence that has also occurred during the course of Indian history, and Indic civilization generally.

²² John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Indiana UP, 2000).

It may be that in the final analysis the only fit way to discuss God is to not say anything at all. *Silentium laus*. Nevertheless, we humans are members of a biological species call homo sapiens sapiens. We have somehow obtained a capacity for human speech and thought. Our silence may be appropriate in many circumstances. But the silence or the pause may simply emphasize that which does not need to be said, or cannot be said adequately.

If two human beings, members of two collectivities that do not overlap very much, try to communicate with one another about metaphysics, ontology, ontic reality, philosophical anthropology, epistemology, axiology, ethics, teleological assumptions, and many other things, then they may very well find that many of their symbols are not shared and that they are to some extent thinking in incommensurable ways. But if both thinkers allow for the possibility that both sign systems have value in their own right and that mis-communication is not necessarily a matter of fundamental incommensurability, then there may be room for some kind of dialogue. The precise nature of one's views on theisms is not as important as the way in which one translates those views into pragmatic action. One of the clearest indicators of a clear conceptualization of the true nature of that which is most divine and holy is a respect for other persons and other societies.

All of us belong to more than one Interpretive Network. We need to understand what it is like to walk in another person's shoes, but we also need to know what it means to walk barefoot. We have to conceptualize whatever theism we prefer in such a way that it does not automatically exclude other human beings. In all scientific inquiry there has to be an open minded approach to truth and a willingness to consider new paradigms and new kinds of research theories. That is true in the social sciences no less than in the so-called hard sciences of physics, chemistry and biology. Moreover, the various philosophical discourses on the existence of a God (or some other theistic or atheistic representation) should not be seen as tangential to scientific inquiry. True inte-disciplinarity requires social scientists maintaining communication with philosophers and theologians. Unfortunately, that is rare. But it is absolutely necessary. C. P. Snow only considered the two cultures: the hard sciences and the arts and humanities. But no less than in the study of physical or biological phenomena, in the study of human beings and collectivities (such as societies) it is very important to carefully consider and reconsider axiomatic assumptions.

A full awareness that every generalization and proposition needs to be seen in the historically- and societally-specific context in which it was produced will go a long way to improving our Pragmaticist understanding of widely different viewpoints. A little bit of Peircian semiotic theory goes a long way to correcting the misleading notion that it is all a matter of the scientist or other kind of think as the 'subject' viewing concrete, material 'objects' in an 'objective' manner. The objective statement that we can make about God is that he, she or it is probably not a material, corporeal object. Whatever form of theism we promote as the one that our group or tribe most admires, we need to be aware that our own knowledge is limited by our semiotic sign system. Olah Boga!

