CHAPTER SEVEN

GUESSES AT SOME RIDDLES

So, continuing the counsels that had been asked of me, I should say, "Enter your skiff of Musement, push off into the lake of thought, and leave the breath of heaven to swell your sail. With your eyes open, awake to what is about or within you, and open conversation with yourself; for such is all meditation."

C. S. Peirce, 1908

The title of this brief chapter is an allusion to the sketch that Peirce made in 1887–1888 for a book that was never published. My choice of title is intended as a gesture to the fact that, as noted in the Introduction, this whole book amounts to one big guess. It is also intended as an acknowledgement that, ambitious as this guess is, loose ends of course remain.

One such thread concerns the question of the nature of Trinitarian ‘personhood’ and the relation of this to conceptions of the human ‘self’. In §7.1.1 I approach this question in the context of the merits and limitations of the traditional ‘psychological’ and ‘social’ analogies for the Trinity. In §7.1.2 I discuss ways in which, on the face of it, the semiotic model coheres most closely with the psychological analogies. In §7.1.3 I outline Peirce’s semiotic approach to the self. I argue that Peirce’s account of selfhood presents a critique of the psychological and social analogies alike, yet also suggests a way in which the insights of each of those approaches may be integrated without incorporating the troublesome consequences of either.

In the last sections of the book-proper I make two guesses about Firstness. In §7.2.1 I take up John Zizioulas’s argument that the free-

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domain of human persons is grounded in the free personhood of the
Father. I argue that the semiotic model invites a parallel argument,
to the effect that the ‘goodness’ of creation is, in a sense, guaranteed
and sealed by the reality of the ever-emergent Firstness that is a ‘like-
ness’ of the Father’s role in the perichoretic unity of the Trinitarian
persons.

In §7.2.2 I note a suggestion that has been made, from a psychoana-
lytic perspective, about the root of Peirce’s melancholy. This leads to
some brief remarks on the relation of Firstness to the ‘maternal’, with
some possible implications for attitudes to the gender-specific lan-
guage in which Trinitarian thought has traditionally been articulated.
It also leads to a guess about the nature of the creaturely existence for
which we might hope at the eschaton.

Beyond this chapter there is an epilogue, in which I ask what might
have happened if the Fathers had known Peirce.

7.1 Trinitarian Selfhood: Psyche, Society or Semiosis?

7.1.1 Psychological and Social Analogies for the Trinity

In my explorations of the possible connections between Peirce’s phi-
losophy and Trinitarian theology I have generally followed the tra-
ditional use of the term ‘person’ for what, according to Christian
theology, is threefold in God. In doing so, I have set aside the ques-
tion of the nature of Trinitarian personhood. I now turn to consider
how Peirce’s philosophy may illuminate that question, and I shall do
so by considering how the semiotic model may be capable of clarifying
the merits and limitations of the so called ‘psychological’ and ‘social’
alogies of the Trinity.

Alongside the idea that the distinctions between the Trinitarian per-
sons are constituted by their relations (§2.4.1), Augustine’s other major
contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity was his exploration of vari-
ous ‘psychological analogies’. Augustine suggested several such analog-
ies based on the faculties of the human mind, the best known being
the triads of mind-knowledge-love, memory-understanding-will, and

276–79.