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- Author:** Colapietro, Vincent M.
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- Abstract:** The essay explores how C. S. Peirce, especially in his mature thought, addressed the question of meaning. It underscores how he not only took meaning to be at bottom a function of our habits but also how he conceived these habits themselves to be functions of the histories in which they originate and operate. Hence, what I propose here is this: One of the most fruitful ways to interpret Peirce's own contribution to this question is to see his efforts as carrying forward the impetus intensified by Hegel and Darwin's emphasis on temporality and historicity. In Part One of this paper ("The Question of Meaning"), I suggest how Peirce approaches the question of meaning primarily in reference to what I call the drama of self-correction. Moreover, his approach is explicitly related to his pragmatism, semeiotic (or general theory of signs), and phenomenological doctrine of categories. Finally, the historical development of his own reflections on this question is taken to provide a basis for an historicist interpretation of his mature position. In Part Two ("The Routes of Significance"), I propose that the metaphor of a route provides a corrective to the excessively formal and indeed formalistic interpretations of Peirce's theory of signs still dominating the discussion of this theory. Routes are understood here not as antecedently fixed paths, but as historically emergent and alterable trajectories defined by the movements of travelers. In conjunction with this emphasis I explore several distinct senses in which both beliefs and signs are what agents go on. Such reflections are articulated for the purpose of facilitating a deeper understand of not only what Peirce meant by meaning but also what we might mean by this elusive term.
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