

Final Interpretant

1906 | Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmatism | CP 4.536

In regard to the Interpretant we have [...] to distinguish, in the first place, the Immediate Interpretant, which is the interpretant as it is revealed in the right understanding of the Sign itself, and is ordinarily called the *meaning* of the sign; while in the second place, we have to take note of the Dynamical Interpretant which is the actual effect which the Sign, as a Sign, really determines. Finally there is what I provisionally term the Final Interpretant, which refers to the manner in which the Sign tends to represent itself to be related to its Object. I confess that my own conception of this third interpretant is not yet quite free from mist.

1909 | Letters to William James | EP 2:496-7

...there is certainly a third kind of Interpretant, which I call the Final Interpretant, because it is that which *would* finally be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter were carried so far that an ultimate opinion were reached. [—] In the Second Part of my Essay on Pragmatism, in the *Popular Science* of November 1877 and January 1878 I made three grades of Clearness of Interpretation. The first was such Familiarity as gave a person familiarity with a sign and readiness in using it or interpreting it. In his consciousness he seemed to himself to be quite *at home* with the sign. In short, it is Interpretation *in Feeling*. The second was Logical Analysis = Lady Welby's *Sense*. The third was Pragmatistic Analysis [and] would seem to be a Dynamical Analysis, but [is] identified with the Final Interpretant.

1909 | Letters to William James | CP 8.314

...suppose I awake in the morning before my wife, and that afterwards she wakes up and inquires, "What sort of a day is it?" *This* is a sign, whose Object, as expressed, is the weather at that time, but whose Dynamical Object is the *impression which I have presumably derived from peeping between the window-curtains*. Whose Interpretant, as expressed, is the quality of the weather, but whose Dynamical Interpretant, is *my answering her question*. But beyond that, there is a third Interpretant. The *Immediate Interpretant* is what the Question expresses, all that it immediately expresses, which I have imperfectly restated above. The *Dynamical Interpretant* is the actual effect that it has upon me, its interpreter. But the Significance of it, the *Ultimate*, or *Final, Interpretant* is her *purpose* in asking it, what effect its answer will have as to her plans for the ensuing day. I reply, let us suppose: "It is a stormy day." Here is another sign. Its *Immediate Object* is the notion of the present weather so far as this is common to her mind and mine - not the *character* of it, but the *identity* of it. The *Dynamical Object* is the *identity* of the actual or Real meteorological conditions at the moment. The Immediate Interpretant is the schema in her imagination, i.e. the vague Image or what there is in common to the different Images of a stormy day. The *Dynamical Interpretant* is the disappointment or whatever actual effect it at once has upon her. The *Final Interpretant* is the sum of the *Lessons* of the reply, Moral,

Scientific, etc. Now it is easy to see that my attempt to draw this three-way, “trivialis” distinction, relates to a real and important three-way distinction, and yet that it is quite hazy and needs a vast deal of study before it is rendered perfect.

1909 | Letters to William James | CP 8.315

The Final Interpretant does not consist in the way in which any mind does act but in the way in which every mind would act. That is, it consists in a truth which might be expressed in a conditional proposition of this type: “If so and so were to happen to any mind this sign would determine that mind to such and such *conduct*.” By “conduct” I mean *action* under an intention of self-control. No event that occurs to any mind, no action of any mind can constitute the truth of that conditional proposition.

1909 | Letters to Lady Welby | SS 110-1

My Final Interpretant is [...] the effect the Sign *would* produce upon any mind upon which the circumstances should permit it to work out its full effect. [—] ...the Final Interpretant is the one Interpretative result to which every Interpreter is destined to come if the Sign is sufficiently considered. [—] The Final Interpretant is that toward which the actual tends.

1910.08.23 | Letters to Paul Carus | ILS 285

The third sense in which we may properly speak of the Interpretant is that in which I speak of the Final Interpretant meaning that Habit in the production of which the function of the Sign, as such, is exhausted.