Human Nature and Rational Norms: Features of the Idea of "Sociality"

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Abstract:

The current trend in philosophical thought, which blurs the line of demarcation between "deeds" and "values", includes a restructuring in a pragmatic sense of the concept of rationality, one that overturns the ontological framing of Hume's is-ought question in a perspective centered on making explicit the various needs that interweave man's relation with things and with his fellow humans. This essay discusses reflections on the notion of "sociality" as an epistemological and ethical criterion, highlighting the importance of the so-called "logical socialism" of Ch. S. Peirce with respect to contemporary revision of the Humean conceptual network, besides the possibility of utilizing it as a profitable term of comparison for reject the irrational impulses incidental to the crisis in traditional research on the "objective" grounds of knowledge and ethics.

Keywords: Normative, Descriptive, Sociality, Human Nature, Rationality, Epistemology

The question of whether "sociality" is to be considered an "objective fact" or a "normative criterion" of human reality is one that, even at first glance, appears anything but easy. Along the lengthy path Western thought has run since Aristotle's idea of man as a "social animal," the "sociality" category has, in fact, been charged with meanings and diverse conceptual functions that still surface, each with its own *raison d'être*, whenever we try to define it with precision. One useful parameter for putting this category in one or the other of the camps where, on the basis of Hume's *is-ought question*, we tend to place the conceptual tools we utilize could be historiographic contextualization, or limiting ourselves to a reconstruction of the specific theoretical framework in which, from time to time, the concept of "sociality" is used with a factual value or as a normative criterion, in the double sense of a logical and an ethical rule. It would thus be possible to draw a map of the alternations this category as undergone, until it comes to present itself as one of the most pervasive notions in contemporary thought.

That would not help us, however, to answer our question. Instead, precisely the consideration that "sociality" represents one of the concepts that is now familiar in the most diverse theoretical quarters, as well as an ordinary parameter in our daily life-practices, certainly means that any attempt to give it a univocal definition is the equivalent of taking the risk of bringing on one of those "mental cramps" of which Wittgenstein tried to put us on our guard.

As is well known, Wittgenstein's expression mainly concerns the essentialist framing of

philosophical questions, which he undoubtedly invites us to reject; but he certainly does not expect us to repress our persistent, self-questioning attitude, asking instead that we make an effort at "rotating the axis of our questions". It is in this light that I propose to show the philosophical relevance of the "sociality" category and, at the same time, the inadequacy of any attempt to define it in terms of the neat alternatives of "fact" and "values" given us by Hume's *is-ought question*. The guiding idea behind my considerations is, in fact, that Hume's question turns out, in its original formulation, to be incongruous and misleading with respect to the overall tendency in contemporary thought to propose a more and more articulated model of rationality.

For this reason, I will first try to point out some motifs inherent in those epistemologies that have carried on with the pragmatic curve in the second phase of Wittgenstein's thought, spending a moment on reviewing the traditional distinction between "descriptive" and "normative" as delineated by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein, Ascombe & von Wright, 1969). In the second part of this essay, I will discuss a further way to blur that distinction, taking as my underlying theme the so-called "logical socialism" of Ch. S. Peirce (this expression is used in Wartenberg, 1971; and Apel, 1975). This section will deal mainly with setting out a form of naturalism where the "sociality" category presents itself as the cornerstone for a model of rationality that reinforces the psychological components of scientific reasoning but, however, excludes any reduction of that category to the area of "objective facts," or its configuration as a "fact" in human nature.

1. "Sociality" as the Cornerstone of a Non-Dichotomous Logic

After about three centuries since its entrance on the philosophical scene, Hume's distinction between science and ethics continues to be an inescapable point of reference. The numerous re-workings that the notions of fact and of value have already undergone in Kant's critique of traditional metaphysics have still led to a general shift in perspective that reflects the multiform process by which Western thought has gradually abandoned the search for a univocal definition of rationality.

In recent decades, above all, this tendency has taken concrete form in a thinning of the borders between science and non-science, due precisely to the implementation of conceptual networks notably different from those implied in Hume's discourse. More precisely, this concerns rejecting the dichotomies sanctioned by Hume's declaration of the asymmetrical logic between factual pieces of knowledge and determinations of value, thus overturning its ontological formulation in a perspective centered, instead, on

rendering explicit the various functions and requirements that entwine the relationship man installs with things and with his fellows.

This anti-dualistic attitude, in particular, or the commitment to demolish so many "false antitheses," to use Dewey's phrase, is the point of convergence of the relativistic epistemologies that emerged after the crisis of the *standard* conceptions of scientific theories, especially of logical neo-empiricism, which, as is common knowledge, found one of its strong points precisely in the rigid separation of the area of fact from that of values. Indeed, one can say that the most fecund aspect of the alternatives outlined, beginning with Quine and Goodman's writings in the 1950s, consists of the attack on that presupposition, showing how the series of theoretical-methodological distinctions that crowd around the notions of "fact" and "value"–for example, analytic and synthetic, descriptive and normative, pragmatic and epistemic–in reality refer to coextensive aspects of scientific activity.

That this means promoting a widening of the very concept of rationality, renouncing any attempt to find an Archimedean point by which science, as its typical expression, would be supported, seems evident if one considers the intertwining of those notions with the problem of the foundations of scientific propositions, with respect to which problem the so-called *non-standard* epistemologies, taken as a whole, express a tendency to drop the classical opposition between empiricism and rationalism.

More generally, there is a tendency to take leave of any search for an "objective" *primum*, which has usually accompanied, throughout the course of our philosophical tradition, the definition of the ideas of knowledge and rationality. To attenuate the split between the empirical and the logical-rational components of scientific knowledge–to recognize, in other words, their inevitable interference, relying on the by now classic concept of *thick description*--in this sense represents one of the paradigmatic strategies through which, in substance, challenges have been made against the core of traditional formulations of the gnosilogical problem, that is, the nexus between the notion of "final" foundation and the validity justification of the propositions used to express knowledge. In other words, what has been definitively rejected is the particular foundationist requirement, inherent in both the empiricist and rationalist versions of the "mirror" idea of knowing: its double intertwining with the question of its foundation, explained, on the one hand, by the ontological-metaphysical postulate that a sensory or non-material reality exists independently of the knowing individual, and, on the other hand, by the gnosilogical presupposition that there is some function or ability beginning with which the meeting between the human mind and the truth takes form.

Despite great changes in perspective, this theoretical background still permeates the realm of contemporary thought. Just call to mind B. Russell's theory of "propositional knowledge," with which he tries to join together, under the notion of foundation, the justification of knowledge *by acquaintance*, or knowledge of things brought about by direct experience, and knowledge *by description*, namely, knowledge of logical entities (Eames & Blackwell, 1984). It is not by chance that a critique of this aspect of Russell's thought constitutes an integral part of the restructuring that the problem of the foundations of knowledge undergoes, as I will try to make clear, in Wittgenstein, a restructuring to which the objections to the rigid opposition between "facts" and "values" advanced by recent relativist epistemologies make more or less explicit reference.

One certainly cannot fail to note that the "value" category seems to have even supplanted that of "fact" in some of those inflexions of epistemic relativism that assign a determining role to the social, economic and political aspects with which the scientific enterprise is involved, or, at least, give them much more important weight than that accorded to more properly cognitive elements. Nor can one ignore the irrationalist thrusts that might find space within a version like R. Rorty's, who invites one to "think of science in such a way that its being 'based on values' gives rise to no surprise at all."

In implementing his anti-foundationist program, in fact, Rorty works at dissolving the logical-semantic opposition between "fact" and "value," displacing both of those notions from the plane of their presumed correspondence with distinct ontological domains to that of different linguistic games which, in their mutual interference and functionality, comprise–as he maintains–the development of an education. His thesis is, therefore, that propositions concerning the "facts of external reality," the world that "is there outside" with which scientists, one presumes, are dealing, can be legitimized solely as an expression of what has been "constructed" in the course of the whole of those linguistic and social practices that set in along the way, above all, therefore, in reference to those values shared and reinforced by the community (Rorty, 1979, Chapter 5).

Rorty's position exemplifies–though in a radicalized contingentist sense–those requirements characteristic of the pragmatic thread that epistemic relativism includes as one of its most vital expressions. In very general terms, this can be defined as the tendency to bring to the forefront the concrete character of all that pertains to the specific, "rational" figure of the human individual, namely, the pragmatic, communitarian, and, therefore, historical-evolutionary, nature of his logical and semantic tools. This insistence on concreteness and historicity sheds an interesting light

on the issue of "sociality," since it obviously involves the idea of language as an exquisitely inter-subjective dimension, an idea around which unravel the critiques of the neo-Positivist dogma of the heterogeneity of "value judgments" compared to the criteria for producing and developing scientific knowledge[1]. This attention paid to the plane of those requirements and meanings that are backed by the community, as an essential part of his thought on knowledge, leads, on one hand, to a confirmation of the inescapability of the inter-subjective dimension and, hence, in some way, to its presentation as something of a load-bearing structure, an "objective fact," of human reality; and it leads, on the other, to an observation of its exquisitely normative value: in other words, "sociality" is taken on as the parameter of the very meaning that the notion of rationality assumes in that light. Moreover, precisely because "sociality" is inserted in a historical-evolutionary perspective that implies the recognition of the internal dynamism of social relations, and thus the plurality of their aspects, it also appears as a topic that requires a "descriptive" attitude, i.e. an attitude which, by definition, includes the dismantling of essentialism, and therefore of the static and mechanical conception of the theoretical and operative apparatuses of human intelligence.

Perhaps it is superfluous to state that the exchange of the idea of "foundation" with that of "description" is an attempt to express, in principle, a rejection of dogmatism that, under various names, can occur both in the field of science and in that of philosophy. And yet, one cannot help but highlight that subtle form of dogmatism which, in spite of everything, seeps in whenever the descriptive method is invoked as the most fitting one to contest the ontological-metaphysical requirement of traditional thought. In its capacity as a methodological norm both in science and in philosophy, an underground tangle, in fact, enmeshing "description," "empirical facts" and "certainty" insinuates itself, a tangle that risks nullifying the very meaning of that contrast, precisely because it acts to make the descriptive attitude a vehicle for the definitory mentality of essentialism, which it would claim, instead, to eliminate for us.

In this regard, Wittgenstein's attempt to consign a clearly anti-essentialist charter to the descriptive method seems particularly significant, precisely because he tries to divide the nexus between "empirical/descriptive" and "certain." He assigns to propositions that describe empirical facts a "fluid" character, that is, a validity which is never self-sufficient, and he reserves, instead, the qualification as certitude to "systematic propositions"; or to the series of assertions that constitute the inherited backdrop against which the events of our knowing are played out, including what is more genuinely scientific.

The pages of *On Certainty* where Wittgenstein arrives at this position are aimed, in substance, at removing the very idea of "certainty" from the epistemological framework, to make room for a *pragmatic notion of foundation*, according to which all that we find to be undoubtedly certain is, in reality, "epistemically unfounded". This does not mean giving oneself over to irrationalism, but simply recognizing that the justification for the wealth of certainties in which our life is rooted lies in praxes and, therefore, should be sought in the domain of practical reason (here I cite phrases taken from Egidi, 1998).

It is not worth insisting on the anti-dogmatic weight of such a point of view, which, on one hand, implies a strong reduction in the scientific expectations by which philosophy, too, sometimes lets itself be charmed; on the other, it answers the challenges of skepticism, by recovering the notion of foundation in the form of the concrete and multifaceted nature of doing, which is one and the same as our linguistic games and, therefore, intermingles with every expression of human intelligence, including the most highly sophisticated ones.

This resolution of the question of certainty in the pragmatic sense clearly is matched by a restructuring of the concept of "*normative*". By assigning a normative function to the beliefs that we hold to be certain, Wittgenstein, in effect, drops the ontological perspective, for which "normative" would have to do with the immediate intuition of abstract entities *a priori*, as happens, for example, in Frege, or in Russell's "propositional theory," which, as has been mentioned, is one of the polemical goals of *On Certainty*. In particular, what falls away during Wittgenstein's analysis is the rigid character of the notion of the normative, its meaning as a pre-determining logical "datum," from which Wittgenstein distances himself, relying, instead, on the flexibility of language, on the various functions that our propositions can play in linguistic praxes and relying, therefore, on a functional, not ontological, distinction between normative and descriptive. This is synthesized in Paragraph 98, which follows:

> But this is right: the same proposition can be treated one time as a proposition to be checked against experience and another time as a rule for checking it (Wittgenstein, Ascombe & Wright, 1969, par. 98).

Analogous to what happens with the concept of foundation, in short, here there is a connection between the idea of the normative and that of the concrete in a linguistic praxis and the games that include it, a connection that was already quite present in the pages of *Philosophical Investigations* where Wittgenstein examines the notion of rule, supporting the so-called *community view*, according to which the normative character of rules, including mathematical ones, derives from the consolidation of a certain

"practice," from a community's "use" of the rules themselves (Wittgenstein, 1953, par. 199, 201, 202, 206).

More exactly, Wittgenstein wants to show that rules function, and even "exist" as such, precisely by virtue of their repeated application in ways that are determining and collectively shared, and not because they would constitute a kind of "logical machine" containing, *a priori* and definitively, the mechanisms for their own employ (Wittgenstein, 1953, par. 193-197). The "Normative," that is, should be understood by disregarding the idea that there is some pre-established, and, therefore, pre-determining, structure to our ways of operating, since it is, rather, the progressive consolidation of some of these that determine the normative value of the rules. This consolidation, therefore, is never definitive; that is, it never precludes further possibilities or developments, precisely because it has to do with the never completely finished character of human effectiveness (Kripke, 1971).

Once again, all this does not mean surrendering oneself to mere contingency or denying the logical necessity value of rules, but, rather, recognizing in praxis an inescapable point of reference for clarifying the salient motives of our knowing, if not even for considering the concrete attitudes of the human community as the *terminus a quo* and *ad quem* of our reflections on the very notion of rationality.

2. The "Sociality" Category in the Pragmatism of Charles S. Peirce

In the light of these schematic considerations, I will try to show that the shift from the ontological distinction between "empirical-descriptive" and "logical-normative" to the logical-functional one represents the argumentative strategy of the "sociality" criterion employed in Ch. S. Peirce's so-called "logical socialism". It is opportune to point out that the latter consists, for the most part, in deploying two aspects that are closely interconnected and especially meaningful with respect to the development of Twentieth Century theories of rationality: (i) the critique of the logical-epistemic value of the criterion of immediate intuition, whether sensory or intellectual, which he conducts thoroughly and using original arguments (see Calcaterra, 1994, 1996), and (ii) the search for an alternative to models of rationality centered on the "first person"–in short, an alternative to the theories of knowledge based on the ego considered as a "mirroring essence," to use Rorty's expression, or as a system of *a priori* functions.

These two aspects, as is well known, are condensed into the idea of the procedural and, at the same time, "public" character of the very concepts of reality and truth, backed by Peirce's own identification of logic with cognitive semiotics. In short, reality and truth

are considered, not as presuppositions of the human mind, but as results or points of arrival, always partial ones, in a process of "sign inferences": in other words, they carry out the logical signifieds that are formed along the path of the cognitive experiences of human society and that find their fulcrum in the concrete actions of human individuals, in acting, of which the very ability to think and theorize is, for Peirce, an intrinsic aspect. This process is, in principle, "infinite"; that is, it is impossible to identify its absolutely original foundation, nor can its results be considered definitive, precisely because it involves the dynamics of the signs with which thought always must deal: the prior understanding of things which every sign delineates, as well as the multiple interpretive possibilities that it entails.

These are, in essence, the benchmarks of Peirce's conception of rationality as he refined it in the two famous essays, "The Fixation of Belief" (CP 5.358-387, 1877) and "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (CP 5.388-410, 1878), usually considered as the manifestos of Pragmatism. In this context, it is possible to retrace a form of naturalism that prefigures the functional distinction between "empirical-descriptive" and "logical-normative," to show, at the end, the epistemic and normative role of the "sociality" criterion. In particular, it concerns specifying the "sociality" category as the pivotal point in that relation, so to speak, of continuity-in-difference between nature and rationality, which Peirce outlines here.

It is appropriate to recall that the aforementioned essays belong to a group of six texts planned as chapters of an uncompleted book which Peirce would have called *Illustrations of Logic of Science*. In reality, they propose, taken as a whole, a general theory of logic, whose salient aspects are deduced from the methodology of scientific research. The question implicit in this whole discussion–which concerns, in essence, the relation between empirical science and the functioning of the human mind–is analogous to Kant's classic question: what is it that justifies the success of the scientific method and, conversely, the lack of success of metaphysics and traditional logic? Put more generally, of what does rationality consist?

As is well known, Peirce answered this last question by formulating the "pragmatic principle": what has to do with rationality, that is, the concept or meaning, is not to be sought in an *a priori* definition, but instead in conduct, namely, in what we are prepared to do based on a concept/belief (CP 5.400-402). On the other hand, the most important philosophical problem does not lie in the fact that we act on the basis of beliefs, of concepts or opinions about the things that surround us and about the problems that concern us as individuals or members of a community (the *doxa*), but, rather, in seeing

what method used to "fix the beliefs" best expresses the exercise of a series of functions and possibilities that are thought relevant to the specific nature of the human individual, or to all that to which one generally refers using the term "rationality".

From a general point of view, the problem of identifying the most "rational" method for obtaining beliefs is, indeed, one and the same as the way of understanding that particularity. Hence come the various directives of thought that can generically be defined as "pre-Darwinian" and those that, instead, adopt as their own the philosophical implications of evolutionary biology, at least to the extent that they institute a logical-semantic network, according to which the particularity of the human being, or his rationality, is not understood in terms of absolute heterogeneity with respect to the framework of the natural world. The fact, then, that this type of formulation of the problem and those that take advantage of a "pre-" or a "post-" Darwinian conceptuality both imply a reference to some sort of meta-belief concerning the position of man in the universe, is a matter I will simply limit myself to noting.

For purposes that are merely indicative, it is useful to recall the two main requirements that intervene in "post-Darwinian" naturalist perspectives. I am referring, first of all, to the fact that, taking rationality as a biological function, even though completely *sui generis*, those perspectives tend to assign a primary role to beliefs that deal with knowledge of the physical environment, concerning which the human individual finds it necessary to look for possibilities for acting in the way best suited to ensure his or her own conditions for life. In addition, there is the requirement that rational procedures be reducible to the psychological laws that come to be defined over time as constituting human nature; in other words, the affirmation that the laws of logic are subordinate to psychological circumstances and to the psycho-physical mechanisms that preside over the way human beings reason. Identifying the naturalist vein that runs through Peirce's approach to the theme of rationality also means measuring its potential with respect to these two "classic" aspects of naturalism[2].

The argument Peirce offers in "The Fixation of Belief" revolves around the idea that thought activity is carried out in the dialectic between doubt and belief: in the alternation of two mental states which–as he points out immediately–denote the direct practical implications of logic, and not merely the formal poles of a theoretical function. Doubt and belief, in fact, come to correspond, one to a state of uncertainty on the behavioral level, and from which, therefore, we "struggle" to emerge, the other to "a calm and satisfying state" which we try to maintain "because it puts us in a condition to behave in a certain way". Belief is, in summary, "a rule of action," "a behavioral habit,"

as well as a thought content that functions as a "guiding principle" in logical inferences. Doubt, instead, precisely as a psychological-practical condition that is in no way negative, or as a "real and living doubt" and not a mere methodological principle –as Peirce will underscore in his polemic with Descartes (CP 5.376; 5.265)– is the engine behind the search for beliefs "on which to model our actions," a search that constitutes, in his view, the primary purpose of thought activity (CP 5.370-377).

But how is it possible to distinguish the degree of validity for beliefs, beyond their common psychological-practical implication? It is at this level that the "sociality" category appears in its double meaning of empirical-descriptive and logical-normative criterion. It is, in fact, basically according to this category that Peirce "describes" the principal methods that lead to the establishment of beliefs and, at the same time, puts them in hierarchical order, in view of his defense of the exquisitely rational role that "sociality" can play.

The conceptual strategy he adopts for that purpose consists of showing the relationship that each method institutes between the psychological mechanism implicit in our search for beliefs and the possibility that the latter could really be valid representations of something, or, in Peirce's language, beliefs which will reveal themselves true in the *long run*, that is, approximating the ideal *final opinion of unlimited community* of rational inquirers, who continuously try to the challenges of the doubts humans encounter over time in their inevitable confrontation with things and with others[3].

For this reason, we see that the first two methods he considers, which he calls those of "tenacity" and of "authority," clearly mirror a tendency to refuse systematically to expose oneself to the risks of doubt, a refusal which is expressed, respectively, in a stubborn attachment to one's personal opinions and in the slavish observance of beliefs imposed by some authority, such as the State, religion, or current morality. In both cases, more than anything else, it is to the satisfaction of a psychological need to make oneself secure that the fact of having beliefs is strictly tied, with the difference that, while the " tenacity method"–a metaphor for the most exaggerated individualism–is destined to fail because it is in obvious contrast with the "social impulse," that of "authority" at least has the advantage of overcoming individual idiosyncrasies in order to favor the social group's stability. This method, too, however, shows that it cannot be sustained for long: in fact, it is usually accompanied by cruelties that are unacceptable "in the eyes of any rational man," and though "the mass of mankind" might prefer to be the slave of pre-constituted opinions, there will always be individuals animated by greater intellectual freedom and by a "wider sort of social feeling," which will lead them

to compare the customs of various communities, to doubt their own system of beliefs, and, finally, to influence others with their own doubts (CP 5.377-381).

Then there is the method of the "*a priori*," which certainly is "far more respectable from the point of view of reason," because it expresses an attempt to "deliver our opinions from their accidental and capricious element," an attempt carried on in the name of universal principles of truth. But this method, when viewed closely, does nothing but reproduce in another form the negative aspects of the preceding ones, since it uses the dogmatic criteria of mathematical logic, disregarding any factual comparison and appealing to the presumed immediate truth of certain subjective ideas which, instead, in the majority of cases, simply mirror the apparatus of convictions and habits established in a given socio-cultural context (CP 5.382-383).

It is important to specify that this negative characterization of *a priori* "truth" certainly is not equivalent to a denial of the logical value of beliefs or ways of thinking and acting that are well-established socially. Rather, Peirce here is alluding to the confusion, in his opinion typical of the "transcendentalists," between *a priori* truths and the certainties of common sense, concerning which he takes a position analogous to that of Wittgenstein concerning so-called "systematic propositions". More generally, this is a matter of reassessing the very notion of *a priori* logical principles in the light of a critique of transcendentalism which, above all in Peirce's mature writings, will be clarified by his emphasis on the normative character of logic[4]. Within this framework, in fact, should be placed his propensity to refer some of the Kantian logical principles to the series of common sense beliefs regarding empirical reality, to which he assigns, in fact, a logical-normative, pragmatically grounded function: although such beliefs cannot be traced back to an authentic process of factual research, but rather to a set of observations that are unverifiable but still have not been contradicted by experience, those beliefs might acquire the value of certainty and function as "first principles," for which it would be possible to require neither logical legitimization nor a metaphysical explanation (see Hookway, 1993; Tiercelin, 1997).

The last method that "The Fixation of Belief" takes in consideration is the "method of science," whose specific characteristic is "the conception of truth as something public." Its acquisitions are the fruit of a research that climbs over the mere psychological need for stability implicit in the other methods, having, rather, to do with the *critical exercise of thought*; hence, it is not content with reassuring beliefs, nor does it forego investigating their objective bases, for fear that they "may turn out rotten". The method of science is, in fact, for Peirce, a synthesis of logic and experience which, by taking

advantage of its realistic presupposition as a methodological norm, manages best to express the common requirement that opinions coincide with "real facts," which will be precisely those that establish themselves regardless of the contingent determinations and particular ends of single individuals.

The "public" concept of truth is, in few words, an immediate implication of the realist hypothesis assumed by science as the criterion for verifying its own propositions, and it is precisely in this sense that the notion of "sociality" comes to take on a *normative meaning* that displaces the descriptive function contained in the analysis of the four methods. More exactly, the "sociality" criterion here emerges as a necessary norm and a validity criterion for scientific procedure, which Peirce certainly points to as the most fruitful for obtaining beliefs, so much so that he maintains it should become a "true and proper life choice".

Leaving aside for the moment the ethical meaning that the "sociality" category thus takes on, it is necessary to clarify whether its utilization in terms of logical-epistemic normativity derives from the generalization of an empirical observation, that is, whether it consists of the pure and simple transposition of a natural tendency onto the logical-normative level. From the answer to this question, actually, depends our interpretation of the "public" concept of truth in terms of mere conventionalism or in a more solid, epistemological sense, in other words, as a necessary condition for the gnosilogical validity of propositions obtained using it. My interpretive hypothesis is that, in support of the second alternative, there is a host of reasons that, taken as a whole, contribute to showing Peirce's distance, in the matter of logic, from reductionist naturalism.

One of the first considerations concerns the fact that, as we observed earlier, the appeal to "sociality" is, in effect, the cornerstone of validity distinction in the four methods for fixing beliefs. On one hand, that could imply that the science method has greater validity precisely because it *structurally* involves the "public" concept of truth and, therefore, corresponds to a general tendency in humans, empirically detectable–that is, to the fact that humans usually tend to answer their own doubts when debating with others. It would, therefore, in this sense be a matter of proposing a certain homogeneity between the natural and the rational planes.

Nevertheless, considering the interdependence of the social criterion for truth and the realistic hypothesis as a methodological rule no less necessary for scientific research, one notes, in effect, that Peirce suggests the precariousness of the natural plane, setting aside the essentialist meaning of both the concept of human nature and that of rationality. What counts more for our purposes is, in other words, that the social

impulse which, according to Peirce, humans generally demonstrate, presents itself, not as a self-sufficient "objective fact," a substantial, and therefore self-guaranteed and pre-determining, given, but rather as something that in itself is always subject to the risk of being nullified in the search for beliefs that only provide immediate satisfaction of the psychological need for security. For the rest, on various occasions, both before and after the composition of "The Fixation of Belief," he denies that the *feeling* of satisfaction, like any other feeling as such, can contribute to ascertaining the validity of a belief or of an argument (for a discussion of this aspect and the related textual references, see Kasser, 1999).

One further observation concerns the semiotic approach in Peirce's thought, the fundamental features of which had already been formulated in the so-called anti-Cartesian essays, which predate the text under consideration by about ten years (cf. note 17 above). Keeping in mind especially the distinction between "demonstrative application" and "representative function" that runs through his analysis of the properties of signs, we could also say that "sociality" emerges as a sign that is only potentially indicative of human nature: a pure, representative provision that has, in itself, no objective referent but only opens the possibility for the signified that each sign implies and that, however, can take form only when it enters into the dynamics of thought, hence, into the chain of logical mediations through which, inevitably, its ability to be of value passes as the actual representation of some reality (cf. CP 5.283-289; see also the notion of "index" in Manuscript N. 404, published in part in CP 2.281; 2.285; 2.297-302).

If we then look at the more mature developments in Peirce's theory of signs, to consider "sociality" as a "natural" aspect of the human being means precisely to identify it with the logical-ontological category of possibility, with the *firstness* that Peirce designates as the pure and simple provision of a "quality" of the real, for which the possibility of its taking form implies the aggregate developments of its sign relations, which involve, in his opinion, both the natural plane and that of logical activities. Setting aside whether such a cosmological vision of the semiotic process is plausible or not, the deeper *raison d'être* of the anti-dualism that characterizes his philosophy, even from the methodological point of view, remains in "synechism": the principle of the continuity among the various spheres of the existent. In any case, what it interests us to underscore for our argument is that to speak of continuity between the natural sphere of man and the rational sphere means, from Peirce's perspective, adhering to the ideal of the growth of concrete rationality and, therefore, promoting a form of life that

encourages it. As for "sociality," Peirce's point of view suggests that its ability to have value as a "real fact" of human nature is inseparable from the normative of the rational requirement, that is, from the role that the exercise of rationality plays with respect to the insertion of certain "natural" possibilities in the continuum of reality, in other words, from its presentation as a tendency to generalize the accomplishable events that prove to be more fruitful and those behavioral habits that ratify them.

One might object that, precisely by maintaining this point of view, one would not in any way exclude the merely psychological interpretation of the "public" concept of truth: the social instinct could, indeed, be understood as the necessary presupposition for the feelings of pleasure and displeasure, approval and disapproval, which emerge in the course of our relations and which could be taken up as the *raison d'être* of the propositions we are prepared to consider valid. But Peirce's so-called "logical socialism" tends precisely to reject this possibility. The question of natural feelings, of psychological states in which the dialectic of doubt and belief that nourishes our reasoning is rooted, is, in truth, detached from the problem of the "rational" validity of our thought processes. What really counts on this final side of the coin is not the mere feeling that our thinking is coherent with that of others, but rather the ability to judge whether our way of thinking and that of the others is correct, to evaluate the correctness of our reasoning, keeping in mind the "resistance" that factual experience can put in opposition to our thinking and acting as time goes on and that, therefore, cross over the level of natural impulses, including the one where we find ourselves agreeing with those who surround us. In summary, to speak of continuity between the natural sphere and the rational sphere does not necessarily imply that they overlap. The exercise of rationality is, in itself, a particular form of conduct, a "verified" and "thought-out" way of proceeding, one that is, therefore, aware and selective, also with regard to the more immediate pressures of human natural attitudes (see Calcaterra, 1989, pp. 133-145).

For the rest, there is no guarantee that social instinct or feeling will not decrease in the course of the evolution of the human species, which is no less uncertain than the path of logic, for which "a main road does not exist," as Peirce states in an important text, "Grounds of Validity of the Law of Logic," (cf. note 17 above) which predates "The Fixation of Belief" by about ten years. That is, we *do not possess any safe rule* for carrying out our thought and our conduct; in other words, *there is no certain criterion for rationality*. We can only have trust in the probability that the future experience of the human community will validate our logical and practical inferences. This is the sense

of the "social foundation of logic" of which he speaks in this context: if one considers the fallibility in principle that logic brings with itself, namely, the possibility that our inferences could also not find any confirmation in the future, the "sociality" criterion even presents itself as the sole rational criterion that can, in fact, be justified.

The justification of its validity cannot, however, be anything but exquisitely pragmatic. It is, therefore, to be sought on the side of praxis, or in the functioning of the "sociality" category in a practice of searching for beliefs, one that shows itself to be a vehicle for emancipation from personal and group idiosyncrasies, for awareness of the possibility of error that ensues from the acceptance of a lack of certain foundations for our knowledge, hence as a vehicle for anti-dogmatism–in other words, a theoretical and practical attitude in which the Cartesian search for static certainties gives way to the dynamism of reasoning, to that continuous openness to new perspectives of meaning and action, which can find concrete exemplification in the evolution of scientific activity and of its very tools for investigation. The social principle, in short, emerges, on one side, as the price we pay for awareness of the limits of rationality, of our inability to have immediate access to truth and reality–in other words, the price for the fact that we always find ourselves having to operate on the basis of the sign/interpretation character of our concepts. On the other side, sociality emerges as something on which to graft their very use and meaning, the multiple possibilities for theoretical and practical developments that accompany our figure as "artificers of knowledge".

Understood in this way, "sociality" obviously acquires an ethical valence that certainly exceeds its epistemological one, but in which, however, it can find adequate reasons for support (on the relationship between science and ethics regarding Peirce's suggestions, see Calcaterra, 1989, chapter 7). In any case, it could be said, following Donald Davidson, that, since truth and objectivity are concepts that arise from the reciprocity of relations between persons and relations with physical things, the principle of "sociality" requires no foundation, but it is simply to be described, in Wittgenstein's sense of the term, and still to be privileged as a means of correcting our beliefs. In other words, it is a principle that could serve to set aside those beliefs that prove to be arguable in the light of a conception of rationality that certainly does not allow absolute criteria of truth–though neither does it absolutize the normative value of the conventions and customs of individual social orders–to rely instead on the possibility of interpersonal and intercultural understanding, which derives from the fact of being acknowledged as rational individuals, that is, endowed with intentions, desires, material needs, and abstract requirements[5].

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Notes

1. The statements for which neo-Positivism takes on a "dogmatic" character as a whole are in turn effectively criticized in (Friedman, 1999) ↵
2. As for the US context, a useful overview can be found in (Ryder, 1994) ↵
3. This is the meaning, extremely simplified, of the fallibilism that Peirce outlines in the last of his three "anti-Cartesian" essays in 1868: "Question Concerning Some Faculties Claimed for Man (CP 5.213-5.263), Some Consequences of Four Incapacities (CP 5.264-5.317), and "Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic: Further Consequences of Four Incapacities (CP 5.318-357) ↵
4. Peirce elsewhere defines the transcendental method as a form of "occultism" (CP 3.422). From Peirce's dense annotation in 1893 (CP 5.383, n.) it is clear that the criticisms of the "a priori method" raised in "The Fixation of Belief" concern, besides Descartes and Plato, who are named explicitly, also the philosophy of Kant. Even though on many occasions he acknowledges his debt to Kant, he shows that he rejects the central aspect of Kant's perspective, namely, the idea that the demonstration of logical presuppositions, of a priori conditions, of experiential knowledge legitimizes their own truth (CP 2.113); the transcendental concept of logical principles as constitutive elements of knowledge is replaced by Peirce's decisive assertion that "every principle of logic is a Regulative Principle and nothing more" (CP 3.371, Eisele 1976). As De Tienne (1966) observes, the anti-transcendentalism which Peirce, in reality, declares from his youthful writings on, consists of a radical disagreement with Kant's expectation to be able to establish what the mind does

"normally," disregarding the interactive and dynamic character of experiential knowledge, which Peirce supports, instead. On the contrary, K. O. Apel (1973) insists on the continuity between Peirce's entire opus and Kant's transcendentalism: besides maintaining that there is a substantial analogy between many passages in Peirce's writings on logic and epistemology and the main arguments of the Critique of Pure Reason, he affirms that Peirce would have achieved the transformation of critical philosophy by replacing "transcendental logic" with "transcendental semiotics". ↵

5. Peirce's gnosilogy can be considered an anticipation of the "triangular externalism" of D. Davidson (see Davidson 1986, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1994) ↵