The Red Book

THE BEGINNING OF POSTMODERN TIMES

OR:

CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE AND THE RECOVERY OF *SIGNUM*

John Deely
Visiting Professor of Semiotics
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Text prepared for The Metaphysical Club
of the University of Helsinki
FIN–00014 Helsingen Yliopisto
Finland

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THE PAST AS PROLOGUE AND THE BOUNDARY OF TIME

The past is prologue to the present as the present is prologue to the future. But these terms need defining, not so much the term “prologue” as the terms “past”, “present”, and “future”, for they represent the divisions of time as a framework or measure for the pinpointing of events, and so have no fixity outside the very framework they provide. The “present”, famously, is the boundary separating past from future, but the very boundary itself is notoriously shifting, for it moves as we try to state it, as in answering the question, “What time is it?”, our answer works only to the degree that we allow it to lack precision. Were we to answer “Two o’clock”, indeed, by the time we gave the answer, two o’clock would already be past. As a practical matter, of course, our answer was good enough. But the theoretical and speculative point that it is impossible to state a present moment before that moment is past remains as the far more interesting point, ever deserving of consideration.

We need a broader notion of “present” than the instant joining past with future. The boundary of time that I would propose for the purposes of writing these pages is the lifetime of each of us gathered for the lectures to be based on these pages. As long as we, each of us, author and auditors, continue to live, we are entitled to speak of the “present”. The present, then, as I am defining it here, is the exclusive preserve of the living. The boundary of time is then the separation of the no longer living from the not yet dead, on the one side, and the further separation of the not yet dead from the not yet living, on the other side. The already dead define the past. The not yet living define the future. The not yet dead define the present.

By the device of these definitions, even though we are yet left with a shifting boundary both on the side of the past and on the side of the future, yet the interval between past and future, the present, is long enough for us to work some matters out and perhaps even contribute to what will be the heritage of the past for those future inquirers who are not yet part of our present.

The Past as Prologue

If we take the English word "sign" and ask where it comes from, the answer is that it comes from Augustine of Hippo, the first thinker of record to forge a general notion of sign as a genus to which natural and cultural phenomena alike are species. This is so, at least, if we can trust the results of the team of researchers who have worked the fields of ancient thought from a semiotic point of view under the guidance and tutelage of the celebrated Italian scholar and Bologna Professor, Umberto Eco. Sign in the current sense, particularly as it is of interest to semiotics, therefore, comes from the Latin *signum*.

"Semiotics" as an English word is more problematic. But we may nonetheless say that it comes to us from a kind of bastard Greek coinage made by John Locke in the *Essay concerning Humane Understanding* that he published in 1690, where, at the conclusion of his book, he proposed Σημιωτικὴ as the one-word equivalent of the English expression, "doctrine of signs". Locke's term may have come indirectly from a Greek medical dictionary.[1] In any case, as the term appears in Locke, it is malformed. By the applicable requirements of Greek grammar, it should have had an epsilon separating the mu from the iota, which it did not. Nor can this malformation be dismissed as a printer's error; for, in every subsequent edition of the *Essay* prepared by Locke prior to his being overtaken by the boundary of time and made a definitively *past* author, the original malformation is meticulously maintained.

Now it is interesting that "semiotics" is not a straight transliteration of Locke's Greek malformation. What *is* a straight transliteration of the Greek malformation Locke introduced, however, is the Latin term "*semiotica*", which no Latin author ever used. So the term, a Greek malformation in Locke's *Essay*, is in effect a neologism in Latin transliteration, but it means in English "the doctrine of signs", according to the only definition Locke provided in his original introduction of and comment upon the term.

The reason that this detour through the Latin transliteration of Locke's Greek malformation is interesting is because "semiotica" as Latin neologism would be a neuter plural name that could only be translated into English as "semiotics". Professional linguists have been careful to point out that there is in English a class of "-ics" words which do not conform to the usual rule that an English noun is made plural by adding an "s" to its ending.[2] By this reckoning, "semiotics" is not

[1] Cf. Luigi Romeo, "The Derivation of 'Semiotics' through the History of the Discipline", in *Semiosis* 6 (1977), Heft 2, 37-49.

[2] "At least a part of the confusion which learners experience in handling the *-ics* words ... is caused by the fact that no dictionary makes clear that the final *-s* in these words, no matter what its origin, is not identical with the familiar plural morpheme of nouns which happens to be homonymous with it" (Archibald Hill, "The Use of Dictionaries in Language

the plural form of "semiotic". Nonetheless, "semiotics" is the direct English transliteration of the Latin "semiotica", which is turn is the direct transliteration of the Greek malformation Locke introduced into the closing chapter of his *Essay*.

So a Latin, rather than a Greek, background proves etymologically decisive for sign and semiotics alike as contemporary notions, despite Locke's conscious choice of the Greek root (*sem*-) for the notion of "natural sign" (*semeion*) in his one-word summation or name (*semiotike*) for the doctrine of signs.

Of course, the Greek philosophical contribution to what would eventually take form in contemporary culture as an explicit attempt to develop the doctrine of signs can hardly be underestimated, particularly in Aristotle's doctrine of categories, for example, with his sharp development of the contrast between subjective being in the doctrine of substance and suprasubjective being in the doctrine of relation. But it remains that it is first in the late 4th century Latin of Augustine that the general notion of sign appears, and that it is first in the early 17th century Latin of Poinsot that this general notion is vindicated as more than a nominalism. Contemporaneously, the Latin Age itself recedes into the past as modern philosophers with their nominalistic doctrine of ideas as the objects of direct experience take control of European intellectual development.

By the time Charles Peirce passed from the status of future, that is, not yet living, to the status of present contributor to philosophical discussion, the Latin notion of *signum*, its origin, development, and vindication over the 1200 or so years of the Latin Age, had passed into oblivion, forgotten to all present contributors to the discussion of philosophy. Peirce, as we will see, proved not to be a typical modern. He did not contemn the past of philosophy, in particular its Latin past. He undertook instead to explore it. And, though his explorations did not reach as far as the work of Poinsot, they did come upon Poinsot's principal teachers and predecessors in the matter of the doctrine of signs, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and the Conimbricenses.

As a result, Peirce was able to recover the Latin notion of *signum* very nearly at the point where the Latins had left it, that is to say, at the point where it had been realized and definitively explained that *signs* strictly speaking are not their sensible or psychological vehicle, but that this vehicle, loosely called a "sign" (especially in the case where it is a sensible object), is but the subjective foundation or ground for an irreducibly triadic relation which, in its proper being, is not subjective but suprasubjective in linking its subject term to a terminus or object signified as represented to some observer, prospective or actual in *its* subjective being. Thus, while both the

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Teaching", *Language Learning* 1 [1948], 9–13).

sign vehicle and the observer when actual are subjective beings, the sign itself is always and irreducibly suprasubjective. And the "object signified" or significate of the sign is itself always and irreducibly sustained as the direct terminus of a triadic relation regardless of whether it has any subjective being at all as an immediate part of its objective being, its "objectivity", or status as signified.

If the most important development for the immediate future of philosophy is to be, as I believe, the realization of the centrality of the doctrine of signs to the understanding of being and experience for human animals, then Peirce's recovery of the notion of *signum* for the Latins may be said to have marked the beginning of new age in philosophy. For, as we shall see, by overcoming the forgottenness of *signum*, Peirce also destroyed the common foundation upon which the mainstream modern philosophers, from Descartes and Locke to Kant, analytic philosophy and phenomenology in our own day, had constantly built. There are some today, culminating modernity with its doctrine that only the mind's own constructions are properly said to be known, who have coined the phrase "postmodern" to advertise their stance. But the coinage cannot conceal the stipulation which guarantees that these would-be postmoderns are nothing more than surviving remnants of a dying age.

The Boundary of Time

Postmodern times began in philosophy with Peirce's doctrine of categories. And Peirce's doctrine of categories, in turn, is rooted in the Latin doctrine that relation is unique among the modes of being in being objectively indifferent to the subjective ground, physical or psychical, which makes the relation actual under any given set of circumstances. In other words, postmodernity and semiotics are of a piece, even though "semiotics" is destined to be a permanent name for the major development of philosophy whose present has arrived in our lifetimes, while "postmodern" is destined to be a temporary term of fashion which serves relatively to call attention to the need to make intelligible the boundary which separates the presemiotic past of modern philosophy from the semiotic present of philosophy insofar as philosophy is truly contemporary.

So, while "sign" as a term connects us especially and directly with our Latin past, "semiotics" as a term connects us with the Latin past only indirectly, as it connects us also indirectly with our Greek philosophical past and heritage. "Semiotic", however, as a term for the doctrine of signs does connect us directly with Charles Sanders Peirce, the first thinker to take up directly Locke's challenge at the close of his *Essay* to undertake the development of the doctrine of signs, and the

bringing of “words” and “ideas”, in particular — that is to say, both outward sensible manifestations and underlying psychological states of subjectivity — into the suprasubjective perspective of the sign in its proper being.

It is by virtue of this direct connection that Peirce is rightly known as the father, if not of the doctrine itself of signs, at least of the diversified intellectual movement called today “semiotics”; and it is something of the story and consequences of his recovery of the notion of sign from our Latin intellectual forebears that I want to explore for the present occasion.

Chapter 1

FIRST OF THE POSTMODERNS

Descartes succeeded in turning philosophy away from tradition and commentary on books toward the quite different book of experience itself. His interpretation of experience, as being directly of products of the mind's own making, it is true, resulted in a disastrous split between the ambitions of science to understand the book of nature and the convictions of philosophy that the world of things in themselves is unknowable. Philosophy thus came to play Mr. Hyde to science's Dr. Jekyll, a situation which we may take as a metaphor for modernity. But while philosophers became convinced that scientists could not possibly be doing what they naively took themselves to be doing for want of an understanding of the nature and limits of human knowledge, they also became settled in the Cartesian mindset that the study of the history of philosophy was by and large a waste of time. For the history of philosophy amounts to little more than the record of false starts and blind gropings toward the point the moderns had successfully formulated, namely, that reasoning upon experience can safely begin anew with the individual, without regard for the past.

Charles Peirce was an heir to modernity in philosophy, but he proved anything but an acquiescent one. He eventually came to undermine the twin pillars at the foundation of the modern outlook, the view that the mind can know nothing which it does not first itself construct, and the view that the predecessors to modernity, the scholastic Latins in particular, had nothing to offer the serious inquirer after philosophical truth and understanding. In doing this, he not only changed the epistemological paradigm out of which philosophy henceforward must work, but broke through the dead-end of the way of ideas to discover the much broader and more capacious way of signs, a traveler on which is obliged to visit both past and future companions (at least such as can be imagined, along with those of his future companions who succeed in crossing the boundary of time while it still includes the life of the traveler in question as present) in the search for philosophical understanding.

The Last of the Moderns ...

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) was the man who fully introduced into the great conversation of philosophy the unconsidered assumption which had made the way of ideas seem viable to the moderns, the assumption, namely, that the direct objects of experience are produced by the mind itself. In philosophy, he was raised on *The Critique of Pure Reason*. He claimed to know it by heart. When he said "No!" to Kant, it meant something.

Now why did he say no?

As a young teenager, he read in his brother's room Whateley's *Elements of Logic*, a work which, between 1826 and 1857, had gone through nine editions. But it is not likely, and for sure we have no record, that another student was as inspired by Whateley as was Peirce. From those early days, he later told his correspondent friend Lady Welby, his whole life became one long meditation on the nature and action of signs, one long investigation of the question first left hanging in the air by Augustine's posit at the turn of the 4th century that the sign has a general mode of being with respect to which both natural and cultural objects of signification stand as species.

And what a life. It was a tragedy, by any measure. It need not have been, but so it turned out. The first culprit was his father, but after that it was Peirce himself, with a few extra villains thrown in along the way. Notable in the cast was Simon Newcomb (1835–1909), whose reputation as a man of integrity is not likely to survive the coming to light of the details of the last years of Peirce's life.

Peirce's father taught him to indulge his genius and society be damned. But one would have expected Peirce at some point after fifty, if not sooner, to have unlearned so evil a lesson. He did not. But of all this and more you can read about for yourselves to form your own impressions, thanks to the work of Joseph Brent, whose own career was almost wrecked by his work as a graduate student to write Peirce's biography. This biography[3] finally came to publication thanks to Thomas Sebeok, who tracked Brent down in his later years, and thanks to John Gallman who, as Director of the Indiana University Press, overcame the decades long effort by Harvard University to prevent the Peirce biography from seeing the light of day. It is a sordid tale all around on the existential side, but on the side of thought and philosophy it becomes nonetheless a glorious one.

Here we will consider only the glorious side.

[3] Joseph L. Brent, *Charles Sanders Peirce. A Life* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993).

From the first, Peirce was a reader. He read everything, or tried to, particularly in the area of logic which, he tells us,[4] "in its general sense, is, as I believe I have shown, only another name for semiotic, the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs". Probably, almost certainly, we have been repeatedly told, he took this notion and term from the end of Locke's 1690 *Essay*. Nearly everyone is content with the assurances; but when the matter is put under a microscope, it proves impossible to tell for sure. There emerge from the nineteenth century mists of Peirce's childhood a debris of names and works in England and America and Europe[5] who were poking around in the semiotic wasteland which so many years on the way of ideas had created for the late moderns.

And Peirce violated the cardinal commandment of modernity: thou shalt not learn from the Latins. He read even there, and what he found, more than any single influence, revolutionized his philosophy. From Scotus in particular, but also from Fonseca and the Conimbricenses,[6] he picked up the trail of the sign. He was never able to follow it as far as the text of Poinsot. This would have been only a question of time, no doubt; but in 1914 Peirce's time ran out.

Nonetheless, what he picked up from the later Latins was more than enough to convince him that the way of signs, however buried in the underbrush it had become since the moderns made the mistake of going the way of ideas instead, was the road to the future. And in this future Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde might be cured of their schizophrenia, able to live at last in a world where one could be a scientist whose self-image would be that of a student of nature without accusation

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[4] c.1897.A fragment on semiotics, partially printed in CP 2.227 (following the standard procedure of abbreviating to CP and identifying the volume and paragraph number from the 8-volume set, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur W. Burks, published by Harvard University Press between 1931 and 1958).

[5] Thomas A. Sebeok has a beginning of the story in his *Semiotics in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). Yet more clues can be found in Shea Zellweger, "John James Van Nostrand and Sematology: Another Neglected Figure in American Semiotics", in *Semiotics 1990*, ed. Karen Haworth, John Deely, and Terry Prewitt (bound together with *"Symbolicity"*, ed. Jeff Bernard, John Deely, Vilmos Voigt, and Gloria Withalm; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 224-240; and "Before Peirce and Icon/Index/Symbol", in *Semiotic Scene* n.s. (Spring 1990), Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 3 (two columns).

In my own researches, embodied in a yet-unfinalized manuscript of some 52 pages under the title of "Why Semiotics?" developed over four days in the Library of Congress, I have found the matter inconclusive. It may even be that Peirce took the term "semeiotic" from p. 22 of a book by Augustus Rauch, *Psychology, or a View of the Human Soul, including Anthropology*s (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1840), still to be found in the Harvard library, published coincidentally in the first year of Peirce's life (as Poinsot's *Treatise* was published in Locke's birth-year).

[6] On Fonseca, see John Deely, *Introducing Semiotic. Its History and Doctrine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). On the Conimbricenses, see John P. Doyle, "The Conimbricenses on the Relations Involved in Signs", in *Semiotics 1984*, ed. John Deely (Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 567–576. On Scotus and other background figures, see Mauricio Beuchot and John Deely, "Common Sources for the Semiotic of Charles Peirce and John Poinsot", *Review of Metaphysics* XLVIII.3 (March), 539–566. On the importance of such background discussion, see John Deely, "Why Investigate the Common Sources of Charles Peirce and John Poinsot?", in *Semiotics 1994*, ed. C. W. Spinks and John Deely (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995), 34–50.

of naïvete and, at the same time, that of a philosopher without having to sneer in private at the folly of naturalists and common sense in thinking that the mind could reach beyond itself and pull in from the depths something of nature herself in her mind-independent insouciance toward the practical world of human affairs. In other words, it was Peirce's suspicion that the Lebenswelt into which culture, by the cumulative transmission of learning, had transformed the Umwelt of the linguistic animal, was yet not closed off from contact with and prospective knowledge about the mind-independent realities of the physical environment on which the linguistic animal, like any other, depends. The realm of what exists "noumenally" or "in itself"[7] and the realm of what exists "phenomenally" or "in appearances", he considered, are laced together by the action of signs in such a way that we can come to distinguish and know the one as part of and through the other by the critical control of objectivity that is the heart of science and philosophy alike beyond their differences of orientation

Fortunately, in setting off down his way of signs, Peirce did not have to re-invent the wheel. Drawing to a large extent on the same sources from which Poinsot had drawn, and being a man of scientific intelligence such as he had come to acknowledge the great scholastics also to have been — of which more anon — he quickly reached the substantially same conclusions that Poinsot had reached: that the sign consists not in a type of sensible thing but in a pure relation, irreducibly triadic, indifferent to the physical status of its object and to the source of its immediate provenance, nature or mind. Since all thought is in signs, and all signs are relations, the same bone which was related in nature to a dinosaur could come to be understood in thought as related to a dinosaur. The fact was inscribed in the being of the bone; thought had only to realize it.

He almost got a job at Johns Hopkins University as a tenured professor. Newcomb, playing on the Victorian conventions of the time, managed to turn that situation from victory to defeat. But in the five years he did have at Hopkins, Peirce had had in his class as a student John Dewey (1859–1952), as close to a household word as you can get in philosophy. And he had another friend of longer standing, every bit as celebrated as Dewey in the annals of American philosophy, William James (1842–1910), one of the heroes of the Peirce biography. Had it not been for James, and for Josiah Royce (1855–1916) as well, instead of pondering the way of signs today, we might all still be walking the way of ideas.

[7] I am aware of the technical differences between the *noumenon* and *ding-an-sich*, but they do not bear on the point here.

... and First of the Postmoderns

From Peirce, James and Dewey had picked up a new idea, "pragmatism". It seems to date back to the Autumn of 1874, and the gatherings of the group called "The Metaphysical Club", meeting, Peirce tells us,[8] "sometimes in my study, sometimes in that of William James". The group was a minor "who's who" of the period. I should mention that, in the particular of the idea for pragmatism, an especially influential source for the conception Peirce originally proposed was the Scottish philosopher, Alexander Bain (1818–1903), with his definition of belief as "that upon which a man is prepared to act". It was Nicholas St. John Green, a disciple of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), who, according to Peirce,[9] liked to push this definition. In Peirce's view, Bain thus becomes the grandfather of pragmatism, for "from this definition, pragmatism is scarce more than a corollary."

In any event, Peirce tells us that from the discussions of this little group he drew up the first paper under the name pragmatism. In his view the basic idea had a long lineage, which he traced, or thought to trace, in every significant thinker, on the ground that "Any philosophical doctrine that should be completely new could hardly fail to prove completely false", which is assuredly so. "The rivulets at the head of the river of pragmatism", in Peirce's view,[10] "are easily traced back to almost any desired antiquity".

But that was not the way James and Dewey saw the matter, and they were the ones to put the new label into effective circulation. They were the ones who made it famous. After them the term came to be considered quintessentially American, expressive of all that "Can do!" spirit and down-to-earth thinking on which we like to pride ourselves. Americans are "pragmatists". They invented pragmatism, by showing that meaning consists in action, in doing.

But Peirce himself looked with a certain horror on what "pragmatism" became along this line, even if it happened at the hands of his dear friend William James and his old student John Dewey. For James and Dewey, however, pragmatism was a way to continue the modern dismissive attitude toward the past, and particularly toward Latin scholasticism. The attitude was particularly strong in Dewey.[11] But we have also noted that this was a general attitude of modernity at least since Descartes, whose whole approach to philosophizing made indifference to historical knowledge a matter of principle.

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[8] c.1906: CP 5.12, "Historical Affinities and Genesis [of Pragmatism]" (title assigned by CP editors).

[9] Ibid.: CP 5.11.

[10] Ibid.

[11] See John Deely, "The Philosophical Dimensions of the Origin of Species", *The Thomist* XXXIII (January and April), Part I, 75–149, Part II, 251–342.

For Peirce, the matter was quite otherwise, and became the moreso as the years went by, as he became more and more clear about the centrality of a doctrine of signs for the future of philosophy. By 1905,[12] however, "after awaiting in vain, for a good many years, some particularly opportune conjuncture of circumstances that might serve to recommend his notions of the ethics of terminology," Peirce had had enough.

An ethics of terminology? What? An extraordinary notion. Not only did Peirce wait in vain for his contemporaries to take the point up, the point itself still waits in vain. Well, then, we shall take it up here. But not yet. Let us leave it to the end of the chapter, although we will note all along the way points where its rules would apply, to pique the reader's interest in this heretofore neglected topic. Should the reader find this method too frustrating, skip ahead to the final chapter where the ethical rules proposed by Peirce are stated in full.

Under the plan of making our work's end be the "particularly opportune conjuncture of circumstances that might serve to recommend his notions of the ethics of terminology," we will for the present stick to Peirce's own course of 1905, which was to drag the rules in, as he put it,[13] "over head and shoulders, on an occasion when he has no specific proposal to offer nor any feeling but satisfaction at the course usage has run without any canons or resolutions of a congress."

Taking *The Monist* for 1905 as his platform, and the proposition "What pragmatism is" as his lead, Peirce began the task of separating his views from those several contemporaries who, beginning with James, had commandeered in the public consciousness the banner of "Pragmatism". The body of that article, which the American philosophers united in refusing to hear, constituted a ringing statement to the effect that what pragmatism is, is not pragmaticism.

With the explicit treatment of the ethics of terminology reserved to the end of the present discourse, then, our immediate task is to show the distance Peirce wishes to put between himself and what the usage of the term "pragmatism" came to signify.

Pragmaticism is not Pragmatism

The greatest American philosopher disowning the most famous American development in all of philosophy's history is a considerable embarrassment to those who cherish the idea of a home-grown philosophy, and prefer being able to cite their own to the constant deferral of philosophical greatness to the European past of the "colonies". So it is understandable that those

[12] See "What Pragmatism Is", *The Monist* 15 (April, 1905), 161–181, as reprinted in CP 5.411–437.

[13] Peirce 1905: CP 5.414.

desirous of promoting philosophy with a distinctively American accent have largely been discomfited or annoyed by Peirce's disavowal of "pragmatism", and have tried to pass it off as merely a verbal quibble, merely a far from isolated manifestation of the cantankerous prima-donnaness of a notably eccentric individual. Even Corrington, who, in writing the first *Introduction to C. S. Peirce* with an explicitly semiotic consciousness should well know better (but who is also a devotee of "the American tradition in philosophy"), introduces this aspect of Peirce's own thought under the label Peirce repudiated.[14]

Embarrassment or no, the fact remains that Peirce is the first figure in the history of American thought who enters into the grand history of philosophy as a whole on the merits of his speculative genius as embodied in the surviving texts we have from his pen. James and Dewey, by far the better known in popular consciousness, are by comparison on a second tier, and their main claim to a place in general histories of philosophy is that they have filled for a popular consciousness the previously empty niche of "American philosophers". But it is pragmaticism, not pragmatism, that properly fills that niche, and in the story of pragmaticism "pragmatism" is but a footnote.

Surveying the scene in 1905, Peirce considered that things had gone far enough:[15]

> ... at present, the word begins to be met with occasionally in the literary journals, where it gets abused in the merciless way that words have to expect when they fall into literary clutches. ... So then, the writer, finding his bantling "pragmatism" so promoted, feels that it is time to kiss his child good-by and relinquish it to its higher destiny; while to serve the precise purpose of expressing the original definition, he begs to announce the birth of the word "pragmaticism", which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers.
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> Much as the writer has gained from the perusal of what other pragmatists have written, he still thinks there is a decisive advantage in his original conception of the doctrine. From this original form every truth that follows from any of the other forms can be deduced, while some errors can be avoided into which other pragmatists have fallen. ...

In all the variants of pragmatism, practical, experimental effects are made the determination of truth. Three things distinguish pragmaticism from such a simple, positivistic doctrine, which is compatible with nominalism:[16] "first, its retention of a purified philosophy; secondly, its full

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[14] See Robert Corrington, *An Introduction to C. S. Peirce: Philosopher, Semiotician, Ecstatic Naturalist* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), Chapter 1, "Pragmatism and Abduction".

[15] From Peirce 1905: 414–415.

[16] Peirce 1905: CP 5.423.

acceptance of the main body of our instinctive beliefs; and thirdly, its strenuous insistence upon the truth of scholastic realism (or a close approximation to that)".

Pragmaticism and Metaphysics

Pragmatism prided itself on the demolition of "metaphysics". But what it understood by "metaphysics" had little or no connection to the "metaphysics" of Aristotle, still less to that of the schoolmen of the Latin Age.[17] How could it? As Dewey inadvertently demonstrated in his famous essay on "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy", these pragmatists knew nothing of metaphysics save what they had learned from the modern philosophers, and especially the British empiricists, where there is not that much of metaphysics to be learned. In the confines of the Metaphysical Club, Peirce tells us,[18] "the type of our thought was decidedly British. I, alone of our number, had come upon the threshing-floor of philosophy through the doorway of Kant, and even my ideas were acquiring the English accent." And for this modern metaphysics Peirce had no more use than his club fellows.

But Peirce, unlike his pragmatist colleagues, came well to learn that there was more to metaphysics than this. Let the pragmatists "wipe out metaphysics" in the sense of those "philosophers of very diverse stripes who propose that philosophy shall take its start from one or another state of mind in which no man, least of all a beginner in philosophy, actually is", such as we have seen espoused especially by Descartes, Berkeley, and Hume.[19]

There will still remain for pragmaticism, as not for pragmatism, the "retention of a purified philosophy" distinct from science, namely, that sense of philosophy capable of providing an

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[17] See John Deely, "On the Problem of Interpreting the Term ‘First’ in the Expression ‘First Philosophy’", in *Semiotics 1987*, ed. J. Deely (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 3-14.

[18] c.1906: CP 5.11, "Historical Affinities and Genesis [of Pragmatism]".

[19] 1905: CP 5.423: "all such rubbish being swept away, what will remain of philosophy will be a series of problems capable of investigation by the observational methods of the true sciences — the truth about which can be reached without those interminable misunderstandings and disputes which have made the highest of the positive sciences a mere amusement for idle intellects, a sort of chess — idle pleasure its purpose, and reading out of a book its method. In this regard, pragmaticism is a species of prope-positivism." Here the reader is advised to advert to Peirce’s adoption (c.1902) of a strange terminology from Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832, in a work of 1816), according to which Peirce divides science into *idioscopic* — what are ordinarily called the experimental sciences as requiring special experience to determine the sense of their propositions — and *cenoscopic* (also "coenoscopic"), what are dependent on observation only in that sense which is available to a mature human organism at any time. Thus Aristotelian physics is a coenoscopic science, and so was medieval metaphysics a coenoscopic science. But physics after Galileo, modern physics, is rather a definitely idioscopic science. The idioscopic sciences are scientific in the modern sense, but the coenoscopic or philosophical ones are rather doctrinal in the Latin sense which separates itself equally from theological dogma and scientific hypothesis to constitute the interpretive horizon of objectivity within which the relative autonomy of all three types of discourse can be verified and vindicated, both in general and as each admitting of a variety of further subdivisions.

explanation and consistent exposition in discourse of the general framework or horizon of human understanding within which alone scientific experiments of a particular type become possible in the first place. "Has it not occurred to you", Peirce asks his imaginary interlocutor who is trying to speak on behalf of the pragmatic interpretation of Peirce's original statements in the area,[20] "that every connected series of experiments constitutes a single collective experiment"? Or that "the unity of essence of the experiment lies in its purpose and plan"? So that when the pragmaticist speaks of experiment "he does not mean any particular event that did happen to somebody in the dead past, but what surely will happen to everybody in the living future who shall fulfill certain conditions."

Pragmaticism and Relations

In rejecting the nominalistic idea that an experiment reveals nothing more than that "something once happened to an individual object and that subsequently some other individual event occurred", Peirce cuts to the heart of the matter. Pragmaticism, in other words, is the contrary opposite to any view compatible with nominalism. For pragmaticism subscribes only to a view that[21] "meaning is undoubtedly general; and it is equally indisputable that the general is of the nature of a word or sign". But here the reader would be completely misled to think that "word" here is being opposed to "sign" in the ancient Greek sense of *symbolon* opposed to *semeia*, or that Peirce is propounding some prenatal Wittgensteinian theory of meaning as linguistic. On the contrary, the "or" signifies *sign in general* of which a word is a well known instance.

The "consideration that has escaped" the pragmatists is that individuality as such, as isolated in itself — substance in the Rationalist sense[22] — is completely excluded by pragmaticism:[23]

> do not overlook the fact that the pragmaticist maxim says nothing of single experiments or of single experimental phenomena (for what is conditionally true *in futuro* can hardly be singular), but only speaks of general kinds of experimental phenomena. Its adherent does not shrink from

[20] 1905: CP 5.424.

[21] Peirce 1905: CP 5.429.

[22] Let us use Kant's notion of substance as our example: "Since every self-sufficient being contains within itself the complete source of all its determinations, it is not necessary for its existence that it stand in relation to other things. Substances can therefore exist, and yet have no outer relation to things, nor stand in any actual connection with them" — from Kant's *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces*, trans. by John Handyside in *Kant's Inaugural Dissertation and Early Writings on Space* (Chicago: Open Court, 1929), p. 8.

[23] Peirce 1905: CP 5.426.

> speaking of general objects as real, since whatever is true represents a real. Now the laws of nature are true.

Good old "American individual conscience", for Peirce, is an empiricist heritage that is not sufficient to the requirements of a philosophy "purified" of the imaginary excesses of modern metaphysics. What is needed, on the contrary is the older notion of substance as a *transcendental relative* as we have seen it introduced in the Latin Age to contrast with and provide the subjective ground for pure relations as suprasubjective in principle and actually intersubjective in fact when the circumstances of the environment dictate this (when the terminus of the relation as well as its ground in some subjective aspect of a subject of existence, an individual, physically exists).[24]

Peirce, as we saw, did not quite make it up to the point in his study of the Latin Age where this terminology of transcendental and ontological relatives became fully incorporated into the doctrine of signs itself.[25] Yet he leaves no doubt on the point of his own embrasure of what that terminology signified in the doctrinal context of Latin semiotic:[26]

> Whatever exists, ex-sists, that is, really acts upon other existents, so obtains a self-identity, and is definitely individual. As to the general, it will be a help to thought to notice that there are two ways of being general. A statue of a soldier on some village monument, in his overcoat and with his musket, is for each of a hundred families the image of its uncle, its sacrifice to the Union. That statue, then, though it is itself single, represents any one man of whom a certain predicate may be true. It is objectively general. The word "soldier," whether spoken or written, is general in the same way; while the name, "George Washington", is not so. But each of these two terms remains one and the same noun, whether it be spoken or written, and whenever and wherever it be spoken or written. This noun is not an existent thing: it is a type, or form, to which objects, both those that are externally existent and those which are imagined, may conform, but which

[24] See John Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis* (1632), trans. and ed. John Deely (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), esp. the "Second Preamble: On Relation", p. 80ff. Commentary in John Deely, *New Beginnings: Early Modern Philosophy and Postmodern Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), Appendix 1, "Contrasting Ontological and Transcendental Relatives", pp. 249–253.

[25] Krempel, in his massive study of *La doctrine de la relation chez saint Thomas. Exposé historique et systématique* (Paris: J. Vrin), p. 668, the only one who has made anything like a complete, albeit unsuccessful, survey of the terminology in question, leaves no room for doubt that John Poinsot, the author of the first *Treatise on Signs* systematically vindicating in doctrinal or speculative terms the general notion of sign posited by Augustine, was also the author in whom the notion of substance as transcendentally relative "found its true theoretician". I suspect that the reason for this was precisely because of the importance of the notion for stabilizing in a thematic way the distinction between representation and signification as such: see the discussion of "The Fundamental Architecture of the *Treatise on Signs*" in the "Editorial AfterWord" to the 1985 edition of Poinsot, pp. 472–479.

[26] Peirce 1905: CP 5.429.

> none of them can exactly be. This is subjective generality. The pragmaticistic purport is general in both ways.

Only by acting and being acted upon, and through the network of relations that result from such interactions both in nature and in society, do the individual subjects of existence, the real substances, come into and maintain themselves in existence. To make the point as plain as possible, Peirce indicates that "two things here are all-important to assure oneself of and to remember":[27]

> The first is that a person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is "saying to himself", that is, is saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. The second thing to remember is that the man' s circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism. It is these two things alone that render it possible for you ─ but only in the abstract, and in a Pickwickian[28] sense ─ to distinguish between absolute truth and what you do not doubt.

So we approach the heart of the matter. Generalities, relations which hold true over and above the subjectivities of individuality, are the heart and soul of pragmaticism. And, as if to emphasize the point, Peirce points out that:[29]

> Not only may generals be real, but they may also be physically efficient, not in every metaphysical sense, but in the common-sense acception in which human purposes are physically efficient. Aside from metaphysical nonsense, no sane man doubts that if I feel the air in my study to be stuffy, that thought may cause the window to be opened. My thought, be it granted, was an individual event. But what determined it to take the particular determination it did, was in part the general fact that stuffy air is unwholesome, and in part other Forms ... So, then, when my window was opened, because of the truth that stuffy air is malsain, a physical effort was brought into existence by the efficiency of a general and non-existent truth. ... Generality is, indeed, an

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[27] 1905: CP 5.421. On Peirce's approach to the self, Vincent Colapietro's 1989 monograph, *Peirce's Approach to the Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press), is an initial study that has already, and deservedly, achieved near-classic status.

[28] Pickwickian, because "things as they appear to God" ─ the world as it would be seen by an omniscient intelligence present in awareness to the least details of the actual existence and interactions of things at every level of the universe, such as is God according to Aquinas (and in contrast to Aristotle's God) ─ constitute absolute truth, without at all constituting that within our experience about which we have no doubt.

[29] 1905: CP 5.431.

> indispensable ingredient of reality; for mere individual existence or actuality without any regularity whatever is a nullity.

It is not the individual actions and interactions as such that are significant but only those individual actions and interactions as they *further* relate to the "scheme in the observer's mind". The relations in physical nature are dyadic, but with this *further* element whereby they become *revelatory to* an observer, the physical environment itself is transformed into part of the objective world or Umwelt; and because that objective world in this case is a Lebenswelt, a species-specifically *human* objective world with language at its contemplative core and discursive center, at that moment the physical universe ceases to be merely physical. The realm of brute force and physical interaction as such at this moment becomes caught up in the semiotic web, and the universe becomes perfused with signs:[30]

> The phenomenon consists in the fact that when an experimentalist shall come to act according to a certain scheme that he has in mind, then will something else happen, and shatter the doubts of sceptics, like the celestial fire upon the altar of Elijah.

> Of the myriads of forms into which a proposition may be translated, what is that one which is to be called its very meaning? It is, according to the pragmaticist, that form in which the proposition becomes applicable to human conduct, not in these or those special circumstances, nor when one entertains this or that special design, but that form which is most directly applicable to self-control under every situation, and to every purpose. This is why he locates the meaning in future time; for future conduct is the only conduct that is subject to self-control. But in order that that form of the proposition which is to be taken as its meaning should be applicable to every situation and to every purpose upon which the proposition has any bearing, it must be simply the general description of all the experimental phenomena which the assertion of the proposition virtually predicts. For an experimental phenomenon is the fact asserted by the proposition that action of a certain description will have a certain kind of experimental result; and experimental results are the only results that can affect human conduct.

This is so even if we consider a certain truth to be an eternal and unchanging truth, such as the proposition that if God did not exist there could be no world, or whatever we might choose to cite as an instance of "unchanging truth":[31] "some unchanging idea may come to influence a man

[30] Peirce 1905: CP 5.425, 427.

[31] Peirce 1905: CP 5.427.

more than it had done; but only because some experience equivalent to an experiment has brought its truth home to him more intimately than before".

The Purpose of Human Life

The heart of the matter is the purpose of human life. Peirce saw that purpose to lie in so conducting oneself as to create of one's total self — the relative self in which we actually consist as a member of a community over a certain duration of time — something that is beautiful, an aesthetic whole. And for the individual life to be a beautiful life, Peirce, as one of the few moderns early or late to have any least familiarity with the medieval doctrine of the transcendentals, according to which truth and goodness are convertible with being, required the human being so to live as to express over the time of one's life a commitment to truth on the side of thought and to goodness on the side of comportment.

An Ethics of Thinking as well as an Ethics of Doing

The heart of the difference between pragmaticism and pragmatism lies in the very notion of conduct itself. For the pragmatist, "conduct" means, mainly and ultimately, *outward behaviour*, which is why it could degenerate into the likes of the 20th century psychological doctrine of behaviorism, in such authors as B. F. Skinner (1904–1990), or the doctrine of verification as a supposed theory of truth in such authors as Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970) or A. J. Ayer (1910–1989).[32] Or, to the extent pragmatism encompasses inward behavior, it emphasizes the will, as in the writings of William James.

Pragmaticism avoids both these traps.[33] For the pragmaticist sees that "human conduct" is a complex of inner thought and outer social interaction; and that just as social interaction needs to be regulated by ethics so does thought need to be regulated by logic. Logic, in fact, is nothing

[32] See "Semiotics: Method or Point of View?", in John Deely, *Basics of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 9–21.

[33] 1905: CP 5.429: "if pragmaticism really made Doing to be the Be-all and the End-all of life, that would be its death. For to say that we live for the mere sake of action, as action, regardless of the thought it carries out, would be to say that there is no such thing as rational purport."

Ibid. 5.436: "if one cares at all to know what the pragmaticist theory consists in, one must understand that there is no other part of it to which the pragmaticist attaches quite as much importance as he does to the recognition in his doctrine of the utter inadequacy of action or volition or even of resolve or actual purpose, as materials out of which to construct a conditional purpose or the concept of conditional purpose. ... continuity is an indispensable element of reality, and ... is simply what generality becomes in the logic of relatives, and thus, like generality, and more than generality, is an affair of thought, and is the essence of thought."

more nor less than the ethics of thinking — that is, the exercise of responsible self-control in the adoption of opinions and beliefs as our own:[34]

> Now, just as conduct controlled by ethical reason tends toward fixing certain habits of conduct, the nature of which (as to illustrate the meaning, peaceable habits and not quarrelsome habits) does not depend upon any accidental circumstances, and in that sense may be said to be destined; so, thought, controlled by a rational experimental logic, tends to the fixation of certain opinions, equally destined, the nature of which will be the same in the end, however the perversity of thought of whole generations may cause the postponement of the ultimate fixation [as happened to metaphysics, Peirce thought, in the classical modern mainstream on which the pragmatists almost exclusively drew in their reactive self-definitions].

Now "the real" for Peirce, exactly as for the Latin scholastics, is being in its character as independent of any finite mind.[35] Not only does the human being have in thought contact with that which is independent of thought, Kant and all the epistemological theory of modern philosophy to the contrary notwithstanding. Further, to the extent that the human being succeeds in giving expression to that which "is" in this sense, human thought approximates to the truth. And, as Aristotle also noted, success in achieving such expression is not the work of the individual in isolation but of the individual as belonging to a community of inquirers; so that truth grows over time, even as the community of inquirers grows:[36]

> As to reality, one finds it defined in various ways; but if that principle of terminological ethics that was proposed be accepted, the equivocal language will soon disappear. For *realis* and *realitas* are not ancient words. They were invented to be terms of philosophy in the thirteenth century, and the meaning they were intended to express is perfectly clear. That is real which has such and such characters, whether anybody thinks it to have those characters or not. At any rate, that is the sense in which the pragmaticist uses the word.

As being is brought more and more into the objective sphere, the distinction between what is independently of human awareness and what exists objectively (that is, within human awareness)

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[34] 1905: CP 5.430.

[35] As Peirce himself put the matter against his pragmatist contemporaries: "It appears that there are certain mummified pedants who have never waked to the truth that the act of knowing a real object alters it. They are curious specimens of humanity, and as I am one of them, it may be amusing to see how I think" — to see, that is, how pragmaticism differs from pragmatism, nominalism, and modern idealism generally (c.1906, "Reflections upon Pluralistic Pragmatism and upon Cenopythagorean Pragmaticism": CP 5.555).

[36] 1905: CP 5.430.

diminishes in fact. Part of this process consists in what exists only objectively coming to be more and more recognized as such, so that more and more the human community is in a position to avoid the mistake of saying that what is not is, or the opposite mistake of saying that what is is not. So more and more do human beings approach the state of the "ultimate opinion", that is, that opinion where what is objective will include the whole of the physical known as such, and whatever the objective includes which is of fiction will also be known as such. Exactly "the state of things which will be believed in that ultimate opinion is real", which is why truth as more than a partial achievement always lies in the future:[37]

> That which any true proposition asserts is real, in the sense of being as it is regardless of what you or I may think about it. Let this proposition be a general conditional proposition as to the future, and it is a real general such as is calculated really to influence human conduct; and such the pragmaticist holds to be the rational purport of every concept.

So precisely because and inasmuch as "the rational meaning of every proposition lies in the future", the pragmaticist, in contrast to every species of pragmatist, does not locate the highest human good in action. Action, for the human being as such, can be good only insofar as it is an embodiment of thought, an execution of some ideal plan to change the outer world, the "phenomenal" world, for the better:[38]

> Accordingly, the pragmaticist does not make the summum bonum to consist in action, but makes it to consist in that process of evolution whereby the existent comes more and more to embody those generals which were just now said to be destined, which is what we strive to express in calling them reasonable. In its higher stages, evolution takes place more and more largely through self-control, and this gives the pragmaticist a sort of justification for making the rational purport to be general.

Pragmaticism does not try to do away with the abstract in favor of the concrete, or to do away with speculative thought in order to concentrate on practical applications; nor does it tolerate a subordination of understanding to willing in decisions as to what is so. All such emphases can be left to the varieties of pragmatism; and left without loss, to the extent that such emphases tend to deform the nature of human understanding and interfere with the growth of

[37] 1905: CP 5.432.
[38] 1905: CP 5.432–433.

truth in time. Pragmaticism finds general meanings in particular phenomena and abstracts these meanings as guides for future conduct, thought, and research:[39]

> Pragmaticism does not intend to define the phenomenal equivalents of words and general ideas, but, on the contrary, eliminates their sential element, and endeavors to define the rational purport, and this it finds in the purposive bearing of the word or proposition in question.

The Line Separating Pragmaticism from Modern Philosophy

So we come to the bottom line. Pragmatism is, while pragmaticism is not, compatible with idealism in the modern sense. Peirce's own way of putting this was to say that "pragmaticism is at issue not only with English philosophy more particularly, but with all modern philosophy more or less, even with Hegel; and that is that it involves a complete rupture with nominalism".[40] That is why pragmatism belongs to late modern philosophy, while pragmaticism is determinately postmodern.

As the founder of the movement that came to be called pragmatism, Peirce may be said to be the "last of the moderns". But in rejecting the interpretation of his earlier statements that gave rise to pragmatism as the distinctive movement of 20th century American philosophy, and in explaining those ideas instead in terms of pragmaticism, Peirce became the first of the postmoderns, the first to recover for human understanding the full scope of its doctrinal possibilities in the age of science.

Pragmaticism and the Doctrine of Signs

Pragmaticism, thus, is not itself a philosophical system but a way of thinking. On their side, Hence "one of the faults that I think they" — the pragmatists — "might find with me is that I make pragmatism" — the original pragmatism, that is to say, what he resorts now to terming rather "pragmaticism", as we have seen — "to be a mere maxim of logic instead of a sublime principle of speculative philosophy".[41] Pragmaticism is not a theory of truth, as James and other pragmatists tried to have, but only of meaning as a way to truth, which alone, in the end, reality itself, *in collusion with thought*, can determine. Pragmaticism is a way of fostering and promoting the collusion.

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[39] Peirce 1905: CP 5.428.

[40] c.1905: CP 8.208, from an unsigned letter addressed to Signor Calderoni.

[41] Peirce, 1903: Lecture on "Pragmatism and the Normative Sciences", CP 5.18.

Vincent Colapietro, in a recent conversation, summarized Peirce's mind on the point excellently. Pragmaticism, he remarked,[42] is in Peirce's context "a maxim for how to conduct ourselves as investigators and a principle of translation for getting habits out of abstract concepts". If we wish to speak of pragmaticism in terms of a principle, Peirce tells us, he himself,[43] "even in order to be admitted to better philosophical standing", has not succeeded in a formulation "any better than this":

> Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood.

Or, to put the matter as succinctly as possible:[44] "what a thing means is simply what habits it involves." And habits, engendered by things, involve beliefs about reality — beginning with the reality of the physical environment around us. Not only is Peirce's point of departure for philosophy far removed from the artificial "problem of the external world" which defeated the moderns. His very way of thinking, pragmaticism, construed as maxim or principle or both, is a way of thinking that succeeds precisely where modern philosophy failed dismally. For the pragmaticistic outlook brings together science and philosophy as complementary modes of knowledge bearing on the real, thus fulfilling the initial dream of modernity — before Descartes' dreams turned modernity into an epistemological nightmare as the inexorable logical consequences revealed themselves in thinker after thinker who pursued the way of ideas.

Thus did the first way of thinking in history to be conceived from the outset in function of the doctrine of signs overcome the schizophrenia of modern philosophy; but, by the late 19th century, that meant the overcoming of modern philosophy itself. For Jekyll to live a sane life, after all, Hyde had to die. It was radical therapy.

To understand how completely pragmaticism is an expression of semiotics conceived in terms of what is distinctive to the species-specifically human objective world, consider, first, how vast is the pragmaticistic notion of experience; and then consider how central this notion of experience as including real relations is to pragmaticism. Without the conception of experience distinctively human in a species-specific sense, there is no pragmaticism; but

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[42] 24 May 1998.

[43] 1903: CP 5.18.

[44] 1901: from the entry "Pragmatic and Pragmatism" in Volume I of Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, CP 5.4.

pragmaticism gives such expression to the conception as to remove itself at the outset from the climate and family of modern philosophy. Modern philosophy began with the universal doubt whereby Descartes had made being a function of his thinking. Pragmaticism begins rather a belief in the reality of what is more than thought, and proceeds by continually putting to test the contrast between thought and what is more than thought, between merely objective being and objective being which reveals also something of the physical universe:[45]

> if doubting were "as easy as lying" ... doubt has nothing to do with any serious business. But do not make believe; if pedantry has not eaten all the reality out of you, recognize, as you must, that there is much that you do not doubt, in the least. ... All you have any dealings with are your doubts and beliefs, with the course of life that forces new beliefs upon you and gives you power to doubt old beliefs. If your terms "truth" and "falsity" are taken in such senses as to be definable in terms of doubt and belief and the course of experience (as for example they would be, if you were to define the "truth" as that to a belief in which belief would tend if it were to tend indefinitely toward absolute fixity), well and good: in that case, you are only talking about doubt and belief. But if by truth and falsity you mean something not definable in terms of doubt and belief in any way, then you are talking of entities of whose existence you can know nothing, and which Ockham's razor would clean shave off. ...
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> Belief is not a momentary mode of consciousness; it is a habit of mind essentially enduring for some time, and mostly (at least) unconscious; and like other habits, it is (until it meets with some surprise that begins its dissolution) perfectly self-satisfied. Doubt is of an altogether contrary genus. It is not a habit, but the privation of a habit. Now a privation of a habit, in order to be anything at all, must be a condition of erratic activity that in some way must get superseded by a habit.
>
> Among the things which the reader, as a rational person, does not doubt, is that he not merely has habits, but also can exert a measure of self-control over his future actions; which means, however, not that he can impart to them any arbitrarily assignable character, but, on the contrary, that a process of self-preparation will tend to impart to action (when the occasion for it shall arise), one fixed character, which is indicated and perhaps roughly measured by the absence (or slightness) of the feeling of self-reproach, which subsequent reflection will induce. Now, this subsequent reflection is part of the self-preparation for action on the next occasion. Consequently, there is a tendency, as action is repeated again and again, for the action to approximate indefinitely toward the perfection of that fixed character, which would be marked by entire absence of self-reproach. ...

[45] 1905: CP 5.416–420.

> These phenomena seem to be the fundamental characteristics which distinguish a rational being. ... Now, thinking is a species of conduct which is largely subject to self-control. In all their features ... logical self-control is a perfect mirror of ethical self-control ─ unless it be rather a species under that genus. ...
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> ... "thought", in what has just been said, should be taken ... as covering all rational life, so that an experiment shall be an operation of thought. ... that ultimate state of habit to which the action of self-control ultimately tends, where no room is left for further self-control, is, in the case of thought, the state of fixed belief, or perfect knowledge.

Now consider that, for Peirce, all thought is in signs. This means that all rational life is mediated through the action of signs, and "rational life" here embraces everything that tends in any way to fix or unsettle belief. It is quite a notion. Without rational experience there is no pragmaticism. But without signs there is no experience of any kind. There is no thought at all.

Chapter 2

PEIRCE'S GRAND VISION

Yet Peirce has a vision even grander than any doctrine merely of experience as human, even than of being as knowable through experience. He thinks that semiosis, as the action of signs, outruns the confines of experience as merely our experience, and even of experience itself broadened to the whole web of material life. He thinks that experience itself, completely structured throughout by sign-relations, is yet itself but the expression of a process with roots as deep as the being of rocks and stars. Not only human beings and other animals make use of signs. So do plants and inanimate substances:[46]

> The action of a sign generally takes place between two parties, the *utterer* and the *interpreter*. They need not be persons; for a chameleon and many kinds of insects and even plants make their living by uttering signs, and lying signs, at that. Who is the utterer of signs of the weather ... ? However, every sign certainly conveys something of the general nature of thought, if not from a mind, yet from some repository of ideas, or significant forms, and if not to a person, yet to something capable of somehow 'catching on' ... that is, of receiving not merely a physical, nor even merely a psychical dose of energy, but a significant meaning. In that modified, and as yet very misty, sense, then, we may continue to use the italicized words [*utterer* and *interpreter*].

As we saw in the last chapter, contemporary philosophers at work on the development of the doctrine of signs according to the fullness of its possibilities have begun to speak, after Peirce (who himself derived the term from a usage of the ancient Stoics and Epicureans[47]), of the

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[46] Peirce c.1907: Ms. 318, pp. 205–206.

[47] See in particular the tract, familiar to Peirce, from a.79AD, by Philodemus, Περὶ σημειώσεῶν (*De Signis*), trans. as *On the Methods of Inference* in the ed. of Phillip Howard De Lacy and Estelle Allen De Lacy, rev. with the collaboration of Marcello Gigante, Francesco Longo Auricchio, and Adele Tepedino Guerra (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1978), Greek text pp. 27–87, English 91–131. Here seems to be the *locus* whence Peirce took his coinage of "semiosis" as an English term, curiously omitting (perhaps in imitation of Locke?) the epsilon before the iota proper to the Greek.

actions in general of signs as *semiosis*, and of the action of signs at each of the cosmological levels. At the broadest physical level of atoms, molecules, interstellar gases, galaxies, stars, planets, and geological development, the action of signs is called *physiosemiosis*.[48] In the living world of plants, the action of signs is called *phytosemiosis*.[49] Among animals generally, the action of signs has come to be called *zoösemiosis*.[50] And the species-specifically human use of signs, rooted in language, as we have many times mentioned in crossing the centuries to this point, is an action of signs called *anthroposemiosis*.[51]

As the footnotes to the terms introduced in the previous paragraph make clear, except for the generic term *semiosis*, the rest of the terminology all develops after Peirce. But the vision for such a vast reach for the actions of signs was original with Peirce, even though he himself was never able to bring it to ground in his lifetime. I have called it[52] "Peirce's Grand Vision", for that is what it is, one of the most grand visions to be found in all the annals of philosophy, with the added advantage of being rooted more in science than in mysticism.[53]

> [T]he problem of how genuine triadic relationships first arose in the world is a better, because more definite, formulation of the problem of how life first came about; and no explanation has

[48] The argument for an action of signs in the physical environment as such presupposed for the living world — for physiosemiosis as presupposed to biosemiosis — has been made in a number of places. Originally, the argument was stated in Chapter 6 of *Basics of Semiotics*, esp. pp. 83–95. Further in John Deely, "Semiotics and Biosemiotics: Are Sign-Science and Life-Science Coextensive?", in *Biosemiotics. The Semiotic Web 1991*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992), 45–75; "How Do Signs Work?", Chapter 6 in *New Beginnings* (Toronto, 1994), pp. 151–182; and "How Is the Universe Perfused with Signs?", in *Semiotics 1997*, ed. C. W. Spinks and J. N. Deely (New York: Peter Lang, in press).

[49] The term was coined by Martin Krampen, "Phytosemiotics", *Semiotica* (1981), 36-3/4: 187-209, with an extensive commentary debeloped by John Deely, "On the Notion of Phytosemiotics", in *Semiotics 1982*, ed. John Deely and Jonathan Evans (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 541-554. This essay with the commentary is reprinted in *Frontiers in Semiotics*, ed. J. Deely, B. Williams, and F. E. Kruse (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 83–103.

[50] The term "zoosemiotics" first appeared (unfortunately, without the umlaut over the second "o") in a review article by Thomas A. Sebeok, "Communication among social bees; porpoises and sonar; man and dolphin", *Language* 39 (1963), 448–466. The original coinage together with a fuller discussion from *Animals* 111.6 (December, 1978), p. 20ff., "'Talking' with Animals: Zoosemiotics Explained", has been also reprinted in *Frontiers in Semiotics*, pp. 74–82. See also T. A. Sebeok, "The Word 'Zoosemiotics'", *Language Sciences* 10 (1970), pp. 36–37; "Zoosemiotics: At the Intersection of Nature and Culture", in *The Tell-Tale Sign*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Lisse, the Netherlands: Peter de Ridder Press, 1975), pp. 85-95; and "Zoosemiotic Components of Human Communication", in *How Animals Communicate*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), Chap. 38, pp. 1055-1077.

[51] I am unaware of the provenance of this term. It may well be a coinage of Sebeok, but I have no original *locus* of its appearance. The longest single essay on its sense to date is my book *The Human Use of Signs* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), which bears the co-ordinate title *Elements of Anthroposemiosis*.

[52] In the collection, *The Doctrine of Signs*, ed. Vincent Colapietro and Thomas Olshewsky (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), from the September 5–10, 1989, Charles Sanders Peirce Sesquicentennial International Congress at Harvard University.

[53] Peirce, c.1909: CP 6.322.

> ever been offered except that of pure chance, which we must suspect to be no explanation, owing to the suspicion that pure chance may itself be a vital phenomenon. In that case, life in the physiological sense would be due to life in the metaphysical sense. Of course, the fact that a given individual has been persuaded of the truth of a proposition is the very slenderest possible argument for its truth; nevertheless, the fact that I, a person of the strongest possible physicistic prejudices, should, as the result of forty years of questionings, have been brought to the deep conviction that there is some essentially and irreducibly other element in the universe than pure dynamism may have sufficient interest to excuse my devoting a single sentence to its expression. For you may be sure that I had reasons that withstood severe, not to say hostile criticism; and if I live to do it, I shall embody them in a volume.

The Action of Signs and Causality: Anticipating an Ethics of Terminology

If we had all the volumes philosophers had promised or hoped to write we would surely need many more libraries than we have. This volume Peirce hoped to live to write is yet one more of those ethereal tomes in the library of books that did not get written. In the case of this book, there was a special problem: its would-be author was on a bit of a wrong trail in trying to determine the type of causality proper to signs. He never fully got beyond the notion that some dressed-up notion of final causality as teleology[54] might be the causality proper to the action of signs, although a careful analysis of his texts indeed reveals that he was at the same time on the scent of distinguishing final causality in all its forms from what he called "ideal" causality, which we are obliged by his own "ethics of terminology" to call rather *objective* or *extrinsic formal causality*.[55]

The trail was wrong, but not completely wrong, and certainly not as wrong as the direction that modern philosophy had pursued in shrinking the notion of causality down to dimensions that could be made to fit a thoroughgoing idealism. For pragmaticism, as we saw, requires us to think of human life as a growth and a development that it is up to us to make an aesthetic one, that is to say, one that is good and beautiful; and to do this requires the growing embodiment of rationality in our lives and in the world around us. Actually, European civilization in its political institutions, for example, as they have developed since the 17th century, provides a pretty good example of the sort of progress Peirce thought in store for humanity along pragmaticistic lines.

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[54] See "How do signs work?" in John Deely, *New Beginnings*, p. 141ff.; and "Renvoi", *ibid.*, p. 201ff.

[55] See the "Excursus on Peirce and Poinsot" in the 1985 edition of Poinsot's *Tractatus de Signis* of 1632, pp. 493–4, for a listing of texts in Peirce on this technical point.

So it was not surprising that the contemporary founder of the doctrine of signs, or semiotics, expressly "thought of semiotic as precisely the development of a concept of a final cause process and as a study of such processes".[56] Ransdell remarks that Peirce's would-be commentators, imbibed with the modern prejudices against and misconceptions of the Latin tradition of natural philosophy, seem to have found this fact "an embarrassment, a sort of intellectual club foot that one shouldn't be caught looking at, much less blatantly pointing out to others", which would explain "why the topic of final causation is so strangely absent in criticisms and explanations of Peirce's conception of semiotic and semiosis", despite its centrality in Peirce's own reflections and explanations. As Ransdell rightly says,[57]

> Peirce is talking about the overall form of a process, not about the relation of a process to something external to it.[58] He is talking about the tendency toward an end-state, and the general features of such a tendency in whatever medium the process may be realized.

Ransdell's interpretation here is warranted as clearly as one could wish by Peirce's own words concerning pragmaticism. Those who content themselves "with fixing their own opinions by a method which would lead another man to a different result," Peirce advoses,[59] "betray their feeble hold of the conception of what truth is." For truth is a function of the contact of thought with reality, with the result that, properly pursued, though "different minds may set out with the most antagonistic views," yet "the progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to one and the same conclusion."

Thus, Ransdell continues, "the final causational form of a process can be realized only through efficient causation, and in that sense presupposes the possibility of a physical explanation as well". And in all this Peirce is thinking squarely within a mainstream of Latin thought,[60] even though,

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[56] Joseph Ransdell, "Some Leading Ideas of Peirce's Semiotic", *Semiotica* 19.3/4 (1977), p. 163.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Compare Poinsot *Naturalis Philosophiae Prima Pars* (1633), in Reiser ed., *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, Vol. II (Turin: Marietti, 1937), p. 281a19.

[59] 1907: "How To Make Our Ideas Clear", CP 5.406-407.

[60] Compare Poinsot, 1633: 282b17-19; Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* (c. 1265-1266), q. 5. art. 1. The articles by Ashley are among the few sensible late modern products on this topic: Benedict M. Ashley, "Research into the Intrinsic Final Causes of Physical Things", *ACPA Proceedings* (1952), XXVI, 185-194; "Final Causality", in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), Vol. V, 915-919., respectively, the first treating primarily of the Greek and Latin periods, the second treating of the modern period. Further discussion in notes 11 and 12 following; "Teleology", in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), Vol. XIII, 979-981; and "Change and Process" in *The Problem of Evolution*, ed. John N. Deely and Raymond J. Nogar (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 265-294.

as a matter of fact, eccentric to the line of causality immediately manifested in any action of signs consequent upon the being proper to signs as such.

This is one of those points in Peirce's semiotic where we have to regret that his researches among the Latins did not carry him as far as Poinsot's *Treatise on Signs* of 1632. For there in Poinsot's work[61] he would have found the clues he needed to make the sharp distinction between final causality and the formal specificative causality called by the scholastics "objective" or "extrinsic formal causality as specificative", as also to make the further distinction within extrinsic formal causality between its specificative and exemplificative exercises, the former of which is regulative, the latter comparative.[62] This last form of extrinsic formal causality, the exemplary, or "extrinsic formal causality as exemplar", the Latins also called "ideal causality". The Third and Fifth rules of his "Ethics of Terminology",[63] as well as the Sixth, which proscribes introducing terms which interfere with an existing term, would have obliged Peirce to adopt the name of *objective* or *specifying cause* to identify the action proper to signs, had he known of Poinsot's semiotic in particular.

Recall Aristotle's successful identification of the notion of dependency in being as the central note in the concept of causality, and his further analysis showing that such dependency is fourfold in the case of the coming to be and passing away of material substances or individuals — namely, efficient, material, formal, and final. Building on this fourfold scheme, the later Latins were able to show that the scheme must be further refined to account for phenomena within the Umwelt or Lebenswelt as such, for the *objectivity as such* of phenomena, even when they are also physical.

To begin with, to account for works art, making in the broadest sense, it was necessary to introduce two further distinctions. The first was a distinction between the intrinsic final causality observed in the maturation and growth of organisms, on the one hand, and an extrinsic final causality to explain an end intended by an intelligent agent but not itself part of the material used to achieve that end (as a fork is made *for* eating, although it is not the fork that will do the eating; or a dam is made by a beaver *for* a series of goals). The second was a distinction between the intrinsic formal causality observed in the cohesion and organization of material substances (again, organisms in particular) and an extrinsic *exemplary* formal causality, also called "ideal causality", to explain the plan or design (the idea) according to which an animal (rational or brute) executes

[61] See the references in note 66 below, p. 31.

[62] An exemplary cause, too, can function to regulate, but when it does it does so *through* a comparison, whereas an objective cause directly specifies the power in its knowing of this rather than that. Knowing this, it can advert to that, and so compare the two; but the knowing of this rather than that, or that rather than this, presupposes the specifying causality as more fundamental than the exemplary which becomes possible only subsequently.

[63] Peirce 1903: esp. CP 2.226.

the construction of a difference in its environment. This pattern or plan which is finally embodied in that construction as a formal pattern or series of relations which make it the kind of construction it is (such as the blueprint by comparison with which a house is built, the outline according to which a paper is presented, or the cognitive and conative “ideal” model according to which a beaver constructs its dam) is introduced from outside the materials manipulated, unlike the natural “formal cause” of Aristotle which unfolds by organizing its material from within.

But, in addition to these distinctions increasing the number of recognized fundamental types of causality, yet another is needed to explain how an observer or a thinker has attention directed to one feature rather than another of the objective world. This seventh (or eighth) mode of causality (depending on how one counts the distinctions[64]) is the causality required to explain cognition and psychological states in general. The later Latins called it *specificative* or *objective* causality, because it is from the object presented to the mind that attention is focused on this rather than that.[65] On the subjective side, a thinker may try to turn attention toward or away from triangles; but the measure of success lies not in the subjective effort but in the objective content surviving the effort. And since presenting objects is exactly the function of signs, the action of signs is a species of this last distinguished extrinsic formal causality, called “specificative”, rather than a species of either final causality or exemplary causality.[66]

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[64] In Aristotle’s original scheme of causes, remember, the factors identified were the agent or efficient cause; that upon which the agent acts, or material cause; the result in or response of the material correlated with the action of the agent, called the formal cause; and the pattern of development which an effect once produced exhibits over time, called its "final cause". Thus were derived the famous "four causes" required for the investigation of nature. But to explain artifacts and cultural phenomena generally, later thinkers found it further necessary to distinguish, first, between the original formal cause as intrinsic to the effect, and an extrinsic formal cause according to which, as a pattern or plan, such an internal formal cause might be introduced into matter by an intelligent agent, adding the *exemplary* or *ideal* cause as a fifth type of cause to the original four; and to distinguish, second, between the original final cause as the intrinsic pattern according to which a given effect sustains itself over time, and an *extrinsic* final cause representing the intention according to or purpose for which the artisan designs the material structure in the form that he or she gives it (as a fork is a certain ideal form embodied in a suitable material *for* conveying food to the mouth speared if desired), adding the *extrinsic final cause* as a sixth type of cause to the original four. But the extrinsic formal cause as distinguished from the intrinsic formal cause, it turns out, is itself twofold, in one case as providing a pattern for fabrication, and in another case as specifying cognition as an awareness of this rather than that object or aspect of an object, adding *objective* or *specificative* cause to the original four. Extrinsic formal and final causes bring the original four to six; extrinsic formal causes further divided into exemplary and specificative bring the six to eight.

[65] It is not as difficult to understand as first appears, when you consider that this is just how laws work in society (insofar as they do work): by the extrinsic specificative formal causality the scholastics called "objective". By contrast, so-called "role models" are exercising rather the extrinsic exemplificative formal causality the scholastics called "ideal".

[66] For a synoptic summary of the Latin discussions on efficient, material, intrinsic formal, and extrinsic exemplary formal causality, see Poinsot 1633 (Reiser ed. Vol. II): Questions 10–13, 197a11–287b43, where, however, extrinsic specificative formal causality ("objective causality") is mentioned only in response to an objection confusing it with exemplary causality (at 245a24–43, and 247a7–14).

The discussion of formal causality as extrinsic specification is to be found mainly as follows: in Poinsot 1632 (Reiser ed. Vol. I): Q. 17, Arts. 5–7, 595b25–608b7 (included in the electronic but not in the print edition of the *Treatise on Signs*),

Formal causality in the specificative sense best explains the action of signs from every point of view. This causality can be exercised through the intrinsic constitution of the sign-vehicle (in the case of a natural sign) or not (in the case of an arbitrary sign), as the situation calls for. It is more general than the final causality typical of vital powers, inasmuch as it specifies equally both vital activity and the chance interactions of brute secondness at the level of inorganic nature. This is the causality that enables the sign to achieve its distinctive function of making present what the sign-vehicle itself is not, regardless of whether the object signified enjoys a physical existence apart from the signification. Only extrinsic specificative formal causality is equally suited to the grounding of sign-behavior in chance occurrences (as when the implosion of a star leads to the discovery of a new law of physics, or when accidental scratches become the clue leading to the apprehension of the criminal) and planned happenings.

Once it is understood that the action proper to signs is explained by specificative causality, the central question for understanding the scope of semiosis turns out to be exactly the one asked by Peirce:[67] "What is the essential difference between a sign that is communicated to a mind, and one that is not so communicated?" On the one side of this line is the thirdness of experience, on the other side the thirdness of the laws of nature. How does semiosis link the two? The answer to this question is through the interpretant, which need not be anything mental, but must in every case provide the ground for objectivity. Hence Peirce elaborates on the central question thus:[68]

> If the question were simply what we *do* mean by a sign, it might soon be resolved. But that is not the point. We are in the situation of a zoölogist who wants to know what ought to be the meaning of "fish" in order to make fishes one of the great classes of vertebrates. It appears to me that the essential function of a sign is to render inefficient relations efficient, — not to set them into action, but to establish a habit or general rule whereby they will act on occasion ... A sign therefore is an

Q. 21, Arts. 4 and 5, 670a11–693a31, and Q. 22, Arts. 1–4, 693a34–715a21 (=*Treatise on Signs*, Book I, Questions 4 and 5, and Book II, Questions 1–4, respectively); and in Poinsot, *Naturalis Philosophiae Quarta Pars. De Ente Mobili Animato* (1635; = Reiser ed. Vol. III) — i.e., in the context of his discussion of cognitive organisms in the biological treatises — Q. 6., Arts. 2–4, 177b1–198a16, Q. 8, Art. 4, 265b1–271b20, Q. 10, Arts. 1–5, 295b1–339a45, Q. 11, Arts. 1 and 2, 344b1–366b34.

Notice that the contexts in which these questions mainly arise are generally biological and epistemological contexts, whence they inevitably come to a focus also in contexts specifically semiotic (Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis*,: Book I, Questions 4 and 5; Book II, Questions 1-4), where it is not too much to say that some of the most difficult and extended passages in Poinsot's attempt to systematize the foundations of semiotic inquiry arise from the need to make this heretofore peripheral topic of natural inquiry central to the establishment of semiotic.

[67] Peirce 1904: 8.332. Several interesting versions of this question occur in Poinsot, such as: is the statue of a dead emperor still a sign of the emperor?; are the letters in a closed book still signs?; etc. See Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis* (1632), *passim*.

[68] Ibid.

> object which is in relation to its object on the one hand and to an interpretant on the other, in such a way as to bring the interpretant into a relation to the object, corresponding to its own relation to the object.

Thus the pieces to solve the puzzle of how to ground the Grand Vision are mostly there in Peirce himself, and only a little help is needed from the Latin semiotic tradition to bring the pieces together.

For want of this little extra assistance, Peirce sometimes was tempted to despair of his grand vision, or at least of its ever being established. In these moments, he could almost sympathize with those of his later critics who would persistently try to reduce the key notion of the *interpretant* to that of an *interpreter*. Thus in his famous "sop to Cerberus" letter of December13, 1908,[69] addressed to Victoria Lady Welby:

> I define a sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediated by the former. My insertion of the term 'upon a person' is a sop to Cerberus, because I despair of making my own broader conception understood.

But in his calmer and more contemplative moments, he threw no such sops. For example:[70]

> Genuine mediation is the character of a Sign. A Sign is anything which is related to a Second thing, its Object, in respect to a Quality, in such a way as to bring a Third thing, its Interpretant, into relation to the same Object, and that in such a way as to bring a Fourth into relation to that Object in the same form, *ad infinitum*. If the series is broken off, the Sign, in so far, falls short of the perfect significant character. It is not necessary that the Interpretant should actually exist. A being *in futuro* will suffice.

Or again:[71]

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[69] Charles S. Hardwick, *Semiotic and Significs. The correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 73–86, esp. p. 81. Relevant parts of the letter are perhaps more conveniently available in *The Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2, ed. The Peirce Edition Project (Bloomingtron: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 478–483.

[70] c.1902: CP 2.92

[71] c.1907: CP 5.473.

> For the proper significate outcome of a sign, I propose the name, the interpretant of the sign. ... it need not be of a mental mode of being. Whether the interpretant be necessarily a triadic result is a question of words, that is, of how we limit the extension of the term "sign"; but it seems to me convenient to make the triadic production of the interpretant essential to a "sign" ....

Peirce's suggestion that semiosis is the fundamental process on which all the life forms depend has been taken up since Peirce principally by Thomas A. Sebeok in a variety of works. But Peirce's Grand Vision goes much further, to suggest that semiosis is perhaps the ultimate source of that general progress in physical nature from simple to complex forms that we have heretofore called "evolution".

Filling out this sketch is perhaps the greatest challenge in philosophy today, the over-reaching project, as we might say, for the postmodern era. It is a project well suited to a species on the frontiers of space. And it speaks well of Peirce's "Guess at the Riddle" of the universe that we are, after all, finally considering him in just the light that he hoped. Much criticism has been leveled, and justly leveled, at the way the Peirce papers were handled after Peirce's death. Even when parts of them were brought to print, those parts were butchered for presentation to those whose main interest was to understand his writings according to the categories already existing in modern philosophy so far as possible rather than on their own terms. Yet Hartshorne and Weiss, the principal early editors, certainly chose well their opening paragraph for the *Collected Papers* as a whole. For Peirce had for philosophy a postmodern dream to rival and surpass the dreams of Descartes:[72]

> To erect a philosophical edifice that shall outlast the vicissitudes of time, my care must be, not so much to set each brick with nicest accuracy, as to lay the foundations deep and massive. Aristotle builded upon a few deliberately chosen concepts — such as matter and form, act and power — very broad, and in their outlines vague and rough, but solid, unshakable, and not easily undermined; and thence it has come to pass that Aristotelianism is babbled in every nursery, that "English Common Sense", for example, is thoroughly peripatetic, and that ordinary men live so completely within the house of the Stagyrite that whatever they see out of the windows appears to them incomprehensible and metaphysical. Long it has been only too manifest that, fondly

[72] From Peirce c.1898: CP 1.1. Dra. Lúcia Santaella, perhaps with the dreams of Descartes in mind wherein the modern project of philosophy was explicitated (see Chapter 11, p. 324), has even called this passage "the dream of Peirce": *A Assinatura das Coisas* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora, 1992); and "El Dialogismo entre la Semiótica General y las Semióticas Especiales", in *Escritos. Semiótica de la Cultura*, ed. Adrián S. Gimate-Welsh (Segundo Encuentro Nacional de Estudiosos de la Semiótica, Noviembre de 1993; Oacaca, México: Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca, 1994), 43–55.
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> habituated though we be to it, the old structure will not do for modern needs; and accordingly, under Descartes, Hobbes, Kant, and others, repairs, alterations, and partial demolitions have been carried on for the last three centuries. One system, also, stands upon its own ground; I mean the new Schelling-Hegel mansion, lately run up in the German taste, but with such oversights in its construction that, although brand new, it is already pronounced uninhabitable. The undertaking which this volume inaugurates is to make a philosophy like that of Aristotle, that is to say, to outline a theory so comprehensive that, for a long time to come, the entire work of human reason, in philosophy of every school and kind, in mathematics, in psychology, in physical science, in history, in sociology, and in whatever other department there may be, shall appear as the filling up of its details. The first step toward this is to find simple concepts applicable to every subject.

Nothing so applies to every subject as does the sign. All our knowledge of objects turns out to be in function of the actions of signs, yet pragmaticism was the first way of thinking conceived in recognition of this realization.

Semiotics as the Study of the Possibility of Being Mistaken

Peirce had another name for pragmaticism. He also called this way of thinking *fallibilism*;[73] and insofar as pragmaticism is conceived in function of the doctrine of signs, this alternative designation for it is truly excellent. For just as the sign is that which every object presupposes,[74] so the study of signs through their proper action, semiotics, is *eo ipso* the study of the possibility of being mistaken. The movement of human understanding from confusion in its first apprehension to clarity, unfortunately, is not a simple linear development from confusion to the clear grasp of truths. It is just as often a development from confusion to a clarity that is mistaken. Why it is that we have trouble telling what is real and what is not is rooted in the nature of experience itself, and for understanding this structure Peirce proposed his “New List of Categories” in 1867.

[73] c.1897: CP 1.13: "indeed the first step toward finding out is to acknowledge you do not satisfactorily know already; so that no blight can so surely arrest all intellectual growth as the blight of cocksureness; and ninety-nine out of every hundred good heads are reduced to impotence by that malady — of whose inroads they are most strangely unaware!".

[74] A startling point; yet when one considers that, in sensation, the common sensibles are based on the proper sensibles by sign relations, in perception and intellection alike the sense data are objectively organized on the basis of *species expressae* as formal signs, the inescapable conclusion is that the objective world from its foundations in sense to its superstructures in understanding rests upon the sign.

Chapter 3

CATEGORIES AND THE ACTION OF SIGNS

If we care to have an official date for the beginning of the postmodern era in philosophy, the 14th of May, 1867, would suffice. Of course, like all official dates, it is but a fixed point in otherwise shifting sands, a landmark rather than an absolute beginning. The wintry winds of modernity would continue to blow long past this early date, but as the official beginning of spring does not by itself bring an end to winter's blasts, still, it signals that the end is near at hand.

Expanding the Semiotic Frontier

Peirce did not merely recover the Latin *signum*, he at once proceeded to develop it beyond anything to be found in the greatest of the Latin authors. He did not have to work his way to the arduous conclusion that the general notion of sign is no mere nominalism. That is the point at which the Latins had enabled his semiotic to begin. What were loose ends in the semiotic as first systematically realized in a speculative treatise became the threads of the new beginning for the doctrine of signs as Peirce introduced it for postmodern philosophy.

Peirce did not speak of "formal" and "instrumental signs". He did not have to. For him, the overcoming of the divide between nature and culture in the being of the sign was the point of departure, not the point of arrival. And, in any event, arriving at that point of departure as the conclusion of semiotics in the Latin Age, the once-celebrated distinction had been but a stage along the way, and an equivocal one at that. This distinction was at best a terminological marking of analytic points in the doctrine of signs already achieved as early as the 13th century. At worst it was a diversion as well as an advance, since nothing in the terminology guaranteed that it needed to be understood as the modal expression of a single underlying or common way of being,

as the nominalistic use to which the terminology was put in the work of the learned Fonseca proved.[75]

Problems in the Latin Terminology

The defect of the Latin terminology on this point is worth dwelling on, for it helps to understand how it was possible for the moderns to get off on the way of ideas in the first place. We saw that, in the final clarification of the general notion of sign in the Latin Age, the calling of such physical structures as smoke and bones "natural signs" was justified by this fact: the very physical constitution of such signs serves to guide the formation in experience and cognition of objective relations which duplicate the essential structure of an intersubjectivity which at least at one time obtained independently of and prior to the experience in which such objective relations are here and now formed. But strictly, it is neither the smoke nor the bone but the relation itself so formed which constitutes the sign in its actual being as sign. Technically speaking, the smoke and bones are not signs, but rather *sign-vehicles*; they are signs *fundamentally* but not *formally*, in scholastic parlance.

The sign-vehicle, thus, in contrast to the sign-relation, is the representative element in the sign, while the relation arising *from* this foundation, obtaining (or obtainable) *over and above* the foundation, and *terminating* at a signified object, alone makes this representative element a representation of *something other than itself*. In the absence of this relation, hence, the foundation becomes merely virtual or material *as* a foundation and is then experienced instead simply as a *self*-representation or object.

But the concept or idea, too, the percept of a pure zoösemiosis no less, is a sign-vehicle in just this sense: it too is a subjective structure or modification which, according to its intrinsic being, guides the formation of a relation to an object signified, and as such (as a sign-vehicle) the idea or "mental image" is a sign fundamentally rather than formally. But, unlike the fossil bone or plume of smoke which can exist without being apprehended or known, the idea exists only insofar as it guides an apprehension to the awareness of this rather than that object. It is the knowing that forms the idea, so that the idea cannot be *except* as an idea *of* its object, as something "praecognitum formaliter" — something existing "as the rationale and form whereby an object

[75] These remarks are based on researches that are to appear in a comprehensive history of philosophy on these points, *Four Ages of Understanding*, in final stages with the University of Toronto Press.

is rendered known within a power, and so it is precognized formally, not denominatively and as a thing is cognized". In other words, the idea is not objectified as a self-representation.[76]

The bone, of course, which, even in order to signify, is objectified first as a self-representation, is the bone *of* some animal, as the smoke is *of* some fire. But here the *of* refers to the *productive source* of the bone, the animal whose bone it was, or to the fire whence the smoke arises, which is not necessarily an objective relation but only, as a relation, indifferent to the possibility of being objectified and duplicated or made to exist again now in cognition or even in cognition alone. By contrast, the *of* in the idea, which is objectified only through its other-representation, refers not to the mind as producing the idea but to *that of which the idea makes the mind aware in producing it*. In other words, the *of* distinctive of the idea as such refers not backward to the idea's productive source as *my* idea or *your* idea, but outward to the objective term of an experience in principle suprasubjective and, insofar, accessible to others besides the one here and now forming the idea making that object present.

It is necessary to be quite precise in symbolising this situation, perhaps even more precise than whoever it was among the Latins who originally suggested the designation of the concept as a *signum formale*. For while this designation is justified by the fact that the idea cannot exist *without* founding a relation to an object, it is also a problematic designation inasmuch as the idea (or concept) in itself, that is, as a psychological mode of being, is not the *suprasubjective* referral or relation as such required for renvoi (as the irreducibly triadic relation constitutive of every sign has come to be known). The idea or concept in itself as directly modifying and characterizing a knower is only the *subjective* referral or fundament (the transcendental relation) on which that (ontological sign) relation — in which alone the sign *formally* consists — is based. The existential inseparability of the two (of the transcendental relation of subjective foundation from the ontological relation of suprasubjective connection) in the case of the idea does not gainsay the modal real distinction of relation from its foundation. Nor does it gainsay the fact that the foundation as such is neither suprasubjective, nor (still less) intersubjective, but subjective. But this existential inseparability does explain why an idea, in contrast to, say, our fossil bone, has no existence apart from its semiosic one.

By speaking of *the concept* as a "formal sign", the scholastic analysis did not foreclose the very confusion that surfaced in semiotics when Roman Jakobson proposed *aliquid stat pro*

[76] Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis*, Book II "On the Divisions of Sign", Question 1 "Whether the Division of Sign into Formal and Instrumental is Univocal and Sound", 226/43–45.

aliquo, “something that stands for something”, as a correct formula for sign as such in general.[77] For this formula yet remains open to the interpretation of Fonseca, the interpretation which provides for the very reduction of sign to sign-vehicle that would become in Descartes and Locke the irredeemably solipsistic equation of objects with ideas. The correct formula is, then, rather, *aliquid stat pro alio*, “something that stands for another than itself, something that may or may not present itself objectively yet always presents objectively something that it itself is not”.

Since the reality of relation and hence of general modes of being was his starting point, Peirce was able to begin more or less at the most advanced point reached in the earlier Latin conversation. He did not first have to consider what fossil bones and ideas of dinosaurs have in common with respect to the dinosaur as an object signified. He simply fastened at once on the fact that the sign in its proper being consists in a relation which is, like all relations, suprasubjective in principle and often intersubjective in fact, but different from all other relations in the physical world in irreducibly involving in principle three and not just two terms. He began at once with the problem of tightening up the terminology of everyone else before him who, in speaking of the sign both strictly and loosely, had trod this ground.

Strictly, Peirce agreed with Poinsot that the sign in its proper and formal being consists not in a representation as such but in a representation only and insofar as it serves to found a relation to something other than itself, namely, an object signified as presented or presentable to and within the awareness of some organism, some observer. He saw also that, loosely, we, like our Latin forebears, speak of sign as that one of the three terms in the triadic relation from which the sign-relation — the sign formally — pointed toward its significate directly and the prospective observer indirectly. At once it was clear to Peirce that a further precision is called for, an improvement in the extant terminology, and “formal vs. instrumental sign”, as we have just seen, will hardly do what is needed at this point.

[77] Roman Jakobson, "Coup d'oeil sur le devéloppement de la sémiotique", in *Panorama sémiotique/A Semiotic Landscape*, Proceedings of the First Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, Milan, June 1974, ed. Seymour Chatman, Umberto Eco, and Jean-Marie Klinkenberg (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 3-18; English trans. by Patricia Baudoin titled "A Glance at the Development of Semiotics", in *The Framework of Language* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Studies in the Humanities, Horace R. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, 1980), 1–30. Extended commentary in the Thomas A. Sebeok Fellowship Inaugural Lecture, "How Does Semiosis Effect Renvoi?", published in *The American Journal of Semiotics* 11.1–2 (1994), pp.11–61, and as Ch. 8 of *New Beginnings*.

Sign-Vehicle as Representamen

We have seen that that one of the three terms which is loosely called “sign”, namely, the sign-vehicle, can be either a physical or a psychical structure.[78] When this term (the sign-vehicle or “sign” loosely so-called) is a material mode of being — such as a sound, a mark, or a movement — it is also a perceptible object in its own right. As a perceptible object, however, the sign need not succeed as a sign. It remains perceptible whether it also functions as a sign (a sound heard and understood as a word) or whether it fails further so to function (a word heard but mistaken for a mere sound and not recognized as a linguistic expression at all, the footstep of a thief in the night heard but mistaken for a rustling of the leaves by wind), although even in such “failed cases” a signification is always virtually nascent, if only in the form of a question — “What?” — leading the mind to investigate further the status of this perceptible object which has intruded upon awareness to become part of a Lebenswelt. Yet all of this is beside the present point.

The present point is that whether the sign loosely so called is a material structure accessible to outer sense or a psychological structure accessible as such only inwardly (by feeling directly and cognition only indirectly, say), this in either case is the element in the sign formally considered that conveys the object signified to the observer, actual or prospective. We have come to call this sign loosely so called (indifferently formal or instrumental in the older parlance) the *sign-vehicle* in contrast to the *sign itself* as triadic relation linking this vehicle to its object signified and the interpretant through which the link is here and now actualized or verified. But Peirce had another name for the sign-vehicle, psychological or physical. He called it the *representamen*.[79]

“Ground”

And at once we land in yet another quagmire, that of the “ground”:[80]

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[78] We may further note that, as a psychological or psychic structure, it matters not whether the sign-vehicle be cognitive or affective, including conative.

[79] Here I would like to repeat my quixotic point on the pronunciation of this Peircean term made in "From Glassy Essence to Bottomless Lake", in *Semiotics 1992*, ed. J. Deely (Lanham, MD: University Press of America), p. 157n1. Contemporary Peirceans, with the exception of Vincent Colapietro who is unique among them in not being ignorant of Latin scholasticism, insist on mispronouncing "representamen" with that insouciance according to which Americans typically approach the sound-system of all languages outside of English. Since it is a question of pronunciation, an audial form, and here my sole medium is scriptal, my foray is perhaps doubly quixotic. Nonetheless, here goes. The term "representamen" is derived from the Latin for "to represent", or "a representation". In accordance with this etymology, the term should not be pronounced, as by the Anglophile Peirceans, "represént-a-men", but rather as "represen-tá-men".

[80] Peirce c.1897: CP 2.228–229.

> A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen. ...
>
> In consequence of every representamen being thus connected with three things, the ground, the object, and the interpretant, the science of semiotic has three branches.

What are we to understand by "ground" here? The difficulty arises from the fact that the term "ground" is often used to convey the Latin sense of *fundamentum*, the "foundation or ground" in a subject from which a relation springs and upon which it depends for its being correlative with a terminus. For example:[81]

> though a cause is required for every entity and form, yet in a special sense a fundament is said to be required for a relation, because other forms require a cause only in order to be produced in being and exist, whereas relation — owing to its minimal entitative character and because in terms of its proper concept it is toward another — requires a fundament or ground not only in order to exist but also in order to be able to remain in existence, that is, in order to be a mind-independent rationale of physical being.

But "ground" in this sense, in the case of a sign relation, would be identical with the representamen or sign vehicle.

The mystery clarifies, however, if it be the case that what Peirce means by ground is exactly that extrinsic formal specification whereby the foundation of a relation gives rise to its relation as terminating at this rather than that aspect of an object signified. In other words, what Peirce means by "ground" is not at all the *foundation* of a relation but rather its strict formal *terminus* as such,[82] very like the crucial Latin analytical concept of *formal object* which was so essential to the Latin analysis of cognition and so conspicuously absent from the modern analyses of the same phenomenological data of perception. The ground, then, is that which is directly and immediately presented by a sign in its signified object, by reason of which whatever else is

[81] Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis* (1632), Second Preamble "On Relation", Article 2 "What Is Required for Any Relation To Be Categorial" (= Under what conditions will a relation obtain in the physical environment as such), 89/18–27.

[82] See, in the electronic edition of Poinsot's *Tractatus de Signis* (Charlottesville, VA: Intelex Corp., 1993), Appendix C: The Texts on Relation Completing the Second Preamble (Σ19–23). These texts appear only in the electronic edition, as additions to the texts in the 1985 text published by the University of California Press.

presented in the object as well is presented, as in the following description from the "New List of Categories":[83]

> the conception of a pure abstraction is indispensable, because we cannot comprehend an agreement of two things, except as an agreement in some respect, and this respect is such a pure abstraction as blackness. Such a pure abstraction, reference to which constitutes a quality or general attribute, may be termed a ground.
>
> Reference to a ground cannot be prescinded from being, but being can be prescinded from it.
>
> Empirical psychology has established the fact that we can know a quality only by means of its contrast with or similarity to another. By contrast and agreement a thing is referred to a correlate, if this term may be used in a wider sense than usual. The occasion of the introduction of the conception of reference to a ground is the reference to a correlate, and this is, therefore, the next conception in order.
>
> Reference to a correlate cannot be prescinded from reference to a ground; but reference to a ground may be prescinded from reference to a correlate.
>
> ... suppose we think of a murderer as being in relation to a murdered person; in this case we conceive the act of the murder, and in this conception it is represented that corresponding to every murderer (as well as to every murder) there is a murdered person; and thus we resort again to a mediating representation which represents the relate as standing for a correlate with which the mediating representation is itself in relation. Again, suppose we look up the word *homme* in a French dictionary; we shall find opposite to it the word *man*, which, so placed, represents *homme* as representing the same two-legged creature which *man* itself represents. By a further accumulation of instances, it would be found that every comparison requires, besides the related thing, the ground, and the correlate, also *a mediating representation which represents the relate to be a representation of the same correlate which this mediating representation itself represents*. Such a mediating representation may be termed an *interpretant*, because it fulfills the office of an interpreter, who says that a foreigner says the same thing which he himself says. The term representation is here to be understood in a very extended sense, which can be explained by instances better than by a definition. In this sense, a word represents a thing to the conception in the mind of the hearer, a portrait represents the person for whom it is intended to the conception of recognition, a weathercock represents the direction of the wind to the conception of him who understands it, a barrister represents his client to the judge and jury whom he influences.

[83] 1867: CP 1.551–553.

> Every reference to a correlate, then, conjoins to the substance the conception of a reference to an interpretant; and this is, therefore, the next conception in order in passing from being to substance.
>
> Reference to an interpretant cannot be prescinded from reference to a correlate; but the latter can be prescinded from the former.

And the discussion continues, but let us leave it at this point. Representamen, we may say with Peirce,[84] is "that which refers to ground, correlate, and interpretant", and we have some definite notion as to what is being talked about — to wit: object signified as such, sign-vehicle, and the prospective or actual observer.

For perhaps enough has been said to show both how "ground" may be best understood (though there may be some arguments to be made on this point in the framework of the ethics of terminology), and, at the same time, what is principally different about Peirce's semiotic as he picks it up from the Latins. This latter point holds even if we have quite missed the true import of "ground" as a technical term in the Peircean texts.

From the Being of Sign to the Action of Sign

What principally distinguishes the semiotic of Peirce in contrast with semiotics as the Latins left it is this. The Latins, for the most part, got only as far as establishing the being proper to signs, the common factor or element which justifies the notion of sign in general in Augustine's sense and removes it from every theoretical context of nominalism. But Peirce, in good medieval fashion, goes at once from this as established terrain to consider what immediately follows from it, namely, the action proper to signs. For as the Latins liked to say, *agere sequitur esse*, "action follows upon being, 'follows' logically, but is temporally simultaneous therewith and necessary thereto".[85]

Peirce gives his notion of sign in general in dynamic terms. From the first, he tries to keep his eye not on what the sign is as much as on how it acts as a result or consequence of what it is. Recall what Peirce said about the sign in its proper character as a genuine mediation:[86] anything is related to a second thing, its Object, in respect to a quality, its Ground, in such a way as to

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[84] Ibid., CP 5.558.

[85] For full discussion of the point, see John Deely, *The Human Use of Signs* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), ¶ 3ff.

[86] c.1902: CP 2.92, cited above at p. 32. See also the c.1894 MS 404, "What Is a Sign?", in *The Essential Peirce* Vol. 2, pp. 4–10.

bring a third thing, its Interpretant, into relation to the same Object, and that in such a way as to bring a fourth into relation to that Object in the same form, *ad infinitum*.

Infinite Semiosis

When an argument slipped off into infinite process, the scholastics, like Aristotle, at that moment jettisoned the argument; for by the fact of involving an infinite process, the argument was known to have skipped a cog in what was up for being explained, namely, some occurrence in the order and among the subjective structures of physical nature. Infinite process as such begged the question of any sought for explanation in physical nature, because such a process was possible only by founding relation upon the basis of other relations, which cannot occur in the physical world but only in thought. Indeed, for Aquinas, this point formed the linchpin in the cosmological form of argument to the existence of God as he formulated it in his *Summa theologiae*.

But when it comes to the sign, it is no longer a question of seeking for explanations determinately aimed at the order of *ens reale*, "mind-independent being". For the whole point of the sign is that, as mediating objectivity, it is not determinately located in that order, but equally, and, indeed, more fundamentally in a certain sense, in the order of mind-dependent being, inasmuch as outward signs depend upon inward signs in order to function within experience. Infinite process, repugnant in physical explanations concerned with accounting for how the interactions of finite beings as such bring about this or that condition, are the normal condition with signs. This mind-dependent mediation of the sign as an infinite process is exactly why conspiracy theories, for example, can become irrefutable. The equivalence in objectivity of real and unreal relations make possible the attribution to objects by the mind of relations which, in the nature of the case, *could be* so. *Nothing prevents* their being so — though, on the other hand, nothing requires it. The problem is to decide not what relations could be, but which actually are or were part of the order of mind-independent being, *ens reale*. It is the whole problem of human understanding.

The human individual wakes up intellectually in the middle of a river of signs, for the most part hidden behind, below, and within the objects they present as "the way things are". Neither the banks of the river nor the bottom are in immediate reach. From the individual's point of view, there is neither a beginning point to the process in the past nor a foreseeable end to the process in the future. Once the human mind becomes aware of the role of signs in experience, the individual becomes aware also that he or she is caught up in precisely an infinite process — not a hopeless or self-defeating one, by any means, but neither is it one over which the individual can gain a complete critical control.

This is the situation Peirce found needed accounting for, and it was with this in mind that he devised his system of categories, the third such great system in the history of philosophy. The first great scheme of categories was that of Aristotle, intended to map out the basic irreducible modes of mind-independent being in terms of which we can make unequivocal predications. The second great scheme of categories was that of Kant. Here is not the place to go into a detailed discussion of Kant's categories, but only to make the general point that, in the nature of the case, they could provide no more than the essential categories of mind-dependent being insofar as it enters into discourse since, according to Kant, all phenomena without exception are wholly the mind's own construct. Nonetheless, do not be deceived by this fact into thinking that the Kantian scheme is not worth studying. It is filled with triads, which Peirce found very suggestive in finally arriving at his own categories, even though Peirce's are categories of experience in precisely the sense that Kant tried to rule out and foreclose upon for all future philosophy.[87]

A New List of Categories

I call Peirce's "new list of categories" his *semiotic categories*, or the *categories of exper*ience, because precisely what they do is account for the transformation of the animal Umwelt into the human Lebenswelt, that is, a species-specific objective world of meanings into a world of meanings expressly contrastable with the world of the physical environment in its dimension of being prior to and independent of the involvement of the semiotic animal. The simplicity of the scheme exhibits the same kind of genius we find in the history of semiotic at the point when Poinsot realized that, by framing the question of sign in terms of the contrast between transcendental and ontological relative, he had hit upon an exclusive and exhaustive alternative wherein the choice became a self-evident one.

Peirce gives his categories the names of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. The reason for the names becomes apparent as the manner in which the categories function unfolds. Experience moves the understanding from a confused total grasp wherein there is no difference between dream and reality, possibility and actuality — because all is wrapped up in one "blooming, buzzing confusion" — to definite experiences and conceptions wherein the determinate plurality intruded into the objective whole (Secondness) becomes intelligible through sign relations. Thus Firstness

[87] Mention could also be made of the Hegelian categories, but I think the devastating remark about them made by Peirce is enough for present purposes (1903a: CP 1.544): "Hegel's method has the defect of not working at all if you think with too great exactitude".

is the *primum cognitum* of Aquinas left over as a free-floating problem from the 13th century, but one now situated determinately at the base of the doctrine of signs.[88]

[88] See, besides Part IV in *The Human Use of Signs*, ¶s 285–311, the traditionally grounded yet ground-breaking work of Vincent Guagliardo, in particular: "Being and Anthroposemiotics", in *Semiotics 1993*, ed. Robert Corrington and John Deely (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 50–56; "Being-as-First-Known in Poinsot: A-Priori or Aporia?", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 68.3 "Special Issue on John Poinsot" (Summer, 1994), pp. 363–393; and his "Introduction" to the Special Issue on Thomas Aquinas of *Listening* 30.1 (Winter), 3–6.

Chapter 4

THE PECULIAR CASE OF FIRSTNESS

Firstness is in several ways a particularly interesting case. Not only does the whole categorial scheme depend on its being well understood. It provides a striking example of the importance of Peirce's ethics of terminology, up to which we are leading. This example gives a basis for appreciating why Peirce was led to propose such an idea as a consequence of his years of study of Latin philosophy in the course of working out his semiotic, or contribution to the doctrine of signs.

Let us use the occasion to preface a look at the ethics of terminology, therefore, by an examination of the categories, beginning at the beginning. We will see that there is even more of Latin history that bears on the idea of Firstness than even Peirce realized. But the fact would not have surprised him in the least, except in the way of delight. Such was the temper of his mind.

To begin with, there is a difference within experience between what is sensed and what is understood regardless of whether or not it can also be sensed, especially with reference to objects whose very understanding essentially excludes a proper sensory instantiation, either because the object in question has never existed in the physical environment, or, more radically, because the manner of existence postulated for the object is *ex hypothesi* of its nature inaccessible to any sensory modality.

This is one way of making the point that there is something which can be expressed through linguistic means that cannot be communicated in any other way, something that differentiates human awareness as species-specifically as the exaptation of language species-specifically differentiates human communication. Something does so more primordially, since the apprehension in question antecedes the exaptation of language and, moreover, seems to be of a piece with it. There is, to refer back to Thomas Aquinas's characterization of the situation, something which is to understanding (or "intellection") as sound is to hearing[89] and differentiated light is to

[89] Aquinas, *Summa* (c.1266), I. q. 5. art. 2, p. 191.

seeing.[90] There is, in short, a *primum intelligibile* or "primary intelligible", just as there is a *primum visibile* or "primary visible" and a *primum audibile* or "primary audible".

This is not a question that has been often posed in the history of philosophy, for it is not easily faced. When we look at the world around us, it is the diversity of shapes and colors, not the omni-present fact of the differentiation of light that we call color as enabling seeing at all, that interests us. So too when we listen: it is the particular sounds and combinations of sounds that interest us, not the general fact that sound as such enables the particular hearings. So too in investigating what anything is, it is the particulars of the case, the reason for this feature and that characteristic, that interest us, not the fact that were things not intelligible in general, the particulars of the case would both forever elude us and could not be inquired into in the first place.

The first of all species-specifically human conceptions, therefore, is not a starting point for intellectual knowledge in a temporal sense. That is to say, it is not a question of a linear beginning which is left behind as understanding progresses. The question concerns what must be present throughout intellectual awareness whenever and as long as understanding occurs over and above, or within, sensation and perception. Other particularized moments of understanding may proceed out of it, but it itself can proceed from nothing else, precisely because, respecting this object (this aspect or dimension of objectivity, let us say), there is no other preceding cognition as basis of its formation. The eye works together with the ear and with touch and taste, and so forth, in forming our perception of an object as sensible. Yet the contribution of each channel is distinct and irreducible. So also with the understanding, which contributes precisely intelligibility to what is directly perceived and sensed. What this intelligibility consists in is the objective world presented in perception apprehended in relation to itself.

The relation of an object to itself is a mind-dependent relation. Even if the object is in one or another aspect also a thing, i.e., a mind-independent element of the physical environment, as is always in part the case with an Umwelt, any given thing "in itself" simply is what it is. It is not *related to* itself, it *is* itself. For a thing to be *related* to itself cognition must intervene, and cognition of a specifically intellectual type, able to construct and grasp relations independent of the related terms which, in the present case, are not even distinct mind-independently. Here, however, at the level of *primum intelligibile*, it is not a question of any given object of perception being cognized under a relation to itself. It is rather a question of the objective world as such, the

[90] Aquinas, *In quattuor libros sententiarum Petri Lombardi* (c.1254-1256), lib. 1. sent. dist. 19. q. 5. ad 7., p. 55.

Umwelt as the totality of objectification at any given moment, being grasped in relation to itself.[91] Peirce calls this "Firstness", "the Idea of that which is such as it is regardless of anything else";[92] "the positive internal characters of the subject in itself";[93] "the conception of being or existing independent of anything else";[94] "the present, in general", or "IT":[95]

> This is a conception, because it is universal. But as the act of *attention* has no connotation at all, but is the pure denotative power of the mind, that is to say, the power which directs the mind to an object, in contradistinction to the power of thinking any predicate of that object, — so the conception of *what is present in general*, which is nothing but the general recognition of what is contained in attention, has no connotation, and therefore no proper unity. ... Before any comparison or discrimination can be made between what is present, what is present must have been recognized as such, as *it*, and subsequently the metaphysical parts which are recognized by abstraction are attributed to this *it*, but the *it* cannot itself be made a predicate.

Applying to "Firstness" the Ethics of Terminology

Peirce goes on to identify this "it", the objective world as the here and now present in general, with one of the meanings of the philosophical term substance. He excludes from "it" the conception of *being* as a predicative notion bound up with the copula. But his remarks show an ignorance of a main Latin tradition in one of its little explored particulars, the very one we are attempting to explore now, namely, the determination of the species-specifically human contribution to cognition from which language and the postlinguistic symbols of culture in general arise.[96]

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[91] See Poinsot 1635 (Reiser ed. Vol. III): 315b6-13, 315b30-40; Cajetan, *Commentaria in summam theologicam. Prima pars.* (Rome: May 2, 1507; reprinted in the Leonine edition of the *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia*, vols. 4 and 5), I p. q. 79. art. 7. The point that Poinsot, Cajetan, and Aquinas before them struggle to make is perhaps clarified in the contemporary formulation of Corrington (1992: 41): on the one hand, "embodiment radically limits the reach of the self and binds it to the fragmentary conditions of origin": this is the *virtus intellectus*; on the other hand, "the human process is not confined to its sheer embodiment but moves outward through its products and utterances": this is the *capacitas intellectus*, the asymptotic (or syncategorematic) "full reach of the human process" beyond its condition of embodiment — a reach doomed to fall short, to be sure, if actual achievement of infinity is the measure, but a reaching nonetheless evermore-infinite in prospect and succession in time, according to the Peircean idea that the truth to which mankind has devotion ought not to be merely the "truth as we understand it", but precisely truths we do not yet understand, "truth as a symbolic growth in time".

[92] Peirce 1903c: CP 5.66.

[93] Peirce c.1906, "A Survey of Pragmaticism": CP 5.469.

[94] Peirce 1891: CP 6.32.

[95] Peirce 1867: CP 1.547.

[96] See the original attempt to formulate this problematic in the seminal paper of Vincent Guagliardo, "Being and Anthroposemiotics", in *Semiotics 1993*, ed. Robert Corrington and John Deely (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 50–56.

Being in the sense Peirce rejects as inapplicable to the IT, the being wherein the junction of predicate to subject occurs, is only one of nine or so *derivative* senses Aquinas assigns to "being" as the "*primum cognitum*" of intellection.

The text in which Aquinas makes this point[97] is too long to cite here, but a diagrammatic summary of it should be useful:

Being as *primum cognitum* can only be differentiated from within	either by the recognition of some special mode of being	whether that of a being existing	in itself: *substance*	
			or in another: the various subjective *accidents*	
		or of a being existing toward another: *relation*, whether	mind-dependent or	
			mind-independent	
	or by the recognition of some general mode of being	following on any being as it is in itself	whether affirmatively: *thing*	
			or negatively: *unity*	
		following on any being as it is in an order to another	according to the division of one thing from another: *something*	
			according to the agreement or suitability of one being	respecting desire: *good*
				respecting apprehension: *truth*

Diagram of the Meanings of "Being"
Derivative to the *Primum Cognitum* in Aquinas

Especially since the Latin Age, the term "being" is one of those most bandied about in the history of philosophy. Whence it has been assigned a number of determinate meanings, including substance, which Peirce also assigns "in one of its meanings" to Firstness or the IT.[98] But in making this assignment Peirce is violating the Third as well as the Sixth Rule of the "Ethics of Terminology". Even the one sense of substance which partially fits the IT — Aristotle's "first substance", which is neither predicated of a subject nor in a subject — does not justify the identification of the two notions, for two reasons.

[97] *De veritate* (c.1256-1259), q. 1. art. 1 *corpus*.

[98] Peirce 1867: CP 1.547.

First, that which is first known by understanding in its difference from sense perception does not fail to be a predicate because it is identified with, or includes in itself, the notion of first substance. It fails because "in the first intellectual cognition of all things neither can the understanding apply itself nor the will the understanding, since there will not have been another cognition by virtue of which such application could be made, and therefore there is only at work in the case the immediate proportion of object known with power knowing".[99]

Second, that which is first known by understanding is the prospectively definable structure or essence of perceptible objects. This "essence" is not by any means as restricted to "substance" as the being proper to individuals existing as such. "Definable structures" include equally "whatever can be conceived in the manner of some nature and essence, including characteristics of individuals and modes, and indeed singularity itself can be understood after the manner of an essence"[100] — such as the famous *haecceitas*, "thisness" or "form of individuality", in the writings of Scotus. The understanding investigates the properties of perceived objects through the concept of a definable unifying structure indicative of some principle. This structure has an order and dependence on the perception as on the abductive point of departure from which the sought for principle of unification can be derived. It provides also an inductive point of arrival against which the adequacy of the objectified principle can be verified.[101]

We can say, then, that that which is first apprehended intellectually, insofar as intellection differs from (even while occurring within) perception, is the objective world in relation to itself. In this apprehension the imperceptible "relation to itself" is the sole contribution of understanding. Yet this contribution is sufficient both to elevate the perceptible elements of the Umwelt to the level of intelligibility and, by the same stroke, to transform the Umwelt into a Lebenswelt, that is to say, an objective world perfused with stipulable signs apprehended as such in the heart of otherwise naturally determined significations, even those symbolic in structure.

Making the Sensible World Intelligible

It was a very important and insufficiently understood insight of Latin scholasticism that the physical environment, insofar as it enters into the cognitive structure constituting an Umwelt, is of itself sensible but not of itself intelligible. Understanding itself, taking the materials of sensation

[99] Poinsot, "De Primo Cognito", Q. 1, Art. 3, of his *Philosophiae Naturalis Prima Pars* (1633; Reiser ed. Vol. II), 26b34-27a2. Poinsot's discussion of "being as first known" is the most extended treatment we have from the Latin Age after Aquinas.

[100] Poinsot 1635: 318b7-19.

[101] Poinsot 1633: 33b5–17.

and perception as its base, has to make that material actually intelligible. This it does by first seeing the whole material of perception — the objective world or Umwelt in all its parts — in relation to itself, over and above the relations to biological needs and interests which are already factored into the structure of the Umwelt by virtue of the biological heritage of the cognitive organism.[102]

Hence the objective world, seen in relation to itself, already consists of a mixture of mind-independent and mind-dependent relations. But these relations are undistinguished as such. They are not explicitly recognized as mind-dependent, but simply function in accordance with their objective mutual equivalence as relations within the apprehension constitutive of Lebenswelt.[103] Thus the first action of the understanding is to apprehend its objects in such a way that they *can eventually* be understood critically, and this is to apprehend the objective world under that mind-dependent relation which allows its contents to appear, truly or falsely, as present-at-hand and not merely ready-to-hand (as they appear to the animals which are not human).

Whence, to Heidegger's question,[104] "Why does Being get 'conceived' 'proximally' in terms of the present-at-hand *and not* in terms of the ready-to-hand, which indeed lies *closer* to us?", the answer lies in the difference between zoösemiosis as common to animals and anthroposemiosis as unique to linguistic animals. *Ens ut primum cognitum*, "Firstness", which constitutes the species-specifically human mode of apprehension underlying the exaptation of language for

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[102] Poinsot 1635: 318b25-319a5. Poinsot speaks in this text of "abstraction" not as a scientific procedure, but as the simple negative process whereby a cognitive power — in this case, understanding or intellect — fastens on its proper object (i.e., the object which correlatively defines the power in its difference from what other channels of apprehension present or manifest) to the exclusion of all else that falls outside that formality. Guagliardo (1994: §3, 375ff.) has one of the few thematic discussions of negative abstraction. See Poinsot 1633: 31a5-28, and compare this with Peirce's discussion of abstraction or "prescission" in his "New List of Categories" (1867: CP 1.549).

Thus the *ens ut primum cognitum*, contrary to common assumptions of the neoscholastics, is irreducible equally to *ens sensibile*, *ens perceptibile*, and to *ens* as it is studied in any of the special sciences — *ens reale* or *ens mobile* which is studied in physics, *ens quantitativum* which is studied in mathematics, *ens commune* or *ens inquantum ens* or even *ens transcendentale* such as is studied in Aristotelian or Thomistic metaphysics. *Ens ut primum cognitum* is a notion *sui generis*, prior to all predication as that which makes predication possible to begin with, from which all other notions of being, logical, scientific, or metaphysical, are derived *ab intra*, "from within", and on which all other specifically intellectual notions depend.

[103] Aquinas, from the *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*, c.1265: q. 9. art. 7. ad 6: "among these four transcendental concepts [namely, being, unity, truth, and good], the first by far is being. And for this reason [when, after the internal differentiation of being by nonbeing, predication becomes possible] being must be predicated positively, for negation or privation cannot be the first thing understanding conceives, because what is denied or deprived always belongs to the understanding of negation or privation. But the other three necessarily add over and above being something which being does not reduce to itself; for if they reduce to being they already would not be primitives. But this situation requires that they can add to being only something according to understanding alone: this is either a negation, which adds unity to being (as was said), or relation to something born to be referred to being in every instance. And this last is either the understanding itself to which it conveys the relation of true, or desire, to which it conveys the relation of good."

[104] *Sein und Zeit*, 1927: 487.

communicative purposes and at the root of the transformation of Umwelt into Lebenswelt, does no more than establish the foundation for the eventual arising thematically of questions of the form, "What is that?" Ready-to-handness neither requires nor admits of any such thematic development, for it contains no apprehension of otherness in the required sense. Thus:[105]

> The idea of the absolutely first must be entirely separated from all conception of or reference to anything else; for what involves a second is itself a second to that second. The first must therefore be present and immediate, so as not to be a second to a representation. It must be fresh and new, for if old it is second to its former state. It must be initiative, original, spontaneous, and free; otherwise it is second to a determining cause. It is also something vivid and conscious; *so only it avoids being the object of some sensation*. It precedes all synthesis and all differentiation; it has no unity and no parts. It cannot be articulately thought: assert it, and it has already lost its characteristic innocence; for assertion always implies a denial of something else. Stop to think of it, and it has flown! What the world was to Adam on the day he opened his eyes to it, before he had drawn any distinctions, or had become conscious of his own existence — that is first, present, immediate, fresh, new, initiative, original, spontaneous, free, vivid, conscious, evanescent. Only, remember that every description of it must be false to it.

The animal aware of its objective world in such a fashion is alone positioned to form the conception, along with reality, and of a piece with it, of *otherness*. Otherness (present-at-handness in contrast to the ready-to-handness which reduces the environment within objectivity to the level of that extension of organismic dispositions which is the essence of an Umwelt proportioned to the biological nature of the cognizing organism) arises precisely within experience through "brute actions of one subject or substance on another, regardless of law or of any third subject".[106] It is "the conception of being relative to, the conception of reaction with, something else".[107] It is, in a word, the conception of "something other", of one thing different from another thing within the play of objects of awareness. The experience of otherness within firstness is the motivation of every question of the form "What is that?"[108]

We have already seen that the ground of this question is established by the mind itself in presenting the objective world intellectually as relative to itself and, insofar, intelligible. "The

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[105] Peirce c.1890: CP 1.357, italics added

[106] Peirce c.1906, "A Survey of Pragmaticism": CP 5.469.

[107] Peirce 1891: CP 6.32.

[108] The fundamental awareness or apprehension is neither of existence as such nor of intelligibility — "essence" or "possibility" — as separate from existence, but simply of a *prospective intelligibility given in and through experience*. See Poinsot 1633: 23b34-24a41.

formal rationale of knowing of the understanding", the Latins argued,[109] "in which understanding is distinguished from perception, is not the singularity itself of sensations, but the very definable structure of which singularity is a mode". In other words, it is the grasping of that general mode of being of which all singularities but provide instances.

Sense perception and understanding work together as contraries within the genus of knowing. The former is primarily and essentially ordered to manifesting the individuating sensible characteristics of objects signified. The latter is primarily and essentially ordered to manifesting the relative structure which gives to the sensible properties their pattern of intelligibility as manifesting the underlying relations which give to the world as perceived its definable structures, both "natural" and "cultural".[110]

Relations and the Knowledge of Essences

We see, then, that the so-called "essences of material things" actually consist, so far as understanding is concerned, in *patterns of relationships* instantiated or verified in perceptible objectivities, but that the *relationships themselves*, in contrast to the elements of the system related, are never as such perceptible, though they can be understood. Thus the grasping of the relationships themselves, in their distinction from the perceptible aspects of the objective world which manifest them, is precluded for an animal which has only sensation and perception to rely on, in their contrast with understanding.

Especially important to grasp at this juncture is a point made in passing by Thomas Aquinas quite early in his career,[111] in reflecting on the medieval doctrine that the intellect (in its difference from sense) is ordered to grasping the *quidditates rerum sensibilium*, "the definable structures of material being". "Even the being of an essence", he says, insofar as the human understanding lays hold of it, "is a kind of being of reason".[112] Essence "insofar as human understanding lays hold of it" is a kind of being of reason not simply because it is something known, for the known simply as such may equally be a being of nature. Essence as grasped by the understanding is a being of reason in the sense that the pattern of relations constituting what any given phenomenon — natural or cultural — is, so far as the understanding grasps that structure, is constructed by the

[109] Poinsot 1633a: 32b37-33a13.

[110] See Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Power of God* (c.1265), q. 9. art. 7. ad 15.

[111] In his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* (c.1254-1256), lib. I. dist. 19. q. 5. art. 1. ad 7.

[112] "Etiam quidditatis esse est quoddam esse rationis".

understanding on the pattern of relations it has experienced as physically given and obtaining within the objective world.

Thus the sensations elaborated within perception give us a structured world of embodied objects, and those aspects of the objects sensible as such coincide further with the physical surroundings as an environment common — as physical — to all the life forms.

On the basis of things as presented through the senses, the mind is provided with materials for the imagination to construct worlds which are not presented as such within perception, but "only imagined". Within these materials provided through perception, the understanding finds relations as well as related things, where perception finds only related things; and understanding constructs also relations of its own devising. The relations constructed by the mind on the pattern of physical relations given in experience have this in common with the physical relations at their modular base: both the constructed relations and the physically given relations are truly relations, and both are experienced as such within the world of society, language, and culture.

In contrast to these objective constructs are the objective constructs which are made on the basis of our experience of individuals and their characteristics, which are decidedly not themselves relations though they are involved in relations and are experienced, as we have seen, through these relations. Thus we see not merely colors, shapes, and movements, but college presidents, diplomats, and policemen. The objects experienced are, from the standpoint of the physical environment as such, mixtures of mind-dependent and mind-independent relations. Both of these — the mind-dependent and the mind-independent, the relatively "unreal" and the relatively "real", relations — constitute the object of experience as such in its proper being and as "first intentions" thereof.[113]

When we "invent" a character, such as Sherlock Holmes or Hamlet, in contrast to "real" characters such as Detective Tom Schaefer of the Dubuque Police Department or Cleopatra, the invented character is nothing besides a pattern of characteristics, nothing more than an objective nexus of mind-dependent relations. Some of these — the relations in which the character is involved, such as social roles, kinship, legal adversary, paternity — *are* themselves, as relations, just

[113] This is a technical and little-developed but important and intriguing point. See, in Poinsot's *Treatise on Signs*, the First Preamble, Art. 2, 60/7-25; and Book 1, Quest. 2, 141/12-14: "not every mind-dependent objective relation is a second intention, because even though every mind-dependent relation results from cognition, yet not every such relation denominates a thing only in the state of a cognized being, which is a second state, but some also do so in the state of an existence independent of cognition, as, for example, the relations of being a doctor, being a judge. For the existing man, not the man as cognized, is a doctor or a judge, and so those mind-dependent relations [being a doctor, judge, teacher, etc.] denominate a state of existence."

"You may gather from what has been said that even in the case of stipulated signs the rationale of sign must be explained by a relation to a signified."

what that after which they are patterned are. Others of the characteristics, the size, weight, gender, and physiognomy of the character, say, consist in a being patterned after (consist in mind-dependent relations imitating) that which they themselves *are not*, namely, subjective characteristics of being given in our experience of objects as coincident with physical things. Thus *the whole* of the invented creature is a pattern of relationships, both those of its features which are presented as if they were not mere relationships ("beings patterned after") and those of its features which are presented just as if they were physical relationships, even though all of the invented creature's features are "in reality" constituted by purely objective relations.

For this reason Poinsot, here following Aquinas and other major Latin authors, who in turn base themselves largely on texts of Aristotle, divided being into natural (*ens naturale seu reale*) and mind-dependent or *purely* objective being (*ens rationis*). Natural being is further subdivided into individuals with their characteristics and relations. Mind-dependent being is divided into relations formed on the pattern of natural relations and relations formed on the pattern of individuals with their subjective characteristics. This last class of mind-dependent relations the Latins called "negations", because — being relations — they were *not*, as relations, what their exemplars in nature *are*, namely, subjects (individuals) with their subjective characteristics. Negations and relations, thus, are both relations ontologically and objectively, and together they constitute the entire inventory of mind-dependent being — of being as *purely* objective.

In a word, *relations* constitute the entire inventory of mind-dependent being, both that part of it which diverges from the physical reality of the environment and that part of it which coincides with aspects and features of the physical surroundings. A synoptic diagram is useful here (opposite).

From this we see that *objective* relations as such are neither physical (mind-independent) nor psychical (mind-dependent), but, although always determinately one or the other in a given case, are capable of being either, depending on changing circumstances. Hence objective relations sometimes *pass back and forth within objectivity* from a condition of being now mind-dependent, now mind-independent, and conversely.

An illustrative example. Two lovers travelling to meet one another at 1900 hours are involved in a whole network of physical and objective relations, and some of the physical relations in which they are involved are as such objective, i.e., physical relations of which the parties are well aware. At precisely 1845 (i.e., 6:45PM), unbeknownst to the young man who continues toward his appointed and agreed rendezvous, the young woman is struck by a meteor and instantly killed. At that moment, whatever physical relations she was involved in as such ceased, for physical relations require the existence of both terms in order to exist. The objective relations, of course,

being sustained not by the dynamics of physical being as such but by semiosis, are, as objective, unaffected by the dramatic change in circumstances — except in this crucial particular: those of the objective relations which were *also* physical became, at 1845, *only* objective. Yet, for want of knowledge of the changed circumstances, the young man continued to rush on at 1850 hours just as he had been rushing at 1840 hours, so as not to keep his love waiting.

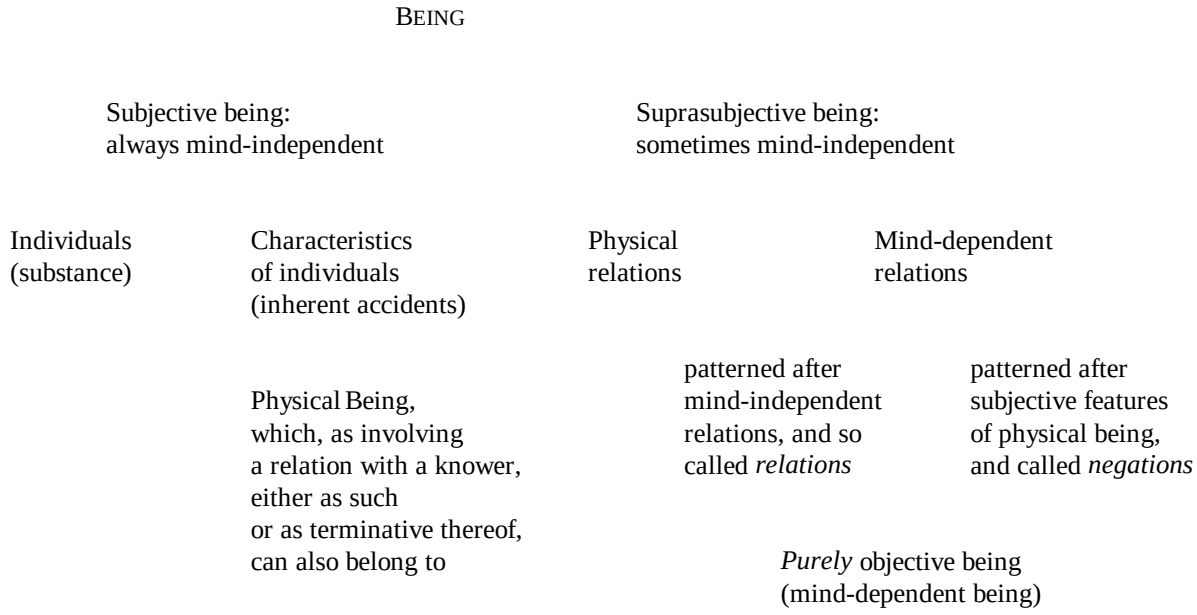

Diagram of the Interpenetration in Objectivity of Subjective and Suprasubjective Being

This example makes a quintessential point: the entitative character of a relation in its rationale as a relation is unaffected by the difference between being mind-dependent or mind-independent. One and the same relation, under different circumstances, can be one time only physical, one time both
physical and objective, and another time only objective, in each case owing wholly to surrounding circumstances extrinsic to the being of the relation as such.

This crucial point bears directly on the matter of supposed essences or "quiddities" of things insofar as they are *known* essences, that is to say, objective. There is no doubt that physical struc-

tures of the environment are internally determined and structured in their parts and in their relations to other physical structures — are "transcendentally relative", as the Latins said. Let us take again the example of the bone of a dinosaur. It is a physical structure. That structure can come to be known and, if respected, can even be made to tell us whether it is the bone of a brontosaurus, a pterodactyl, or indeed of some other of the great reptiles. The Greek and Latin doctrine of transcendental relation, without using the name, was perfectly grasped by Cuvier (1769–1832), who made it the basis of modern paleontology and comparative anatomy: "com mencing our investigations by a careful survey of any one bone by itself, a person who is sufficiently master of the laws of organic structure may, as it were, reconstruct the whole animal to which that bone belonged",[114] the environment essential to such an animal, and so on from part to part, one thing leading to another, to encompass eventually — in principle — the whole physical universe.

But in order to yield up its secrets of the physical world and the past, the bone must first of all be perceived. The transcendental relativity of things in the environment provides no more than the prospective foundation for a scientific understanding. The "*knowledge* of essences" arises, if at all, only in and through the ontological character of the objective relations that come to be founded on that transcendental relativity both in perception and (especially) understanding. The one perceiving the bone may be an ignorant human animal, or indeed an animal other than human. As a key to the past and to some scientific knowledge, the bone is in this case wasted, though it may be excellent to chew on or to use as a club. However, with luck, the one perceiving the bone, the one for whom the bone is objectified, may happen to be a paleontologist. In this circumstance the bone becomes a sign, not of a chew toy or of warfare, but of the age of the dinosaurs, and of some individual and type of individual dinosaur as well. A relation which was once physical between the bone and the dinosaur whose bone it was now has a chance of being reconstructed by the scientific mind. Should that happen, a relation once only physical comes to exist again, unchanged as a relation — that is to say, in its essential rationale and structure as a relation — but now existing only as purely objective.

The bone is not the bone of a shark. It is, and was all along, the bone of a dinosaur. But for its *relation* to be realized, either the dinosaur had still to exist *or* a sufficiently knowledgeable observer had to objectify the bone. Either circumstance gives rise to the ontological relation "of

[114] From Cuvier's *Recherches sur les ossements fossiles des quadrupèdes* of 1812–1825, as cited in Henry Smith Williams, *History of Science* (New York, 1909), Vol. IV, pp. 104–106.

a dinosaur",[115] whereas in the absence of both circumstances the *relation* as such, but not indeed *the bone* as such (the bone as a physical structure of calcium or of stone, etc.), wants for existence.

Now since mind-dependent and mind-independent relations are univocal in their being as *objective* relations, just this circumstance arises: we can be deceived and cannot always tell when a relationship we have posited for the purpose of understanding some physical structure, or, indeed, some cultural structure, is real or unreal. We perforce rely on models in order to answer the question what something is, and models are systems of objective relations which may or may not be duplications of a system of *physical* relations as well. Insofar as the model is an accurate model, that is, insofar as it actually models the physical structure we seek to understand, it provides us with the essence, the "quiddity", of the structure in question, whether that structure be natural or cultural. This need for models is nicely conveyed in a text Aquinas penned quite late in his lifelong series of reflections on *ens ut primum cognitum*:[116]

> It is impossible for the human mind ... to actually understand anything except by the use of models in the imagination. ... This is something that anyone can experience for themselves, namely, the fact that when one tries to understand something, one forms for the purpose some imaginary model to provide examples in which one can, as it were, inspect that which one desires to understand. And thence it is that even when we wish to make someone else understand something, we propose for that person examples on the basis of which he or she can form a model for understanding. And so reliance on imaginary models is necessary for the human mind to actually understand its proper object, for only in this way is the mind able to see a universal nature instantiated in a particular.

These models, Aquinas explains, in which our knowledge of "essences" physical or cultural principally, though not exclusively, consists, are not in themselves true or false, though such a model can be said to be "true" insofar as it adequates the "reality" it has been constructed to explain by illustration.[117]

We see then that the grasp of being as first known (*ens ut primum cognitum*) is intimately related to the notion that the human mind can grasp the "essences" of material things (*quidditates rerum materialium*), but that this knowledge has nothing to do with a special intuition or

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[115] By contrast, as we have just seen, the bone as "*bone of* a dinosaur" is rather a transcendental relation, a subjective structure of physical being from which an ontological relation can arise, whether in nature or as the objective basis guiding the formation of a cognition. See Poinsot's *Treatise on Signs* (1632), esp. 108/38–109/3.

[116] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa* (c.1266), I. q. 84. art. 7 c.

[117] See Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* (c.1254-1256), Book I, dist. 19. q. 5. art. 1. ad 7, p. 55.

immediate insight *into* what things are "beyond their sensible appearances". On the contrary, a "grasp of an essence" is normally those very sensible appearances themselves subsumed under the pattern of a set of relations abstractly taken apart from the instances and supposed or considered to exhibit the unique character of some object, whether real or fictional.

Two More Categories

The physical world "is what it is" when the individual human being is born into it as a part. That physical world intrudes itself through sensation at every point, sometimes brutally. That is why Peirce calls the physical interactions among the various parts of the physical environment, as including humans and other organisms, "brute secondness". Firstness is as a dream out of which *ens reale*, the category of Secondness, inevitably at times awakens a sleeper.

But the realm of secondness is in itself also a structured realm, both subjectively and intersubjectively. Secondness comprises not only real individuals of various sorts, but myriads of real relations among them. To these the mind becoming aware of its surroundings adds relations of its own, to organize the objective world according to its own purposes and interests. This process, together with the assimilation of some of the environment's own relations and the sorting out of the whole network of relations constitutive of objectivity, constitutes Peirce's category of Thirdness.

Thus the categories are related not as building blocks but as compenetrating dimensions of human experience as the experience is developed, structured, and constantly modified by the action of signs. It is a question of "whether there be a life in Signs",[118] of accounting for the fact that "symbols grow".[119] The interpenetration of the categories in the constitution of experience as that through which the world becomes intelligible is the whole point of the "New List". "The world of fact contains only what is, and not everything that is possible of any description", Peirce points out,[120] and hence "the world of fact cannot contain a genuine triad. But though it cannot contain a genuine triad, it may be governed by genuine triads." So he describes his third category

[118] c.1902: CP 2.111.

[119] 1893: CP 2.302.

[120] c.1896: CP 1.478.

as marking a definite position, precisely one of the positions occupied by pragmaticism in the field of philosophical history:[121]

> a position which the pragmaticist holds and must hold, whether that cosmological theory be ultimately sustained or exploded, namely, that the third category — the category of thought, representation, triadic relation, mediation, genuine thirdness, thirdness as such — is an essential ingredient of reality, yet does not by itself constitute reality, since this category (which in that cosmology appears as the element of habit) can have no concrete being without action, as a separate object on which to work its government, just as action cannot exist without the immediate being of feeling on which to act. The truth is that pragmaticism is closely allied to the Hegelian absolute idealism, from which, however, it is sundered by its vigorous denial that the third category (which Hegel degrades to a mere stage of thinking) suffices to make the world, or is even so much as self-sufficient. Had Hegel, instead of regarding the first two stages with his smile of contempt, held on to them as independent or distinct elements of the triune Reality, pragmaticists might have looked up to him as the great vindicator of their truth. ... For pragmaticism belongs essentially to the triadic class of philosophical doctrines, and is much more essentially so than Hegelianism is.

Peirce's categorial scheme is neither a scheme designed to express exclusively what is there in the objective world prior to it and independently of it, as Aristotle's was, nor is it a scheme designed to express exclusively necessary aspects of the mind's own working in developing discursively the content of experience, as Kant's was. Peirce's scheme is designed to express the mixture and interweave of mind-dependent and mind-independent relations which constitute human experience in its totality as a network of sign relations, a semiotic web (or semiosic web). This web is a living tissue of relations. It not only ties together nature and culture, but it does so in a community of understanding, a "community of inquirers". As the spider depends on its web to catch its food, so the understanding sustains and nourishes itself from what its web of relations catches of reality and transforms into culture.

With the help of language, the web of understanding, spun of sign relations, keeps up contact over the centuries even with fellow workers of the life of the mind long dead in bodily form. For the community of inquirers making its way toward truth in the long run is not some isolated band, but includes all those human beings who have come before and will come after us, to the extent that they weave strands into the web that become part of our common heritage, reaching from the

[121] 1905: CP 5.436.

depths of the unconscious to the farthest reaches of human speculation in search of what is or better could be.

It is not surprising that Peirce, in a play of musement, developed a "neglected argument for the existence of God",[122] the first serious advance in a cosmological argument since Aquinas, of whose "fifth way" the "neglected argument" can be considered a semiotic elaboration of much fuller and more credible form in a post-Darwinian universe.

[122] Peirce 1908: CP 6.452–485.

Chapter 5

THE ETHICS OF TERMINOLOGY

Who ever heard of such a thing? And who but Peirce among the moderns could even have dreamed of such a thing, let alone propose it? Next to his pragmaticism, of which it forms a piece, the ethics of terminology is, perhaps, the most postmodern idea in the Peircean corpus.

General Discussion

I had known of Peirce's terminological canons as an odd idea, one of many such in Peirce, which I had no particular reason to ponder until I first posed for myself the question of how, exactly, *do* signs work? It was in the context of examining Sebeok's claim that sign-science and life-science are co-extensive[123] that I first began to discover that Peirce himself, in this area, had run afoul of his own rules. Later, in trying to think through the whole matter of the species-specifically human use of signs whereby Umwelt becomes Lebenswelt, I began to gain a serious appreciation for the terminological canons Peirce had proposed. I found myself using them enough times, in the end, to have to add an Appendix to *The Human Use of Signs* with the complete list of rules in order to enable readers to see for themselves "what the shooting was about".

I also came to see clearly why this, one of Peirce's most important ideas, is also his most neglected idea. It is the one feature of his thought which imposes on his would-be students or followers the obligation thoroughly to school themselves in the Latin scholasticism as it flourished before Descartes, an obligation which, for reasons not difficult to imagine, his admirers have been so far almost unanimous in finding ways to avoid. We are still close enough to modernity that its pernicious attitude of contempt for previous historical developments in philosophy breathes strong, even in the early postmodern air. On top of becoming aware of this pernicious attitude,

[123] See John Deely, "Are Sign-Science and Life-Science Coextensive?", in *Biosemiotics. The Semiotic Web 1991*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992), 45–75.

there is the need to learn Latin to investigate with full seriousness Peirce's Latin sources in semiotics, and the several other Latin sources of even greater semiotic importance than the several Peirce heroically managed to rediscover. This is a challenge before which most hearts continue to sink (though it is not nearly so great a hurdle as they imagine[124]). Look at the bright side: since there was no general notion of sign before Augustine, at least you don't have to learn Greek as well (still, that is advisable).

In my own reading of Peirce, at first I thought that his "ethics of terminology" was surely some side or subsidiary point. Conversation with Ken Ketner soon disabused me of this notion, and Professor Ketner sent me his earlier essay on the point[125] which showed that, far from being some secondary issue in Peirce's mind, the matter of ethics in terminology had preoccupied him over his entire career as a thinker. I am sure that the issue took on the importance that it did for Peirce from his first-hand discovery of the Latin riches, on the one hand, contrasted, on the other hand, with the attitude of his late modern contemporaries in general toward the Latins. This importance in Peirce's mind was compounded in particular by the attitude of present-minded dismissal of the pre-Descartes past of philosophy by those who considered him a "fellow pragmatist", but who had no understanding of scholastic realism nor hence of the pragmaticism to which such realism is essential. His peers wanted nothing to do with the results he had developed from the Latin past, still less did they want anything to do with the respect he had late developed for that Latin past.

Looking into the matter further, I found that Peirce's ideas on the ethics of terminology, for depth and seriousness, really had no counterpart in previous philosophy. True, there are superficially similar formulations to be found in some early modern authors, such as Francis Bacon (1561–1626)[126] and Locke himself;[127] but the operative term here is "superficial", as a comparative

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[124] See the encouraging and accurate remarks on the ease of learning the Latin of Aquinas in A.D. Sertillanges' classic discussion from 1934, *The Intellectual Life*, trans. Mary Ryan (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1948), esp. pp. 112: "A man who would allow himself to be deterred by the slight effort needed to make his way about a language that an ordinary mind can master in two months would not deserve to have interest wasted on his mental training"; for, as the translator explains (p. 112 note 1), "the Thomist vocabulary is so limited, the turns of speech so often recur and are so free from the features that make Latin difficult that really only laziness can hesitate when a treasure is to be had at the price of so slight an effort." Be all that as it may, it remains that reading the Latin of Aquinas is like looking through miles of the clearest water, an experience well worth the having,, and one never acheived in the comparatively muddy reading of even the best English "translations".

[125] Kenneth Laine Ketner, "Peirce' s Ethics of Terminology"*Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* (Fall, 1981), XVII.4, 327–347.

[126] See Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620), ed. Thomas Fowler (Oxford, 1889); English trans. and ed. by Fulton H. Anderson, *The New Organon* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960). See further John Deely and Anthony F. Russell, "Francis Bacon", bibliographical entry for the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, Thomas A. Sebeok, General Editor (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986), Tome 1, 68–70.

[127] Locke, *An Essay concerning Humane Understanding* (1690), Book III, Ch. X.

reading of the various proposals rapidly shows. Applications of such ideas obvious ideas as Bacon and Locke outlined were explicitly made in modern times in the development of biology and chemistry. To this extent, it can be said that Peirce's reflections on this question were "a culmination of scientific traditions antedating him by at least two centuries".[128] But the culmination so exceeds the forebears as to stand *sans pareil*.

Corrington[129] notes in regard to Peirce' s view that the philosopher "must always be careful to shape a term so that its integrity and scope are truly commensurate with its subject matter", and "must always probe into the full connotation and denotation of any technical term". But these observations, while true, verge on platitudinous unless they are combined with a seriously historical temper of mind, and hence go not at all to the heart of Peirce' s ethical claims in this matter. Putnam,[130] in an act of ritual symbolism in the politics of academe carried to the point of farce, draws an analogy — as condescending in tone as it is otiose in substance — between Peirce's "charming section on the ethics of terminology" and Quine's "Mathematosis".[131]

So it became clear to me that Peirce must still be, after his 1905 try in *The Monist* to convince the pragmatists that they were far from pragmaticism, "awaiting in vain" — albeit now from afar — "some particularly opportune conjuncture of circumstances that might serve to recommend his notions of the ethics of terminology". Let us see if, between Ketner's lone essay and the present, such a conjuncture of circumstances might not have come about through the development of our four previous chapters of this present work!

In the extraordinary document crystallizing Peirce's reflections on the ethical obligations incumbent on philosophers in their use of terms, what needs to be specially attended to among the various strictures is the fact that care in choice of terms presupposes most fundamentally the recognition and acceptance of an *historical* obligation in *intellectual justice* to keep a kind of running account of the *decisive achievements of our predecessors*. The *raison d'être* for such an accounting is "to keep the *essence* of every scientific term unchanged and exact", yet while meeting at the same time the duty of supplying new terms and families of cognate terms (as in the case of semiotics) falling "upon the persons who introduce the new conception".[132] Balance in this twofold effort means that the duty of introducing new terms is "not to be undertaken without a thorough knowledge of the principles and a large acquaintance with the details and history of the

[128] Ketner, *loc. cit.*, 327.

[129] *Op. cit.*, 51.

[130] In K. L. Ketner, ed., *Reasoning and the Logic of Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 93.

[131] See W. V. O. Quine, "Mathematosis", in *Quiddities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 127–129. The euphony with "halitosis" is probably without significance.

[132] Peirce 1903: "The Ethics of Terminology", CP 2.222.

special terminology in which it is to take place, nor without a sufficient comprehension of the principles of word-formation of the national language, nor without a proper study of the laws of symbols in general".[133] In other words, Peirce would convince us that ethics in the use of terminology is of a piece with the communitarian nature of anthroposemiotic progress in the pursuit of truth. The effort is of a piece with his conviction that a semiotic view of logic presents that subject, cold and barren when taken narrowly, as the very ethics of understanding itself, performing for thought what moral principles perform for behavior.

This historical dimension of the growth of symbols in the species-specifically human communication system (*langue* as opposed to *parole*, we might say) Peirce saw as providing our main and often only safeguard against "arbitrary dictation in scientific matters". An example of such arbitrary dictation is the sort of short-sighted present-mindedness transmitted from classical modernity into twentieth-century philosophy by the early pretensions of Russell and Wittgenstein to have solved or dissolved all the problems of philosophical tradition,[134] thus perpetuating the modern twilight well into the postmodern dawn.

In the case of philosophy as such (which here means simply any foundational inquiry of a doctrinal rather than hypothetical nature[135]) there is both "positive need of popular words in popular senses ... as objects of its study" (an example would be the subjective-objective dichotomy of modern parlance), and a "peculiar need of a language distinct and detached from the common speech ... so outlandish that loose thinkers will not be tempted to borrow its words".[136] With respect to this latter language, though it may indeed eventually influence the popular speech and in some measure become in turn part thereof (just as disastrously happened with Kant' s use of 'subjective' and 'objective'), in the interim, "if a reader does not know the meaning of the words, it is infinitely better that he should know that he does not know" (which holds equally for the female reader, if we are to update in gender-neutral terms Peirce's 19th century gender-specific phrases).

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[133] Ibid.

[134] See, for analysis, John Deely, "Reference to the Non-Existent", *The Thomist* XXXIX.2 (April, 1975), 253–308.

[135] Or of a coenoscopic rather than an idioscopic character, as Peirce would say (see note 19, p. 13 above). On the contrast between the relative appropriateness today of the terms *scientia* and *doctrina* to characterize philosophical knowledge as such, see John Deely, "On the Notion `Doctrine of Signs'", Appendix I in *Introducing Semiotic*, pp. 127–130; "Doctrine", terminological entry for the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok et al. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter), Tome I, p. 214; "What' s in a Name?"*Semiotica* 22/1–2 (1978), 151–181; and "Looking Back on a Theory of Semiotics: One Small Step for Philosophy, One Giant Leap for a Doctrine of Signs", in *Reading Eco. An Anthology*, ed. Rocco Capozzi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 82–110.

[136] Peirce 1903: 2.223. And here we see again the disdain that Peirce had acquired for literary pretensions paraded as philosophy. He was too early for that terminal modern development called deconstruction, but he anticipated its consequences in philosophy and, with his ethics of terminology, would have forestalled them rather completely.

The Rules Themselves

So much by way of introduction. Here, then, in the form of seven rules,[137] with an eighth that I propose as needed in hindsight[138] to complete the list, are the final results of Peirce's reflections on terminology as he codified them eleven years before his death.

First. To take pains to avoid following any recommendation of an arbitrary nature as to the use of philosophical terminology.

Second. To avoid using words and phrases of vernacular origin as technical terms of philosophy.

Third. To use the scholastic terms in their anglicised forms for philosophical conceptions, so far as these are strictly applicable; and never to use them in other than their proper senses.

Fourth. For ancient philosophical conceptions overlooked by the scholastics, to imitate, as well as I can, the ancient expression.

Fifth. For precise philosophical conceptions introduced into philosophy since the middle ages, to use the anglicised form of the original expression, if not positively unsuitable, but only in its precise original sense.

Sixth. For philosophical conceptions which vary by a hair' s breadth from those for which suitable terms exist, to invent terms with a due regard for the usages of philosophical terminology and those of the English language but yet with a distinctly technical appearance. Before proposing a term, notion, or other symbol, to consider maturely whether it perfectly suits the conception and will lend itself to every occasion, whether it interferes with any existing term, and whether it may not create an inconvenience by interfering with the expression of some conception that may hereafter be introduced into philosophy.[139] Having once introduced a symbol, to consider myself almost as much bound by it as if it had been introduced by somebody else; and after others have accepted it, to consider myself more bound to it than anybody else.[140]

Seventh. To regard it as needful to introduce new systems of expression when new connections of importance between conceptions come to be made out, or when such systems can, in any way, positively subserve the purposes of philosophical study.

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[137] From "The Ethics of Terminology" of 1903, CP 2.226.

[138] Needed for the speculative and historical reasons clear from the present discussion as well as from the more technical one developed in *The Human Use of Signs*.

[139] I take this stricture in Rule 6 against employing terms that may "create an inconvenience by interfering with the expression of some conception that may hereafter be introduced into philosophy" to be a *monitum* against proposing terminology designed and intended to block further inquiry, such as the analytic attempt to rule discussion of mind out of philosophy, the behaviorist attempt to rule discussion of consciousness out of psychology, or the attempt of the officers of the Linguistic Society of Paris to rule discussion of the origin of species-specifically human language out of linguistics, rather than a requirement, obviously preposterous, to divine the particulars of future developments of human understanding.

[140] So has Sebeok perforce had to stand by his coinage of zoösemiosis, now improved by the umlaut.

Eighth. To scrutinize contemporary epistemological problems in the light of late Latin developments which the moderns neglected, as an aid in determining the choices of terminology most suitable for postmodern considerations.

Conclusion

Let this complete our discussion of Peirce as the founder of postmodern times. His is the first philosophy to be conceived from start to finish in light of the doctrine of signs, and what we have learned over the centuries about the central role that signs play in giving to our experience that part of its structure whence the intelligibility of the sensible world derives.

The one author after Peirce who contributes most to the consolidation and definitive establishment of a postmodern spirit in philosophy is Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Although Heidegger's philosophy has neither the scope of Peirce's thought nor the clarity as to the being of sign as central to the development of human understanding, what Heidegger does contribute at the foundations of the postmodern age is an uncompromising clarity and rigor that exceeds Peirce's own in focusing on the central problem of human understanding vis-à-vis the notion of Umwelt, wherein arises within experience the distinction between object and thing under the notion of *ens primum cognitum*. This heretofore neglected problem is what is central to the problematic of philosophy in a postmodern age. This problem is the ground and soil of the doctrine of signs, whose development — "the way of signs" — constitutes the positive essence of postmodernity.

The original vindication of the ground of a semiotic consciousness, attained at the end of the Latin Age, forgotten in modern philosophy, and recovered and developed anew by Peirce in exploring the black hole in modern consciousness of what happened in philosophy between Ockham and Descartes, lay in the thematic realization that any division of sign proposed must first be understood in the light of what it is that is being divided. In the spirit of that original realization, and because it is principally through that *thema* that Peirce's own work and even more the study of that work by subsequent inquirers leads to a recouping of the philosophical tradition and appreciation of the historical dimension implicit in every attainment of human understanding, I have kept my consideration of Peirce strictly within the general purview of *signum* as a mode of being indifferent to the subjective source of its realization in what it has of pure relation. I have said nothing about Peirce's main proposal for the division of sign into icons (or sign-vehicles related to their significates on the basis of a resemblance), indices (sign-vehicles related to their significates on the basis of a connection in physical causality), and symbols (sign-vehicles related to their significates on the basis of a habit or stipulation), because

I have been concerned exclusively with those parts of his semiotic necessary to understand the prior *general notion* of sign which is thus divided.

The older divisions of sign, such as into "natural" and "conventional", or into "formal" and "instrumental", turned out to be drawn more from considerations which were accidental to the sign's proper being, which is not to say that they do not have plenty of merits that warrant, and will I am sure receive, further discussion in appropriate contexts as the postmodern age unfolds. Peirce's division has found greater currency than the older divisions, I suspect, not only because it is more recent, but also because it has the distinctive merit of being one more directly drawn from the being proper to sign than was the case with the historically prior divisions (even though this has not been the consciously stated motivation for adopting Peirce's proposal in the mind of a single commentator so far).

We reach here one of the boundaries between history as a story of what has occurred or been accomplished by previous thinkers and history as it is something being accomplished through the discourse of present interlocutors. At the turn of the 21st century, most of what needs to be said in semiotics, the doctrine and theme unifying the entirety of Peirce's *corpus philosophicum*, be it remembered, has yet to be said. We are talking about, as Peirce liked to say, an *esse in futuro*. But this much is already clear: in thematizing the sign, Peirce definitively destroyed the underlying assumption unifying classical modern thought from Descartes through Kant; and in recovering at a higher level the possibility of a grasp of being in its unrestricted amplitude as both mind-dependent and mind-independent, he at once brought philosophy to a standpoint transcending the controversy between realism and idealism in the modern sense of that opposition. In so doing, without fully adverting to it, he defined and crossed the frontier of postmodernity in philosophy, whose positive essence, as I have argued, will prove to be the playing out of the consequences of having entered upon the way of signs.

Here we engage a matter of one of the great changes of age in philosophy, comparable to the 4th century break of the Latin Age with the ancient Greek tradition, or of the 17th century break of modern times from the Latin Age. For the moment, there can be no more question of history, except in the revisionist sense of breaking down the false picture of Latin scholasticism that has become the "standard outline" of the history of philosophy as told after Descartes. Apart from this task of historical revision such as I tried to exemplify in my recent book on early modern philosophy, *New Beginnings*, however, the *history* of philosophy is not what is in question, but the *doing* of philosophy in a postmodern context, the history of which awaits the further development of the doctrine of signs at the hands of those living today in order to be susceptible of being written some generations hence.

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