

RIGHT OPINION AND PEIRCES THEORY OF SIGNS

Since my studies of philosophy, in part, were at a school of education, I became well acquainted with John Dewey's arguments. I believed that his pragmatic theory of knowledge was representative of other philosophers who named themselves, "Pragmatists," James and Schiller and Peirce. I assumed that Dewey's instrumentalism went hand-in-glove with the others and that pragmatism promised progress in truth making and rational decision.

In 1948 when William Pepperell Montague published, *The Ways of Knowing* I was shocked when I read:

Now, pragmatic relativism in its repudiation of logical validity and in its substitution of the new interest in psychological genesis for the old interest in objective truth and falsity voices accurately and in the language of technical philosophy the anti-intellectualism that dominate the new school of political and social science. In theory it means the deliberate and systematic repudiation of that disinterested faith in ideals which, however imperfectly practiced in the past, has been the inspiration of human greatness.

The shock of that charge turned my readings to James, to a bit of Schiller and to a lot of Peirce.

Shock followed shock!

There was not one but three pragmatic theories of knowledge and one pragmatic theory of meaning, Peirce's.

My readings of and about Peirce did not clear the confusion. When I turned to Peirce in 1950, I started with Eugene Freeman's, *Categories of Charles Peirce*. In these writings, Peirce came through as a Classical Realist. In Justice Buchler's books, *Charles Peirce's Empiricism* and *The Philosophy of Peirce: Selected Writings*, Peirce was characterized as an instrumentalist with a touch of radical empiricism. Thomas Goudge in *The Thought of C. S. Peirce* found him to be philosophically schizophrenic. Metaphysically Peirce was held to be a transcendentalist and logically he was held to be an instrumentalist.

I became plagued by the form of the question later to become popular in a T.V. talk show: "Will the real Charles Sanders Peirce please stand up?"

That question continues. Perhaps this time he will show himself.

Back then, in order to find him I decided to read what Peirce wrote unaided by the commentary of others. By this means, I thought I could compare what he wrote with Dewey and the others and reconcile the variants of pragmatism. Things were going well, but I was shocked again!

Peirce rejected the "kidnappers" and renamed his theory of meaning, "Pragmaticism." In so doing he seemed

to be striving mightily not only to preserve, but to extend objective truth and falsity and to foster ideals that inspired human greatness, for he rejected the nominalism of William of Occam and praised the dynamic realism of John Duns Scotus

As I continued my reading in the *Collected Papers*, I formed the view that Peirce was very positivistic in his epistemological perspective and that his logic of science was close to that of the logical atomists such as Bertran Russell. Repeatedly he had asserted claims such as the following:

... it is necessary to turn to the rhetorical and see whether or not they are verified by observations.

and

To satisfy our doubts, therefore, it is necessary that a method be found by which our beliefs may be caused by nothing human, but by some external permanency - by something upon which our thinking has no effect ... the method must be such that the ultimate conclusion of every man shall be the same ... Such is the method of science.

But he also wrote refutations of positivism and logical atomism. In one paper he argued that:

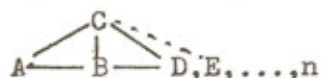
"August Comte...would condemn every theory that was not "verifiable." Like the majority of Comte's ideas, this is a bad interpretation of the *truth*. An explanatory hypothesis, that is to say, a conception which does not limit its purpose to enabling the mind to grasp into a variety of facts, but which seeks to connect those facts with our general conceptions of the universe, ought, in one sense, to be *verifiable*; that is to say, it ought to be a little more than a ligament of a numberless possible predictions concerning future experience, so that if they fail, it fails ... Comte, Poincare and Karl Pearson take what they consider to be the first impressions of sense, but which are nothing of the sort, but are percepts that are products of psychical operations, and they separate these from all the intellectual part of our knowledge, and arbitrarily call the first *real* and the second *fictions*. These two words *real* and *fictive* bear no significance whatever except as marks of *good* and *bad*. But the truth is what they call *bad* or *fictions*, or subjective, the intellectual part of our knowledge, comprises all that is valuable on its own account, while what they mark *good* or *real*, or *objective* is

nothing but the pretty vessel that carries
precious thought. (V.597)

In a letter to Lady Welby, Peirce revealed that he rejected Betran Russell's logical atomism. That rejection was based upon the absolute exclusivity of his category, third. Peirce held that everywhere in the phenomena (he called such, "Phaneron"), in all common place events, and throughout analysis of ordinary observatons, these three ideas appeared. They were so broad that they, "may be looked upon rather as modes or tones of thought than as definite notions." (I.35)
He wrote:

It is *a priori* impossible that there should be an indecomposable element which is what it is relatively to a second, a third, a fourth. The obvious reason is that which combines two will by repetition combine any number. Nothing could be simpler nothing in philosophy is more important." (I.298)

In demonstrating Russell's error to Lady Welby, Peirce provided a demonstration that reduced all extensions beyond three to three. My simplistic representation follows:



Peirce denies that the categories are given in sense, for they are not sensations. "They could appear in sense as things labeled." He wrote: "First, second and third are due to congenital tendencies of mind.

Shock again!

If the categories have a psychological origin, any extensions of those categories such as those in his classification of signs also have a psychological origin. What then can truth be but opinions relative to what one has in mind? Given that stance: "How can truth be found by means of logical validity?"

Pierce replies:

Truth is that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief ...,and,...there is *something* that is SO, no matter if there be an overwhelming vote against it. The very opinion entertained by those who deny that there is any truth, in the sense defined, is that it is not force but their inward freedom which is their experiential cognition. But this opinion is flatly contradicted by their own experience. They insist upon shutting their eyes to the element of compulsion, although it is directly experienced by

them." (II.138)

and

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 ... said to be *destined*, which is what we strive to express in calling them reasonable." (V.433)

At this point we shall leave Peirce and visit Socrates, but before we do I wish to underscore the words, *the element of compulsion*, and *those generals said to be destined*.

Like Peirce, Socrates sought generals destined to be true, and, like Peirce, Socrates found deduction, induction, and descriptive definitions inadequate as means for obtaining true belief. I cannot, at this time, give full treatment to Socrates' explication of those inadequate means of inference, but I shall present a possible resolution of the, "labels of the mind," grounded in, "something that is SO." That ground is what Socrates called, "right opinion".

After leading Theaetetus through deduction and induction, both which Theaetetus agreed were wanting, Socrates presents a way out. That way is through experience. By classifying commonalities found in things of experience one could derive a descriptive definition. Both Theaetetus and Socrates seemed pleased that a way had been found to vindicate belief and thereby have knowledge, i.e., justified true belief. But then Socrates had this to say:

Socrates. ...but while you lay hold only of the common and not the characteristic notion, you will only have the definition of those things to which a common quality belongs. (Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Random House, p.215)

He notes that when one recognizes a person to be that person, the definition is superfluous. Let us follow the discussion in the dialogue:

Socrates. Surely I can have no conception of Theaetetus until your snub-nosedness has left an impression on my mind different from the snub-nosedness of all others whom I have ever seen, and until your other peculiarities have a like distinctness: and so when I meet you tomorrow the right opinion will be recalled?

Theaetetus. Most True

Socrates. Then right opinion implies the perception of differences?

Theaetetus. Clearly.

Socrates. What then shall we say of adding reason

or explanation to right opinion? If the meaning is, that we should form an opinion of the way in which something differs from another thing, the proposal is ridiculous.

Theaetetus. How so?

Socrates. We are supposed to acquire a right opinion of the differences which distinguish one thing from another when we have already a right opinion of them, and so we go round and round: the revolution of a scythe or pestle, or any other rotating machine in the same circles, is as nothing compared with such a requirement and we may be truly described as the blind directing the blind; for to add those things which we already have, in order that we may learn what we already think, is like a soul utterly benighted. (p.216)

Armed with right opinion, let us return to Peirce.

I thought there might be a connection such that "right opinion" was ground for Peirce's theory of signs of things destined to be SO.

Please listen very attentively to this excerpt from Bruno Walter's rehearsal of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's performing Mozart's, *Symphony No 36 in C Major* (Columbia Records, LS 224). Did you grasp the distinguishing characteristic that makes Walter's eighth note SO? If you employ the sign that marks it, you will be compelled to acknowledge that eighth note at any time in any place. If such is so, you now have a right opinion of it.

In order to relate the recognition of Bruno Walter's eighth note to Peirce's theory of signs a more complete explication of Peirce's signs is required. I shall present solely that which is necessary to demonstrate the force and reach of signs that mark unives which are SO, and which are directly experienced.

(If you are interested in a complete explication of Peirce's signs I refer you to Raymond Rossi's definition chain.)

The first thing that I call you to discern is the index, "too long!" Your eighth notes are too long!" Repetition was unsuccessful so Bruno Walter tried to mark the note with a bit of silence between two voiced sounds. Again his effort was without success. He had a unique thing in reference, his eighth note, and he was trying to separate that one from the ones sounded by the orchestra. Thus, when a referent is unique it is not revealed by its common attributes, but by its characteristic one. The former are shared, whereas the latter is not.

Shared attributes enable comparisons of class membership of things, thereby enabling definitions. Through definitions we come to "know that" to have true beliefs about the relations of things. We have an explanation.

Characteristic attributes, on the other hand, are incomparable. Such attributes locate the betweenness of things. We come to know "that-one." not an instance of a

kind. One can argue about the adequacy of a definition, but one can only acknowledge a unique. If you know it, you have the right opinion of its identity as an existent

I have argued elsewhere that acknowledgement of unives is of three kinds: recogniton, acquaintance and appreciation. In this demonstration, I shall refer only to recognition.

Again, let us return to Peirce.

Over and over again Peirce denies that an *idea* of firstness is qualities as feelings or appearances. He held that qualities are peculiar positives that are not in relation to anything else. Qualities are peculiar positive possibilities in themselves. For example, now, this instant, is a point in time. It is not empty. It has duration. It is now. It is not before and not after. As an idea, no thought can take place. No details can be noted. It is there. It is a discrete possibility to be marked as such, i.e., *now*. Such discrete possibilities Peirce called, "Firstness."

A universe of discrete possibilities cannot be in relation without experience. "Experience," Peirce wrote to Lady Welby (Significs and Semiotics, Hardwick, 1977), is, "what the course of life has *compelled* me to think."

Such compulsion is termed by Peirce, "Secondness." Secondness is forced by "brute action". The brute action of secondness results in facts. Brute facts that is. Such facts are not particulars, but specifics. They are immediate. They are right now. Brute facts mark identity and existence. They characterize the single one. As existent, a brute fact is in a real relation to an identity, an action. As identity, that fact is a second, but it is a second that is determined by its own intrinsic nature, therefore that secondness is a degenerate secondness. It is a relation that denotes the identity of an existent as that one and only that one.

The action is a third, a degenerate thirdness. It compells an existent into cognitive relation. Such degenerate thirdness represents the brute fact as beng in dyadic relation, a relation of one and none other. It signs the between of existents and thereby indexes uniqueness.

In a letter to Lady Welby, Peirce defined sign as:

... an 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 its object.

Before I continue this explication, I ask you once again to listen to Bruno Walter's attempts to index his eighth note. What is the sign that brings into relation the interpretant that corresponds to its own relation to its object? That sign is "off"

Clearly, Bruno Walter's eighth note is a unique. It is in itself what it is. It is an existent with identity.

It is a brute fact that can be acknowledged, but not argued. The acknowledgement is the recognition of it. Recognition of it is through the sign system that forces the knower to mark that eighth note as incomparably what it is. It is Bruno Walter's eighth note. It is not Aturo Toscanini's.

In Peirce's system, the sign, as first, is an appearance which he called a "Qualisign" The sign, as second, is an individual object or event. Peirce called it a "Sinsign". The sign, as third, is a rule that regularizes the relation of qualisign and sinsign. It is called by Peirce, "Legisign", for it legislates occurrence.

The qualisign differs from the legisign as the term 'similar' differs from the term 'same'. Things that are similar have close resemblances, but as similarity diverges, there is a point at which the similitude vanishes and a new qualisign appears. For example, anything called "red" retains that interpretation through a range of redness until a color emerges which is other than red. The red is there, but the quality is not.

In a sense, a quality is an edge. It presents what is between one and another, and when nothing is between the quality vanishes.

To have identity is to be the same throughout a variety of appearances. For example, the face of George Washington has identity. That identity is the same regardless of the manner of appearance.

Peirce seemed very taken by the legisign 'same'. He saw the presence of identity in a photograph as a brute fact that vindicated his ontological thesis.

When we first heard the sounds of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, we heard music not noise. That is to say, for us the sound was organized. In part that organization was regulated by bits of silence. The duration of those silent bits controlled the flow of the sound. Bruno Walter's bit of silence was recognized by the musicians through the legisign. By means of that legisign they actualized the eighth note in their performance.

Do you recall the words: "Too long! Your eighth notes are too long!" These expressions were sinsigns marking the object, his eighth note, from all other eighth note similarities, but they were not legisigns and failed to signify. The rule, "too long" was a general one that did not mark the edge, the betweenness of one possible eighth note and another. Faced with the genuine thirdness of that rule, the members of the orchestra could use a number of instances of silence that would fit that rule. They needed a legisign, not a sinsign. What was required was a degenerate thirdness that sharply marked the edge of sound which was Walter's eighth note.

As you recall Walter employed other signs, even silence without effect. But when he presented his legisign "off" and its companion "pom", the orchestra sounded between the right bit of silence and produced that eighth whenever it was signed in the score.

From Peirce's perspective, they could follow a

legisign, a degenerate third, which related a qualisign (a bit of silence) to a sinsign (an eighth note). They, through the legisign (the word, "off"), were compelled, for the legisign was a rule, but not a general one. It marked the characteristic not the class. The legisign "off" indexed the note. It did not generalize. It produced the brute fact of it.

Now that you and I have the legisign you can follow it on any occasion, and with it we can distinguish Bruno Walter's eighth note from that of Arturo Toscanini's.

I chose as references these two great conductors because neither of them is or can be epistemically present. Their eighth notes can be so present, however. Their eighth notes are universals that are SO. By means of proper legisigns we can recognize them and teach others to do so. As brute facts of our experience they can be compared and through such comparisons we can devise definitions; and, through the definitions, we can argue explanations and thus, we could become musicologists.

Through Peirce, we can explicate recognition semiotically. Recognition is the surfacing of a quality through a qualisign that is made actual through a sinsign. The legisign that governs the relation of qualisign and sinsign marks the characteristic which we come to know. With that marking we have a rule to follow and by following that rule we have right opinion.

It is patent that through Bruno Walter's eighth note I brought you to a beginning, not an ending. Nothing was done to explicate the complex of signs as interpretants. What we can say of interpretants is given also in Peirce. We can characterize the bit of silence as an iconic sinsign and an eighth note as a rhematic indexical sinsign and *the* eighth note as a dicent indexical sinsign.

I hope I have disclosed something of the real Peirce. He is an instrumentalist in the sense that logic is a tool drawing meaning from experience. He is neither a positivist or logical atomist, for things in mind are as objective as things out of mind. Signs signify truths that are universal and invariant. Those things which are SO cannot be denied.

They are so for all of us for they are grounded through our right opinions of them. All signification, therefore, is anchored in consciousness and it is in consciousness that we must seek the foundations of philosophy and science; those quests that seek to know the, "Universe," which is, "thought hidebound by habit."

If my demonstration disclosed something of the "real" Peirce, we must conclude that he is a phenomenologist more realistic than idealistic in his intention, for what is in consciousness is compelled from without. In order not to confuse his phenomenology with that of Husserl's, I recommend that we refer to him as a, "Phaneronologist." I have not time here to draw further distinctions. As a teaser for you to consider however, I shall suggest that in *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl loosens his idealism and approaches the dynamic emergent realism of Peirce. Note

particularly what Husserl has to say of, "substrate objectivities."

At any rate, if we follow Peirce's phaneronology, it becomes more difficult to fall into the pit of phenomenalism, for with Peirce, we have right opinion to ground us.

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