THE PHILOSOPHICAL ENTANGLEMENTS OF PEIRCE'S PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION

This special issue gathers five papers on the relation between semiotics and philosophy in Charles S. Peirce's work. As Peirce's philosophy is highly eclectic and his writings are not only great in volume but also scattered over several collections and still unorganized manuscripts, these contributions can only scratch the surface of the matter. However, we consider that they reveal insightful research pathways, on subjects of considerable salience.

While each article discusses a distinct aspect of this relation, a shared idea runs throughout. In brief, for Peirce, semiotics, as the doctrine of signs, is a theory of logic (CP[1] 2.227). Particularly, semiotics is a pragmatic logic or, more exactly, a theory of logic grounded on the maxim of pragmati(ci)sm. By *pragmatism* or, as he eventually termed it in an attempt to salvage his doctrine, *pragmaticism*, Peirce meant a maxim on which logic should rest (see CP 5.415). Unlike his followers, particularly William James, who made this term popular, by *pragmatism* Peirce did not refer to a general philosophy, epistemology or theory of knowledge. In brief, pragmaticism is the principle that the conception of an object of thought consists in all the practical effects of the object of thought (see CP 5.18). For Peirce, this is the same as to posit that "the question of pragmatism […] is nothing else than the question of the logic of abduction", namely to accept that "explanations of phenomena are hopeful suggestions" (CP 5.196). This does not mean that knowledge or inquiry start with doubt, in a Cartesian or, generally, modern fashion. The emphasis falls on "*hopeful*": pragmatic logic consists in accepting plausible hypothesis as starting points for deductions and inductions.

Peirce formulated this simple but abstract principle in various ways. Arguably, the notion is so simple that it defies definition. At the same time, it is counter-intuitive for Western modern philosophical language, deeply rooted in (Aristotelian) substance ontology. As semiotics is a formal semantics, Peirce defined pragmatism in a simple and straightforward way, by making use of the (grammatical) concept of mood:

> 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. (CP 5.18)

Simplifying even more, a proposition in the indicative mood means what it means because it can also be interpreted in the imperative mood. Pragmaticism supports a relational logic: an assertion can only be understood as part of an argument, relating to other assertions, including the conclusion of the argument. By conceiving the conception of inference *in futuro*, it paved the way for process philosophy. For example, Peirce also formulated the maxim of pragmatism as the belief that "a conception can have no logical effect or import differing from that of a second conception except so far as, taken in connection with other conceptions and intentions, it might conceivably modify our practical conduct differently from that second conception" (CP 5.196). Change (modification) is the basic criterion to consider in assessing an inference.

Pragmatism can be expressed simply in terms of signs:

> A sign is only a sign *in actu* by virtue of its receiving an interpretation, that is, by virtue of its determining another sign of the same object. This is as true of mental judgments as it is of external signs. (CP 5.569)

It is understandable, though, why Peirce often tried to define pragmatism independently of semiotic terminology: since semiotic logic is founded upon the maxim of pragmatism, it is circular (or redundant) to define the latter in the terms of the former. However, the semiotic expression of pragmatism reveals other simpler ways of expressing the principle that preoccupied Peirce all throughout his philosophical work:

> To say that a proposition is true is to say that every interpretation of it is true. Two propositions are equivalent when either might have been an interpretant of the other. […] Any necessary inference from a proposition is an interpretant of it. When we speak of truth and falsity, we refer to the possibility of the proposition being refuted; and this refutation (roughly speaking) takes place in but one way. Namely, an interpretant of the proposition would, if believed, produce the expectation of a certain description of percept on a certain occasion. The occasion arrives: the percept forced upon us is different. This constitutes the falsity of every proposition of which the disappointing prediction was the interpretant. (CP 5.569)

These considerations shed some light on why did Peirce find the medieval notion of sign of particular interest. Developing a pragmatic logic implied reconsidering the (Aristotelean and scholastic) categories of substance and relation and, implicitly, the modern philosophy of mind. On a Peircean account, substance does not take ontological priority to relation. This renders Peirce's semiotics as particularly interesting for the contemporary purviews of, for example, linguistics, cognitive sciences and sociology, which are at odds with modern philosophy of mind. The papers in this issue offer insightful contributions in this regard.

Tony Jappy[2] discusses the role that iconic signs, particularly metaphors, play in the constitution of Peirce's pragmatism. For this, Jappy offers a minute investigation of

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the gradual evolution of Peirce's thought on the matter. He explains the relevance of employing the more recent concept of mediatization so as to put to use Peirce's theory of icons in the study of visuality, a possibility illustrated by Peirce's Existential Graphs.

Susan Petrilli[3] and **Augusto Ponzio**[4] address creativity from a Peircean perspective. The discussion revolves around abduction as a play on iconic signs. For this, they employ some established uptakes of Peirce's semiotics, such as by Thomas Sebeok and Roman Jakobson, among others. Also, they relate Peirce's semiotics to other celebrated accounts of thought as dialogical, such as in the literary theory of Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenology. Petrilli and Ponzio give an overview of their well-appreciated *semioethic* theory, which they update here with a focused outlook on creativity.

Ionuț Untea[5] further comments on the contemporary importance of semioethics. His paper unearths how Lady Welby, another pillar of Petrilli and Ponzio's semio-

ethics, steered Peirce's semiotic thinking, as reflected by concepts such as "significs" and "mother-wit". This leads Untea to discuss, as well, matters of creativity, but as particularly related to *responsibility*.

Victor D. Popescu[6] tackles complex questions on the limits of interpretation. He argues that, in this regard, Umberto Eco's perspective is in agreement with Peirce' notion on unlimited semiosis. He contrasts this view with Richard Rorty's approach, which is rooted in the linguistic turn. Following Eco, Popescu presents arguments in favor of Peirce's concept of *semiosis* and its implications for the boundaries of interpretation. This involves a minute discussion on the typically Peircean notion of community of inquirers, as providing contexts for interpretation.

Aleksandar Feodorov[7] zooms in on the notion of community of inquirers. In consideration of an encompassing array of views on sociality, Feodorov explicates the actual relevance of a construal of community as stemming from Peirce's pragmatic semiotics. His view is also supported with considerations from Josiah Royce. Feodorov considers human communities in a hermeneutic key, as simultaneously producing and produced by human interpretation. By conceptualizing community as interpretative process, he offers an attractive alternative to contemporary (arguably capitalist, neoliberal) individualistic ideologies that, paradoxically, conflict with overwhelming evidence that cooperation has been the engine of human progress.

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Semiotics (2021), *Semiotica* (2021), *Ethical Perspectives* (2021, 2019), *Philosophical Forum* (2019), *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (2020), *Politics and Religion* (2019), *The Monist* (2018).

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