Peirce's Philosophical Perspectives

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TO THE READER

THE ESSAYS IN THIS COLLECTION were written at different times, for different audiences, and for different occasions. Hence, each stands on its own and can be read independently of the others, provided, of course, the reader have some knowledge of who Charles Peirce was and what in general his philosophical position was. Again, given the circumstances of how each essay came to be written, it is inevitable that there be some repetition, but I have tried to edit out what could be deleted without destroying the sense. I hope the reader will not be too annoyed with any remaining redundancy since it might turn out to be a case of repetitio, mater studiorum. Finally, these essays do have a unity: they center on several key Peircean positions (realism, pragmatism, ty­ chism, synechism, and theism) and try to show that these positions are systematically related and internally consistent.

Some may be surprised, or even disappointed, that there is no extensive treatment of semeiotic, admittedly an important and novel contribution of Peirce’s to philosophical analysis. But I have explicitly discussed the most basic notions of Peirce’s semeiotic in connection with his theory of cognition, both underscoring that he held all human knowing to be mediated by signs and explaining in some detail the meaning and implication of this position. Moreover, my treatment in the later chapters of experience as a medium of disclosure is at least implicitly semeiotic, for disclosure itself is certainly a semeiotic phenomenon par excellence. It is true that, in discussing the disclosure of God in and through our experience, I have not drawn extensively upon Peirce’s fine-grained analyses and classifications of signs, objects, and interpretants. But it is also true that I have acknowledged in various places the fact that Peirce’s philosophical perspective is a semeiotic perspective.

Let us look at the list of essays to show briefly how they are connected. Chapter 1 surveys briefly Peirce’s life and philosophy, especially his realism and pragmatism. Chapter 2 adds some material to the biographical material in the first chapter, particularly Peirce’s sojourn in England in the 1870s. It also shows the influence on his work of three philosophers from the British Is­
Scotus, Whewell, and Bain. These three were chosen not only because of their impact on Peirce’s pragmatism, but also because their influence on him is less well known than that of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, not to mention Ockham. Ideally, this chapter should be supplemented by two others, one on his French Connection and the other on his German Connection.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 deal with how Peirce viewed the relations of normative science, methodology, and pragmatism to one another. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with three key issues in Peirce’s ontology and theory of knowledge: realism, the notion of substance, and foundationalism. Chapter 8 deals with “continuity” as a key mathematical notion and a central philosophical category to which Peirce gives much attention, while Chapter 9 deals with the important issues of substantial unity and the foundations of knowledge.

Finally, Chapters 10, 11, 12, and the Appendix take up the issue of Peirce’s theism, focusing in 12 on his “Neglected Argument for the Reality of God.” Chapter 10, in particular, explores how Peirce viewed the role of experience in religion, and in the course of that discussion attention is again paid to his analysis of human knowing.

I am indebted to so many colleagues and friends who over the years offered criticisms and suggestions to inspire these pieces that I simply cannot enumerate them all here. Let me say simply that I owe a great debt to my professors at Yale, especially John E. Smith; to my colleagues in the Philosophy Department here at Fordham; and to my associates at Indiana University, especially Christian Kloesel and Nathan Houser, and at Texas Tech, especially Kenneth Laine Ketner.

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