

**THE JOURNAL OF DIALOGIC ETHICS:  
Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives**



# THE JOURNAL OF DIALOGIC ETHICS: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives

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# THE JOURNAL OF DIALOGIC ETHICS: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives

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## Editorial Introduction: Sustaining

Annette M. Holba

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This issue of the *Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives* is devoted to the 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Philosophy of Communication Conference: Pragmatism, which was sponsored by the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies and the Communication Ethics Institute at Duquesne University on June 7–9, 2022. Included here are three keynote presentations—from Vincent Colapietro, Annette M. Holba, and Annette Madlock—and two essays that were presented in panel sessions—from Michael L. Raposa and Alain Létourneau. Emphases around pragmatism, interfaith and interhuman perspectives, or the theoretical and philosophical contributions of Charles S. Peirce are woven through each of these unique pieces. There are also connective contours across all of these essays that support pragmatic ethics and how one finds meaning in a world where we live with others.

In the essay “C. S. Peirce and the Primacy of Practice: Implications for Understanding Communication,” Vincent Colapietro situates Charles S. Peirce’s theory of semiosis as relevant to understanding communication and its processes, structures, experiences, and outcomes. Colapietro reinforces the need to establish and support understanding of phenomenological and ontological communicative processes and practices. He situates Peirce’s pragmatism as relevant to and aligning with tradition that may intertwine with alternative and even opposing traditions. Emphasizing how Peirce’s pragmatism is a dynamic encounter with practice as meaning is navigated, he situates the primacy of practice as essential to communication, validating meaning making and honoring the importance of human communication practices.

I contribute the next essay, “Semioethics and Interfaith Action: Jane Addams and ‘The Fellowship of the Deed,’” which explores the life of Jane Addams (1860–1935) and her works involving interhuman and interfaith engagement. I argue that Addams brought ethics to interhuman experience and interfaith action to life in her commitment to service within her communities. This essay explores her passions for a life of service through her personal vision of service and several stories of her encounters with others throughout the early years of her work at Hull House. Committed to pragmatism and embodying a

meaningful existence through a life of service to and action for and with others, Addams focused on the best way to make a difference in the world, bringing ethics into action and expanding how we think about interhuman engagement and interfaith service.

Annette Madlock exemplifies womanist thought through her examination of the beloved community in her essay, "Building a Beloved Community in a Wounded World: Womanist Thought and the Pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois." Madlock situates the beloved community as centering around communal, collective moral agency rather than a focus on individual moral responsibility. She weaves a tapestry around communal understandings and practices as a framework for building the beloved community.

Michael L. Raposa's essay, "Some Ethical Applications of the Law of Mind," considers certain applications of Peirce's Law of Mind that hold ethical significance. Raposa argues that the law centers around "growth of meaning," which can be relevant to communication ethics and, in this case, an ethics of attention. The essay navigates experiences of attention and their implications on boredom and distraction. Raposa advocates for a genuine community that is informed and creatively shaped by the Law of Mind.

Alain Létourneau's essay, "In Which Sense Is It Appropriate to Discuss Charles S. Peirce's Philosophy of Communication?," holds relevance to Peirce's contribution to philosophy, semiotics and semeiotic theory, phenomenology, and pragmatism, where he bridges the gap between European and American theories of sign. Létourneau adds how Peircean concepts can be decoded by the interpretive sciences and the social sciences. All of this demonstrates broad implications of Peirce's semiotic phenomenology not only to traditional philosophy but also as "inaugurating the field of action sciences," which provides hermeneutic to interpretive sciences and social sciences.

While these topics initially appear to be diverse and disconnected, they each focus upon action—more specifically, action with others. Themes that emerge between these essays involve communicative practices and actions or encounters. These themes include practice and practicing as constitutive of meaning making; a focus on action and practices through the fellowship of working together for others; communal, collective moral agency highlighted through an emphasis on collective practices; an ethics of attention through a practice of active agency; and, finally, the introduction of action sciences to complement interpretive and social sciences. All of these essays attend to pragmatic action that is necessary for meaning making, which enables people to continue moving, learning, and evolving in their thinking and doing. These emphases bring awareness to a field of study around action science tied to communal moral agency and service and action with others.

The conference theme centered around pragmatism, and there is nothing more pragmatic than communication processes and practices between human



beings who navigate their surroundings, encounters, and experiences with others in order to discover meaning and purpose in their lives.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the *Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives*.

## C. S. Peirce and the Primacy of Practice: Implications for Understanding Communication

Vincent Colapietro

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**Abstract:** The author shows how Charles S. Peirce’s theory of semiosis (or sign-activity, or sign-process) is directly relevant to the study of communication. To do so, however, he must remove three principal obstacles, ones impeding a proper understanding of Peirce’s theoretical framework: the portrayal of Peirce as a thoroughgoing formalist; Peirce’s own tendency to allow his preoccupation with science to constrain, to some extent, the scope of his semeiotic; and the attribution of agency to signs themselves. Having addressed these obstacles, the author highlights above all three methodological implications of a Peircean approach: the need for an explicitly phenomenological, normative, and ontological study of our communicative processes and practices. In addition, he reflects on classical pragmatism as a *living* tradition—hence, one requiring the resources of alternative and even rival traditions. He insists that no tradition is sufficient unto itself. This is—especially regarding questions of signs, communication, dialogue, and dissemination—true of pragmatism in general and Peirce’s pragmatism in particular. After arguing this point, the author highlights how we encounter, at the center of Peirce’s pragmatism, an affirmation of the primacy of practice. This is, however, not the reductivist thesis it is all too often taken to be. Rather this affirmation is precisely intended to honor the irreducible heterogeneity of human practices.

**Keywords:** agency; critique; normativity; ontology; Peters, John Durham; phenomenology; semiosis (or sign-activity)

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### Introduction: Communicative Rationality

Nothing is more explicit in, and central to, Charles S. Peirce’s writings than his theory of semiosis or sign-activity.<sup>1</sup> Please note: the focus of his concern is not on

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<sup>1</sup> This is true even though there is a gap in his obvious engagement in elaborating a theory of signs (see Short 2007; Houser 1992; Freadman 2004). In this paper, and the presentation on which it was based, I have focused almost exclusively on Peirce’s theory of signs. As Ivo Assad Ibrī’s (2022)

a kind of object, but on a form of process or activity. The emphasis falls decisively on semiosis, not signs. However this may be, Peirce's interest in communication might appear at least to some readers as implicit and even peripheral. It *is* for the most part implicit, but hardly peripheral (Ransdell 1998; Bergman 2004, 2009). Part of my task here is to suggest just how central communication is to Peirce's account of semiosis.<sup>2</sup>

This is, to some extent, recognized by scholars of both communication and Peirce. In a gathering such as this,<sup>3</sup> it seems especially appropriate to recall the judgment of John Durham Peters, a prominent theorist of communication. Since his understanding of communication is so deeply Peircean (Peters 1999, 114, 256–59, 267–68; 2015, 178, 214, 344, 369, 380–82, 385), allow me to quote Peters at some length. But, first, let me quote a brief and likely startling claim by Peirce himself: “It would, certainly, in one sense be extravagant to say that we can never tell what we are talking about; yet, in another sense, it is quite true” (CP 3.419). This suggests just how deep Peirce's fallibilism cuts. In an especially noteworthy manner, Peters elaborates on the radical fallibility<sup>4</sup> woven into the very fabric of our communicative endeavors:

Communication is a risky adventure without guarantees. Any kind of effort to make linkage via signs is a gamble on whatever scale it occurs. To the question, How can we know we have really communicated? there is no ultimate answer besides the pragmatic one that our subsequent actions seem to act in some kind of concert. All talk is an act of faith predicated on the future's ability to bring forth the worlds called for. Meaning is an incomplete project, open-ended and subject to radical revision by later events. (1999, 267)

After stressing these points, Peters quotes Peirce: “A sign is objectively *general*, in so far as, leaving open its effective interpretation indeterminate, it

paper (“Communication in Light of Peirce's Pragmatic Synechism”) at the 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Philosophy of Communication Conference makes clear, however, other parts of Peirce's “system” are relevant to the exploration of communication. In fact, I bring in other parts of Peirce's philosophy in relation to his semeiotic. Even so, Prof. Ibri's approach complements my own.

<sup>2</sup> “There is nothing,” as Max H. Fisch notes, “that may not be a sign; perhaps, in a sufficiently generalized sense, everything *is* a sign. . . . The fundamental distinction is not between things that are signs and things that are not, but between triadic or sign-action and dyadic or dynamical *action* ([CP] 5.473). So the fundamental conception [of Peirce's] semeiotic is not that of sign but that of semeiosis; and [consequently] semeiotic should be defined in terms of semeiosis rather than of sign, unless sign has antecedently been defined in terms of semeiosis” (1986, 330). Peirce's so-called theory of signs is truly a theory of semiosis, one in which the accent falls decisively on activity, generativity, and indeed creativity.

<sup>3</sup> This essay was first delivered as a keynote address at the 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Philosophy of Communication Conference on Pragmatism sponsored by the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies and the Communication Ethics Institute at Duquesne University via Zoom on June 7, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> One of the most important functions of communication is indeed the very discovery that we do *not* know what we are asserting or arguing or otherwise trying to communicate. The presuppositions and implications, the import and reference of even our most assured claims, can be in principle otherwise than we take them to be. This is not skepticism; it is rather fallibilism and, in Peirce's hands, as Peters appreciates, it is a radical doctrine.

surrenders to the interpreter the right of completing the determination form himself" (quoted 1991, 267; Peirce, CP 5.505). No sign, however, escapes generality or, for that matter, vagueness<sup>5</sup> (generality and vagueness being, in Peirce's judgment, two distinct species of semiotic indeterminateness).<sup>6</sup> "Since all signs are general to varying degrees, person-to-person converse is like dissemination, closure taking place [if anywhere] at the receiving end. Peirce put it bluntly: 'No communication of one person to another can be entirely definite' or determinate" (Peters 1999, 268; Peirce quoted here by Peters, CP 5.506). Though Peirce would almost certainly be hesitant to endorse such a sharp contrast between dialogue and dissemination, as the one Peters tends to draw,<sup>7</sup> the radically fallible depiction of our communicative endeavors just quoted is unquestionably Peircean. More generally, Peirce's relevance to the field of communication cannot be gainsaid. The work of theorists in this field such as Peters, Richard Lanigan, Lenore Langsdorf, Andrew Smith, Isaac Catt, and Mats Bergman,<sup>8</sup> makes this clear. This is especially evident in their attention to the degree to which signs are inherently indeterminate and, closely allied to this, the ways in which they can be, for certain purposes, rendered contextually determinate. Irreducible indeterminacy does not preclude effective determination; rather it both demands and, paradoxically, facilitates processes whereby signs *in situ* are rendered more—and more effectively—determinate.

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<sup>5</sup> After defining objective generality, Peirce defines such vagueness: "A sign is objectively *vague*, in so far as, leaving its interpretation more or less indeterminate, it reserves for some other possible sign or experience the function of completing the determination" (CP 5.505). A sign or utterance leaves it up to the interpreter to identify the designatum (it effectively instructs the agent occupying this position or role, "Take your pick"), while the speaker or the utterer reserves the right to spell out more determinately the import of any attribution or ascription (in this regard, the sign or utterance in effect instructs those entangled in the exchange, "I, the utterer, get to say what this means"). Ahti-Veikko Pietarinen is very helpful in illuminating the game-theoretic dimensions of our sign exchanges (see Pietarinen 2006, especially Chapters 7 and 11).

<sup>6</sup> While Peters stresses here generality, vagueness is no less important as a species of indeterminacy. See Jarrett E. Brock's *C. S. Peirce's the Logic of Vagueness*, a dissertation at Illinois supervised by Max H. Fisch (Brock 1969), and a distillation of some of the main points in this study in "Principal Themes in Peirce's Logic of Vagueness" (Brock 1979). See also Ahti Pietarinen (2006). In other places in Peters, both in 1999 and elsewhere, he takes note of vagueness. From a Peircean perspective, however, generality and vagueness, distinct species of indeterminacy, are better considered together than treated separately.

<sup>7</sup> "There is," Peters insists, "no indignity or paradox in one-way communication. The marriage of true minds via dialogue is not the only option; in fact, lofty expectations about communication may blind us to the more subtle splendors of dissemination or suspended dialogue. Dialogue still reigns supreme in the minds of many as to what good communication might be, but dissemination presents a saner choice for our fundamental term. Dissemination is far friendlier to the weirdly diverse practices we signifying animals engage in and to our bumbling attempts to meet others with some fairness and kindness. Open scatter is more fundamental than coupled sharing; it is the stuff from which, on rare, splendid occasions, dialogue may arise. Dissemination is not wreckage; it is our lot" (Peters 1999, 62).

<sup>8</sup> To a degree possibly not matched by anyone else, Mats Bergman is at once a scholar of Peirce and a theorist of communication. He brings to the study of Peirce a deep and wide acquaintance with the literature on communication; he brings to his work in the field of communication an intimate and nuanced understanding of Peirce.

If we approach this from the opposite side, that of Peirce rather than the side of communication, we arrive at the same conclusion. As I did with Peters, please allow a single scholar to function representatively. The philosopher Joseph Ransdell's claim<sup>9</sup> regarding communication has not been taken up by very many Peirce scholars<sup>10</sup>: at the very heart of Peirce's project, we encounter a distinctive understanding of communicative processes (1997). This is, in my judgment, not only right but also fecund in ways yet to be appreciated. The seeds which Peirce has sown might have given rise to "a wild harvest" (CP 1.12)<sup>11</sup>, but the fruits to be found therein are as nourishing as they are delectable. We have yet to gather fully the fruits of his labor and, moreover, to take the seeds from these fruits and plant them in soil adjacent to the fields in which he tilled, planted, and harvested his prodigious ideas (cf. Peters). On this occasion, I want simply to remove several of the obstacles to understanding his theory of signs (or semiosis) and, then, to draw out the implications of his understanding for an approach to communication. Jürgen Habermas's (1995) expression "communicative rationality" is especially felicitous. While the expression is his, its applicability to the form of rationality identified and explored by Ransdell is evident. Ours is a rationality formed in the matrix of communication, moreover, one disciplined in the exacting contexts of experimental inquiry.<sup>12</sup> Even before turning to either of these tasks (removing obstacles and identifying implications), I want to highlight several features of Peirce's general theory of signs and, above all, a tension at the heart of his semeiotic.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ransdell (1966) wrote his dissertation ("Charles Peirce: The Idea of Representation") at Columbia University and taught for many years in the Department of Philosophy at Texas Tech University.

<sup>10</sup> Again, the most notable exception is Mats Bergman.

<sup>11</sup> "The development of my ideas has been," Peirce disclosed near the end of the nineteenth century, "the industry of thirty years. . . . their ripening seemed so slow. But the harvest time has come, at last, and to me that harvest seems a wild one, but of course it is not I who have to pass judgment. It is not quite you, either, individual reader; it is experience and history" (CP 1.12).

<sup>12</sup> "From the Peircean point of view we begin," Ransdell (2000) noted in his Presidential Address to the Peirce Society ("Peirce and the Socratic Tradition"), "by regarding the sciences as communicational communities whose members share a commitment to finding out about something cooperatively, and we think of this primarily from the point of view of the scientific inquirers as such, who are always—that is, ideally—attempting to do what they can to promote a common acceptance of findings which will accumulate, notwithstanding the occasional setbacks when some part of what has accumulated has to be jettisoned. What makes the findings accumulate is that only those findings which actually come to be used in the ongoing course of inquiry count as accepted. Scientific findings are not accepted because somebody says 'This is acceptable', much less because somebody says 'I accept this,' regardless of who says it on what occasion or from what office. They are just accepted or not, and the only way we can tell if they are accepted is by finding out whether or not they actually function in the relevant intellectual community as premises or presuppositions used in further inquiry" (350). I am indebted to Gary Richmond and Benjamin Udell for an email exchange regarding various aspects of Joseph Ransdell's creative appropriation of Peircean insights, especially as it bears upon the topic of communication.

<sup>13</sup> "Semeiotic" was Peirce's preferred spelling. When referring specifically to his theory of signs, I will tend to follow him and use this spelling. However, when referring more generally to the field as it has developed after and, in many ways, independently of his work, I will use the more commonplace spelling, "semiotic."

As conceived by Peirce, a general theory of signs or, better, semiosis should provide indispensable resources for a diverse range of theoretical purposes.<sup>14</sup> One of those purposes is to provide a compelling account of communicative rationality, as this form of reason is evident in a *variety* of contexts (cf. Smith 1970 on living reason; Smith 1981).<sup>15</sup> While Peirce himself tended to focus on the specific context of theoretical (or heuristic) rationality, he was aware that the range of our rationality is hardly exhausted by its deployment in this field. There is more to *logos* than what *logos* reveals about itself in the context of *theoria*. What complicates this even more is that, for Peirce, *theoria* is, in one sense, itself a form of *praxis*. Our practices are irreducibly plural. This makes Peirce's insistence on the primacy of practice also an embrace of pluralism, specifically, of the distinct (though not necessarily separate or separable) forms of shared practices. The sciences constitute only one form of human practice among various other forms.

This is a point to which I will return. For the moment, however, I want to highlight one of the most salient features of communicative rationality. Such rationality is not principally a technical competence or formal capacity. It is rather first and foremost an expressly moral orientation toward sign exchanges. There is, at the heart of this orientation, a concept that Peirce calls *tuism* (from the Latin word *tu*). This concept asserts that all thought is dialogue and that, in turn, all dialogue is addressed to a "you."<sup>16</sup> *Tuism* is the "doctrine that all thought is addressed to a second person, or to one's future self as to a second person" (Peirce, quoted in Fisch 1982, xxix). In this entry to the *Century Dictionary*, Peirce was defining a doctrine which he himself espoused. It was one he had hit upon decades earlier. In some of their earliest exchanges, Peirce and his slightly younger friend William James appear to have discussed the former's fascination with the deeper implications of personal pronouns, perhaps especially with those of the variants of second-person pronouns. An entry in one of his friend's notebooks makes this clear: "The *Thou* idea, as Peirce calls it, dominates an entire realm of mental phenomena, embracing poetry, all direct intuition of nature, scientific *instincts*, relations of man to man, morality, &c" (Fisch 1982, xxix). James immediately adds: "An *analysis* must be into a triad; *me* and *it* require the complement of *thou*" (Fisch 1982, xxix; cf. Royce [1913] 1968 and Davidson 2009, especially Chapter 14). Even such a seemingly primordial relationship as that between the I and the not-I is one

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<sup>14</sup> Such a theory certainly might bestow practical benefits. But Peirce's principal commitment was to a comprehensive *theory* specifically designed to facilitate experimental discoveries. Just as his doctrine of categories was crafted to guide and goad inquiry, so too his theory of signs was articulated for such a heuristic purpose.

<sup>15</sup> "Human reason has," Karl Marx wryly observed, "always existed, only not always in reasonable form" (Tucker 1978, 9). It seems appropriate, to me at least, to suggest that human rationality never appears in an entirely or purely reasonable form. Like the pathologies and perversions of communication, those of rationality are paradoxically the ones in which the very nature of reason is possibly most manifest. We discover what reason inherently is by observing what it dramatically fails to be. Of course, the pathologies and perversions of rationality are, of a piece, with those of communication. They are possibly one and the same.

<sup>16</sup> The title of Martin Buber's *I and Thou* is almost certainly better translated as *I and You*, since the German word he used was the informal one. In any event, Peirce was deliberate in using the informal variant of the second-person.

in which the mediation of yet another party (or third), taken as a *thou*, is ineliminable. That is, it is not simply a dyadic relationship; rather it is an irreducibly triadic one. It is hard to say whether James himself held that analysis of these phenomena “must be into a triad,” or whether he was only reporting Peirce’s conviction. We know this much: however it stood with James, Peirce was unabashedly committed to the “*thou* idea” and, intimately connected to this idea, the irreducible character of some triadic relationships.

An entry in one of Peirce’s own notebooks written at roughly the same time (in fact, a year earlier) as that found in one of James’s offers these suggestive comments: “I here, for the first time, begin a development of these conceptions [*I*, *It*, and *Thou*], hoping that this will be accompanied by a development of the souls of those who read” them. He moreover suggests, “THOU is an IT [an other] in which there is another I” (W 1, 45). While I looks in and “It looks out, Thou looks *through*, out and in again. I outwells, It inflows, Thou commingles” (W 1, 45, emphasis original; see Viola 2011). For our purpose, the intricacies and implications of these youthful reflections, as inherently fascinating as they are likely to be, fall outside the scope of our concern. They reveal something critical to Peirce’s orientation. This facet of his approach makes it especially appropriate for a piece on him to appear in a journal focused on dialogical ethics.

Others—concrete, embodied, sentient, and expressive others—are encountered in a variety of contexts. While Peirce tended to be preoccupied with the community of inquirers, hence with his relationship to other rational agents as co-inquirers, this was certainly not the only relationship to which he attended. Peirce focused mainly on the context of theoretical inquiry, but the purpose of his semeiotic extended far beyond this (cf. Rorty 1982). The irreducibly different forms of human community were of interest to him,<sup>17</sup> including (as Michael Raposa along with Vincent Potter [1996] has shown) communities of religious worship.<sup>18</sup>

There is however a tension at the center of Peirce’s efforts to elaborate a general theory of semiosis. On the one hand, his aim truly was to craft a *comprehensive* theory providing critical resources for describing, evaluating, and relating the heterogeneous forms of communicative rationality. On the other, he was, as already suggested, preoccupied with offering a finely detailed account of experimental inquiry. More precisely, his main focus was to provide a normative account of objective inquiry. Of course, a comprehensive theory of signs encompasses far more than science, but Peirce’s preoccupation was to elaborate a semeiotic account of science. This tension is nowhere more evident than with respect to the ideal of convergence (see Bernstein 1988). Experimental inquiry is governed by a commitment to an ideal of consensus and, thus, one of convergence,

<sup>17</sup> It is illuminating and instructive to read Josiah Royce’s efforts as extending those of Peirce. See especially his *The Problem of Christianity* (Royce [1913] 1968).

<sup>18</sup> Practical, moral, political, religious, heuristic (or theoretical), aesthetic, economic and other forms of communities are the most manifest contexts of human encounter and engagement (e.g., in a political community, I encounter others as citizens). For an instructive delineation of the most critical contexts of human mutuality, see John E. Smith’s (1981) “Interpretation and the Religious Dimension of Experience.”

an ideal not necessarily constitutive of other communicative practices. Perhaps our failure to appreciate the extent to which, say, the practical ideal of political deliberation is principled compromises grossly distorts our understanding of such deliberation. We imagine that we ought to be aiming at and even approximating consensus when, given the very nature of politics, consensus is for the most part neither possible nor desirable. In the arts the inapplicability of the ideal of consensus is even more evident.

Even *in* science, consensus and convergence are both practically more elusive than our highly idealized accounts of scientific investigation would have it *and* actually less important than the history of the sciences appears to attest. The extent to which scientists disagree—profoundly and possibly even intractably—is insufficiently appreciated. In addition, the history of science is, as Peirce noted, one of ramification: convergences contribute to the ceaseless *branching* of one science into various other disciplines, quickly evolving to the point where participants in one discipline can communicate with those in another only with great difficulty, if at all. While the tower of Babel might have been originally a symbol for the fragmentation of humanity into mutually incomprehensible communities, it can perhaps be taken for the inescapable fate of communicative rationality in the context of science. The irony is manifest: communicative rationality in one of the paradigmatic fields of human striving is in a sense doomed to result in mutual incomprehensibility or rational incommunicability. It is therefore imperative for the inquirer to be humble. The *ethos* of science encompasses the *humility* to acknowledge the extent to which a felt sense of solidarity and an equally sharp sense of incomprehensibility are compatible. For example, those engaged in cutting-edge research in biochemistry and those likewise engaged in ecology might occupy quite different worlds. They feel kinship despite not being conversant with the discourse of one another.

There is, then, implicit in Peirce's theory of semiosis an approach to communication in which the distinctive form of human rationality is explicated. Whatever traces of scientism there are in this theory, Peirce's comprehensive framework provides critical resources for describing, evaluating, and relating to one another the irreducibly *different* forms of communicative processes. Certain distortions might be built into the framework (e.g., Peirce's insistence on the ideals of consensus and convergence might be true of scientific inquiry but not of other forms of human communication). This framework however contains within itself principles of *self-correction* by which such distortions can be identified and eradicated. Indeed, communicative rationality as envisioned by Peirce is an *ongoing* process in which enhancements of self-consciousness, self-critique, and self-control are precisely what sustain the promise of our practices being rational (Colapietro 1989).

There was at the heart of Peirce's "quest of quests" (CP 1.568n) a normative account of objective inquiry. His theory of signs was for the most part designed to provide just such an account of inquiry. It is however difficult for many today to comprehend the very conception of semiosis (or sign-activity) proposed by Peirce. In part, this is because he ascribes agency to signs themselves, though in part other considerations obstruct our understanding of his semeiotic. Accordingly, some



care must be taken to remove several of the most commonplace obstructions to obtaining an interior understanding of Peircean semeiotic. Only then are we able to appreciate his contribution to the field of communication.

## Obstacles to an Understanding of Peirce's Theory

We now turn to three of the main obstacles standing in the way of attaining "an interior understanding" of Peircean semeiotic (Peirce, CN 1, 33). After doing so, I will turn to my eventual task: the task of drawing out the implications of semiosis for an understanding of communication. Substantively, these implications include contextualism in general, the abiding need for a deliberate specification of the relevant contexts, and finally the dramatic interplay between the agency of sign-users and that of signs themselves. But methodologically these implications point to the need to approach the study of communication phenomenologically, normatively, and ontologically. On this occasion, my stress will be on these *methodological* implications more than substantive ones. This practically means highlighting phenomenology, critique, and ontology. A Peirce approach to our communicative practices must be expansively imagined, not narrowly conceived.

There are both obvious and subtle obstacles standing in the way of attaining an interior understanding of Peircean semeiotic. But three are, especially regarding communication, particularly noteworthy. The first two concern principally how Peirce tends to be misinterpreted, the third how signs themselves as conceived by Peirce are, given deeply engrained prejudices, misunderstood.<sup>19</sup> The first obstacle to understanding Peirce's theory concerns *formalism*, the second *theoreticism*, and the third the *agency of signs* themselves. Stated bluntly, Peirce was *not* a formalist; despite his advocacy of theory (his occasional tendency to set theoretical endeavors in sharpest contrast to practical affairs), he was a pragmatist (!),<sup>20</sup> that is, a theorist who both conceived theory as itself a form of practice and indeed appreciated the primacy of practice; and, finally, a semiotician who traced the roots of semiosis (or sign-activity) to rudimentary processes having nothing to do with conscious agency or deliberate actors (see Esposito 1979).

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<sup>19</sup> Like Martin Heidegger, Peirce struggled to give signs and, by extension, language fully their due. When Heidegger asserted that language speaks, his claim was for many utterly incomprehensible and, if understood, manifestly implausible. *We*, human beings, speak. To grant language or signs the power to speak is to hypostatize or reify what is, at bottom, nothing more than the somewhat unique capacity of certain beings. Or so the story goes. Heidegger and, before him, Peirce set out to challenge this anthropocentric approach.

<sup>20</sup> The way Dewey (1991) makes this point is especially illuminating. He does so by contrasting Peirce to James, claiming that "Peirce was much more of a pragmatist in the literal sense" than James. What is this sense? It is the sense in which the word "expresses action or practice" (483). In Dewey's judgment, Peirce's pragmatism was more consistently and thoroughly focused on *practices* than James's. This is a remarkable and, from my perspective, accurate claim. This focus includes an affirmation of the primacy of practice.

### *Formalism*

On the surface, it might seem as though Peirce's approach to signs is excessively formalistic and thus inadequately contextualist (Rorty 1982, 161). This is, however, not the case. Although he certainly might have made this aspect of his orientation more explicit, his emphasis is demonstrably contextualist. It is both rooted in and oriented to *contexts of practice*. On my reading, pragmatism entails contextualism, and, in turn, contextualism is partly defined by purpose. If my purpose is solely or primarily heuristic, the context in which I am acting is one of inquiry. If my purpose is principally concerned with my answerability to others, then the context is ethical and possibly religious.

It might be possible to identify forms of processes cutting across diverse contexts, perhaps even forms manifest in virtually any context. Such a bold claim is actually at the heart of Peirce's theory of signs. His theory, no less than other theories, of communication strives to reach the highest level of generality by identifying such forms. The center from which his theory radiates in all directions is his claim regarding the irreducibly triadic structure of sign-processes. Let's begin with a closely allied phenomenon, an act of giving. A gives B to C. Any such act encompasses both an act of divestiture and one of acquisition. These two dyadic relationships are integral to anything recognizable as giving: A gives B away, while C comes into possession of B. But the accidental conjunction my divesting myself of a possession and someone else coming along and acquiring it does not constitute an act of giving. There is an essential link here. In other words, there is an irreducibly triadic structure.

In this respect, signifying is akin to giving. The sign gives itself to another in such a way that something other than itself is also given to another. Signs are media of disclosure, however partial, perspectival, and, as a result of being partial and perspectival, distorted.

### *Theoreticism*

It is crucial to appreciate the extent to which theoretical inquiry is a distinctive form of human practice. The *differential* perspective of the purely theoretical inquirer does not necessarily provide a model for the use of signs or the forms of communication characteristic (or typical) of other contexts or practices. Indeed, these other practices might throw more light on *theoria* than *theoria* throws on other forms of *praxis* (Smith 1981). For example, scientific inquiry might incorporate within itself a distinctive form of moral discourse, including a conscientious cultivation of specific virtues, not least of all veracity and trustworthiness or integrity. As a practice, science exhibits numerous and deep affinities to, and differences from, other shared practices. In being so singularly devoted to exploring the nature of experimental inquiry, in light of the history of our experimental explorations of especially the natural world, Peirce tended to be captivated by certain features of semiosis or sign-processes, ones already identified (e.g., the regulative ideal of communal consensus, to which I might add here the abiding willingness to challenge traditional authority and, in certain

respects, the systematic exclusion of humane feelings). It may be that *all* our practices are, at bottom, experimental. But it may also be that they are experimental in quite different ways. However that may be, the vastly extended family of purely heuristic endeavors, pursuits aiming at the discovery of the truth, do not readily provide a model for understanding the distinctive character of other human practices. Wittgenstein in his way, Heidegger in his, and the pragmatists in their manner strenuously argued for this realization. To assimilate, for example, religious worship to a disguised form of theoretical inquiry precludes the possibility of understanding practices of worship on their own terms. Not all human purposes are reducible to that of discovering the truth. Accordingly, not all practices are, in essence, instances or forms of *theoria*. It is far better to see *theoria* itself as a distinctive form of *praxis*, than all forms of *praxis* as concealed forms of *theoria*. The integrity of these theoretical endeavors no less than that of human practices in their irreducible heterogeneity demands approaching these topics from this perspective. As I understand it, then, the primacy of practice demands the rejection of *theoreticism*, though certainly not the denigration, much less the rejection, of theory as such.

### *The Agency of Signs*

There is likely no larger obstacle to obtaining an interior understanding of Peirce's semeiotic than his insistence that signs themselves exercise a form of agency. Increasingly since the early modern period in Western thought, the human subject has presumed absolute sovereignty. This is nowhere more apparent than in the distinctively modern understanding of signs. To step back momentarily from this understanding, consider the proverb that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. It is utterly implausible, for some seemingly inconceivable, to imagine any alternative (beauty is in the form of the beheld or is in the transaction between perceiver and perceived, with the perceived object or event making an indispensable contribution). This is so even though some of the greatest minds in the classical period (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Moses Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas) rejected a thoroughly subjectivist account of beauty. Analogously, meaning has in modernity been traced to the impositions or attributions of the subject (or self). In themselves, the data are meaningless. They become meaningful only by being taken as such by the self in acts of interpretation, understood as acts of imposition. Significance reflects the agency of interpreters and utterers of signs, not the agency of sign themselves. To ascribe such agency to signs is indeed a seemingly wild claim, akin to animism. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein asks: "Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life?—In use it is alive. Is life breathed into it there?—Or is its *use* its life" (1.432). While it is hard to ascertain just where Wittgenstein stands on this question, the modernist view is that *human* subjects breathe life into signs (cf. Ransdell 1980, 151, 173). In contrast, Peirce unabashedly holds that life and, thus, agency, inheres in signs themselves (see, e.g., CP 2.222, 302). It is undeniable that they have evolved to the point where minds have emerged with their own distinctive form of semiotic agency, above all, their capacity to monitor and control, to some extent, how they use signs. But the

control of our minds over the signs on which they so completely depend is far less than we imagine. The degree of our dependency on them is comparable to that of their dependency on us (see, e.g., CP 5.313–14). Symbols in particular have an *inherent* power it would be foolish to slight or overlook. Just as breathing is as much an affair of environing (thus, sustaining) conditions as it is an exercise of a physiological capacity, so too significance in its distinctively human forms is the conjoint achievement of the agency of signs and the agency of conscious, critical, and ingenious sign-users. Human imposition and institution of meaning is undeniably part of the story. But it is far from self-evident, at least to Peirce and his followers, that meaning originates by such acts. Put positively, the roots of significance must be traced more deeply than the acts and fiats of our subjectivity. Irreducibly triadic relationships are immanent in nature. They are in countless instances discovered, not created, by humans. *We* owe our intelligence to how signs have addressed us in fatefully challenging ways as much as signs owe their very being to our fiats and conventions. Such at least is Peirce's position, with its stress on the agency of signs themselves.

Peirce was truly a pragmatism, not a thoroughgoing formalist (though he uncertainly appreciated the value and power of formalizing some of our procedures and processes, in particular, our forms of reasoning and the complex patterns of interwoven inferences) (cf. Ransdell 2000, 349–50). Moreover, to interpret or appraise his semeiotic as the work of a thoroughgoing formalist is to miss its pragmatic character. The scope of his semeiotic encompasses far more than an account of science, though providing a detailed, comprehensive account of experimental investigation is at the center of his concern. Finally, his approach to signs is not anthropocentric. In it, the sovereign subject of modern thought is dethroned; the subjects—the signs themselves—are full accorded their rights and their status. We cannot understand Peirce's theory of semiosis unless we remove these obstacles from our path. But having unblocked our way, where does the road beckon?

## Implications for the Theory of Communication

What *are* the implications of Peirce's pragmatist theory of signs that especially those of you who are trained in these fields (communication, rhetoric, and other institutionally recognized disciplines or discourses) would judge to be an adequate approach to communication? Of course, they are far too numerous even to identify. Allow me simply to highlight a handful of what I take to be the most important of these implications. Implicit in my identification of these is the structure of Peirce's system or classification of the sciences (the sciences of discovery are mathematics, phenomenology, the normative sciences—logic, ethics, and esthetics—metaphysics, and the special or *idioscopic* sciences) (cf. Kent 1987; Stuhr 1994). Those of you who are not familiar with this part of Peirce are not at a disadvantage in comprehending what I am suggesting.

If we are guided by Peirce's pragmatism, such a theory must be in its inaugural phase *descriptive* (or phenomenological) and, since the phenomena are

to a great extent historical, *historicist*. That is, it must focus phenomenologically on our historically evolved and evolving processes and practices of communication. In this regard, it must be both *synchronic* and *diachronic*: it must grasp systems as they function in the present (this is the synchronic perspective) *and* as they have evolved and indeed are currently in process of transforming themselves (this is the diachronic perspective). The inaugural and culminating focus of any such theory is the entire array of communicative processes, with equal regard for their irreducible heterogeneity and the most fundamental affinities between various processes (e.g., the respects in which scientific inquiry and artistic production are akin, despite being irreducibly different). Practices are phenomena and, as such, avail themselves to being described and re-described in diverse manners and from complementary perspectives. However, these phenomena are by their very nature *historical* and, hence, demand a narrative, including a genealogical, or Foucaultian, approach.

For the purposes of developing an adequate approach to our communicative practices especially, phenomenology and history are necessary but not sufficient: painstaking, nuanced descriptions and detailed, accurate histories are invaluable, but the possibility of multi-perspectival, “mobile” critiques is no less so. Such a theory must be inherently and insistently *critical* (and critical along at least these axes—logic, ethics broadly imagined, and esthetics). This insistence is the signature of Peirce’s pragmatism. In its inherent development, the theory of communication must be critical and normative. The norms, ideals, principles, and values always already structuring and to some extent defining our communicative practices need to be made explicit and, beyond this, they need to be assessed in terms of their internal consistency, empirical adequacy, and ultimately practical fecundity (cf. Peters 1999).

The *emphasis on critique* ought not to eclipse *either* the inaugural work of phenomenology and history (we can rush too quickly to critique) or the culminating possibility of elaborating nothing less than an *ontology of becoming*. As I envision it, such an ontology of becoming would be inclusive of an account of the emergence, evolution, and self-transformations of our distinctive modes of self-making (our historically instituted and also improvisational forms of making sense of whatever we encounter in experience, whatever the context of encounter and engagement). As the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, Peirce identified as one of the great questions being pressed both inside and outside of science this one: *How do things grow?* (CP 7.267, no. 8). He takes this question to be related to his synechism (or doctrine of continuity): “Once you have embraced the principle of continuity no kind of explanation of things will [ever] satisfy you except that they *grew*” (CP 1.175). Of course, exploring *specifically* how something came into being and, in countless instances, ceased to be imposes an exacting challenge. Regarding the forms, functions, and effects of communication *and* the myriad media in the elemental sense in and through which these forms function, this challenge is especially exacting. Even so, the extent to which an adequate theory of communication requires even just a minimal sketch of an ontology is (I realize) far more disputable than either the need for a phenomenological inauguration or a normative development of communication studies. From

Peirce's perspective, however, such a theory would be incomplete if it stopped short of ontology.

Reversing the order, we are obligated to confront above all three questions: the *ontological* question, "What is the case?"; the *normative* questions, "How ought I to comport myself in the context of my inquiries into communication and, in addition to this reflexive query, what is the inescapably normative character of the communicative practices that I am investigating?"; finally, the *phenomenological* question, "What description of the context into which I am thrown enables me to orient myself, most effectively, to this context, especially when this context is taken to be first and foremost an arena of action?"

An historically inflected phenomenology, an explicitly normative orientation, and finally an ontology (specifically, an ontology of becoming, including *coming to be* intelligible) would be, from Peirce's perspective, the minimally requisite phases of any adequately articulated theory of communication. The word *phase*, however, must be carefully qualified. No one of the phases, especially the inaugural one, is ever superseded. The phenomenologist must resist the impulse uncritically to equate appearance with reality (phenomena with noumena), without prejudicing the question of the ways in which any phenomenon might be—indeed, *must* be—disclosive of reality. The ontological commitments of the phenomenologist are exposed and, to some extent, rendered problematic in the very course of that inquirer's endeavors. Even so, phenomenology is in itself not quite yet ontology, whatever momentous and unavoidable consequences regarding becoming and all else flow from its descriptions. In contrast, the ontologist must be a phenomenologist. The culminating phase, the ontological one, does not supersede—thus, does not leave behind—either the sensibility or the tools of the phenomenologist. Quite the contrary.

Peirce's pragmatist theory of signs needs to be read in conjunction with his semeiotic theory of pragmatism. Both need to be made more explicit than he often did. His formal doctrine of signs needs to be read as a thoroughly *pragmatist* doctrine, with the emphasis on the functions and efficacy of signs and the specific strategies of historically situated sign-users. No less so, his pragmatic approach to meaning needs to be read as a semeiotic doctrine. Accordingly, the title of his famous essay, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," needs to be translated into, "How to Make Our Signs Clearer." Like absolute certainty, absolute *clarity* is unattainable. For some purpose at hand, that is, *in some context*, it is possible to render our signs clearer. The degree of clarity needed is determined by the context of engagement in which the exchange of signs actually functions, unfolds and transforms itself.

Peircean pragmatism directs our attention to the *experiential contexts* in which our communicative practices must be situated in order to be understood. This is indeed the very heart of that pragmatism. A theoretical context as such is a delimiting field. His insistence on the primacy of practice does not preclude a recognition of the irreducibly distinctive character of our purely theoretical (or heuristic) endeavors. Put more simply, theory is itself a form of practice or, more

precisely, an extended family of human practices, complexly related to yet other shared practices.

There is nothing crude or reductionist in Peirce's insistence on the primacy of practice. His equal insistence on the inescapability of some more or less determinate context leaves open the question of our capacity to transcend, to some extent, possibly *any* specific or determinate context in which we are implicated. Effective emancipation from our inherited frameworks and even from our somatically inscribed norms (the cultural norms we have ineluctably *incorporated* into the innermost recesses of our embodied psyches)—effective emancipation from both such frameworks and such inscriptions—need not be illusory. The history of communication is, to some extent, however slight, one in which we have proven ingenious and courageous enough to *twist free* from external and internalized constraints. No theory of communication could ever be pragmatic were it not emancipatory.

Of course, Peirce falls short of offering a robust and even simply explicit account of pragmatic emancipation (or should I say emancipatory pragmatism?). But then, a philosophical tradition is not fully realized in its inaugural moment. *Later* figures—figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Jane Addams, Dewey and Rorty, Hans Joas and John Stuhr—are of course integral to the ongoing development of any intellectual tradition. The emancipatory promise of the pragmatist tradition mostly waited upon the children of Jane Addams (Charlene Haddock Siegfried's work; Shannon Sullivan) and the progeny of Du Bois (the work of Cornel West, Eddie Glaude, Jr., Paul Taylor, Lee McBride, and others). That is, feminist pragmatism and critical race pragmatism are those developments in which we can observe most clearly significant strides toward the fulfillment of the promise of emancipatory pragmatism.<sup>21</sup> Hence, these subsequent developments are at least as definitive of the pragmatist tradition as its inaugural—that is, its Peircean—phase. For a tradition so attuned to outcomes rather than origins, fruits rather than roots, these developments are arguably *more* important than its inauguration. This should not be taken as a slight to Peirce; rather it should be taken as recognition of just what figures such as Du Bois and Addams achieved, against even greater odds than those confronted by Peirce.

## Classical Pragmatism as a Vital Tradition

Peirce insisted on the primacy of practice. We must begin and end with critical attention to our shared practices. Moreover, we must see ourselves first and foremost as situated practitioners, i.e., implicated participants in any number of intergenerational communities in which human autonomy, achievement, and transformation are alone possible.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Magee 2004; but see McBride 2021. Lee McBride's book presents a forceful, nuanced, and eloquent case for emancipation in its most urgent contemporary sense (the struggle of the oppressed to win for themselves their lives and a world in which those lives matter).

For me, then, American pragmatism is a vital tradition and, virtually from its inception, it was at once local (distinctively American) and global or international. Part of its vitality is, I believe, its relevance to the study of communication. What I have tried to do is simply to identify some of the most important implications of Peircean pragmatism for communication studies. Please note: I am making a comparatively weak claim (no theoretical imperialism is implied in my advocacy of the relevance of this form of pragmatism for this field of study). The implications of Peirce's theory clearly point in directions other theories also point. In addition, they point in directions toward which students of communication have to some extent already moved. In this regard, Peirce is not necessarily indispensable (we might have and indeed many have arrived at my conclusions regarding communication without any help from Peirce), though he is, in my judgment, illuminating and (arguably) singularly instructive. The systematic (or architectonic) character of his approach (his guiding sense that the most effective movement of human inquiry is from phenomenology to ontology, by way of normativity) is extremely suggestive and possibly far more fecund than those unacquainted with the history of the sciences might imagine or appreciate.

No tradition or perspective is sufficient unto itself. This is as true of pragmatism as it is of any other tradition (Colapietro 2012). For an understanding of revolution, Marxists must look beyond the writings of Marx and others in their tradition. For an understanding of the workings of the unconscious, Freudians and other psychoanalysts must look beyond Freud and others in *this* tradition. Analogously, for an understanding of practice, sign-processes, experience, conduct, science and the host of other topics with which historical pragmatism has been preoccupied, contemporary adherents of the pragmatist tradition must look beyond Peirce, James, Dewey, Mead, even Du Bois, Addams, and look *to* such theorists as Heidegger and Gadamer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas, Foucault and Deleuze, Wittgenstein and Austin, Susanne Langer and Toni Morrison. To repeat, no tradition is sufficient unto itself. The ways in which phenomenology, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, feminist theory, critical race theory, and other perspectives complement pragmatism cannot be gainsaid. Put positively, they must be not only acknowledged but also celebrated. Pragmatists are as much pluralists as they are contextualists, and pluralism (despite what Robert Talisse and other misguided contemporary "pragmatists" argue) is integral to pragmatism. What a pragmatist emphasis on the primacy of practice entails is an acknowledgment and celebration of the *plurality* of traditions. These traditions and perspectives overlap in complex, ever shifting ways, optimally, to the mutual benefit of the intersecting traditions.

"The world is," William James (1978) suggests in his *Pragmatism*, "full of partial stories that run parallel to one another, beginning and ending at odd times. They mutually interlace and interfere at points, but we cannot unify them completely in our minds" (71). On this occasion, I have told what I realize is and could only be a very *partial* story, in several senses of that adjective. My only hope is that it was also an engaging and suggestive story, not least of all in pointing to *some* of the ways in which this tradition interlaces and interferes with other traditions, to the mutual benefit of these diverse orientations.



## Conclusion

Peirce lived his final years as an enigmatic, reclusive genius. If I have done anything to make him more accessible and more of a participant in the *ongoing* community of diverse fields of critical studies, then my efforts have been, to that extent, pragmatically fulfilled. He was acutely aware of how difficult some of his auditors and readers found his utterances. He strove to be clear *and* precise, but his commitment to precision often made his lectures or writings, for some readers, inaccessible or at least extremely challenging. He was and “will always remain,” as John Dewey (1991) noted, “a philosopher’s philosopher”: “His ideas will reach the general public only through the mediations and translations of others” (480). It is even true that his ideas will to a great extent reach scholars and theorists outside of philosophy “only through the mediations and translations of others.” Even though the irony in this is manifest, it deserves to be stressed. This philosopher of mediation, moreover, a theorist as deeply committed to what John Durham Peters calls “elemental media”<sup>22</sup> as any writer in any epoch, needs himself to be mediated, in order that the import of his writings can more effectively be communicated!

Granting agency to signs and media apart from the intention and awareness of human sign-users does nothing to strip those users of their importance or

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<sup>22</sup> Peters’s point is essentially Peirce’s: our tendency to focus exclusively on signs instituted and used by humans and other species of animals closely akin to ourselves occludes how pervasive and nearly primordial (see Esposito 1979) signs or media are. “Before a word is spoken, our togetherness,” Peters (2015) insists, “is already supersaturated with meaning. The world does not need to be re-enchanted; it is already wondrous. The universe is full of data [arguably, best conceived as gifts—gifts of meaning (cf. Raposa 2020)]; why should we attend only to the narrow bandwidth of data [or media] made by humans, exceedingly fascinating and creative though they be. Science at its best is not the foe of wonder, but its vehicle” (381–82), or at least, one of its vehicles. For Peters (2015) no less than for Peirce, “meaning is *in nature*” (4, emphasis added). “A medium must not [simply] mean but be.” Even among humans, “media of all kinds serve elemental roles. Once communication is understood not only as sending messages—certainly an essential function—but also as providing conditions for existence, media cease to be only studios and stations, messages and channels, and become infrastructures and [even] forms of life” (14). Media in this expansive and indeed “elemental” sense however fell prey to a historical development in the recent past: “The decisive break happened in the nineteenth century with the slow turn of media [and signs] into a conveyance of specifically human signals and meanings” (47). Part of the irony here is that, just at this time, Peirce was struggling to retain the older, wider sense of media. A recovery of this sense is, arguably, bound up (as Peters clearly implies) with a recovery or simply the discovery of Peirce. “The idea that media are message-bearing institutions . . . is relatively recent in intellectual history” (Peters 2015, 2). Especially at a time “when our most pervasive surrounding environment is technological and nature . . . is drenched with human manipulation,” it is imperative to recover a concept of media deeper and wider than our contrivances and consciousness, our stipulations and demands. Indeed, especially at a time when “a culture of pathological convenience” (Grenell 2022, 8) structures the rituals of our everyday lives, though these rituals are not recognized as such, the need to begin to appreciate the extent to which media provide nothing less than conditions for our very lives is imperative.

indeed their responsibility.<sup>23</sup> Radical fallibilism and radical responsibility are not only compatible: they entail one another (cf. Arnett 2017). I am responsible for what I say and think even if my utterances and thoughts trace their roots to forces and factors deeper than the resources and resolves of my own agency and also carry implications *far* beyond anything I can imagine or anticipate. I am *practically* rooted in diverse histories, only some of which I am in a position to acknowledge, and implicated in fateful trajectories, only some of which I will ever have the resources to identify, however partially and perspectively. The primacy of practice means, in part, being rooted in various histories and implicated in their open-ended trajectories. To imagine that I, in my isolation from others, take myself to be the author of my own being, rather than a co-author, often with less to contribute than other factors shaping the meaning of my utterances and thoughts, is nothing short of delusion.<sup>24</sup> To affirm the primacy of practice is, on my reading, to accept, with the degree of discernment only obtainable by means of humility, my radical dependence on elemental media and my own status as (to some extent) a medium of disclosure. I am at every moment being addressed by signs (cf. Buber 2002, 12–13), most of which I do not discern as such.<sup>25</sup> At every turn, human survival and flourishing have hinged on ecological literacy in a very practical sense. The primacy of practice *practically* encompasses attunement to what myriad natural signs convey, if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

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<sup>23</sup> Signs are, Peirce asserts, “the only things with which a human being can, without derogation, consent to have any transaction, being a sign himself” (CP 6.344). The self not only uses signs as media of disclosure but also is itself, in its innermost being, a medium of disclosure. This makes its innermost being an outreaching identity. Are “we shut up [or imprisoned] in a box of flesh and blood? When I communicate my thoughts and my sentiments to a friend with whom I am in sympathy, so that my feelings pass into him, do I not live in his brain [or psyche] as well as in my own,—most literally?” Peirce adds: “Each man has an identity which far transcends the mere animal;—an essence, a *meaning* as subtle as it may be. He cannot know his own essential significance; of his eye it is [as R. W. Emerson wrote in one of his poems] eyebeam. But that he truly has this outreaching identity . . . is the true and exact significance of the fact of sympathy—fellow feeling— together with all unselfish interests—and all that makes us feel that he has an absolute worth” (CP 7.591; cf. CP 8.38).

<sup>24</sup> Peirce goes so far as to call this “the metaphysics of wickedness.” “If you embrace synechism [i.e., the doctrine of continuity], you must abjure this metaphysics of wickedness. In the first place, your neighbors are, in a measure, yourself, and in far greater measure than, without deep studies in psychology, you would believe. Really, the selfhood you like to attribute to yourself is, for the most part, the vilest delusion of vanity. In the second place, all men who resemble you and are in analogous circumstances, in a measure, yourself, though not quite in the same way in which your [more proximate] neighbors are” (CP 7.571). A seldom cited text regarding this topic is found in a chapter of *The Grand Logic* (“The Essence of Reasoning”): “There are those who believe in their own existence, because its opposite [is to them] inconceivable; yet the most balsamic of all the sweets of sweet philosophy is the lesson that personal existence [i.e., a purely or absolutely separate existence] is an illusion and a practical joke. Those who have loved themselves and not their neighbors will find themselves April fools when the great April opens the truth that neither [their personal] selves nor neighborselves were anything more than vicinities; while the love they would not entertain was the very essence of every scent” (CP 69; see also 6.355ff.).

<sup>25</sup> “Some signs,” Peirce observes, “address themselves to us, so that we fully apprehend them [as signs]. But it is a paralyzed reason that does not acknowledge others that are not directly addressed to us [e.g., a dog growling at another dog], and that does not suppose still others of which we know nothing definite” (NEM IV, 299).

In turn, an appreciation of Peirce's relevance to communication includes an awareness that the media of communication far outstrip human consciousness, control, and (to some extent) even destructiveness.<sup>26</sup> For example, our careless, inattentive, and corrupt use of language maims but does not utterly destroy this inheritance and resource (however, cf. Morrison [1993] 2008, 199–202). In some fashion, these media possess a life of their own. The life of signs is itself a sign that neither their meaning nor their life depends entirely upon our attributions or especially our fiats. In other words, it is a sign of a life more encompassing and complex and even intimate to our own life than we ordinarily appreciate or dimly sense.<sup>27</sup> The muted, incomprehensible sounds and other signs first experienced by us in the womb are in effect an initiation into a life in which signs abound, though their meanings often prove extremely elusive. The practical recognition of feelings and perceptions *as signs* amounts to nothing less than crossing a threshold. Our intelligence practically comes into being with this recognition. The meanings of most signs are indeed to a great extent missed, though the practical import of some of the more salient signs is, especially for narrow or immediate purposes, effectively grasped (e.g., the capacity to sense one is in the presence of a predator). Were this not so, we would have long ago been extinct.

The primacy of practice enfolds within itself myriad forms of practical "literacy" — the capacity to utter and interpret signs in various contexts, for diverse purposes. Our "feel" for the salience and significance of aspects of the objects and events disclosed in our experience is deeply instinctual, though largely acquired. A mostly unacknowledged complex of innate dispositions makes possible the forms of habituation and hence of enculturation characteristic of *Homo sapiens*. This extensive complex of tacit practical skills itself makes possible our explicit theoretical endeavors, including our ability to make sense of the texts of an author such as Peirce and of the staggeringly vast array of phenomena such as those we encounter in our communicative processes and practices. When an author such as Peirce and a field such as communications intersect, mutual illumination is destined to occur. My hope is to have rendered this claim plausible—nothing more, but also nothing less.

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<sup>26</sup> What the pragmatist adores "is *power*; not the sham power of brute force which, even in its own specialty of spoiling [or destroying] things, secures such slight results; but the creative power of reasonableness" (Peirce, CP 5.520). The power of signs to replicate themselves in some recognizable form is one thing, the power of signs to generate radical novelty (e.g., a new genre of literature or a new form of inquiry) is quite another. For Peirce, the accent must fall most of all on the *creative* power of our signifying practices.

<sup>27</sup> "The love of life is," Peirce insists, "*more than a love of sensuous life*: it is also a love of rational life" (MS 146, Winter 1867–68; published in W 2, 124, emphasis original). As such, "our love of life is not confined within the walls of our own body; but since our reason lives wherever it is active, primarily in our own brains but also in the brains of those who take up our thoughts and sentiments, it is a part of the love of life, to love our influence upon and fame with succeeding generations" (124). The love of rational life encompasses that of semiotic life, a love of signs specifically insofar as to contribute to the ongoing growth of our deliberate rationality or rational agency. Closely connected to this, "in intellectual life there is a tendency to value existence as the vehicle of forms" (Peirce, CP 5.440). That is, the life of reason is one in which the forms or media in and through which rationality is concretely realized are cherished.

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## **Semioethics and Interfaith Action: Jane Addams and “The Fellowship of the Deed”**

Annette M. Holba

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**Abstract:** Jane Addams (1860–1935) brought ethics and interfaith action to life in her commitment to service within her communities. This presentation explores her passions for a life of service through her personal vision of service and several stories of her encounters with others through the early years of her work at Hull House. Committed to pragmatism and embodying a meaningful existence through a life of service to others, Addams focused on the best way to make a difference in the world, bringing ethics into action and expanding how we think about interfaith service.

**Keywords:** Hull House; interfaith service; social ethics; semioethics; reflective encounter; fellowship of the deed

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Thank you for such a nice welcome to the 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Philosophy of Communication Conference: Pragmatism. Today, I will be discussing the pragmatism of Jane Addams (1860–1935), and, I confess, I have not studied Addams in any depth until now, though I am exploring her from a philosophy of communication perspective. While I knew a little about Jane Addams, I really had little understanding of her interfaith and interhuman philosophy and action. So, when I was asked to speak on Addams, I was excited to have an opportunity to delve into her life, her work, and her philosophy. I started with reading her biography by Louise Knight, who, by the way, is a great storyteller. Then I read her books *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1911) and *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), both of which gave me insight into her pragmatic thinking and doing. What I hope to do here today is to expand her story as we think about her social, moral, and very pragmatic engagement in the world, exemplifying her interfaith and interhuman commitments. I want to do this by telling stories about her life, stories that she shares in her writings, stories that helped her come to meaning in a world of suffering and challenges.

I am going to start with acknowledging one commonality between Jane Addams and the conclusion drawn by Vincent Colapietro about Peirce in his keynote yesterday: Jane Addams also affirmed the “primacy of practice” throughout her work. While Addams was well educated and lived a life informed



by her education, she engaged reflectively but did not stop there. She allowed herself to be fully present in her work with others, and she allowed her understandings and perspectives to be informed by others. She, too, celebrated plurality. For Addams, it was plurality that was central to her work, and it was the plurality of differences that always guided her decisions and the meaning that she gained through her experiences. To begin this presentation, I want to start with a few stories that will help to set the framework for understanding Addams's life and work.

Louise W. Knight (2010) begins her biography of Jane Addams with a story of Jane's early years. She recounts that as a two-and-a-half-year-old little girl, Jane experienced her first death when her mother died after an accident. Jane's mother, Sarah, was seven months pregnant when she slipped and fell on an icy hill on her way to assist someone else who was in labor and giving birth. After her fall, a little while later, Sarah went herself into premature labor and delivered a stillborn daughter. Afterward, she slipped into unconsciousness. At the time, Jane's father was away at the Illinois state capital serving as a state senator, and he was called back home to be by his wife's bedside. Initially, the family tried to keep Jane out of the room, but in one of her mother's more lucid moments in between bouts of unconsciousness, she heard Jane pounding on the door and she called out to let Jane in to come to her side. Five days after her fall, Sarah was dead.

This devastated Jane. There were other deaths to come in her immediate family, too. When Jane was six years old, her sister Martha died from typhoid fever, and again her family shielded Jane from Martha's death by not letting her attend Martha's funeral. Jane had been left behind at the house, and she describes herself sitting in a vigil state on the steps staring into a wall, which made her feel left out and simultaneously protected from death. Later, when Jane was sixteen years old, Polly, a family servant who helped to raise Jane after the death of her mother, fell ill, and this time, Jane was present, along with Polly, when she died. Addams ([1911] 2022) indicated that these early death-related experiences in her life left her feeling unsheltered as she faced nature's elemental forces in what to her seemed to be a relentless fashion. When Jane was twenty, she also witnessed the death of her father. So, her first twenty years of life were rife with death experiences.

This is a lot for a child to bear, but it was not an uncommon experience back then. What is so telling about these early years of Jane's life is the pounding on the door calling for her mother, the persistence of holding a vigil at a wall blocking her from entering the space of death for her sister—she persisted in breaking her way into being a witness of, for, and to death. Her persistence would come to represent her commitment to witness with and to others in spaces of suffering and to work hard to reduce, disrupt, and eliminate whatever suffering of others she could. This is the narrative ground from which Jane Addams led her life: always to, for, and about the other. Jane Addams had a keen sense of response-ability, or being able to respond, for the other, to care for the other, especially during suffering.

Throughout her adult life, Jane Addams built a life of servitude, cultivating an interfaith community through her words and deeds. Addams had what she

described as a “curious sense of responsibility” (2017, 8), referring to a repetitive dream that she recalled from her earliest years: Night after night she dreamt everyone in the world was dead except herself, and she recognized that responsibility rested solely upon her, only her, to rebuild the wagon wheel. The wagon wheel was the metaphor she used for the world because it represented movement, action, and doing. In her dreams, she remembered she was standing in her empty, deserted village realizing that she did not know what to do nor how to move forward with rebuilding. She kept thinking that what she had to do was just to start—start something, start somewhere, start building. In her dream, that was to build one wagon wheel. From there, she thought the world would begin anew. So, she began her life with this immense sense of duty, obligation, and responsibility for the human community to exist and to flourish.

This immense sense of responsibility for the other and for community is not the only intuitive passion she felt. She also felt an interfaith fortitude that was enculturated within her from her father’s evangelical impulses. Her father, John Huy Addams, who died when Jane was twenty years old, is described as refusing to join any one particular faith community because he could not accept the complete teaching of any one singular religious perspective. The family did attend a local Presbyterian church, but John Addams also shared many Quaker affinities. He was an influential Bible school teacher; thus, he contributed to the religious development of his community, and he also held strong evangelical beliefs. Being raised in this kind of ecumenical environment provided the ground of interfaith sentiment in Jane from the beginning of her developing years.

This presentation offers a very brief biography of Jane Addams in case one is not familiar with her life work, which has left an imprint on many people and communities around the country and around the world. Then, using one aspect of semioethics—the “reflective encounter” discussed by Ronald C. Arnett—as a frame, I explore two features of her work. The first is the notion of “fellowship of the deed” and its connection to interfaith commitment. The second is her commitment to interhuman engagement. It should be noted that I chose the “reflective encounter” because of its pragmatic necessity. According to Arnett (2017), semioethics in action involves a “reflective encounter” that provides a way to eliminate assumptions we take for granted about communicative behavior. The reflective encounter invites divergent voices into a dialogic space regardless of differences. Arnett (2017) affirms this perspective, suggesting that the significance of this reflective encounter provides an opening for a “critical response to the ongoing expansion of global communication production processes” (80). The more voices, the better. The reflective encounter allows one to check and remove the assumptions we make, implicit or explicit, as we engage in ever-changing local and global landscapes. Additionally, as I consider Addams’s philosophy of service, two questions emerge that motivate her persistence toward serving her communities: how do we serve the other as we would want to be served, and how do we break down the walls between people of differences? These two questions undergirded everything that meant anything to her.

## Who Was Jane Addams?

Laura Jane Addams, who used the name Jane, was born in Cedarville, Illinois, on September 6, 1860, and lived until May 21, 1935. She was the eighth child in a family of nine children. As a young child, Jane suffered with a spinal defect, which was corrected by surgery later in life. She accomplished a lot in her life, most notably winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 for her effort in working to revive and rekindle the spirit of peace in her nation. She was also recognized as a pioneering social worker in America, an active suffragist, and an internationalist. All of humanity was her concern.

Addams's father was a successful businessman and politician serving for sixteen years as an Illinois state senator. John Huy fought in the Civil War and was a friend and colleague of Abraham Lincoln. Jane attended higher levels of education; she graduated from the Rockford Female Seminary and was awarded a bachelor's degree after the school was accredited as Rockford College for Women. Addams also attended medical school but had to leave due to her own poor health.

When Jane was twenty-seven years old, traveling with a friend and partner, Ellen Starr, she visited a settlement house in London. This visit led to Addams pursuing her dreams of service to her community. When they returned, they rented a house in Chicago and designed the initial Hull House (named for the builder of the house), which would serve the underprivileged in providing a higher civic and social life and maintaining educational and philanthropic work to improve living conditions and human experiences for all others. Addams did this initially with her own money.

Addams and Starr worked together in serving the needs of the underprivileged in Chicago. In doing so, more and more civic responsibility was drawing her into more and more civic environments. As her reputation expanded, she earned an honorary degree from Yale University and gave a series of lectures at the University of Wisconsin, which led to a publication one of her books, *Newer Ideals of Peace*. One of the goals in her life was to eliminate the need for war and to provide relief and education to the poor. Her lifetime of commitment to serving those less privileged was started with her own money, and eventually she was able to receive funding from others the more successful she became. She passed away after having several heart attacks and ovarian cancer in 1935.

Using her first book about her work, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (2022), first published in 1911, we can explore her commitment to and embodiment of interfaith engagement. Her commitment to action is explicitly represented in her mantra "the fellowship of the deed" (Addams 2017, 43).

## The Fellowship of the Deed

The word "fellowship" has several meanings that have emerged over time and across disciplines. Fellowship can mean having a friendly association, and this friendliness can be enhanced if it is shaped around common interests. In certain

disciplines or industries, it can also mean an award of a certain amount of funding designed to either acknowledge a good idea or to support or subsidize the cost of something, like an educational degree or professional development. In most academic settings, a fellowship refers to some kind of monetary gift or award, which can be merit-based but not always. While the word “fellow” colloquially refers to a companion of some kind, in its etymology it comes from the word “consociate,” referring to one who is united with another as a comrade or companion (Simpson 1959). “Fellow” also aligns itself with the Greek word *koinonia*, which refers to commonality or having something in common with an other in the sense of being “in communion with” (Jones 1977). This reflects a sense of friendliness, a partnership, or some kind of sharing of something—money, an idea, or an experience. The Greek notion of fellowship often refers to a friend, one who is in the company of another, a member in a class or a profession, or a member of a pair of something. “Fellow” plus “ship” refers to the state of being together, companionship, partnership, being in communion with one another or others (Jones 1977). Fellowship also has a religious connotation, such as participating in a religious community or partaking in a meal together (Daniels 2017).

Fellowship also has a spiritual connotation: being in spiritual communion with a divine being. In the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 13:14 states, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (NASB). As a verb, fellowship is an action, meaning to admit to fellowship or to enter into fellowship with or to make one feel welcome by showing friendship or building a cordial relationship. In the context of Jane Addams’s exemplification, the word “fellowship” stands for the sentiment of care that she had for the other, and the word “deed” stands for her emphasis on doing and action. It is not good enough to just think or reflect; that reflection, which is necessary, must be tied to action.

Thinking about “fellowship” resonates with some understandings of welcoming the other. In Jacques Derrida’s essay *A Word of Welcome* (1999), he states that welcome insinuates or points to the following:

1. Saying “welcome” insinuates that one is at home here;
  2. This means that one knows what it means to be at home;
  3. At home, one receives, invites, or offers hospitality,
  4. Appropriates for oneself a place to welcome the Other,
  5. Or one welcomes the other so that one appropriates a place for oneself;
  6. When one welcomes the other, one speaks the language of hospitality.
- (15–16)

Fellowship opens to a welcoming, which then opens to hospitality—being hospitable to the other. François Cooren (2018) identifies the metaphor of hospitality as the key feature of Derrida’s ethics of communication. Cooren (2018) suggests that Derrida’s principle of hospitality is an unconditional welcoming of

the Other, as Addams did. Jane Addams led with interfaith and interhuman sentiment, which also exemplifies that which Thich Nhat Hanh (2020) referred to as interbeing (leading to his model of Engaged Buddhism, which shares similar qualities with Addams's work). Fellowship, welcoming, and being hospitable defines who we are and what we should do as human beings: we are all interbeing (Hanh 2020). When we welcome the other in fellowship, we are hospitable, and as the host of this hospitality, we become hostage, in action, we host the Other. Jane Addams's life was devoted to this commitment.

The "fellowship of the deed" reflects an emphasis on action that demonstrates an interfaith commitment to serving others in society, regardless of socioeconomic status, religion, race, or other divisive constructs. It reflects our responsibility toward the other through service, deed, and meeting others where they are in any given moment. This sentiment was the foundation and fabric of the first settlement house imagined and built by Addams.

Addams referred to the settlement house as "an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by modern conditions of life in a great city" (Addams 2022, 64). Addams (2022) wrote that people must be content to live quietly and in harmony, side-by-side, with others. She envisioned that by living with others of difference, people can grow together, have respect and relational experiences with others, and build their connections around mutual interests. Addams penned this construct to symbolize how through words, language, and actions, she built her life serving an interfaith, interwoven community, which demonstrated or modeled to others how to live a life enriched by otherness.

Fellowship was an important word to Addams as it represented her sentiment of care for others grounded in pragmatic doing and serving others. She stated that without fellowship, "we may never know how great the divergence between ourselves and others" really is and what it means to the integrity of our relations. She stated that without fellowship, we actually experience loneliness (Addams 2017, 118), and this can become so significant that it leaves absolutely no room for gratitude in our hearts. Fellowship, especially while sharing food and drink, provides a "common meeting ground" for people situated within differences (Addams 2017, 243).

The notion of the fellowship of the deed is the key to understanding Addams's interfaith vision and actions. In her book *The Twenty Years at Hull House*, Addams (2017) stated her "early hopes for the Settlement that it should unite in the fellowship of the deed those of widely differing religious beliefs" (43). This, uniting those separated by religious and other differences, is the true consequence of service toward and for others.

In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams stated that "a standard of social ethics is not attained by travelling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the thronged and common road where all must turn out for one another, and at least see the size of one another's burdens. . . . [This] implies that [it is] diversified human experience and resultant sympathy which are the foundation and guarantee of democracy" (Addams 2014, 3). Addams advocated for this kind of a social and interfaith ethic as a universal condition of existence.

Addams (2017) stated that “if we grow contemptuous of our fellows, and consciously limit our intercourse to certain kinds of people whom we have previously decided to respect, we not only tremendously circumscribe our range of life, but limit the scope of our ethics” (4). In this way, we close down dialogic spaces and our capacity, or possibility, to achieve dialogue and other interconnections with others.

I want to share two more stories from Jane Addams’s life that demonstrate her pragmatic philosophy, which embodies the commitment of her actions. The first one involves meeting Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). The second story involves a little boy named Goosie and how his life and death remained in Addams’s inner reflections throughout her entire life. This story exemplifies interhuman action.

### **Semioethics and Meeting the Other: An Interfaith Perspective**

Jane Addams was very educated and well read. She was familiar with Tolstoy’s writings and shared a story about a time when she met him during her travels to Europe. Addams described Tolstoy as being dressed in his “peasant garb,” and he was looking at her judgmentally (Addams 2017, 127). He stated to her, while pulling or tugging on the sleeve of her dress, that “there was enough stuff on one arm to make a frock for a little girl.” He then asked her if she found that “such a dress” was a “barrier to the people” (Addams 2017, 127–28). Addams stated that she was a little taken aback by his judgment of her, and she replied to him that “monstrous as my sleeves were they did not compare in size with those of the working girls in Chicago and that nothing would more effectively separate me from the people than a cotton blouse following simple lines of the human form” (127). Addams continued, “even if I had wished to imitate him [Tolstoy] and ‘dress as a peasant’ it would have been hard to choose which peasant among the thirty-six nationalities we had recently counted in our ward” to dress as (127). This sentiment points to Addams’s awareness of diversity in peasantry.

This story illustrates Addams’s commitment to live among those she served and demonstrates that she did not pretend she was something that she was not. Tolstoy was judging her on her appearance and thought she could better serve the poor by dressing as he had imagined poor people would dress. Addams responded by indicating that it is more important to know others by living with them within their daily existence than to guess something about them. Then you will know how to dress to become a part of their life and experiences—building trust, which you need if you want to make a difference in their lives. Tolstoy would not have made such a quick judgment about her sleeves if he was aware of the multiplicities within the peasant population. He would have known this had he lived fully present among the poor and recognized that understanding the poor is not a singular understanding; there are diverse ways to communicate, dress, and live with them. Addams reflected on this and realized Tolstoy was pretending: he remained outside and above the people to whom he wrote.

Additionally, this story points to diversity of perspectives since Addams referred to the thirty-six nationalities of people living in her ward, as well as the

expansive range of religious differences, all of whom she knew intimately and served regularly. She was an integral part of Hull House. She also knew enough that they were all different from each other, in their dress, in what they ate, in the norms of how they acted, and in their religious and worship practices. She accepted and celebrated all of their differences, especially the contours of religious practices. Having various religious perspectives in conversation with each other and living among this rich diversity laid the backdrop for her interfaith commitment. This story involving Tolstoy reveals the extent of Addams's interfaith commitment to the people she served. She also allowed the experience to enable a deeply reflective orientation for her, and she never forgot the exchange.

Interfaith work can be represented several ways. According to Brad Fulton and Richard L. Wood (2013), interfaith work may come in the form of grassroots collaboration on social projects, locally sponsored interfaith dialogues, or collaborations sponsored by nondenominational shared work on faith-based initiatives (17). Addams engaged in interfaith work through her grassroots collaborations that led to building, running, and maintaining Hull House. It was the interfaith structures at Hull House that embodied her interfaith commitments; all faiths were welcomed and deemed equal in their work. The more perspectives, the more successful Hull House would become, and the more people it would help.

## **Semioethics and Interhuman Action**

Addams made her case for a life lived in ethics and interfaith action, thus representing a model of care through her fellowship sentiment. Her interfaith commitment underscores her social ethic, which is about "recognizing that democracy is a 'rule of living' which requires individuals to cultivate a sense of shared responsibility for social processes" (Hanagan 2013, 370). Addams's social ethic lays the responsibility for reforming social processes in the hands of the people—it is not any top-down solution. This is something that all people have the responsibility for; the locus of control is, or should be, in the hands of everyone.

Knight (2010) describes Addams as an activist. If Hull House was going to be successful, Addams would have to get a little political, something that she often resisted but eventually got drawn into. Lobbying was something Addams hated doing, yet she knew it was necessary for social change. Her interhuman perspective and engagement would eventually help to shape a more positive view of lobbying. Before having to lobby, she thought that lobbying was about pushing one main agenda at all costs. Later, she came to see lobbying as cross-class political campaigning in that people from all different political voices would come together to advocate for social and political changes, and these changes would be felt in the lives of the people she worked with and served.

Hull House came to signify roots, connection, and belonging in the community. This second story centers around an experience that Addams shared about a boy named Goosie, which reflects a sense of what it means to have an interhuman perspective and experience. There were many reasons for the need of

a social space such as the settlement house, and living there led to many epiphanies for Addams. She knew Goosie's mother because he attended the childcare center at Hull House every day while his mother worked hard outside of the home. When Goosie was five years old, he was helping his mother on the roof of a shed building, where she was hanging laundry before going to the factory for the day. Unfortunately, that morning was very windy. In the blink of an eye, when Goosie was reaching up to hand his mother a clothespin, a strong wind lifted him up and threw him off the roof. His mother kept calling for him to come back up to the roof, but she was not aware that his neck was broken. Goosie was dead.

This had a profound impact on Jane. On the day of the funeral, Jane asked Goosie's mother what she could do for her. His mother simply asked if she could still have her wages for the next day if she stayed home. She wanted to hold Goosie, her dead child, all day because Goosie would ask her every day to stay home so they could spend time together just to play or be held. Then, Goosie's mother admitted she never had the time, or made the time, to give this time to Goosie before. For Addams, this sentiment reflected the absurd reality that the mother, living in poverty, had to work for a living and that in doing so, the work left no time "for the tender care and caressing" of children (Addams 2017, 86). Addams recognized this was a problem for all poor people and that no matter how progressive a society became, there would still be poor people who were enslaved by their poverty, and there would always be someone who could not provide the tender care that their child needed. This demonstrated for Jane the need for a firm social ethic around the interhuman action of care. Addams wondered: How can society provide the opportunity or the environment for cultivating and supporting this interhuman desire? From then on, Addams's perspective of the poor expanded even more, and she wanted to continue to make a difference in individual people's lives, especially for working mothers. Addams did not have children of her own, but everyone she served, no matter the age, was like her own child to her.

## **Conclusion**

Interfaith and interhuman qualities are descriptors that exemplify how Jane Addams moved through the world. Addams's life, exemplified through engagement in her work at the Hull House, provided her with opportunities for reflective encounters that allowed her to question the "taken-for-granted assumptions about communicative behavior" (Arnett 2017, 80). Reading *Twenty Years at Hull House*, one finds a rich repository of stories shared by Addams that exemplifies an interfaith mindset and an interhuman spirit, which allowed her to weave together a tapestry of pragmatic engagement for the public good. Addams's life of deeds orchestrated divergent voices, perspectives, worldviews, and faiths into a dialogic space that respected and honored others while embracing the differences between people. Addams brought people together around ideas and differences, modeling for them how to honor, respect, and serve the other.



The work Jane Addams did was a critical response to the growth of the city as well as growth around the world. She would engage in a “reflective encounter” that ultimately opened opportunities to connect and reflect with others around assumptions and processes that we all take for granted (Arnett 2017, 80). Addams did not remain in a reflective mode; rather, she moved from the reflective into a very pragmatic space of action while recognizing that people not only come together around ideas but also around action—in the doing together.

Addams modeled an ethic of care through her stewardship of the poor and the fellowship she shared with them. Let me end with one last story, returning to the wall. By the end of her life, Addams had knocked down the walls that stood between her and the deaths in her family, as well as the walls between her and others in her communities. Being able to witness, to be in fellowship, with those who die, or to be with them at death, allowed for a radical civility (Danisch and Keith 2020) to develop and guide the work—the pragmatic action of her life. She united others through an interhuman sentiment, through interfaith dialogue, and through commitment to pragmatic action. These three elements that underscore Addams’s contributions to society enabled her to make sense of the world for herself and to help others to make their own sense of being in the world, no matter where they were in their human journey. Her life represented resistance to the status quo that represented other kinds of walls in the social fabric of human existence. Jane Addams worked toward breaking barriers and eliminating walls between people, recognizing that it is the differences we share that can lead us to find common ground, to create a respectful community, and to contribute to a flourishing life devoted to serving others, all others.

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## **Building a Beloved Community in a Wounded World: Womanist Thought and the Pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois**

Annette Madlock

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**Abstract:** This essay began as a keynote address on W.E.B. Du Bois for the 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Philosophy of Communication Conference: Pragmatism at Duquesne University. The pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois and the womanism of Alice Walker and Katie G. Cannon are discussed in the context of the beloved community in a wounded world with warring ideals. The traditional definition of ethics focuses on moral duty and obligation. “Warring ideals” involve a struggle between aspirational ideals of what a community is supposed to be and what it actually is, especially for those who are marginalized. The ethic of community is defined as the moral responsibility to engage in collaborative processes as agents for equity. The ethic of community, the beloved community, centers the communal over the individual as the primary locus of collective moral agency.

**Keywords:** womanism; pragmatism; Cannon, Katie G.; Walker, Alice; Du Bois, W.E.B.; beloved community

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“One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”  
—Du Bois ([1903] 2009)

“Womanism requires that we stress the urgency of Black women’s movement from death to life. In order to do this, we recount in a logical manner the historical consequences of what precedes us. We investigate contestable issues according to official records. In other words, womanist religious scholars insist that individuals look back at race, sex, and class constructions before it is too late and put forth critical analysis in such a way that errors of the past will not be repeated.”  
—Cannon (1995)

## Introduction

Over the years, I have been preoccupied with a search for the beloved community. I look for it everywhere, and when I see glimpses of it, I work to shine a light on it whenever and wherever I can in personal and professional spaces. In a special issue of the *Journal of Communication and Religion*, the opportunity was provided to highlight the various ways that individuals work to help build the beloved community in the places and spaces to which they belong based on their skills in collaboration with the wants and needs of the people around them (Madlock 2020). When asked to share my thoughts on the pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois, I had to make the connections between the three philosophies of pragmatism, womanism, and the beloved community. Kipton Jensen and Preston King (2017) remind us that the term “beloved community” was coined by the early twentieth-century philosopher Josiah Royce (1855–1916). However, many learned it not from Royce but from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who often spoke of the beloved community. Ideally, the beloved community can be established in any physical location; however, it is an inclusive place where all people share in the earth’s wealth and where poverty, hunger, homelessness, and other forms of social injustice are not tolerated. Peaceful conflict resolution prevails where love and trust triumph over fear and hatred, and all God’s children rejoice in peace and justice. In this article, the womanist ideal of Alice Walker, the womanism of Katie G. Cannon (1950–2018), and the pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois are discussed as examples of a strategy or framework that can be used for the creation of a beloved community in a wounded world. The ethic of community, the beloved community, centers the community over the individual as the primary locus of collective moral agency to heal a wounded world.

## Pragmatism

Although it is known that Martin Luther King Jr. and W.E.B. Du Bois disagreed philosophically on reconciling issues of marginalization and oppression of Blacks in the United States, they were both pragmatic in their approaches. Historian David Levering Lewis (2002) discusses in his article “Two Responses to American Exceptionalism: W.E.B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr.” that they are studies in contrast. Still, both came to the same conclusion that “to suppose that racial discrimination could be abolished solely through cutting-edge scholarship or exemplary suffering” would not be enough (17). Du Bois and King were pragmatic in their firmly held convictions on overcoming social issues.

Thinking about what it means to be a pragmatist in its simplest form suggests “someone who deals with problems in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist, rather than following particular theories, ideas, or rules” (Cambridge University Press 2023b). Pragmatism is “the *quality* of dealing with a problem in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist, rather than following fixed theories, ideas, or rules” (Cambridge University Press 2023a, emphasis added). Considering pragmatism’s root definition, womanism can be

seen as a pragmatic tool. Alice Walker (1983) identified and named womanism in response to systems of oppression that impact women of color and their communities. Kate G. Cannon (1995), among others (Madlock 2020), have expanded upon and used Walker's womanist framework as a philosophical and theoretical tool to call out the various oppressions in systems such as theological, academic, and societal spaces. In 1903, Du Bois predicted that one of the main issues of the twentieth century would be the "problem of the color line" (Du Bois, [1903] 2009, p. 15). The pragmatism of Du Bois's work, which is expressed through his activism and efforts at racial reconciliation, can be juxtaposed with the womanist work of Cannon, as each has identified the wounds that need to be healed in order to achieve the much sought-after beloved community.

### *We Live in a Wounded World*

Wounded world, wounded communities, wounded people, and a wounded environment—the wounds are extensive. We, the people, are hurting mentally, physically, and spiritually. We are wounded people on multiple levels. We are socially vulnerable as we live in a world of increasing social unrest. Social vulnerabilities refer to the potential adverse effects on communities caused by external stresses on human health. Such stresses include natural or human-caused disasters: disease outbreaks, pandemics, catastrophic weather events (such as Hurricane Katrina), political uprisings, insurrections, global conflict, ethnic cleansing, mass incarceration, police misconduct, housing crisis, corporate greed, and economic swindles. This is not an all-inclusive list; you can, of course, add your own stressors. With that being said, every one of these stressors is exacerbated by racial and economic inequality, the color line that Du Bois ([1903] 1994) spoke of. For some, this is the logical place to start the healing process. If one were to think and act practically/pragmatically to reduce social vulnerability, the tangible result would be a decrease in both human suffering and economic loss. Again, one might be inclined to start with the root problems of social vulnerability and racial and economic inequality. The following quote by Justice Thurgood Marshall ([1992] 2015) is poignant and representative of our current societal situation:

I wish I could say racism and prejudice were only distant memories. I wish I could say that this Nation had traveled far along the road to social justice and that liberty and equality were just around the bend. I wish I could say that America has come to appreciate diversity and to see and accept similarity. But as I look around, I see not a Nation of unity but of division—Afro and White, indigenous and immigrant, rich and poor, educated and illiterate.

Current political, humanitarian, and global crises are reminiscent of a distant and not-so-distant past. Political and humanitarian crises are the problems that Du Bois, others before him, his contemporaries, and many others to come, as of this date, have not been able to correct.

### *Du Bois's Pragmatism*

To provide some insight into Du Bois's perspective as a pragmatist in search of racial reconciliation, it is essential to consider his beginnings. W.E.B. Du Bois—in full, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois—was born February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. He died August 27, 1963, in Accra, Ghana. He was an American sociologist, historian, author, editor, and civil-rights leader. As an activist, he was one of the essential Black protest leaders in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. His maternal and paternal families had been freed from slavery for several generations. After the death of his mother in 1885, he attended Fisk University with the help of his community. He graduated from Fisk in 1888, with much happening in the years following. Du Bois received a PhD from Harvard University in 1895. Two years later, he accepted a professorship at Atlanta University, where he conducted empirical studies on the social situation of African Americans from 1897 to 1910. During his time at Atlanta University, he concluded that change could be attained only through agitation and protest, a view that clashed with his contemporary Booker T. Washington. Du Bois shared in creating the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 and edited its magazine, *The Crisis*, from 1910 to 1934. His 1903 collection of essays, "The Souls of Black Folk," is a landmark of African American literature. Du Bois returned to Atlanta University in 1934 and devoted the next ten years to teaching and scholarship. After a second research position with the NAACP from 1944 to 1948, he moved politically toward the left.

In 1951, Du Bois was indicted as an unregistered agent of the Soviet Union. He was later acquitted of these charges by a federal judge. Recognizing his failed attempts at racial reconciliation and disillusionment with the United States, Du Bois joined the Communist Party, moved to Ghana, and renounced his US citizenship (Lewis 1993; Waite 2001). This brief recollection of Du Bois's life experiences hints at the origins of his pragmatism. One of the keys, here, is the sheer amount of time he spent researching, collecting information, and writing (Lewis 1977).

### *Du Bois's Black Men and the Wounded World*

Collecting evidence of the war experience of Black soldiers in the form of documents and personal papers was DuBois's (1936) practical way of gathering evidence for the world to see in his fight against racism and inequality. His collected data was crafted into a draft manuscript titled "Black Man and the Wounded Word." Historian Chad Williams (2018) examined and evaluated Du Bois's use of this material to solve the problem of double consciousness and the color line. It was one of the ways Du Bois thought there could be a reconciliation of people and identities: using the historical facts and lived experiences of Black soldiers to secure the humanity of Black people at home. It fell short for all of its worth, and it was not good enough.

## Womanism and the Beloved Community

We live in a time of increasing social unrest that has created a sense of lament, yet some are still faithful to the ideal that love and justice will prevail. We are a people feeling the sorrow and grief that comes from the continued loss of Black life and social injustice, but, at the same time, we are a people filled with hope. Hope comes from witnessing a twenty-first century rainbow coalition of citizens take to the streets to advocate for social justice that builds a stronger community for everyone. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of hate crimes, or those crimes reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation that are “motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity” (FBI, n.d.). The most recent U.S. Department of Justice (2023) report on hate crimes, initially published in December 2022 and updated in March 2023, indicates that the most prominent form is anti-Black or African American hate crimes. Crimes of hate are woven into the fabric of the United States and have been persistent since the country’s founding. Not counted in the reported numbers are the mental, physical, and spiritual violations, both macroaggressions and microaggressions, that go unreported or ignored due to various social inequalities found in systems of government, prison, education, health care, religion, and the economy and, most notably, due to police misconduct. Individual fear and complacency also play a role in underreporting racially motivated injustice, a deterrent to community building.

### *Walker, Womanism, and the Beloved Community*

Several autobiographical essays in Alice Walker’s collection *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* praise Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and identify him as one of Walker’s heroes. King also had some spiritual influence on Walker. In particular, King’s notion of the beloved community, a religious and social ideal that epitomized the civil rights movement’s goals during much of the 1950s and 1960s, shows itself in Walker’s novel *Meridian* (Tewkesbury 2011). The values of redemptive suffering, nonviolence, love, and community are as central to Walker’s novel as they are to King’s thought and work toward a beloved community.

### *Cannon, Womanism, and the Beloved Community*

Katie G. Cannon (1950–2018) was an advocate for racial-gender justice and lived by the mantra “there is no value-free space” (Princeton Theological Seminary 2018). According to Cannon (1995), understanding the prophetic tradition of the Bible empowers Black women to fashion a set of values on their terms and to master, radicalize, and sometimes destroy the pervasive negative orientations imposed by the larger society. Also, Black women articulate possibilities for decisions and action that address forthrightly the circumstances that inescapably color and shape Black life. Black women serve as contemporary prophets, calling other women forth so they can break away from the oppressive ideologies and belief systems that presume to define their reality. Womanist notions of ethos,

logos, and pathos reject oppression and are committed to social justice and inclusivity for all humanity; these values go beyond theology. The overarching question, then, is as follows: "How can we create the beloved community, despite the increase in hate crimes and socioeconomic and health disparities?" Also, "What does a womanist rhetorical vision look like when applied to the building, creation, and development of the beloved community?"

### *Lamenting God's Beloved Community*

The definition of lament is "a passionate or demonstrative expression of grief" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2023a) or "sorrow" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2023b). How can one lament what never was, what has never been experienced? As we imagine the possibilities of what could be, the actuality of reality brings discontent and lament. There is a wailing coming from the community in the form of protest and civil unrest. As a womanist scholar, daughter, sister, mother, aunt, chaplain, ordained minister, health advocate, university professor, and more, I hold a notion, with the hopeful others that came before me, that God's beloved community can be realized. The womanist way and God's way seek an all-inclusive place. The idea of creating God's beloved community once seemed achievable and possible, not by magic or prayer alone, but because of the hard work and the literal blood, sweat, and tears that have been invested by so many. Many knew and understood that Black people were more than just Black bodies. Many who advocated for our humanity saw us as fully human, not invisible, voiceless expendable commodities. The rise of Black voices over time, the investment in issues of social justice, and this notion of racial reconciliation brought exposure to the value of Black life and humanity itself (people of color and poor people) for those who chose to see the value.

The mind, body, and spirit of Black people brought to these shores have a legacy of trauma that persists. Black people worked as enslaved commodities to build a nation that enriched a select few white Anglo-Saxon Protestants and other Europeans. The labor of the oppressed was compensated with all manner of cruelty, which defined their expendability. To fight against this demonic treatment in life meant death or a crippling bodily injury to be a lesson to others who would dare think their life had value. The insidious nature of this evil has just shapeshifted into a shape that continues to use the guise of Christianity and democracy.

Plagued by the ostentatious yet ethically debased political state of this country's top leader and those that condone and complacently follow that leadership is heartbreakingly sickening and continues to traumatize our community. The current political administration, having no ethical or moral compass, moves the realization of God's beloved community further into the distance.



### *Du Bois's Black Male Feminism*

While some do not consider Du Bois a profeminist or a profeminist thinker (Weinbaum 2013), others do (Gilkes 1989; Lemons 2001) as they recognize the evolution of his Black male feminism over the years (Dennie 2020; Griffin 2000). Nneka Dennie (2020) suggests that the rhetoric and content of Du Bois's early works were constructed with a masculinist framework for overcoming racism, while his later writings provide a Black male feminist interpretation of racism and sexism. Although Du Bois did not specifically include the experiences of Black women when he documented the experiences of Black men and their role in and contributions to the war effort, he was not blind to Black women's contributions (Keene 2001). Cally Waite (2001) writes extensively about the women who influenced and were influenced by W.E.B. Du Bois, such as Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Du Bois had "attuned to the complexity of Black women's oppression" and had "advocated for Black women's rights in speeches, articles, editorials, essays, and fiction" (Lemons 2001, 200). Cheryl Townsend Gilkes (1989) notes that, in Du Bois's essay "The Freedom of Womanhood," he discusses and acknowledges Black women's contributions to their race, local community, and the nation at large. According to Gilkes (1989), Du Bois acknowledged Black women's dual heroism: first, their historic role in slavery and following, their "politics of rebellion and resistance" (574). This dual heroism of Black women is a critical phase in the journey toward democracy and creating community.

While any discussion of systemic inequality or racism is too complicated and wide-ranging for any single essay or collection of articles to cover, I hope that this particular essay continues the discussion of what it looks like when individuals communicate for survival. The emphasis here is on women's work toward community healing and restoration.

## **Conclusion**

The work of Katie G. Cannon and Alice Walker reflects the pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois, as both women have sought facts throughout history and in the lived experiences of Black people and all those who are marginalized and oppressed. This pragmatism is reflected in their scholarship and creative work, which has sought to better the lives of Black women, the Black community, and society.

Other examples of the womanist style of pragmatic work discussed in this article are articulated in Annette Madlock and Cerise L. Glenn's (2021) edited collection *Womanist Ethical Rhetoric: A Call for Liberation and Social Justice in Turbulent Times*. The contributors to this work are scholars and practitioners who center discourses of rhetoric, race, and religion—in this instance, various notions of religious rhetoric and their influence on Black women's aims for voice, empowerment, and social justice. In conjunction with other frames, the chapters use womanism to examine how Black women incorporate different aspects of our

identities into our struggles for empowerment and how we celebrate who we are in holistic ways that center love and community.

This edited collection begins by examining Black women's spiritual and professional identities among those with belief systems of the religious right, often associated with conservative values centering on white masculine notions of Christianity. It then moves to a national landscape that analyzes the Black Lives Matter movement through a womanist lens, reflecting on tensions within and advancements of activism through more formal organizations and with protests on the ground. The third chapter explores the macro landscape of Black womanhood in religious spaces in popular culture, mainly through leadership and activism, using tenets of womanism and Black feminist thought. The following two chapters expand the notion of a beloved community to address racial academic achievement gaps and inclusion of all Black women, specifically those who do not adhere to norms of "good" Christian Black womanhood. The sixth chapter explores womanist leadership in the AME church, contributing a historical perspective to contemporary issues. The collection concludes with an invitational rhetorical approach to Black women helping each other through sisterhood. Our collection embraces the commonalities and differences between womanists through theoretical and applied contexts. Embracing both allows us to centralize the plurality of Black women's lives, which is vital to advancing our voices and the voices of others.

As a womanist, I take the position that I am not only a witness to the realities of the lived experience of some African American women and their various communities but also a documentarian. My sister scholars would agree that Black, African-descended women in the Academy do not research and write for the sake of research and writing. Our work comes with the responsibility of restoration, healing, and hope. Our strength and the ability to have the opportunity to work, write, and research to document the realities of our communities also provide a modality for healing. The modalities are exemplified in so many ways, some of which were talked about in the book *Womanist Ethical Rhetoric*. Modalities for healing this wounded world also come in the responsibility of being a legacy keeper. As such, these modalities include making community connections to provide creative space and opportunities for women and girls outside of the Academy to be documentarians of their experiences and the experiences of their community. This is what Du Bois was doing when he collected historical narratives of the contributions of Black soldiers during World War One and beyond in the hope that it would be evidence enough for the white establishment, the powers that be, to include African Americans. Using the nomenclature of the time period, Du Bois sought to document factual "Negro" stories, share those stories, and get the word out. This type of work and documentation is practical, as it serves as evidence of the reality of the experience of being Black in this country.

Womanist work is for everybody. What are your practical solutions for justice, reconciliation, and contributing to building the beloved community?

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?" —Micah 6:6–8

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## Some Ethical Applications of the Law of Mind

Michael L. Raposa

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**Abstract:** Charles S. Peirce’s 1892 article on “The Law of Mind” appeared in a series devoted to his cosmological speculations. The purpose of this essay is not to evaluate Peirce’s cosmology, but rather to consider certain applications of his law that can be regarded as having a specifically ethical significance. Since the law itself describes in very general terms the growth of meaning, its application has consequences for the ethics of communication, conceived in the argument presented here primarily as an ethics of attention. After a brief explication of the law of mind itself, these consequences are identified and explored. The manner in which we choose to pay attention—both in terms of the quality and the selected objects of our attention—and the manner in which we respond to the experiences of boredom and distraction as they arise are both shown to be morally meaningful phenomena. The nature of a genuine community can also be illuminated helpfully by creative application of the law of mind.

**Keywords:** Peirce, Charles S.; ethics; attention; boredom; love; semiosis; community

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### Introduction

Charles S. Peirce’s 1892 formulation of “the law of mind” (in an article published in *The Monist* and bearing that title) is equally as compact as his articulation of the “pragmatic maxim” (presented for the first time in *Popular Science Monthly*, some fourteen years earlier). I would suggest that our interpretation of the latter—which tends to be much better known and more frequently discussed—ought ideally to be shaped by an intertextual reading of these two articles. But establishing the plausibility or persuasiveness of that suggestion is not the primary aim of this discussion. Here, I want to examine Peirce’s statement of the law and understand it well enough, not primarily to achieve certain exegetical goals (which motivated some of my earlier inquiries<sup>1</sup>), but rather to enable me effectively to extrapolate

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<sup>1</sup> See, most especially, Chapter 2 on “The Absolute Mind” of my early work on Peirce’s *Philosophy of Religion* (Raposa 1989).

from Peirce's remarks and suggest how such a general rule might be usefully applied for various philosophical purposes.

Here, the types of application that most interest me fall within the general areas marked by semiotic theory and philosophy of communication (including, more specifically, topics in the ethics of communication). As semiosis gradually progresses—whether it takes the form of an actual conversation between two persons or manifests itself as an internal dialogue within the consciousness of a single individual—what happens to any particular idea that might be embedded in the process? Peirce's answer is the description of a phenomenon that is law-like, following a general pattern that he thought could be readily described. I argue that his description can be usefully expanded (often by appealing to Peirce's own ideas as he presented them elsewhere) in order best to explain how semiosis, and so also events of communication, most typically unfold. Within the gentle constraints imposed by Peirce's law of mind, human interpreters have some freedom to participate in the process of discovering, creating, and contributing to the growth of meaning. That freedom entails a certain responsibility while also inviting moral evaluation.

## The Law of Mind

Consider, first, Peirce's actual statement of the law of mind: "Logical analysis applied to mental phenomena shows that there is but one law of mind, namely, that ideas tend to spread continuously and to affect certain others which stand to them in a peculiar relation of affectability. In this spreading they lose intensity, and especially the power of affecting others, but gain generality and become welded with other ideas" (CP 6.104).<sup>2</sup> Despite the brevity of this statement, it is remarkably rich in detail. The claim about *continuity* is crucial for understanding how one idea can *affect* another. An increase in *generality* is related inversely to a loss in *intensity*, as the decline in ability to impact other ideas directly is concomitant with the result of becoming *welded* to them. Taken altogether, these details supply an account of how meaning *grows* from a Peircean perspective.

I want to take this organic metaphor of growth quite seriously in my remarks, as Peirce himself did when he wrote about such matters. I am thinking in particular of his discussion in "Evolutionary Love," one of the articles that was published along with "The Law of Mind" in his *Monist* series. There he invoked the image of himself as a gardener carefully nurturing the flowers planted in his garden to explain the principle first articulated in the Gospel of John, "which teaches that growth comes only from love" (CP 6.289). While Peirce employed the metaphor of a garden/gardener, the specific example that he intended to illustrate with that image was one of "an idea that interests me." Speaking less metaphorically than literally, he described such an idea as "a little person." "It is

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<sup>2</sup> Following a standard convention used by Peirce scholars, all references to the *Collected Papers* (Peirce 1931–58) are by volume and paragraph, rather than by page number. Read "CP 6.104" as "Collected Papers, volume 6, paragraph 104."

not by dealing out cold justice to the circle of my ideas that I can make them grow, but by cherishing and tending them as I would the flowers in my garden" (CP 6.289). These remarks published in the same series of articles a year later must clearly be brought to bear on any interpretation of the law of mind.

Notice that such remarks appear within the context of a discussion of evolutionary theory. The Darwinian principle of natural selection was perceived as having relatively little explanatory power in Peirce's view, at least regarding our understanding of the growth of ideas. If this principle were adequate for the purpose of such an explanation, then one might expect, contrary to what Peirce insists here, that "cold justice" in the form of "survival of the fittest" would best result in the gradual evolution of meaning. This is why I invoked Peirce's pragmatic maxim at the beginning of my essay. There is a sense in which Peirce's pragmatic theory of inquiry can be interpreted in just such a Darwinian fashion, as doubts arise in the normal course of human experience to unsettle beliefs so that a continual process of adaptation is required (CP 5.374). Conceptions developed in this manner will most certainly be evaluated primarily in terms of their "fitness"; indeed, there seems to be very little room in such an account for the type of "cherishing love" that one later finds Peirce judging to be crucial for the growth of ideas. As I have argued quite consistently for many years, however, the problem-solving procedure of responding to the irritation of doubt can be only one plot line in the complex story that Peirce wanted to tell about the nature of inquiry.<sup>3</sup>

Peirce's interest was hardly limited to *human* inquiry and ideation. The articles in his *Monist* series take on a whole range of cosmological issues for their subject matter. I have also argued repeatedly—and in opposition to others among Peirce's interpreters—that his objective idealism ought to be taken quite seriously. This is an especially important consideration for anyone hoping to understand Peirce's philosophy of religion, but it has relevance also for the unpacking of his semiotic theory and philosophy of communication. It is only on the assumption that all of reality is of the nature of mind that it becomes possible to conceive of the universe as being "perfused with signs" (CP 5.448, note 1). Within such a world, communication-as-semiosis can quite easily be regarded as a nearly ubiquitous phenomenon.

The essential significance of this last assertion lies in its articulated recognition that the growth of meaning can occur anywhere and does so continuously. Since anything that exists is of the nature of an idea, it affects all those other ideas with which it comes into contact. Such contact is possible in the first place, however, because no idea is being considered here as an abstraction but concretely, as *embodied* in some actual form. This is just another way of making the

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<sup>3</sup> The most recent version of this argument appears in *Theosemiotic: Religion, Reading, and the Gift of Meaning* (Raposa 2020, 107–13).



Peircean point that every sign must have a “sign vehicle.”<sup>4</sup> Embodied in such a fashion, one thought-sign will affect another in one of any number of different ways on Peirce’s account, by virtue of some resemblance between the two, or one standing in a causal relation with the other, or as the result of some habit of interpretation.

The law of mind states that this process, by means of which one idea affects another, is characterized by a certain intensity of feeling; in its aftermath, intensity wanes, but a certain connection of one idea with another, a kind of “welding,” has been achieved, marking the actual growth of meaning. It is at this point that I think Peirce’s law needs to be adapted and extended, or at least interpreted creatively. A closer examination of this phenomenon of growth and of the factors that might contribute to it is required.

## Boredom and the Growth of Meaning

Continuing to linger with Peirce’s metaphor, the “seeds” of meaning are already planted whenever one idea affects another, this birth of insight being marked by a certain intensity, as he described it. But why did he assume that a loss of potency was inevitable as a particular thought is developed or as mind continues to evolve? Peirce might have looked to another passage from the Gospel of John to answer such a question, this time to the twelfth chapter of that biblical text, where we read: “[U]nless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). The law of mind reads almost like a gloss on this text, as it stipulates that something must be lost for any idea *not* to “remain alone,” but rather to become connected to other ideas and bear pragmatic fruit. This is the first application or extension of that law to which I want to gesture in these remarks. In doing so, I suggest the role that *boredom* might play as a kind of “midwife” in the birth of new meaning.

I developed just such a Peircean semiotic analysis of boredom’s potential significance in a book published many years ago (Raposa 1999). In that earlier account, however, perhaps I could have been more explicit about the extent to which the necessary role that boredom plays in the economy of human semiosis was already clearly established by Peirce in his 1892 *Monist* article and in his formulation of the principle upon which that article serves as an extended commentary. Any new idea by which I am affected, just like any new relationship that I form, will be marked by a certain interest or excitement that must inevitably wane over time. This waning of interest—I am comfortable calling it “boredom”—is a necessary precondition, however, for the birth of fresh insight, thus, for the continuous growth of meaning. I am not suggesting that *every* experience of

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<sup>4</sup> A “sign vehicle” is the cognizable (but not necessarily material) form manifested by anything that is taken to be significant. Peirce sometimes restricted the use of the word “sign” to designate the triadic *relationship* that exists between the thing regarded as significant, the object to which it refers, and an interpreter to whom information about this object is being conveyed. Following this strict usage, the account that he developed is less accurately conceived as a theory of signs than as a theory of *semiosis*, that is, of the dynamic process that generates meaning.

boredom must be characterized in this fashion, that is, as a catalyst for the development of new ideas, but it seems quite clear that *some* instances of boredom must play such a role.

One way of making this point from a Peircean perspective is to observe that induction involves a necessary element of *repetition* or *redundancy* if it is to be successful. To be sure, the repetition of any activity can be boring, but the result is also often a kind of habit formation that facilitates creativity. The habits of thought cultivated in induction become the “rules” (again, to use Peirce’s terminology) that serve as premises for future hypothetical or “abductive” inferences requiring the evaluation of specific “cases” (CP 2.708–14). Habits represent a paradigmatic instance of those “welded ideas” to which Peirce was referring in his promulgation of the law of mind. The boredom experienced in their development is naturally concomitant with the waxing and waning of intensity that characterizes any process of semiosis.

It is a commonsense truism that boredom invites distraction and can defeat attention. A second application of the law of mind, closely related to the first, would involve some exploration of the role that *attention* plays in establishing a continuity of ideas. In any dialogical event—again, whether it manifests as a conversation internal to consciousness or between individuals engaging each other—attention will play a dramatic role in shaping and directing semiosis. I cannot be “affected” by any idea that fails to attract my interest. This is perhaps the most trivial of observations: if you are speaking but I am not listening, no communication event will occur. But somewhat masked by this observation is the corollary recognition of how attention can only be directed at its object for a certain duration of time before some experience of jading becomes inevitable. What happens to attention when such an experience occurs? On one level, this is an empirical question, and its answer will vary with different persons and situations. It seems to me that Peirce’s logic, however—which he regarded as a normative science after all—supplies an answer to the question about what *should* happen.

Developing what others have referred to as a “semioethics,” or alternatively, what I tend to identify as an “ethics of attention,” clearly extends beyond the interpretation of Peirce’s law to embrace the task of further creative application.<sup>5</sup> Peirce’s theory of semiotic is rich in details that can be usefully employed for just such a purpose. Consider, for example, how Peirce somewhat famously observed that every *self* is a sign, the meaning of which is determined both by how it reads itself as a sign and how it directs attention to others (CP 7.591). Now, any given sign’s growth in meaning will continue to occur only to the extent that such attention is deliberately maintained, much as the flowers in a garden can flourish only as a result of someone regularly cherishing and tending them. There is no

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio have pioneered in the articulation of a theory of “semioethics” a theory focused on the human capacity for genuinely *listening* to others. Rooted in my study of Charles S. Peirce’s philosophy, but significantly shaped by my reading of Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch, I have been invested recently in the exploration of an “ethics of attention” that in many respects seems continuous with the efforts of Petrilli and Ponzio (See Petrilli 2017, Raposa 2021, and Panizza 2022).

task, of course—even gardening for an avid gardener—that can evade the risk of becoming tedious if pursued for a long enough period of time. But Peirce’s logical reflections suggest that the key to success in executing such a task *cannot* be to abandon the garden that one is presently tending in order to find a fresh object of interest. The renewal of meaning will need to occur in the very same space where it seems to have faded. Habits gradually formed there through a process of inductive reasoning are a crucial resource for making creative and productive hypothetical inferences. What does this rather abstract claim about the relationship between induction and abduction teach us about the relationships that we form with other persons and about the kind of attention needed to sustain them?

I have argued elsewhere that attention is exercised differently during each of the three “stages” identified in Peirce’s theory of inquiry (Raposa 2020, 116–18). For the purposes of induction, it is necessary to focus attention on the selected features of something given in experience to establish the particular habit of thought that classifies it as being a certain *kind* of thing. In sharp contrast, abduction succeeds only if the inquirer is attentively open to whatever appears in experience, but without being focused in advance on any particular aspect of it, without looking to isolate this or that element as being especially significant. While habits formed inductively will lend shape to the more playful mode of inquiry displayed in hypothetical reasoning,<sup>6</sup> they must function like the rules of a game, allowing for the possibility of a great number of moves to be made within the gentle constraints that they supply. All these considerations suggest that human dialogue and relationships should be governed by a similar logic. Our ongoing experience of those persons with whom we regularly interact will result in the development of certain habits, but each new encounter with a person must be guided by a type of awareness that is open and free rather than narrowly rigid and fixed. Boredom can facilitate such an awareness by causing us to grow weary of the well-entrenched ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that dominate our interactions. One result of boredom, to be sure, is the temptation to abandon existing relationships and ongoing activities. But Peirce’s logic prescribes an ethic of attention that celebrates fidelity and persistence, a “cherishing” love that is open to discovering “germs” of loveliness even in what presently appears to be hateful (CP 6.287–89).

There is an ethical responsibility to remain faithful in relationships that have become afflicted by boredom, although the level of responsibility varies according to the degrees of commitment that can characterize relationships. One might be held more responsible for dissolving a marriage or a longstanding friendship that had grown stale than for slipping out of a boring conversation with an interlocutor of no previous acquaintance at a cocktail party. Nevertheless, there is at least *some* moral obligation that attaches to all our interactions with others, an obligation that

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<sup>6</sup> Peirce himself portrayed abduction as a playful form of inquiry in his discussion of the concept of “musement,” embedded in his 1908 article on “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” (Peirce 1931–58, CP 6.458ff., 6.486).

manifests itself first and foremost as a mandate to pay careful attention to the other. One can attend without love, indifferently or even with contempt, but there can be no love without attention (Raposa 2014); that is to say, one can hardly claim genuinely to love someone while consistently ignoring that person. Peirce's extreme case of loving someone or something perceived as hateful (by first discerning "seeds of loveliness") represents a supreme ethical challenge, the ultimate test for attention. But here Peirce may have once again been attempting to make sense out of biblical wisdom embodied in the Gospels, this time in the form of Jesus's commandment concerning love of enemies (found both in Matthew and Luke).

## **Semiotic Complementarity/Hybridity**

Yet another application of the law of mind addresses those respects in which one idea can be welded to another. There is a temptation to think that this can only occur as a result of similarity, as when two people engaged in dialogue achieve a consensus about the topic they are discussing. Like bonds with like; agreement is the glue that when displayed in a discussion of specific ideas results in the gradual growth of mind. Now, such a way of thinking must clearly be perceived as having ethical significance and surely ought to be subjected to some sort of critique.

In contrast to this way of reading the law of mind, I have emphasized the importance of *semiotic complementarity* as a feature of interpretations resulting from thoughts shared in conversation (Raposa 2020, 179–80, 182, 185). Two (or more) interlocutors may interpret any particular sign that forms the common object of their concern quite differently one from the other. Taken together, these diverse interpretations will form a complex symbol that is more nuanced and richer in meaning than any of the individual thought-signs that contributed to its development. Here is a type of growth in meaning quite different from the gradual building of consensus, a welding of ideas that takes the form of a certain continuity-in-difference. To be sure, in addition to such complementarity and to the possibility of consensus, it is also possible that conversation will manifest as contestation or debate, a simple conflict of ideas. Even such a conflict can result in the growth of mind, however, if it involves the elimination of dangerous misinterpretations through critique, much as the flowers in a garden cannot be expected to flourish if a gardener never bothers to uproot the weeds that might be growing there.

I have talked about semiotic complementarity in order to characterize a process that occurs as communication is achieved between separate individuals. I am now inclined to think that when the same phenomenon unfolds as an inner dialogue within the mind of a single person, it is more aptly described as a manifestation of *semiotic hybridity*, lending a distinctive shape to the identity of that person, dramatically enhancing the meaning of that self-as-sign. Any given person might interpret a certain sign first in one way and then another, by considering it at different times and from different perspectives. As semiosis unfolds, both perspectives may blend to form a complex outlook, an interpretive stance that

incorporates without simply conflating these earlier points of view. I can come to regard a certain person as both generous and selfish, for example—generous with her time and ideas, but a bit stingy when it comes to sharing her financial resources.

This can be regarded as a matter of aspect-seeing, or “seeing as,” in the manner that Wittgenstein (1958) made famous with his meditation on the duck-rabbit sketch in his *Philosophical Investigations* (194). But the law of mind suggests that ideas can become attached to each other in ways that promote a more significant kind of growth in meaning than what might be captured in an account limited to describing a person’s ability simply to adopt alternating perspectives. I may have previously characterized someone, politically or religiously, as being deeply “conservative,” then observed in her behavior evidence of progressive beliefs, culminating in a nuanced opinion of her that rejects labels of “conservative” and “progressive,” or “liberal,” as caricatures. An entirely new way of understanding her principles and behavior will emerge in this process of ongoing interpretation.

It is important to observe that here we are still deeply immersed in morally meaningful territory, since an alternative interpretation of someone or something useful for discovering fresh meaning may first have been gleaned from conversation with an interlocutor who articulated just such a point of view. This is one way of saying that the moral meaning of a person’s life is frequently augmented by encounter and conversation with other persons. When the self-as-sign becomes rich and complex enough in meaning to evidence the sort of hybridity that I am portraying here, however, its moral agency is displayed in its ability to enter into such conversations and make such encounters with other persons productive. This is a reversal of the point of view just articulated, so that now the moral significance of a relationship is enhanced by the developed capacities of one or more participants. The sort of “productivity” that I am envisioning in this portrayal is different from how one might think about the coming to agreement or the winning of an argument. It is what occurs in conversation when a deeper level of insight is achieved, marked by greater nuance, subtlety, and complexity. Once again, the connection between ideas in this instance must be understood in terms not captured by talk about what is “shared” or “similar.”

Peirce’s groundbreaking logic of relations was designed to illuminate such connections. He recognized that “ordinary logic” was well-equipped to analyze “classes” of things with the members of any given class “comprising all that stand to one another in a particular relation of similarity” (CP 4.5). By way of contrast, he called for the analysis of logical “systems,” embracing objects “that stand to one another in a group of connected relations.” The logic of relations “rises from the contemplation of the fragment of a system to the envisagement of a complete system.” This sort of “envisagement,” I am suggesting here, is morally meaningful when it is applied to the task of portraying communities. Such a portrait is nothing more than a crude sketch—and one that is potentially dangerous from an ethical point of view—if it underscores only those respects in which the members of a community resemble one another or share beliefs and perspectives. Any

community conceived in this fashion would be unable to accommodate difference and diversity. Moreover, it would be defined by sharply drawn boundaries that distinguish between insiders and outsiders. As a system of relations, communities will expand to embrace as their members all who “stand to one another in a group of connected relations.” What type of relations would an ideal community most typically display?

One of Peirce’s more common examples of a logical system described the relations that bind together a giver, gift, and recipient in all instances of gift-giving. To qualify as such an instance, Peirce insisted, something more must be involved than one person putting something down and another person picking it up; these two separate actions do not suffice to explain what is essentially involved, the kind of relationship that is established, in any act of gift-giving. As with all examples of semiosis more generally speaking (sign-object-interpreter), the giving of a gift is a triadic relation. To make the point in explicitly semiotic terms, this relation is *meaningful* (something is conveyed to someone) in a way that differs from simply juxtaposing the abandonment of an object by some person with its acquisition by another.

Consider again the law of mind, with respect to which this discussion of gifts is intended to be merely an application. Peirce’s metaphysics, more specifically his objective idealism, is not at present the primary topic of concern. So, I will not invest time and effort here in showing how, on his account, every gift is a sign vehicle, and every act of giving is always already an act of communication. Nevertheless, there is an obvious sense in which gift giving mimics the law of mind, as something is “lost” to the giver in order to “affect” another person who stands in a “peculiar relation of affectability” to the giver as the gift’s recipient. If the law of mind is valid, then it must be possible to conceive of gift giving as somehow involving a process of growth; and if my interpretation of that law is correct, such growth will be facilitated by loving attention. (To reframe an argument already presented here, one cannot give a gift to someone while simultaneously ignoring that person.)

This line of analysis will become a bit easier to understand to the extent that no sharp distinction is drawn between acts of communication and acts of giving. Moreover, both can be perceived as gifts of meaning; indeed, to give any sort of gift requires communicating something to someone. (Without such communication to frame the act, how could the recipient of the gift be certain that the giver was not simply laying something down that she then randomly picked up?) This is also the form that love takes, as Saint Ignatius of Loyola clearly described it—a mutual giving and receiving of gifts.<sup>7</sup> And the conviction that love’s teleology traces a path that marks the continuous growth of meaning is affirmed by Peirce in his discussion of evolutionary love.

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<sup>7</sup> In the concluding “Contemplation to Attain Divine Love” of his *Spiritual Exercises*, Saint Ignatius (1952) observes that “love consists in a mutual sharing of goods, for example, the lover gives and shares with the beloved what he possesses, or something of that which he has or is able to give; and vice versa, the beloved shares with the lover” (101).

Josiah Royce appropriated Peirce's conception of love-as-semiosis for his own philosophical purposes in his talk about the ideal community (Royce 1968, 75–98).<sup>8</sup> On Royce's account, it is a love manifested as loyalty that accomplishes the "welding" together of individuals in a vibrant community. His argument that the highest form of love/loyalty must be understood as a "loyalty to loyalty" safeguards against any problematic interpretation of the relations that form community as being reducible to relations of similarity (Royce 1995, 48–69). In the ideal community, individuals will be motivated to ensure the ability and protect the right of other individuals to remain faithful to their quite different loyalties. Here, the tension between competing loyalties will need to be adjudicated. Dangerous forms of loyalty that destructively undermine the commitments of others will need to be submitted to critique and repudiated. In other cases, the sort of loving attention that members direct to one another in what Royce envisioned as the "Beloved Community" will result in the kind of semiotic complementarity that has already been described here. For Royce, as well as for Peirce, every healthy community is always already a community of *interpretation*. As such, it must be able to accommodate a great diversity of interpretive perspectives, to promote the growth of meaning by insisting on only the most generous type of application of the law of mind.

How unlimited and inclusive is the sort of community that both Peirce and Royce envisioned as ideal? While human interpreters would typically play a key role in constituting such a community, as they understood it, there is no reason to assume that membership must be restricted to our species. Here is the advantage of an approach that emphasizes logical systems over classes of things. While humans may not closely resemble the representatives of other species, they interact in various environments and stand in various relationships with countless numbers of them. Any morally meaningful analysis of the human situation must include an account of such relationships. A loving and nurturing attention, as Peirce conceived of it, must surely be directed to other species as well as to the human. Indeed, while employed by him as a symbol to represent the growth of meaning as ideas spread, the flowers in Peirce's garden also literally represent a form of non-human life that flourishes under human care and attention. This observation suggests how the law of mind might be extrapolated and employed for the contemporary purpose of developing a robust environmental ethic.<sup>9</sup> A Peircean logic may be useful for the task of portraying non-human species as meaningful fragments of a complex environmental system, thus, as legitimate members of our human community.

The earlier discussion of an ethics of attention clearly has relevance for understanding how a community might be perceived as a system of relations. It requires a special quality of attention to recognize anything not simply as a thing

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<sup>8</sup> Royce appealed to the letters of Saint Paul rather than to the Gospel of John as the primary source of inspiration for his philosophy of love.

<sup>9</sup> Gary Slater (2022) has attempted to lay the foundations for such an environmental ethic, drawing on ideas embedded both in my Peircean theosemiotic and in Pope Francis's (2015) encyclical *Laudato Si*.

but also as a sign. In doing so, the interpreting mind responds to a sign not merely as some isolated thing but also as always already enmeshed in various relationships. The habit-forming process that results in the welding of ideas to each other is a necessary precondition for success in the making of this sort of interpretation; it enables the interpreter to see the universe as being thoroughly “perfused with signs” (CP 5.448, note 1). But habit can also induce blindness and cause jading so that a certain, deliberate willing-as-attention will be necessary to perceive the depth of meaning in something encountered, its myriad connections as a sign to a world filled with signs.

## Conclusion

The close identification of volition with attention is most pronounced in the philosophical psychology of William James (1950, 561–62), but it also fits comfortably with the perspectives defended by Peirce and Royce. If this observation is accurate, then it suggests that classical American philosophical pragmatism embodies a distinctive form of voluntarism, one that supplies useful resources for the development of an ethics of attention.

Central to the task of ethical analysis is an evaluation of human behavior, of what persons do or fail to do. On the assumption that paying attention is something that one can do or fail to do, it must immediately be regarded as a morally meaningful phenomenon. This need not hold true for all acts of attention, but only for those that can properly be regarded as deliberate. It is often the case that one’s attention can be “captured”—by a very loud noise, for example, or by aggressive advertising. In such instances, there is no clearly discernible act of volition involved, although such an act may be embodied in the attempt to resist the capturing of attention by something judged as a distraction. (The fact that “judgment” will be required here further underscores the nature of attending as morally significant.) One might also choose not to resist and to linger with a distraction, perhaps even to seek one out as a diversion to avoid attending to something else. Such choices are also obviously open to moral scrutiny.

It is not my intention here to present a fully articulated ethics of attention. That would necessitate a careful analysis of how attending is related to other things that we do, for example, as a stimulus to action or as a prerequisite for any action being regarded as morally significant. If I do something while paying absolutely no attention to doing it—by accident, for example—I might not be judged as either blameworthy or praiseworthy; alternatively, it might be determined that I *ought* to have been paying attention when I was not—as in an accident that occurs because I was distracted by a text message on my cell phone.

Peirce’s law of mind describes how meaning grows with the spread of ideas. The loss of intensity that accompanies such growth can be a recipe for boredom. But I have argued here that a loving attention can survive boredom, even benefit from it, to the extent that boredom is a consequence of habit formation (with such habits providing the rules for future exploration and discovery). This is the same sort of attention that is required for anything to be perceived as a *sign*—not as an



isolated monad but as caught up in a complex web of relations. Genuinely vital communities consist in such multifarious relations—of the sort that connects givers, gifts, and recipients, for example, or those linking human beings to the members of other species. Consequently, acts of attention need to be evaluated both in terms of where attention is directed (here rather than there) and how (as loving and nurturing, rather than hateful or indifferent).

It is hardly an exaggeration to conclude that when Peirce formulated his law in 1892, it was against the background of a love ethic rooted in specific biblical resources, guided by the insight that love's teleology is consistent with the growth of meaning, so that as moral agents we must be attentive in any given instance to whatever love requires.

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# In Which Sense Is It Appropriate to Discuss Charles S. Peirce's Philosophy of Communication?

Alain Létourneau

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**Abstract:** Peirce rarely discusses communication as such, so why follow this hypothesis? We start by briefly situating Peirce and his work. A critical distance taken from a Gadamerian hermeneutic comes with a discussion of Karl-Otto Apel's interpretation of Peirce as a philosopher of communication. The discussion somehow follows a temporal guideline: interpretants in Peirce certainly provide the basis for communication, whereas the normative science component of Peirce's triadic philosophy permits the consideration of probability issues with realism, therefore providing a basis for preventive and prospective considerations. Semiosis can both be understood as an unending quest for knowledge and as an actual communication process, since it involves taking seriously the interpretive dimension of the work. This normative impetus implies a relation to others understood under the perspective of what Peirce calls Speculative Rhetoric. We see there an important insight to understand the need for science communication.

**Keywords:** Peirce, Charles S.; semiosis; hermeneutics; ethics; interpretant; communication; Appel, Karl-Otto

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

### *Some Contextual Remarks to Facilitate Peirce's Interpretation*

As we probably know, Charles S. Peirce did not develop his thinking in a professionalized environment classical for philosophy professors, apart from the short period during which he was part-time lecturer at Johns Hopkins University (between 1879 and 1883; Apel 1975, 5). Therefore, his immense collection of writings, which has been edited by bits and pieces along the years, was not easily

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<sup>1</sup> This article follows on another one (see Létourneau 2018) that treats Peirce's contribution to the epistemology of the social sciences. Some of the ideas have been revised and further developed here, while other elements, specifically around communication, have not been treated before.

accessible before the mid-1950s. With the eight volumes of the *Collected Papers* (in the last edition) and the eight volumes of the *Writings of Peirce*, much is available but not everything; we use specific editions for the *Letters* exchanged with Victoria Welby and other collections of writings. In any case, if we take some time reading Peirce, we will easily see that the number of pages, articles, book projects, chapters, and discussions devoted to issues of logic and reasoning far outweigh the sections devoted to communication as such, which is at best a minor theme in the whole.

This having been said, he is a tremendous creator in logics, semeiotics, and many other fields, including mathematics. Speaking of semeiotics, again it would seem that the bulk of pages devoted to this field, and especially to terminological and conceptual issues in that domain, is impressive compared to the pages treating issues relevant to interactive relations between agents, which are certainly what we think about while discussing communication. But importantly enough, Peirce mentions transmission and discusses establishing states of thought among partners in what today we could call a communicative process, an expression he does not use. The frame to use is what he calls “speculative rhetoric” (CP 2, 425); we will come back to this later.

More than a century after Peirce, communication has become a diversified scientific field of research and teaching (a domain of research that obviously did not exist in Peirce’s lifetime). Furthermore, it has now also been appropriated as a sub-theme by several other disciplines (for instance, psychology of communication, political communication, etc.). In these conditions, even if Peirce was an extraordinary individual, we cannot expect of him to give us a specialized discourse corresponding in all points with what is expected today when we talk about communication. Also, we are not the contemporaries, the original “addressees” of his writing.<sup>2</sup> When we read Peirce nowadays, it is after the development of George Herbert Mead; after the development of symbolic interactionism in Herbert Blumer, Erving Goffman, and others; and after Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas. Elements relevant for interactionism are present in Peirce, but they are not as explicitly developed as what we find in these more recent authors, who have all benefited from the work not only of Peirce but also of John Dewey and Mead, among others.

Also, we should keep in mind that Peirce was constantly revising his own theories; a consequence of this is that he frequently changes the names he uses to identify classes of questions. As Kelly A. Parker (1978) explained very well, Peirce was fascinated by all issues of architectonic, both for sciences and for philosophy – the very structuring of the fields he considers are evolving and changing under his scrutiny and his pen. Peirce often put back on the table questions already treated elsewhere without always discussing the links with his previous elaborations; the frequentation of his texts shows that he refers little to his own writings. He does not hesitate to take up again the reflection in a new way, and then tends to reassess

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<sup>2</sup> Algirdas Julien Greimas ([1970] 1987; [1979] 1982), a French semiotician in the Saussurian tradition, has largely developed the notion of the “destinataire,” basically developing an idea already present in that tradition through the works of Émile Benveniste and others.

certain points that he has established elsewhere and otherwise, without there being a total identity between these various developments. This goes hand in hand with variations in vocabulary already identified by commentators several decades ago. Therefore, we must take into consideration whether a piece of his was written in 1867, 1890, or 1905. Scholarship on Peirce is also advancing, with people taking a closer look at the late Peirce's writings (de Waal and Skowronski 2012), whereas twenty years ago this examination was more restricted.

### *The Relevance of Peirce*

Hans Joas (1993; 2009) has already pointed out how revolutionary Peirce's contribution has been. He first recalled some consequences of Peirce's thought and of pragmatism in general: the impossibility of an abstract doubt like René Descartes's and, therefore, the renunciation of a starting point in a solitary consciousness. Doubt only surfaces in situations of action. We can then think of the cognitive process as a cooperative process. It follows that thought is born in problematic situations, intimately linked with action, and the dualism opposing body and mind can also be avoided. And, in fact, to find this close connection between thought and action, we can take up again in reflection the maxim of pragmatism formulated by Peirce during his frequentations of the Metaphysical Club: the agent is conceived as active and solving problems, not as passive and receiving only stimuli to which it would be a question of answering. But Peirce goes further, since he rethinks the meaning of theories from the point of view of action, as we know since the so-called "maxim of pragmatism" found in Peirce's (1878) "How to Make Our Ideas Clear":

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these is the whole of our conception of the object. (*W* 3, 265)

This means that the contribution of a theory about X is to tell us what to expect of X, how X is going to act or behave, and how we can and should act toward X. These actions will happen in interactions with X—for instance, in a laboratory setting, which was the usual case for Peirce, but also either in preparation or in response to these anticipated actions (Létourneau 2018). Meaning, therefore, has to do with actions, not only of the object theorized but also of different actors.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> According to Joas (1993), it is only with Dewey (1925) and especially Mead (1934) that the contribution of pragmatism to social sciences became clear, notably because of the attention provided to interactive communication. It is by focusing on the actions by which individuals impact each other that Mead allowed an intersubjective perspective, rather than stopping with the solitary individual agent. The formation of the individual became at the same time a space of reflection to understand the process of socialization itself. Things become clearer with Mead's theory of communication: symbols, whether they are objects, gestures, or words, take on their meaning in interactions.

### *Purpose of This Paper*

What I propose to do here is to return consciously to Peirce after the contribution of Mead, interactionism, and the re-reading of Umberto Eco, the Italian semiotician famous for bridging the gap between European (stemming from Ferdinand de Saussure) and American (stemming from Peirce) theories of signs. We shall see that some of Peirce's key concepts can be decoded by showing, better than has been done up to now, their interest for the interpretative sciences in general, among which we must count at least some of the social sciences. If Eco has well seen the relevance (and the limits) of Peirce for the interpretation of works, we cannot say that the wider scope of the link between the triadicity of Peircian categories and the question of inference for the interpretative sciences has been well grasped. But to show this, we will also have to go back to the basis of Peirce's theoretical contribution. The normative character of Peirce's approach constitutes the beginning of an important critique of social morals, while in a sense inaugurating the field of action sciences, as we shall see later.

While discussing Peirce, in some contexts, there is a need to interpret, enlarge, and sometimes rectify expressions. One way to make sure of the rectitude of the reading is to get back to the original writings, analyze, and discuss them in detail.

## **The Basis of the Semeiotic Triad**

### *The Categories*

In a piece of 1867, "On a New List of Categories," which came very early in his reflection, Peirce comes back to the whole of the Kantian categories. Peirce first retained five of them, among which are being and substance. He then kept only three of those, rethinking them and increasing their importance. At the time of his 1867 text, he called them quality, relation, and law. A little later, the names changed to take on a more technical meaning.

They became, of course, Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, which are in deep continuity with feeling, action, and thought. Thus, Firstness in a sense is what comes first, even if it is ultimately unthinkable without experience. Is it conceivable without comprehension, which belongs to Thirdness? One can also wonder if the thing is thought properly, according to the right rules, the right concepts; but it will be understood according to a rule, whatever it is, and one can rightly wonder which one. Action is of the order of Secondness since it is interaction, contact, encounter, and lived resistance, whereas thought as Thirdness draws out the signs, the regularities, the representations, and the laws:

Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is,  
positively and without reference to anything else.

Secondness is the mode of being of that which is such as it

is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third.

Thirdness is the mode of being of that which is such as it

is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other. (H, 24)

These are the being of the positive qualitative possibility, the being of the fact, and the being of the law that will govern the facts in the future. He comments on actuality, or Secondness: "The actuality has something of the brute. There is no reason in it" (H, 26). His examples also explain it: "The law of gravitation is the judge upon the bench who may pronounce the law till doomsday, but unless the strong arm of the law, the brutal sheriff, gives effect to the law, it amounts to nothing" (H, 26). Therefore, it has to do with immediate reaction. Related to the double consciousness of effort and resistance, secondness has to do with immediate reaction. "So is *existence* which is the mode of being of that which reacts with other things. But there is also action without reaction. *Such is the action of the previous upon the Subsequent*" (H, 26). There is an immediacy of activity, existing is to be affected, somehow in a direct and pre-reflective manner. "The unanalyzed total impression made by any manifold not thought of as actual fact, but simply as a quality, as simple positive possibility of appearance is an idea of Firstness" (H, 25) Let us think about redness, for example; it is a possibility that can be actualized or not. Firstness names this possibility.

It is especially concerning Thirdness that the temporal aspect is more obvious. In everyday life, we make predictions all the time, and most of them come true, explains Peirce.

To say that a prediction has a decided tendency to be fulfilled, is to say that the future events are in a measure really governed by a law. If a pair of dice turns up sixes five times running, that is a mere uniformity. The dice might happen fortuitously to turn up sixes a thousand times running. But that would not afford the slightest security for a prediction that they would turn up sixes the next time. If the prediction has a tendency to be fulfilled, it must be that future events have a tendency to conform to a general rule. (CP 1.111, 26)

This does not mean that the prediction is guaranteed to come true: it must be understood in a probabilistic way, as the example of the dice shows. The Peircian interpretation of probability is wise to frequentism as to perceptions: "If a pair of dice turns up sixes five times running, that is a mere uniformity" (CP 1.111, 26). Even if one does not know with certainty that the double six will return the next time, events will tend to conform to the general probabilistic rule because of a roughly predictable frequency. It is this kind of rule that makes it impossible to hold to a nominalist position:

"Oh," but say the nominalists, "this general rule is nothing but a mere word or couple of words!" I reply, "Nobody ever dreamed of denying that what is general is of the nature of a general sign; but the question is whether future events will conform to it or not. If they will, your adjective 'mere' seems to be ill-placed." A rule to which future events have a tendency to conform is *ipso facto* an important thing, an important element in the happening of those

events. This mode of being which *consists*, mind my word if you please, the mode of being which *consists* in the fact that future facts of Secondness will take on a determinate general character, I call a Thirdness. (CP 1.111, 26)

The importance of this for probabilistic thinking cannot be underestimated. For instance, when in the present we think about phenomena like pandemics or climate change effects, planning is required—and transformed, since it has to understand this probabilistic aspect. Climate change, future events, and the like must be taken seriously because of their high level of probability, even though there is some lack of detail (we do not know exactly what, how, when, and where in all precision some events, like a flood or a drought, will happen; the same goes for pandemics and other hazards). This comes with all probable thought in the contemporary sense of the term: one will not be able to know with certainty what will happen in such and such a future throw of the dice, but one will know with certainty that, in a set of throws, a certain proportion will be respected.

Things become even more interesting when we connect the categories with the semeiotic theory. Firstness concerns signs, names, considered in a way before any actualization of a possibility in existence. It is a question of pure possibilities; one could say we are discussing with Firstness a description of the meaning of a word as it figures in a dictionary, for instance. To discuss actuality, it is necessary to discuss encounters, relations—one can also say contact, impact—which are a matter of Secondness. As such, impact is thought of “before” interpretation comes into play. The category of Thirdness will allow one to give a certain meaning to an encounter, whatever is the interpretation. It permits one to give a certain content to a relation between a first and a second. At the same time, to understand this contact, this encounter, this shock, one cannot limit oneself to the identification of the possible or the actual, but it is still necessary to grasp its meaning under given interpretative terms. The three Peircian categories are like a new kind of Ockham’s razor: they suppose that we could distinguish the possibilities from the relations and the regularities or concepts allowing one to account for those possibilities and relations. It is a bit like the cube that needs the line that needs the point. The point by itself has no meaning, but we must postulate it, and we must distinguish it from more complex levels of composition. Thirdness is the class of regularities that we can give ourselves, but it still does not tell us if such and such a regularity thought about a given thing is the right one, is sufficient for the needs, etc. In that sense, the discussion is forcibly situated at the normative level since error is possible and does happen many times. Indeed, the consciousness that we can err is the starting point of semeiotic thinking (CP 1.149, c. 1897; Redondo 2012, 220).

## **The Interpretant Considered from a Hermeneutic Perspective**

### *Enlarging/Criticizing Hermeneutics*

Eco (1979; [1984] 1986), who integrated Peirce’s triad in contemporary semiotics, explains that Peirce’s revolution with the introduction of the interpretant requires a writer to construct a model of the reader, since the reader will rely on his or her



class of interpretants to understand a given work.<sup>4</sup> There is also novelty in the fact of understanding Peirce's thinking as a contribution to hermeneutics, a thing that becomes obvious when we read Eco (Dubord 2021; Létourneau 2022). But hermeneutics will be associated most of the time with Hans-Georg Gadamer, who himself was under the profound influence of Martin Heidegger. One crucial concept for Gadamer ([1960] 1989) is the famous *Wirkungsgeschichtlichesbewußtsein*, the history of the efficiency of works, texts, or otherwise discussed in his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*. All is clearly not to be rejected here; this concept helps to recognize historicity and influence, lasting effects of concepts and cultural artifacts on today's reader. But it seems to me that the problem lies in the "oneness" of this concept, which corresponds to tradition, at the juncture of the Hellenic and the Judaic (and then Christian) traditions (Létourneau 1998). All of this is related to something that is quite problematic inside Gadamer's perspective, and, once again, this is coming directly from Heidegger: ideas like "the truth of art" and accessing the "truth of things in themselves," claims that are continuously put in contrast in Gadamer with methods in general. Methods come in second in opposition with a dialogue with the things themselves, as if they had not been useful at some point precisely by providing access (Létourneau 1998).

It seems that what we have, instead of a unity, is a plurality of effects and of traditions; those mentioned certainly are part of this ensemble of trends, but many others are, too. The focus on truth seems also debatable since hermeneutics has first and foremost to do with understanding meaning, which is not the same as truth, even if we want to conserve the value and importance of truth assessments (Eco 1979; Schleiermacher 1977). To give an example, myths might have great meaning, but this does not equate to them being true. As for the critique of methods, only an expert, Hellenist, historian, linguist, historian of Plato and the dialectic (and of the history of hermeneutics as a subdomain of philosophy) like Gadamer could put forward the perspective of being somehow above method. I compare his posture with that of the accomplished pianist, who will be probably less technique-conscious than some beginners. If we understand that the basis of interpretation is signs, interpretation is favored by a good use of semiotics, not hindered by it. The distance that is admitted here toward the ontological commitments of a Gadamerian hermeneutic is also adopted in the consideration of the metaphysical developments of Peirce's thought, which are obviously important for him; they can be considered for themselves in some other research.

Habermas and his mentor, Apel, seem to be the main European philosophers that helped to give back to Peirce his importance and actuality, after the phasing out of pragmatism due to powerful new trends in philosophy (let us simplify the story: on one side, phenomenology, on the other, analytic philosophy). The style of Peirce is quite different than what we find in European thought; it is certainly something different than German philosophy. His own concepts might seem to be

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<sup>4</sup> Here, the word is spelled "semiotics" to discuss the current science of signs, which is something distinct from Peirce's thought about it considered as such. See, for instance, Greimas and Courtès ([1979] 1982).

complex, but at least he takes the required time to try and explain them. Apel, a German philosopher, presented Peirce as a revolutionary thinker in his 1975 book and in many articles (see Apel 1981). Peirce was understood as having initiated, with others, the so-called “linguistic turn” in philosophy, transforming Kantian thinking about the a priori into a perspective Apel called, interestingly enough, “transcendental-pragmatic.” This was an important idea because it permitted one to give a formal ground to science, morals, and politics, without the background of a particular tradition and community. Here, the perspective was quite broad, and it renewed our relationship with universal questions and themes.

One key idea that was developed by Apel in his interpretation of Peirce was the regulative idea of a communication community (*Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*), or a community of interpreters, the role of which was especially fundamental in scientific endeavors and ethical reasoning. Apel’s reading was clearly oriented toward the future, not so much on the past. With differences, the same would also apply to Habermas. Obviously, there is such a normative dimension of thinking in Peirce, but is it really centered on communication? In any case, there is no doubt that the meaning of a given theory is something assessed in such a community, for better or worse. Apel did not focus on disagreements, even though he obviously recognized them. It is true that assertion and other speech types are mentioned and theorized by Peirce as pragmatic signs, as we see for instance in his discussion of rhemes, symbols, and the interpretant more generally (Misak 2004).

For Apel, the term “pragmatic” is appropriate since acts of language are indeed recognized by Peirce, many decades before Austin and Searle. Apel aims to ground both the quest for knowledge and ethics in the “transcendental” requirement of the communication community. It is important to understand here that “transcendental,” in the neo-Kantian sense of Apel, does not refer to a transcendent being but to conditions of possibility of an element. It is something else than the transcendentalism refuted by Peirce (CP 5.572), always looking for the things in themselves. Peirce was a fallibilist in sciences, but is it true or valid to qualify his language as transcendental-pragmatic? Is it not a little strong, even though he discusses the continually enlarging community of interpreters, especially in science and research? I wonder if the transcendental-pragmatic interpretation is the best way to consider Peirce’s consideration of communication from a philosophical point of view. The alternative seems to be to consider Peirce’s import at the practical level of exchanges, instead of taking it as a condition of everything else. But on that level, he does not say much. And if the first option is to be preferred, what does it mean?<sup>5</sup>

### *The Domain of Thirdness and the Interpretant*

There are excellent reasons to consider Peirce’s work as relevant to a theory of meaning, and it is also the case that a contribution to hermeneutics coming out of

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<sup>5</sup> See also the discussion of Mats Bergman (2000) regarding Parmentier’s theorization around mediation.

Peirce's thought can be demonstrated as fruitful, provided we accept some considerations about the reader's place in the semeiotic process (see Eco 1979). All of this is based on the interpretant, which completes with the representamen and the object the basic triad of what constitutes a sign in Peirce's very peculiar theorization on semeiotics.

And, if we have the aim to thematize the issue of a Peircian philosophy of communication, one main place to start is the role of the interpretant in Peirce's semeiotics. A sign can be a sign if it relates a representamen and an object to and by an interpretant. This is realizing semiosis but only in the long run, since semiosis is a continuing process, not finished once and for all. The interpretant is a kind of sign that gives meaning; to provide an example already used by Parker (1998), a footprint in the sand can be the representamen, the object will be the person, or the foot that produced that trace, and the interpretant is the understanding of this by some person linking together the two phenomena, the trace, and the object. That person could be named the "interpreter," which differs from the sign, the interpretant as such. This could be thought as a process occurring at an individual level, or more broadly among a plurality of individuals. There are signs for which the work of the interpretant can be obvious; in some other cases, the situation might be more complex. Peirce does not focus on situations of a possible plurality of interpretations in front of complex signs, a point that should be kept in mind.

The social character of the sign understood as a triadic form is linked to Peirce's explicit de-psychologization of the interpretant. The interpretant (of a representamen concerning an object) certainly can be mine, but it is a sign and, as such, it can also be yours; it can be actual in a group or a set of individuals. In the best-case scenario, we can call this group a community of interpreters. If we consider, maybe more than Peirce did, the possible plurality of certain relations between signs and representamen, we arrive also at the possibility of a plurality of virtual communities, in relation to a variety of interpretants. Or, we can also say that the "community of interpreters" is not at all unanimous; Peirce's focus is obviously more on the unity and continuity at play (Parker 1998). If, furthermore, we acknowledge that semiosis is a continuous process that extends over eventually long periods of time, we arrive at the idea of the evolution of understandings about said relationships between representamen and objects. The same obviously goes for all the different kinds of signs in Peirce's terminology: qualisigns, sinsigns, indexes, icons, rhemes, symbols. Not only do we have in many cases a plurality of possible interpretations, but there is also the possibility of mistakes, of errors. A point which is, again, not much in the focus of Peirce's discussions, even though he knows perfectly well, as one of the most competent minds in logic, that a syllogism can be wrong. We can interpret this by referring to the normative character of semiosis, which by the way is a characteristic of Thirdness in general. If we allow for a normative reading of semiosis, we can distinguish a particular reading of a sign, which can function very well as a dynamic link between a representamen, an object, and an interpretant and still be false or inadequate. Some interpretant will have to play the part; will it exact that

role adequately is another issue. But, in a sense, for any understanding to occur, it is a condition of possibility to have some interpretant.

This might be a good way to understand a so-called “transcendental” character of the semiosis in Peirce. The completed triadic process is a condition of possibility for any understanding to occur. It has something of an ideal—realized semiosis is knowledge obtained, but the real is infinitely cognizable, with time. Since his very first writings, Peirce explained that the Kantian distinction between a thing and the phenomena is meaningless (Apel 1975, 20); the important difference is between what is known and what is still to discover (Misak 2007, 6). Finally, if semiosis is a norm of understanding, a requirement, it is a solicitation for a possible community of interpreters, challenged by the norm to understand and know better about the objects of their inquiry. The fact that we can be wrong does not mean that no semiosis occurs; it only means it did not sufficiently obtain. Said otherwise, a sentence can seem meaningful at a time and be discovered later as false—a process that is constantly happening in science and elsewhere, including philosophy.

Let us go back to our example of traces of feet in the sand. An individual can look at the imprint without being already in communication, if we stay inside Peirce’s thinking. There is a potentiality for communication, but the example limits us to a process involving one representamen, one object, and one interpretant. If we complexify the example with people discussing, exchanging, seeing, and interpreting the relation between object and representamen, then communication takes place. In a broader sense, people could say that the signs on the beach communicate with readers, but Peirce’s focus is not on that point.

For Peirce, the meaning is relational, the interpretation is fundamental to any signification, and meaning is always practical, even when theoretical in outlook (see the maxim of pragmatism). By the signs, a representation (a thought, a gesture, an object, a word considered as sign) is understood by the interpretant (necessarily present to the group, community, society, individual, network, etc.) as referring to something else, an object (what we call the referent). Even though the interpretant provides a necessary basis for possible communication, it is not enough since interaction between actors is still needed on surplus of their use of interpretants about some object.

### *The Movement of Semiosis and the Work of the Interpreter*

By going beyond the dualism of subject and object, Peirce can help us think about the interactionist aspect of life in society. The knowledge of interactions can be nourished by authors like Mead, Mikhail Bakhtin, or Dewey, who will try to radicalize the idea under the concept of transaction. But the specificity of Peirce’s contribution is to situate interactions within the framework of a dynamic of signification, called semiosis by him, before the thematization of interactions as such in the following decades (CP 5, 313).

But by “semiosis” I mean, on the contrary, an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of *three* subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its

interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs. (EP 2, 411)

We must consider what this means for interpretation: the sign mediates an object for an interpretant, forcibly situated in the future tense, in an act which is called semiosis. It, therefore, expresses the movement of the sign; it articulates the representamen, the interpretant, and the object in a dynamic movement, that of the interpretative intelligence, or of the effective seizure of anything significant, about something. Now, the work of the interpretant can be found in the person with whom this individual communicates, and it is also found in the plurality of interpreters who are able to understand, to a varying degree, the message that has been uttered. Obviously, the singular individual who produces an utterance himself or herself can have a reading about it, too. Hence, the notion of semiosis refers directly to a more or less vast and delimited social set, including the self, the interlocutor, and any one inside something like a public, in a temporality that starts in the near future but which is as open-ended as the community is. Obviously, the nature of semiosis can vary enormously, and the ways of knowing about various types of referents are numerous, although Peirce undoubtedly has a clear leaning toward knowledge as it is produced in the natural sciences. We cannot say that the issue of a possible plurality of interpretations is put forward in his thinking—contrary to what we find in William James's work (1910; Madelrieux 2008).

We saw that interpretants play an important linking part for any sign to work, but signs are also historical and social phenomena (a thing recognized by Peirce, notably for symbols). Interpretants are plural and not necessarily isolated from each other. Let us recall that the Peircian interpretant can be qualified globally as a sign even when it designates some complex element as a theory of the thing concerned (H). Then, the following conclusion, or hypothesis, arises: the various users of interpretants in the process of semiosis might manage to accomplish the understanding concerned, but its content (and, therefore, its quality) will obviously vary. The content will especially depend on the extent and richness of the interpretative repertoire at their disposal. To give a simple example of this: with no previous knowledge of mechanical engineering, a given treaty in that domain will not be understood except for superficial elements based on other regularities of language already possessed. The same goes for everything else.

At a first level of reading, Peirce seems to lose sight of the fact that meaning is not only generated by the sign coming from a speaker X, it is also endowed by people with an evolving history; the receivers of the sign often have their own repertoire. We might have hoped that Peirce's discussion would address the question of the plurality of readings and of the possible error, which he certainly had in view while discussing logic and inference. On this analogical basis, we can surmise that semiosis can also miss its mark, the selected ground can be

insufficient, unimportant, not very decisive, or simply misunderstood.<sup>6</sup> Since he did not devote an explicit piece on interpretation as such, we can at best suppose that the same can be said here as in logic: error being a clear possibility, his claim here can be understood (a) as a description of something that happens—forcibly an interpretant will play a part—or (b) as normative—it is a requirement of some actual semiosis that would be somehow complete or effective. Therefore, the concept is not only normative but also “pragmatic” in the sense of effective in doing something, such as a description.

## **Prospective Communication: The Rhetorical Component of the Normative Sciences**

### *The Disciplines of the Normative Science*

When Peirce wants to characterize philosophy, he presents it as a normative science. For him, this expression designates three disciplines: namely, logic, ethics (see below), and aesthetics (he spells it “esthetics”). For logic, the normative character is quite clear, coming from the fact that logic provides a standard of reasoning—for example, in the discussion of the validity of statements. As discussed previously, there is also the fact that a semiosis may or may not reach correctly what it is supposed to reach, depending on the set of interpretants available in the interpreter’s repertoire and of their historicity. On the other hand, if ethics needs logic, logic also requires ethics (EP 2, 142). For Peirce, ethics clearly belongs to the rational domain. However, as we will see, he is sometimes wary of moralist doctrines, although we can wonder if he distinguishes ethics and morality as many do nowadays (notably Habermas, Paul Ricoeur, and others). Let us look further into this important theme, and afterwards aesthetic issues will be discussed.

### *A Non-moral Normative Science Called “Practics”*

In a 1906 text dealing with ethics, Peirce insists that, in the end, it is not so much ethics that one should speak of in order to designate the normative science that one wishes to grasp, but rather what he calls first “anethics,” then the “science of practice” (the English word he creates is “practics”). This is because ethics itself pronounces on “the nature of the summum bonum, then it implies more than the theory of conformity to an ideal, it has for object a real conformity” (CP 1.41, 573). A quotation will clarify this point:

Insofar as ethics studies the conformity of conduct to an ideal, it is limited to a particular ideal which, whatever the moralists’ statements may be, is in fact nothing but a sort of composite photograph of the conscience of the members

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<sup>6</sup> See Redondo (2012) for a different analogical thinking to supplement for lacks in Peirce’s teachings.

of the community. In short, it is nothing but a traditional standard, accepted, very wisely, without radical criticism, but with a silly pretense of critical examination. The science of morality, virtuous conduct, right living, can hardly claim a place among the heuritic sciences. (EP 2, 377)<sup>7</sup>

This distinction (ethics vs. practics) evokes the one between ethics and morality that we find nowadays in several thinkers, so let us explore this possible parallel. Today we would say that moral conformity is societal; Peirce seems to agree with this point. Rather than simply following this social normativity, the proposed Peircian practics deals with the relation to the ideal, with the normativity that plays, for example, in logic but also in ethical problems; it cannot be confused with an ethics taken here by Peirce as a simple equivalent of the cultural and social morality that can be described (EP 2, 377). One cannot insist too much on the importance of this, in particular, because of the distinction that Peirce makes between the ideal as a guide of reasoning, on the one hand, and as a source of motivation, on the other hand. On this point, he goes so far as to say that, in the end, it is to aesthetics that we must turn to find the foundations of ethics:

If conduct is to be wholly deliberate, the ideal must be a habit of feeling which has grown up under the influence of a stream of self-criticisms and heterocriticisms; and the theory of the deliberate formation of such habits of feeling is what ought to be meant by *aesthetics*. (EP 2, 377–78)

This is a peculiar way of understanding “aesthetics” (the way we write it today). Concerning this, Peirce holds that the Germans invented the word aesthetics, that they restricted it to taste, but that in the end it is still about taste if one prefers “supporting one’s family by agriculture or by highway robbery” (EP 2, 378)—a choice which, according to him, makes a practical difference, but does not change anything in the heuristic point of view, that of a logic of investigation aiming at discovery (he spells it “heuritic”). A last sentence deserves to be quoted at the end of this development: “It is clear, however, that esthetics relates to feeling, practics to action, logic to thought,” which exposes the triad that corresponds for him to the three sites of normative science (EP 2, 377–78). The difference between Peirce and the contemporary distinction between ethics and morals (in Ricoeur and others) resides in this part played by aesthetics, much more important in Peirce, even though reflexivity is a common point between practics and a contemporary “reflective” ethics in Habermas, for instance.

Now, what we find in the first Harvard Lecture of 1903 goes completely in the same direction: ethics is presented there as founded on a doctrine that does not consider “in any way what our conduct should be”; it is based on aesthetics that deals with the admirable, which of course also refers to feeling, to some Firstness, to the possible. Admiring a person or a group certainly has to do with exemplary behavior and character, which are impressive and must be accessible somehow. Outside from that, it does not say much about communication as such.

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<sup>7</sup> Heuritic, here, can be taken to mean “heuristic” in today’s language.

*Languages and Theories, Their Properly Pragmatic Dimension*

Peirce explains that man is sign; there is an equivalence between the two. "In fact, therefore, men and words reciprocally educate each other; each increase of a man's information is at the same time the increase of a word's information and *vice versa*. So that there is no difference even here" (CP 7.346, 587). This mutual play of words and humans shows the reversibility of agency. Signs are recognized, here, explicitly in their proper agency. If words can be educated, let us examine their expansion, the development of their richness and precision by their users.

True knowledge is the work of a community of researchers, as many interpreters have explained. In the framework of his reflection, reference to the community is necessarily present as a horizon, since knowledge and social life are intimately linked. In the end, just as what a thing really is is what people will eventually come to know in the ideal state of complete information, so that reality comes to be acknowledged by the community; in the same way, thought is what it is only by virtue of the fact that it is addressed to a future thought which, in its value as thought, is identical to it, though more developed. As we will see, this does not preclude the possibility of objective knowledge.

As Misak (2018) points out, the fact that we seem to arrive "in the end" at "the truth" should not be taken in the sense of a teleology (37): the accent is to be put on the incompleteness of present knowledge. The true is that which will prove to be indefectible, that is, what one should agree to and, therefore, what no one will be able to refute. Let us not forget, however, that Peirce expresses here the whole idea of the recipient of the thought or speech. Moreover, a so-called true knowledge will still have to be the knowledge of many who share it and even recognize it—otherwise, it would no longer be knowledge. Sharing and recognizing needs some communication. We go beyond the representational vision of knowledge, in the sense that it will always be appropriated knowledge—ideally for all, but this is not always the case, as we keep seeing. Here, though, we have a real request for communication.

In the Harvard Lectures, delivered in 1903, Peirce returned to the sudden popularity of pragmatism, a word and a trend that he had launched thirty years earlier, in 1870, without much public effect at the time. The discussions of the Metaphysical Club and the few texts he published in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* had less impact than the highly successful publications of James, which came a few decades later. It was thanks to James's support that Peirce was able to continue to communicate after his forced withdrawal from the university circuit, notably with the Harvard conferences. In this context, he recalls the well-known maxim of pragmatism, but just before quoting it he provides an additional formulation, often overlooked, which proves to be very interesting. Along the way he brings in a technical term, the notion of apodosis, which is the consequent in a statement of the form "if X, then Y," i.e., the "then Y." The word is also used in music, where the rising part of a melody is the protasis, and the descending part the apodosis:



Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mode is a confused form of thought whose only significance, if it has any, lies in its tendency to implement a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mode. (EP 2, 135)<sup>8</sup>

Peirce is, here, very clearly going beyond twentieth-century developments in pragmatics considered as the theory of speech acts—as in, I assert, I promise, I recommend, but also in the responses given by interlocutors to these acts in dialogues, points developed by Austin and Searle. Indeed, Peirce explains how a theoretical statement can and should also be understood as a kind of prescription—that is, a recommendation for action, and a very serious one: an imperative! This goes further than the mere pragmatics of speech acts, since it is a theoretical statement that is considered, not the singular words or active elements of a statement; the prescription is the moment of apodosis, the “fall,” as a series of consequences of any theoretical sentence. In conclusion, the theory is not thought completely if one does not think the consequences (e.g., seeing the theoretical statement as a rule of action). Certainly, in the quotation, what I call “recommendation” is presented only from the categorical point of view of the imperative. Let us, therefore, admit that some additional nuances could and should complete its expression here, concerning that normative dimension that is still nowadays very poorly recognized and understood. If we are to believe seriously that any theory would have its key in action statements, the link between theory and practice has never seemed so close.

In that same 1903 conference, Peirce dwells on his earlier formulation of the maxim, asking what habits produce a given thought. In every possible circumstance, we must ask ourselves when and how the theory we support makes us act. And we only understand a theory well if we see what actions it leads to. Familiarity and definitions being supposed as given, it is in order to grasp the complete meaning that we need the pragmatic aspect concerned with the consequences of actions, for the theorized object as well as for the interaction between human actions and the object in question. This implies taking seriously the theoretical commitments more than ever.

Returning to the judgment, Peirce says that it is an assertion—as in, “I say to myself.” It is thus an act, as when someone promises at the notary’s office. To make an assertion is something quite different from “grasping the meaning of a proposition” (EP 2, 140). Here, Peirce looks at specific words as speech acts, distinguished from a simple understanding. As we know, the pragmatic dimension is closely linked to any meaning for Peirce. This necessarily applies also to his own theory of categories and semiosis; thinking about their normative character frees up the necessary space for a critique and allows us to avoid the idealism that would spontaneously consider the link as realized, communication as carried out, and knowledge as an assured fact.

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<sup>8</sup> This excerpt is from Peirce’s first Harvard Lecture in 1903.

### The Community

For the social question, the notion of community is often in counterpoint, especially since Ferdinand Tönnies (*Gemeinschaft* vs. *Gesellschaft*), a German theorist probably unknown to Peirce.<sup>9</sup> Let us get back to previous writings from Peirce. The notion of community has several aspects; its meaning is not univocal. On the one hand, the community is the bearer of various prejudices, and it can do violence to individuals by forcing them, by exerting constraint; it is thus a place of pressures and social conformism. Peirce underscores how in communities, a method of conviction based on the will and the effort of persuasion is frequently present. It is, however, not what a thinking individual seeks. Communities with contrary convictions also sometimes encounter each other; then, conviction appears less certain than we thought and is destabilized. Persecution and cruelty have been used wherever there has been a clergy, an aristocratic caste, “an absolutely ruthless power,” which has been seen frequently. Communities and morals go hand in hand and undoubtedly require a critical distance.

On the other hand, for Peirce to speak of science is to speak of a complex enterprise; it is a social fact that extends over several centuries and involves a plurality of people who necessarily work with and in relation to each other. It is known that Peirce is not a skeptic; for him, knowledge of the world is possible, and, moreover, knowledge can be bettered. He wishes not to abuse the notion of truth, but depending on certain conditions, a proposition can be considered *as likely* to be true, and “likeliness” is better than falsehood. Peirce’s realism supposes the work of investigation, maintained for an indefinitely open period and by a group also seen as open, without obvious limit.

A quote shows this but also raises some difficulty:

The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without defined limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge. (EP 1, 52, original emphasis)<sup>10</sup>

We are, here, far from a radically pluralist conception of knowledge, postulating a plurality of irreconcilable realities. There is, or there should be, a reality, as there is or should be a community. Of course, we can distinguish between description of states of affairs and norms, but there is no consideration here of the possibility of setbacks or net losses in knowledge—risks that we are sometimes confronted with nowadays. Furthermore, the possibility of a validity of a plurality of understandings is not really discussed.

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<sup>9</sup> The name does not appear either in W, CP, EP, or in the Nation documents; see Peirce (1975–87).

<sup>10</sup> This excerpt is taken from Peirce’s 1868 “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities.”

The meaning of this conception is to discard what would be only fantasies of one or the other, in favor of what can produce a convergence:

A method of research which would lead different individuals to different results, without taking care to lead them to an agreement, would be self-destructive and worthless. Consequently, reasoning properly conducted tends to produce agreement among men; and doubt once removed, the search must cease. (W 2, 1869–70, MS 165, 357).

Plurality can be an appearance and be only an effect of different grammatical choices. For Peirce, if so-called “different” theories lead to the same practical conclusions, they are in fact identical. There seems to be a close connection between knowledge and the production of intersubjective agreement; there is an accepted value in this convergence. Discussing method, logic is seen as dialectic, science allowing to discuss the value of arguments. Certainly, research is undertaken to remove the doubts of the researcher, but

no sensible man will escape doubt as long as people, as competent as he is to judge, are of a different opinion from his own. Therefore, to solve one’s own doubts is to determine the position to which sufficiently thorough research would lead all men. (W 2, 355)

Real doubts exist and are related to other valid opinions held by competent people. Science is in fact social; in resolving his own doubts, the researcher places himself from the point of view of possible objectors. Mead would say that the researcher has internalized the gaze of the generalized other of a particular “scientific” group.

### *Signs and Communication Theory: The Apparent Teleologism*

Signs presuppose communities of interpreters and, undoubtedly, also a system of communication—let us think, for example, of audiophonic supports. A community of interpreters with some means of communication is required by the simple necessity of the interpretant, which needs to be used by a potential plurality of holders (interpreters).<sup>11</sup> The theory of knowledge thus seems to be transformed into a theory of meaning that presupposes and requires communication. Does it suffice to interpret Peirce’s theory of signs as being, in fact, a theory of communication? Sometimes he seems more interested in generating sub-genres of signs, in classification for a kind of grammar, his complex repertoire of functions of signs, rather than stopping at the interactional aspects, of which he speaks nevertheless by recognizing the rhetorical dimension. This rhetorical dimension is often lost sight of, for example, in the following passage, which is much quoted, but which is simply the emphatic ending of “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” the task of which was notably to refute intuitionism and Cartesian doubt:

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<sup>11</sup> We should keep constantly in mind the difference between people interpreting (interpreters) and the means of this interpretation (a series of signs called “interpretants” by Peirce).

Finally, as what anything really is, is what it may finally come to be known to be in the ideal state of complete information, so that reality depends on the ultimate decision of the community; so thought is what it is, only by virtue of its addressing a future thought which is in its value as thought identical with it, though more developed. In this way, the existence of thought now, depends on what is to be hereafter; so that it has only a potential existence, dependent on the future thought of the community. (W 2, 241)

The discussion remains in the order of the conditional; the writer's production is reduced to a sign to be recognized later, in a future state, eventually. It seems to aim at a complete knowledge, but it is to put it in dependence of the "ultimate decision" of the community, since a knowledge can be declared true only by people who will hold it as true. Peirce overcomes the paradox that consists in holding at the same time many elements: realism, constructivism, historicity of thinking and of science. And not without a touch of communication: a thought is such only by being addressed to a listener or reader necessarily situated in the future with respect to the time of the expression. We find, here, a temporality that is more than simply linear, since the past is said to depend on the future, on a possible recognition. It is rather the opposite that is usually considered as obvious—that is, the dependence of the future on the past, with causality as it is spontaneously understood.

There has been much discussion of the appearance of teleologism, here, when the text is saying something else. If one understands the text in a linear way, then one arrives at a dead end, at something that is not sustainable. According to Misak, this should not be taken in the sense of a teleology: the emphasis is on the incompleteness of present knowledge. True knowledge is that which will prove to be indestructible, that to which one should agree, and therefore that which one cannot refute.<sup>12</sup> Thus, a so-called true knowledge would no longer be a knowledge if nobody shares it. The practical meaning of such an assertion is rather to accept to move toward the search for true knowledge while admitting that this knowledge will have to be recognized. We will not be able to do without making communicable and therefore understandable any knowledge that may turn out to be true, even though in the meantime it could have only a hypothetical value.

Perhaps we have also underestimated the fact that Peirce sees in the community a substantial value, to which the human must necessarily be attached; it is not only an abstract presupposition of the type of community of communication as for Apel. In Peirce's review of the Fraser edition of George Berkeley's work, a text from 1871, the question of community surfaces in a framework that recurs quite often in Peirce: namely, the philosophical discussion between nominalism and realism:

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<sup>12</sup>Misak (2013, 36–37) gives the following source: "if Truth consists in satisfaction, it cannot be any actual satisfaction, but must be the satisfaction which would ultimately be found if the inquiry were pushed at its ultimate and indefeasible issue" (CP 5, 569; CP 6, 485).

But though the question of realism and nominalism has its roots in the technicalities of logic, its branches reach about our life. The question whether the *genus homo* has any existence except as individuals, is the question whether there is anything of any more dignity, worth, and importance than individual happiness, individual aspirations, and individual life. Whether men really have anything in common, so that the *community* is to be considered as an end in itself, and if so, what the relative value of the two factors is, is the most fundamental practical question in regard to every public institution the constitution of which we have it in our power to influence. (W 2, 462–87)

The discussion of agency, individual or collective, is here largely pre-empted. Peirce seeks to show the connection he sees between logic and the reality of community.

Perhaps because of the work of inference, which necessarily rests on signs whose nature is social, he believes that the logical character of propositions would lead us in some way by itself to a widening of our perspectives. I quote:

The very idea of probability and of reasoning rests on the assumption that this number is indefinitely great. We are thus landed in the same difficulty as before, and I can see but one solution of it. It seems to me that we are driven to this, that logicality inexorably requires that our interests shall *not* be limited. They must not stop at our own fate, but must embrace the whole community. This community, again, must not be limited, but must extend to all races of beings with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation. (CP 2.364, 654)

This demands a conceived identification of one's interests with those of an unlimited community. Similarly, we can have the hope that the community will survive indefinitely, though this is by no means a necessity—just because I really need to have \$500 does not give me the money, as Peirce explains.

To get ahead with his perspective on communication, let us take some time on a series of quotes, starting with an early text by Peirce (1867) that will be followed by quotes from later. Here, we find a new triad of disciplines, compared with the one we already discussed, inside logic in a broader sense:

We come, therefore, to this, that logic treats of the reference of symbols in general to their objects. In this view it is one of a trivium of conceivable sciences. The first would treat of the formal conditions of symbols having meaning, that is of the reference of symbols in general to their grounds or imputed characters, and this might be called formal grammar; the second, logic, would treat of the formal conditions of the truth of symbols; and the third would treat of the formal conditions of the force of symbols, or their power of appealing to a mind, that is, of their reference in general to interpretants, and this might be called formal rhetoric. (CP 1.361, 559)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The title of this famous article, originally published in 1867, is "On a New List of Categories."

Grammar, logic, and rhetoric are distinctly defined, even though they are closely interconnected. Their distinction and complementarity are, therefore, extremely important. Because the last discipline is concerned with the force of symbols, it treats their appeal to minds—all of which has to do with their reference to interpretants, meaning the signs that we use to understand other signs. Furthermore, Peirce explains that the choice of concrete signs will affect the interpretants, and this also is part of the domain of rhetoric: “the Theory of the general conditions under which one representamen may produce another . . . may be called *Formal Rhetoric*, or objective logic” (R, MS 839, 103, original emphasis). It could, therefore, be understood as a way to produce a response, an interpretation—or said otherwise, by the understanding it produces, new signs are generated in the practice of logic as discourse. The expression is concise and brief, without much detail.

Another quote (from 1896) will help us to get at the crux of the matter. At the end of the paragraph, it becomes clear that the “Theory of Rhetoric” (*speculativa*, which is used here, means “theory” in John Duns Scotus and others, explains Peirce) must do not only with transmission but also with affecting states of minds, which is expected, after all, if we are discussing rhetoric. We can also say that transmission goes hand in hand with affecting people’s minds. Peirce writes:

The term “logic” is unscientifically by me employed in two distinct senses. In its narrower sense, it is the science of the necessary conditions of the attainment of truth. In its broader sense, it is the science of the necessary laws of thought, or, still better (thought always taking place by means of signs), it is general semeiotic, treating not merely of truth, but also of the general conditions of signs being signs (which Duns Scotus called *grammatica speculativa*), also of the laws of the evolution of thought, which since it coincides with the study of the necessary conditions of the transmission of meaning by signs from mind to mind, and from one state of mind to another, ought, for the sake of taking advantage of an old association of terms, be called *rhetorica speculativa*, but which I content myself with inaccurately calling objective logic, because that conveys the correct idea that it is like Hegel’s logic. (R, MS 900, 110, original emphasis)

Here we have transmission not only of signs but also of states of mind: for instance, being touched by something. Rhetoric, then, is a complement to grammar and logic understood in the ordinary sense. A striking point is explicitly stated here: studying the evolution of thought is equivalent to studying transmission “from mind to mind,” which obviously implies communication even though the term is not used. Furthermore, this transmission is not limited to semantic content since it starts from and touches “states of mind.” Peirce then claims that this rhetorical theory is equivalent to the idea of Hegel’s logic, which is equivalent to speaking of concrete logic, as it happens in actual exchanges.

The quote in the previous paragraph (MS 900) is from thirty years after the preceding one, but there is a remarkable continuity of the terms used from one to the other. In the early piece (1867), Peirce spoke of formal rhetoric, and, in 1896, it is called “Speculative Rhetoric”; but the name of the concept is discussed after 1902

in the context of what he calls “Methodeutic,” which is a new development. This enlargement of the classifying category from Formal to Speculative to Methodeutic (we have here an evolution of the *classeme* in greimassian terms, e.g. the classifier; Greimas and Courtès [1979] 1982) is in itself very interesting: talking of method indicates that the focus seems specified toward scientific communication. Clearly science itself implies inquiry and, therefore, method. Such a move is not surprising at all, considering Peirce’s strong involvement with natural and formal science. But, as we will see, the term rhetoric is not at all replaced by this new name.

This can be confirmed by reading another quote, this time from that later period in his life (1902):

That our thoughts are signs is an old and familiar doctrine. I show that it is only in so far as thoughts are signs, and particularly . . . symbols, that they become subjects of logic; and further that the rules of logic are applicable to all symbols. Accordingly by regarding logic as a science of signs or formal semeiotic, and in the main as a science of symbols, or formal symbolic, we accurately cover its subject matter, and at the same time insure ourselves against all risk of being led astray into psychology. The word formal, in this connection, signifies that only the general conditions to which signs ought to conform are to be considered.

But those conditions may be distinguished into three kinds, leading to a corresponding distinction between three departments of logic, in its wider sense; or Formal Semeiotic. Namely the conditions are either, first, such as must be fulfilled in order that an object may be a sign at all; second, such as must be fulfilled in order that the sign may refer to the object to which it aims to refer, that is, may be true; and third, such as must be fulfilled in order that the sign may determine the interpretant it aims to determine, that is, may be pertinent. [—] The study of the third series of conditions will be found to coincide nearly with what is termed Methodeutic or Methodology; but I prefer to term it Speculative Rhetoric. (CP 2, 425)

Here Peirce goes back to theoretical rhetoric as a classifier. To determine the interpretant is forcibly to help with a correct understanding by some reader or interpret. The link to relevance (Peirce uses the equivalent word “pertinent”), here, is obviously of great import, for irrelevant information might be true but would serve no direct purpose.<sup>14</sup>

Interpreted with charity, this means that if we want to make people understand something, we need to inquire about it with them. If the best way to develop beliefs is by the scientific method, then it is also the better way to make people understand. We need to work at expanding the interpretive repertoires of people who are listening to us if we want to help determine their understanding. This process is to be understood as a way to be convincing. Education, therefore,

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<sup>14</sup> Obviously, irrelevant material can still be used in certain contexts. But this is not the place to enter into a thorough ethical discussion about that kind of rhetorical practice. I will only note that throwing irrelevant truths to people might be abusive—for instance, when this is done as a diversion, in a sophistic process.

has to do with broadening the collection of interpretants available to a group of persons and provide some stability to their thinking with valid and convincing arguments and reasons.

Here is a last quote, from 1902, that will reinforce our last comment, where Peirce goes on again with new terminological precisions, to help us better figure what he is talking about:

Logic is the science of the general necessary laws of Signs and especially of Symbols. As such, it has three departments. Obsistent logic, logic in the narrow sense, or Critical Logic, is the theory of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to their professed Objects, that is, it is the theory of the conditions of truth. Originalian logic, or Speculative Grammar, is the doctrine of the general conditions of symbols and other signs having the significant character. It is this department of general logic with which we are, at this moment, occupying ourselves. Transuational logic, which I term Speculative Rhetoric, is substantially what goes by the name of methodology, or better, of methodeutic. It is the doctrine of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to the Interpretants which they aim to determine. (CP 2, 425)

Signification, or meaning, is not the same as truth conditions, according to this quote. Here the “Transuational” logic is a new name for method, understood again to determine the interpretants and which clearly has to do with a rhetoric that is still attached to knowing the referent, with the constant requisite of being meaningful. The very fact of connecting methodology with rhetoric understood as reference to interpretants puts us back on track for a new understanding of science as a rhetoric to be understood.

## **Conclusion**

We end up with a set of questions about how to interpret Peirce’s theory of semiosis through his theory of categories in the framework of a theory of communication. The communicative practices that are constitutive of the social bond in an interactionist perspective can already be identified in their “semiotic” components, and this without even needing to mobilize an extensive analytic using all the subclasses of signs generated by Peirce within his theorization. For example, what are the interpretants available to interlocutors in a conversation that we would methodically treat in conversational analysis? What is the difference between what comes from a speaker, what comes from prior social communication, or even from education, with all its assumed notions? In any pedagogical or simply communicative effort, the question of which interpretants are available to the receivers is of primary importance. Similarly, if Peirce does not discuss the question of error or misinterpretation when he presents his semeiosis, this theory makes it possible to account for it, since all that is needed to aim for a better semeiosis is a disagreement between one, the other, or the three elements involved. In this case, the notion of semiosis is recognized as having normative value.



On ethical issues, it has happened in the past that we have been suspicious of too strong a claim to moral truth, from which we wanted to deduce so-called certain consequences. Such a reservation seems to me to be rather healthy, but if we think about it, the idea of investigation supposes a desire for knowledge in relation to the situations, to the problems, by which we seek to orient ourselves in the action of making decisions, when required. I believe it is justified to affirm that, without turning into dogmatism, a search for truth remains necessary in ethics. Truth is only the qualifier of a proposition that represents knowledge; we can and must, most of the time, be satisfied with plausible and often incomplete knowledge. This does not prevent a certain orientation toward knowledge that one wishes to be true, if only to avoid errors and falsities. Peirce goes in this direction. Thus, he posits, “we are accepting this belief, not on experience, which is rather against it, but on the strength of our general faith that what is really true it is good to believe and evil to reject” (CP 2.48, 486)—this, intervening in a discussion of Fraser’s edition of George Berkeley’s work. This seems to me to rejoin this other idea, central to Peirce: the process of investigation must normally converge toward commonly shared conceptions. It seems to me that we must keep these perspectives, against the unhealthy apologies of “fake news” and against intellectual defeatism in general, but not at the price of renouncing a sane acceptance of pluralism.

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