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Some Ethical Applications of the Law of Mind

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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

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[1]), but rather to enable me effectively to extrapolate

[1] 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).[2] 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

[2] 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.[3]

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

[3] 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."[4] 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

[4] 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.[5] 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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[5] 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,[6] 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

[6] 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.[7] 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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[7] 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).[8] 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.[9] 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

[8] 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.

[9] 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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