

Abstract

Habit as a Connecting Nature, Mind and Culture in c.s. Peirce's Semiotic Pragmaticism[†]

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0. Extended Abstract

Peirce's view of science and religion differs from the received view and therefore has interesting consequences for how we see the connections between the two. Peirce was like Karl Popper a fallibilist opposing the logical positivist epistemology of possibility of verification of scientific theories and models. The end of research in a certified truth is an ideal far away in the future. Furthermore he was not a physicalistic material mechanists but a process philosopher and an evolutionary synechist. This means that he thought that mind and matter was connected in a continuum and that matter has some internal living qualities, because he did not believe that the world is ruled by absolute precisely determinable laws that somehow existed before the manifest universe in time and space came to be. A further problem with the mechanicism of classical physics was that the time concept in Newton's theory of motion was reversible. Time had no arrow. But in Peirce's cosmogony change is at the basis as Firstness is imbued with the tendency to take habits and time therefore has an arrow and is irreversible and therefore what the laws manifested as the universe develop. This was unthinkable from a mechanical point of view. But Prigogine and Stengers (1984) – in there development of non-equilibrium thermodynamics based on Boltzmann's probability interpretation of thermodynamics – got irreversibility accepted as the basic process in physical ontology and in 2013 the recognized physicist Lee Smolin published the book *Time Reborn*, where he accepts Peirce's as well as Prigogine's views on the nature of time, change and law, which was a big change in foundational conception og physics. In contrast to Smolin and Prigogine Peirce also grounds his philosophical framework in phenomenology. He is inspired by German idealism and Naturphilosophie especially Hegel and Schelling though he is also a kind of empiricist. This makes him a kind of process objective idealist; but a very special one. In the tradition of Aristoteles, Hegel and Kant he worked out system of basic categories that had deep influence on his Cosmogony (CP: 6.32-33¹).

Peirce saw as his primary task to develop an architectonical metaphysical and epistemological system in which his new theory of triadic categorical theory was connected to a dynamic triadic web of semiotics viewed as the dynamics of objective mind (Raposa, 1989 p. 146) based on an emptiness ontology and a continuity principle (synechism), which in some aspect is close to modern quantum field physics vacuum field (EP2, p.300-324 and 303-304). Peirce is influenced by Aristotle's concept of

¹ Peirce scholar reference system: **CP** refers to Peirce, C.S. (1994 [1866-1913 and 1931-35]): *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce.*, **EP** for *Essential Peirce* (see Houser, Nathan & Christian Kloesel (eds.)(1992). *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 1* (1867-1893) and Peirce Edition Project (ed.)(1998). *The Essential Peirce. Selected, Philosophical Writings, Volume 2* (1893-1913).

form, but based on an evolutionary Cosmogony inspired by a combination of Hegel and Schelling and a scientific world view from early 20th century. For Peirce therefore, a sign is a medium for the communication of a form or habit, embodied in the object to the interpretant, in order to constrain the interpreter's behaviour as specifically as possible (EP 2.544, n.22).

Peirce sees through his triadic semiotics the universe as a very abstract symbolic process in self-development unfolding its laws in the process through the manifestations of signs and habits (Romanini 2014). It is a very anti-fundamentalist view avoiding any kind of scientism and fundamentalist religion too. It sees the formation of habit in Thirdness as the basic process of our reality in nature, experience, cognition and communication. Habit taking is of cause also basic to all kinds of magic and religious rituals, but people often forget that they are habits them-selves and therefor will undergo progressive change too. To Peirce our self is a symbol that grows with our life experience. As the laws are rather vague tendencies in the beginning that become more and more rigid habits as the universe unfolds Peirce's important point is that we do not have absolute knowledge, we do not have absolute knowledge. It develops all the time like in the dialectical views be it Hegel's or Marx and Engels. This ontology makes room for life and the evolution of mind. Peirce sees the universe develops from emptiness, not much different from modern quantum field physics vacuum field, that is a spontaneous chaos of all possibilities (Brier, S. 2014a); except that the explanation is placed in his semiotic vision that sees matter as effete mind and the universe as a symbol in development to an a grand argument. (EP 2:322-324).As he also points out the same place, a symbol "produces an endless series of interpretants," and that reality "can only be regarded as the limit of the endless series of symbols. A symbol is essentially a purpose, that is to say, is a representation that seeks to make itself definite, or seeks to produce an interpretant more definite than itself."

This is pretty close to general system theory's process ontology of the *Self-organizing Universe* (Jantsch1980), but adds the dynamics of the three categories, which is pretty close to Hegel's dialectics, but developed into a semiotics. Thus cosmogony and evolution is seen as a dynamic interaction between the three categories. Neither of the categories can be reduced to the other, but cosmogonically viewed, they are derived from each other. Since Firstness is a state of absolute possibility and radical indeterminacy as close to nothingness as possible, it is an absolute permissibility with no cause outside itself. From here, Secondness emerges as one of many possibilities as difference, other, individuality, limit, force and will. Thirdness is the mediating habit-taking aspect of evolution that contributes to the creation of an emergent semiotic order based on habits in matter as well as mind and culture somewhat different from Hegel's dialectical evolution of objective *Mind* and as well the dialectical materialism of Frederick Engels *Dialectics of Nature* from 1893. In contrast to Engels, Peirce's categories also have a phenomenological aspect and in contrast to Hegel he has the category of Secondness, which creates the empirical connection to reality and as such the possibility of falsification, which later became so important in Karl Popper's philosophy of science. But new compared to all other philosophers is his view of the universe as a developing symbol, creating new habits of meaning creating and endless stream of interpretants making its reasoning powers grow (Brier 2015) and extending into our cultures (CP 1.615). Thus for Peirce habit, mediation and reasoning power is a basic character of reality going from (what we call) dead nature, over living nature, mind and culture all the way up to our cultural and religious symbols. For Peirce it is the Growth of love and reasonableness in what he calls agapism (CP, 6.205). These are also part of our reasoning about nature and our life and how they are connected and to what purpose. Peirce's semiotics is a general theory of all kinds of sign systems. Those systems include, as special cases, all natural languages and all versions of formal logic. That logic is semiotic is essential to Peirce's semiotic philosophy. What we usually call logic is on a limited formal side of the whole thing, which is a normative science for correct thinking based on sign. Why the nature of signs and their way to reference and represent forms of reality are essential to fully understand logic. Evolution is a growth in reasonableness (Stjernfelt 2014), habit and order and therefore goodness or the Summum Bonum(CP 1.191). Going back towards chaos and randomness cannot be a common good or

something anyone would desire. Reasonableness must be viewed as progress (CP 5.4.). Peirce's Synechism is opposed to any kind of duality, be it between matter or mind, nature and culture or between science and religion. Still Peirce considers it a metaphysical principle in the philosophy of science and knowing that we can call semiotic pragmatism (CP 7.578). For Peirce life, mind and semiosis are different concepts describing the actions of signs. Life emerges from the dynamics of signs. Biosemiotics is fundamentally the study of symbols as living signs. Semiosis is naturalized to explain mental and living processes, which are considered to be of the same nature as symbols (see Romanini 2014). Modern science has the challenge of understanding the mental world in terms of the physical world. We know that we have not come to the end of our knowledge of matter and energy, since we are inventing new types like dark matter and energy. If we want a sort of monism even if it is a triadic process one, we need to find a way to connect mind and matter. One way is Peirce and Aristotle's that matter has an "inside" that is somehow alive and spontaneously dynamic as we have found it in quantum physics, but which was already part of Engels nature dialectics and Bertalanffy's general system theory. But none of these had like Hegel and Peirce a foundation in phenomenology. Hegel is the typical example of objective idealism. Peirce usually accepts that term for his philosophy, but it is a semiotic one that makes it stand apart from all other forms. By making nature symbolic and letting signs having their own self-organizing abilities he created a philosophy of habits of nature that makes a deep connection between our cultural and mental thinking and communication in symbols and stories where Aesthetics, Ethics and Logics converge into the summum bonum (Potters 1979)

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