

INQUIRY AND EXPERIENCE IN THE PRAGMATIC TRADITION

Prof. Dr. DENNIS M. SENCHUK

Abstract: An exploration of some issues raised by Victorino Tejera's recent book, *American Modern: The Path Not Taken*, this paper considers the extent to which C.S. Peirce's philosophy may be regarded as a direct New World departure from Early Modern European Philosophy. After detailing some problems with upholding any sharp distinction between Cartesian and Peircean metaphilosophies, I conclude that Peirce may be credited, first, with a radical revision of the European Modern conception of experiences, with what might be called a semiotic view of them (as mediated by signs, fraught with inferential processes, and bound up with actions); and, second, with a distinctive, still compelling conception of scientific as well as philosophical inquiry. Turning next to the heir-apparent philosophizing of John Dewey, I note its more obvious affinities to Peirce's thinking but then emphasize that Dewey's own reconception of experience is a still more dramatic departure from the whole European Modern tradition. Experience, Dewey teaches us, is essentially active; it is never entirely passive. This lesson, which I take to be Dewey's single most valuable, philosophically most transformative insight, remains largely unlearned by contemporary philosophers. I end the paper by suggesting that Dewey's conception of experience affords a formidable challenge to John McDowell's Peirce-friendly outlook in *Mind and World*.

Modern Philosophy is a period or tradition in European thinking and writing that begins with Descartes. The path charted by V. Tejera, in *American Modern: The Path Not Taken*, has as its progenitor Charles Sanders Peirce, who heads off, some centuries later, in an aggressively anti-Cartesian direction. New Science plays a preeminent role in the earlier tradition: Descartes tries to set the stage for religiously unfettered scientific inquiry by bifurcating all of creation into two separate and distinct realms of study – viz. The Soul (or, thinking substance) whose only proper students are Catholic theologians and the Body (or, corporeal substance), whose humble students are Cartesian natural philosophers (or, new scientists). This feat is

Dennis M. Senchuk is Professor at the Philosophy Department of Indiana University (USA).

achieved against the background of a methodological framework, his Method of Clear and Distinct Ideas. This method, which is empiricist in its understanding of how we come to have our ideas of 'simple natures' and rationalistic in its understanding of how we come to conceive of the essences of real things, as necessary clusters of simple natures, is then combined with his Method of Doubt. The combination enables him to conceive of indubitable clusters essential to thinking substance as separate and distinct from doubtable clusters essential to corporeal substance. Cartesian dualism is thus born.

Peirce, like Descartes, favors scientific inquiry as a path to truth; but Peirce's fallibilistic conception of such inquiry contrasts propitiously with Descartes' more absolutistic conception. Scholars of Descartes may demur: Descartes' credentials as a path-breaking skeptic are impeccable; and the very realm where his doubts remain in tact, even after he declares a partial victory against skepticism, is the bailiwick of science, i.e., the physical (or, corporeal) realm. Yet closer examination of Descartes' thinking reveals that, for the most part, his skepticism with respect to the material world is limited to some exaggerated 'hyperbolic' doubts about whether bodies exist; he seems fully confident that if matter does exist, it needs to conform to the physicalistic conception his method has enabled him, clearly and distinctly, to form of it. Of course like other New Scientists, Descartes is not without some allegiance to (*a posteriori*) methods of empirical testing, but it is fair to say that he only relies upon such methods within the framework of his (*a priori*) clear and distinct conception of a corporeal world whose essential nature is to be extended.

A grand scheme, to be sure; but couldn't even those framing ideas of the world prove wrong? Perhaps, pace Descartes, the physical universe is not spread out in Euclidean space and fully amenable to analytical geometrical study by way of Cartesian coordinates. Perhaps that universe is not utterly filled up with matter, with extended substance, and only capable of movement by way of matter's constitutive 'vortices,' shifting about like rotating gumballs in a fully stuffed dispenser. Now with all due respect to philosophy, it should be noted that the troubles with this Cartesian picture are discerned by science itself, without outside interventions; but this is not to denigrate the contribution of Peirce to our collective understanding of the nature of scientific inquiry – an understanding of it as a fallibilistic social endeavor.

Peirce, the father of Pragmatic Philosophy, is variously and dramatically at odds with the 'spirit of Cartesianism,' which he even compares unfavorably to pre-Modern Philosophy: Cartesianism 'teaches that philosophy must begin with universal doubt; whereas scholasticism had never questioned fundamentals.' (CP 5.264) This charge is unfair albeit the received wisdom about Descartes' philosophy. Descartes does famously compare his skeptical procedure to someone's task of removing potentially rotten apples from a basket before they spoil the whole bunch: 'Would he not begin by tipping the whole lot out of the basket? And would not the next step be to cast his eye over each apple in turn, and pick up and put back in the basket only those he saw to be sound, leaving the others?' (Descartes 1984: 324) But reflection upon this analogy suggests that Descartes did not altogether suppose that

his method of doubt yielded him an epistemological fresh start: the apples were already gathered by various and sundry means, not by basket tipping (the metaphorical equivalent of universal doubt); and it is some of these very apples that are to be placed back in the basket, provided that there is no reason to call their wholesomeness, their lack of rot, into question.

The beginning of Cartesian inquiry is the body of opinions antecedently arrived at by divers methods other than that of systematic doubt, and some of these other methods could even be pursued in the face of extravagant skepticism. This body of opinions consisted in 'what I had originally believed quite spontaneously and with nature as my guide, and [in] the commonly held views of others, irrespective of truth or falsity.' (Descartes 1984: 325) The skepticism resilient alternative mode of inquiry was his method of clear and distinct ideas. And though Descartes does question fundamentals, it is with the underlying intent of affirming some of them eventually, which hardly seems to be a point against Cartesianism.

Israel Scheffler observes that Peirce conveys 'that elusive, yet profoundly important capacity of science to construct, without certain foundations or indubitable beginnings, a firm habitation for man's knowledge, capable moreover, of continuous use and continuous repair.' (1974: 57) Scheffler cites a number of images used by later philosophers to capture this capacity, including Otto Neurath's analogy of trying to rebuild a ship at sea, having to use materials from the boat itself, and being unable to rebuild afresh; and Scheffler then credits Peirce with having proffered the first of these figures – viz., comparing the reasoning of successful sciences not to a linear, deductive 'chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but [to] a cable whose fibers may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected.' (CP 5.265)

But what should one make of the fact that Descartes' own skeptical procedure can be read, figuratively speaking, as rebuilding on the high seas his ship of knowledge? Were one to regard Neurath's figure in prescriptive terms, as suggesting what ought to be done to emulate the excellent example of successful sciences, this fact would seem to suggest that Descartes did do what needs doing. But what if one were to take the figure to express some sort of existential plight from which there is no escape, to suggest that our human epistemic condition forces us to rebuild from materials on hand? In that case, then, still to his credit, Descartes is not attempting the impossible – at least not by means of his skeptical procedure.

It begins to seem in either case that Peirce's antipathy to Cartesian skepticism is misplaced, but there's more to this story. Peirce, who would seem, anachronistically speaking, to favor the second construal of Neurath's kindred conceit, takes Descartes' skeptical maneuvers to be attempting the impossible. And this apparent futility persuades Peirce that Cartesian skepticism 'must be formal only, hence self-deceptive, since not real doubt.' (CP 5.265)

If this disagreement is about what constitutes proper philosophical conduct, Descartes could easily be defended: his doubting consists of actively calling fundamental epistemic principles into question; his doing this does not require him to

harbor any genuine uncertainties, any fearful suspicions; he does impose and purport to meet the requirement that there be some pointed reasons, however hypothetical, for calling any and all such fundamentals into question; and all this seems eminently appropriate as philosophical procedure. The method of doubt does not end, as Peirce suggests, by reaffirming all of Descartes' previously held opinions; it ends, by Descartes' lights, with a single, necessarily true first principle, 'I am, I exist,' and the wherewithal to recover all and only those clearly and distinctly perceived truths deducible from this principle. This may not sound very much like scientific inquiry does lay the philosophical groundwork (and issue a theological excuse) for such inquiry.

Peirce is on firmer grounds of disagreement when he challenges features of the Cartesian method of clear and distinct ideas, instead. Indeed, his endorsement of the cable metaphor as against the chain metaphor is a direct challenge to this other method. Descartes wishes to maintain that intuition, 'the conception of a clear and attentive mind,' (Descartes 1985: 14) yields immediately self-evidently certain knowledge. His chain metaphor is invoked to explain how deduction, 'the inference of something as following necessarily from some other propositions,' (15) can enable us to know non-self-evident facts with certainty, too: they can be thus known

... provided that they are inferred from true and known principles through a continuous and uninterrupted movement of thought... This is similar to the way in which we can know that the last link in a long chain is connected to the first: even if we cannot take in at one glance all the intermediate links on which the connection depends, we can have knowledge of the connection provided we survey the links one after the other, and keep in mind that each link from first to last is attached to its neighbour. (Descartes 1985: 15)

Peirce may seem to be in the embarrassing position of insisting that cables are inherently stronger than chains, when sometimes even the weakest link in a powerful chain is very strong indeed. But Descartes is patently reliant upon the notion of self-evident intuitions that proceed solely from the light of reason; and Peirce is surely right to be dubious about this notion. His cable metaphor is deployed to suggest, pursuant to the example of successful scientific inquiries, that, even in the absence of antecedent certainties, very powerful cases for our knowledge claims can be based on numerous individually slender lines of argument that are tightly wound together.

Peirce's misgivings about the notion of intuition are connected with his convictions that our cognitions lack immediacy, that they are mediated by signs and are inseparably involved in inferences. This appears to contrast almost completely with Descartes' standpoint; but appearances can be deceiving. Peirce, in arguing against the immediacy of our cognitions, submits examples of sense perception that are supposed to show the covert but undeniable role of inferential processes in even our most patently intuitional cognitions. Thus, he argues that, given the blind spot on the retina, '[it] follows that the space we immediately see (when one eye is closed) is not, as we have imagined, a continuous oval, but is a ring, the filling up of which must be the work of the intellect.' (CP 5.218) Now the notion of what's

immediately seen is a very odd thing to affirm in the context of trying to undermine the notion of intuitional perception; and it is far from obvious that, having ruled out just one possible account of the situation, Peirce is forced, logically speaking, to embrace a single alternative, that he should have to conclude specifically that the intellect is implicated in 'filling up' (whatever that's supposed to mean!) But quite apart from any critical reservations one may have about the philosophical merits of this argument, it may not directly join any real issue with Descartes, whose only proper intuitions are supposed to be conceptions, i.e., intra-mental entities apprehended intellectually, not by way of immediate sense perception.

Descartes expressly distinguishes 'mental intuition from certain deduction on the grounds that we are aware of a movement or a sort of sequence in the latter but not in the former, and also because immediate self-evidence is not required for deduction, as it is for intuition; deduction in a sense gets its certainty from memory.' (Descartes 1985: 15) But what if it transpires that even Descartes' most paradigmatic intuitions are 'shot through' with inferences? Consider his disquisition on the piece of wax. Its essential nature is not known by way of the senses, since the wax remains itself despite the alteration of each and every one of its sensible qualities. Abstracting everything not belonging to the wax, Descartes is left with 'something extended, flexible and changeable. (Descartes 1984: 20) And these attributes are not revealed by his imagination, which is incapable of running through the countless changes in those attributes – e.g., all the different ways in which the selfsame piece of wax is capable of being extended. Ergo, the nature of the piece of wax is apprehended by way of 'purely mental scrutiny.' (Descartes 1984: 21)

This seems to concede that the clear and distinct perception of the wax, involves innumerable inferences to the effect that if it changes in various ways, its nature remains intact. And since Descartes himself freely admits, apropos of his original version of the problem of other minds, that we are quite capable of mistaking one sort of apprehension (e.g., seeing 'hats and coats which could conceal automatons') for another (viz., '*judg[ing]* that they are men' (Descartes 1984: 21)), why shouldn't he be suspected of misconstruing his own deductive knowledge of essential natures as a purely intuitional apprehension of them? What passes for immediate self-evidence could conceivably be the outcome of countless individual deductions intimately connected; and Descartes' lack of awareness of any movement or sequence might be no more telling than our universal intuitional failure to detect any process of 'filling in' in Peirce's (merely analogous) case of perceived visual continuity notwithstanding a retinal blind spot. Appearances to the contrary, Cartesian intuitions could be epistemologically beholden to prior deductions without such indebtedness being immediately self-evident, without its being *intuitively* obvious to the Cartesian light of reason.

So it seems that Peirce is on firm ground against Descartes when he, in effect, raises some such skeptical concerns about the role intuition plays in the method of clear and distinct ideas. The Peircean philosophical shift away from any reliance on immediate intuitions and towards sign-mediated, inference-laden cognitions marks a genuine departure from the European Modern tradition, though it is not without

antecedents internal to that tradition: Descartes himself, as noted in the last paragraph, suggests that we sometimes mistake judgments for purely sensory perceptions; and he also avers that thought (including cognitions) and language (including signs) are necessarily conjoined. Another interesting example is Berkeley, whose *New Theory of Vision* is cited by Peirce as marking a move away from the belief that the third dimension is intuited, toward the idea that 'it is known by inference.' (CP 5.219) But striking antecedents notwithstanding, it is Peirce who first sets off on a fallibilistic philosophical path fully dependent upon mediated cognitions. They serve like piles driven into a swamp, 'firm enough to carry the structure'—to use a Popperian image, as cited by Scheffler (1974: 57).

Peirce is not content, though, with a standard skeptical stance against the European Moderns: he does not merely advance his hypothesis of mediated cognitions to be as equally plausible, equally probable as their notion of intuitions. He presumes that all cognitions, however manifestly obvious they appear to be, are freighted with inferences. This is difficult to know. Peirce advances multiple non-linear considerations in support of this presumption, including the lemma that thought must necessarily be in signs and that, given the nature of signs, every thought must be interpreted in another thought. This, in turn, is assimilated to the idea that 'thought cannot happen in an instant, but requires a time.' (CP 5.253)

Peirce's remarks may charitably be viewed less as an attempted proof than as a proposal for an alternative conception of cognition. According to this conception, individual 'cognitions' incorporate some sort of latent 'inferential' processes in addition to and partly determinative of their manifest features. And given the temporal, empirically contingent yet unobservable character of these processes, it seems most fitting to regard them as theoretical posits, whose existence one should not even be tempted to try to prove on the basis of purely *a priori* philosophical argumentation. Peirce's fallibilism, which begins by suggesting that philosophy ought to emulate scientific inquiry instead of relying on would-be intuitions, finds itself in a boat of its own making: its own posits, inference-laden cognitions, however plausible they seem, ought to be established scientifically. But what does that mean?

Within the European Modern tradition, Descartes' attempt to ground science on indubitable foundations discerned by reason could be said to have evolved, under the selection pressure of dialectical conflict, into an empiricistic variant which tried to ground science on indubitable sensory-experiential foundations, instead. Peirce's fallibilism calls into question whether either sort of foundation is a scientifically preferable alternative to his hypothesis of inference-laden cognitions. But Peirce can hardly rely on straightforward inductive procedures, which do not inquire into the character of the data they range over. What he needs is a more hypothetico-deductive approach, which would be capable, in principle, of lending credence to his theoretical posits; and such an approach does seem consonant with his general theory of inquiry. On that theory, actual doubt is the 'only immediate motive' of inquiry, whose 'sole object... is the settlement of opinion' (CP 5.375) – i.e., the fixation of belief.

In the case of monocular vision, it may be supposed that real doubts about the continuity of the scene served up to us by our visual apparatus are occasioned by the discovery of a blind spot on our retina. These doubts are then dispatched when the hypothesis of inferential processes serving to 'fill up the gap' is framed, since this theoretical posit, which seems to account for the phenomenon in question, allows for a settlement of our opinions. And until such time as any further doubts develop, the new opinion (or, belief) is established as a habit, which is distinguished from other beliefs – including the dispelled belief in the continuity of some purely intuitive visual experience – 'by the different modes of action to which [this new belief will] give rise.' (CP 5.398)

Once such "habits of action" are adjudged to be involved in, if not identical to, the meaning of a thought or 'conception,' Peirce's famed pragmatic maxim is ready to hand: in order to clarify, 'to develop', the meaning of a conception, 'we have, therefore, to determine what habits it produces, for what a thing means is simply what habits it involves.' (CP 5.400) According to Peirce's maxim, things are known by or are completely conceived as their effects, their perceivable consequences in all conceivable actions involving them. This alternative to the Cartesian method of clarifying ideas shares the rationalistic bent of the original, which gets at the clearest possible ideas by way of conceivability. But Peirce's method willfully diverges from its archetype – by substituting the goal of conceiving of all possible '*action-contingent consequences* of the object' (in the words of Scheffler 1974: 78) for Descartes' goal of fathoming features common to all possible changes that allow for the putative identity of the object.

Since language use is undeniably a form of action, I would suggest that our clearest Peircean conception of any object, including those objects posited theoretically, will incorporate *inter alia* everything we are aptly and relevantly prepared to say about it; for whether or not it exists, our conception of it will lead to perceptible consequences in the range of conceivable things to be said about it. Peircean pragmatism, thus amplified, is not limited to the verificationism, operationalism, and the various forms of behaviorism to which it has often been assimilated. Indeed, even though Peirce would have us perceive philosophy through the lens of science, it is far from obvious that he expects the best possible clarification of our ideas to be provided in exclusively causal terms. In truth, not all consequences, not all 'effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings' (CP 5.402), are causal.

Tejera's account of Peirce's philosophy emphasizes, reasonably enough, its association with semiotic, i.e., Peirce's theory of signs. 'Peirce,' he notes, 'describes semiotic at 8.343 as "the *cenoscopic* science of signs.'" (p. 2) This term is a borrowing from Bentham, who used it for a 'science that is founded upon the common experience of all men.' (8.199) Peirce's use of it conveys the notion of a study of observed phenomena which does not rely on special observations to discover any new phenomena. Tejera is right to suggest that in the case of semiotic, Peirce's use of the term is (also) supposed to indicate an inquiry 'based on an abstractive observation of the everyday facts of sign-functioning' (p. 2); but what is 'abstractive

observation' It is, Peirce exaggerates, a faculty recognized by ordinary folk, all of whom have occasion to ask themselves if they would still wish for certain things if, contrary to fact, they had the means to gratify those wishes. A person tries to answer such a question by way of abstractive observation when:

He makes in his imagination a sort of skeleton diagram, or outline sketch of himself, considers what modifications the hypothetical state of things would require to be made in that picture, and then examines it, that is, *observes* what he has imagined, to see whether the same ardent desire is there to be discerned. (8.227)

Easier said than done literally; but, figuratively understood, this passage is suggesting only that one perform some sort of soul-searching to decide, say, whether one would still wish to have a golden touch if one were aware of all that that would entail. Peirce proposes that we *observe* what we imagine, but he is more kindly understood to be suggesting that we *thoughtfully consider* what it would actually be like to have our fervent wishes granted under diverse conditions. One relatively recent philosophical version of this gambit is John Rawls' idea of having principles of justice chosen behind a "veil of ignorance" – roughly, imagining ourselves to be rationally self-interested philosophical legislators ignorant of our place in society, our natural assets and abilities, even our conceptions of the good and our psychological inclinations. (Rawls 1971: p. 12.)

In the case of semiotic, Peirce suggests, it is '[b]y such a process,... very much like mathematical reasoning, [that] we can reach conclusions as to what *would be* true of signs in all cases, so long as the intelligence using them was scientific' – i.e., was 'capable of learning from experience.' (CP 2.227) Shades of Descartes? Against the background of the signs implicit in our cognitions, abstractive observation might be said to conceive of the character of these signs throughout all possible (appropriate) uses of them by a scientific intelligence. But as if to forestall any accusation that he is a Cartesian *malgre tout*, Peirce hastens to say that the resultant statements about what must hold good of those signs-in-use are 'eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense by no means necessary'. (CP 2.227) Moreover, instead of their being the fruits of solitary meditation, these statements are said result from a 'whole process of development among [a] community of students...' (*Ibid.*) Even though semiotic (or, logic 'in its general sense') aims 'to find out what *must be* and not merely what *is* in the actual world', Peirce insists that it is an observational science. What he seems to be suggesting is that logic, like metaphysics, 'really rests on observations, whether consciously or not; and [that] the only reason that this is not universally recognized is that it rests upon kinds of phenomena with which every man's experience is so saturated that he usually pays no particular attention to them.' (CP 6.2) Peirce doesn't address the question of whether or not semiotic rests entirely on such catholic observations, but he does suggest that metaphysics 'in places... welds itself into [a] special science.' (CP 6.6) – Which is to say that metaphysics is occasionally reliant upon special observations to discover new phenomena. Presumably, this is because '[i]ts business is to study the most general features of reality and real objects' (CP 6.6); and some specific features of reality may not be observable to "the naked eye."

Insofar as metaphysics does study 'the most general features,' it is easy to see why its claims, drawn from special as well as ordinary observations, are fallible – viz., because they are generalizations subject to possible refutation on the basis of overlooked specifics. And since other people are equally apprised of the facts, the observations, on which the generalizations rely, it is easy to see why metaphysics so conceived is a public enterprise instead of a purely solitary pursuit: other people are in a position, e.g., to issue reminders about overlooked specifics that could refute even our individually best conjectures about the real world. Indeed, some of those reminders might even concern the character of our own subjective experiences – as, e.g., when we balk at Peirce's own, all too metaphysically figurative account of abstractive observation as requiring us to *observe* what we first imagine. And the latter sorts of reminders may force a clarification of the larger methodological point that metaphysics is based on *observation*: this is not quite true if the term is understood to mean or involve necessarily the careful examinations (or, perceptual inspections) of objects of perception; but if the term is only intended to signify the taking note of and/or remarking on the character of phenomena – regardless of how subjective, how unlike real objects of perception they happen to be – then this methodological point can be sustained. It is rather more difficult to understand how observation may – as Peirce supposes it to in the case of semiotic (or, logic) – yield supportable claims of necessity. It is difficult but not impossible. We may, to begin with, paper over the difficulty by appealing to another, now rather rare acceptance of the word 'observation.' To wit, 'An observed truth or fact; a thing learned by observing; a maxim gathered from experience.' (SOED) Equipped with this definition, it is easier to understand how some necessities may be 'observed'. Thus, a maxim about the practical necessity of painting oneself *out* of a corner may readily be gleaned from experience, even from the actual experiences of others or from the merely imaginary experiences of one's own. And no great leap forward is required to understand how lessons might be also be drawn about the necessity of using signs in particular ways *if* one is to exercise scientific intelligence successfully, if one is to use the signs in learning from experience. And insofar as metaphysics encompasses necessities, too, statements of them could also be seen to be reliant upon abstractive observations.

Now the term 'abstraction,' as if still partly beholden to an olden sense of it as a withdrawal from the things of the senses, does suggest separation within one's *conception* of a thing (rather than some sort of physical extraction from the thing itself). And this can make it seem practically evident that any would-be metaphysical necessities discerned by way of abstraction from our commonest observations are actually just *conceptual* necessities, instead. But Peirce's (pointedly anti-Cartesian) insistence that abstractive observation involves the use of imagination rather than conception could be thought to lean in the opposite direction, since judiciously imagined necessary connections among real things are less likely to be dismissed as being merely necessary connections among images. The latter necessities would hardly seem any more tenable than the former, whereas the notion of conceptual necessity has usually, almost by tradition, been regarded as a clearer, philosophically

more appealing alternative than the idea of metaphysical necessity. Ultimately, of course, there may be no accounting for philosophical tastes in such matters. But if we do wax even slightly metaphysical about conceptions, granting them or their 'realizations' in the concrete some sort of psychologically theoretical if not phenomenal ontological status, then any apparent philosophical advantages accruing to the smug suggestion that conceptual necessities are *merely* abstract could be imperiled.

Peirce himself would seem inclined to reify conceptions, by identifying meanings with psychologically-grounded habits and by being committed, I take it, to the idea that the inference-ladenness of cognitions is some sort of habituation. Accordingly, there is for him no obvious philosophical alternative to viewing putative metaphysical necessities, if any, as real. Consider some Peircean possibilities: If abstractive observations are creatures of the imagination, they are nonetheless cognitions, freighted with signs (or sign-tokens) and their meanings, whose full point and reality are beyond question, beyond real doubt, for Peirce. If these observations are conceptions, instead, they are still cognitions and, again, thus freighted. In both cases, there would seem to be some undeniable ontic flavor to any necessities ascribed to the cognitions, to their associated signs, or to the meanings of these signs. And, of course, if strict observance of the standard philosophical distinction between acts and objects of cognitions would seem to suggest that it is the objects (rather than the acts) of cognitions to which necessities are most properly ascribed, then said necessities are most straightforwardly ontological in character.

Peirce himself distrusts the very idea of empirical necessity, an idea that he seems to associate with the failed scientific methodology of Descartes. He tends to view the world as originally rather chancy and chaotic, though perhaps already in process of forming grand-scale habits in the form of natural laws. (Since habituation plays such a signal role in Peirce's account of cognition, one might wish to accuse Peirce of some solipsistic conception of nature as mirroring the knower; but even though the world may also be conceived by him to be evolving into a more knowable deterministic form while we, as inquirers, improve our collective habits of cognition, this mirroring falls short even of that in the movie *Duck Soup*, where the false Grouchos mimic almost every move of their brother.) But the truth about the world and any ultimate necessities it may presently or may eventually contain is not something to be discerned here and now by some misbegotten philosophical method of clear and distinct ideas. What abstractive observation is *supposed* to reveal instead is, at best, some 'quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs.' (CP 2.227)

This is a puzzling thing to say. Is *quasi*-necessity just apparently but *not really* necessity, or is it some sort of *partial* necessity, whatever that means? Peirce, it may be remembered, here says that the individual claims of logic, which are, presumably, supposed to be constitutive of the doctrine of signs, 'are eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense by no means necessary...' (CP 2.227) This hardly serves to disambiguate his meaning. He doesn't tell us the 'one sense' that seems problematic to him but he may well be confusing *indubitability*, an epistemic notion that really would seem contrary to *fallibility*, with any proper sense of necessity. But is he

implying that there may be a particular other sense of necessary, a sense that does allow for partial necessity? Historical hindsight may provide an answer.

Modern logic as a formal discipline does have a fairly compelling account of how some logical truths may be viewed as formal but not empirical necessities. It is possible to construe that account as being based on abstractive observation. Thus, conjunctions are compound statements that can be formed from a couple of simpler statements by connecting them by means of the word 'and'. One such conjunction would be, 'The sky is blue, and the sun is yellow.' A 'skeleton outline' of this conjunction could be provided by using capital letters to abbreviate its simple component statements and using the ampersand to abbreviate 'and', thus: 'A&B.' We could then consider what modifications in the overall truth or falsity of 'A&B' would be required by hypothetical states involving all the possible combinations of truth and falsity for 'A' and for 'B'. We could picture all these modifications (or, more customarily, draw a table of them all) and then *observe* what we'd imagined (or, drawn). Finally, we could reach conclusions as to what *would be* in all cases – viz., that if both 'A' and 'B' were true, 'A&B' would be true; otherwise, given any other combination of truth and falsity for its components, 'A&B' would be false; and, hence, that if 'A&B' were true, then 'A' would be, too. To what, then, do we owe the apparent necessity of claims like the last one?

The usual line is that, since we have in effect abstracted from the specific empirical content of the component sentences, the necessity must be owed instead to the remaining element of the compound, i.e., the ampersand and, more especially, the truth-functional portion of its allotted meaning-in-use. We have, according to tradition, entered the non-empirical, a priori realm of meaning-dependent necessities. But since we have gotten there by way of abstraction, it takes some great metaphysical leap of faith to suppose that we have achieved complete independence from the empirical, a posteriori domain. Given his allegiance to (what he hopes to pass off as merely) 'quasi-necessary' truths obtained by way of abstraction, there would seem to be no obvious route of escape for Peirce from an ontological commitment to empirical necessities.

In sum, Peirce's abstractive observation can be construed as a philosophically reasonable methodological procedure for logical, metaphysical, and other varieties of philosophical investigation. It is an important forebearer of the special thought experiments that are the stock in trade of much contemporary philosophizing in the ever more loosely-knit Anglo-American tradition. It asks us to consider, in effect, the consequences of certain counterfactual conditions, hypothetical situations, based upon our collective experience of, our observations concerning each and every extant variety of phenomena, all the while acknowledging that our grasp of these phenomena is mediated by language or, more generally, by signs. This procedure, by dint of whatever sensible argumentation we can muster, can enable us to draw sound lessons of a philosophical nature – including fallible, publicly corrigible statements about necessities, claims about what *must be*. Peirce himself would have wanted to object to making such claims in metaphysics or any other non-formal

field of philosophical inquiry; but he offers no good grounds for such an objection, and he could even plausibly be accused of unwitting commitment to such claims, to claims of empirical necessity, in his own formal science of semiotic.

Peirce does chart a philosophical course significantly at odds with the European Modern tradition and, perhaps most especially, with its Cartesian bearings. Most significantly, Peirce may be credited, first, with a radical revision of European Modern conceptions of experiences, with a view of them as mediated by signs, fraught with inferential processes, and bound up with actions; and, second, with highly distinctive conception of scientific as well as philosophical inquiry, a view of them as fallible and communal. In other words, no less than an exceptionally novel reconception of our basic (not so raw) materials and what we may reasonably be expected to be able do with them.

Following out the barest possible outline of the yarn Tejera wishes to spin, let's consider what happens after Peirce to the notion of experience. How does it develop in the philosophizing of Dewey? At first one will probably be struck more by the similarities than by the differences. Like Peirce, Dewey regards experience as mediated by signs. Like Peirce, Dewey identifies the meaning of those signs with habits. Like Peirce, Dewey suggests that there is a close affinity between experience and action.

But Peirce confines his claims about the affinity between experience and action to the suggestion that the cognition-ensconced habits he identifies with sign-meanings are inclinations to act. Dewey, on the other hand, rather thoroughly reconceives of experience as active (and essentially so). Experience is not, as the whole tradition of European Modern Philosophy would have it, some merely passive occurrence. Experience, according to Dewey, always has an active side: experiences don't simply happen to us; they are not impressed upon us like cuneiform inscriptions on a clay tablet; experiences are enacted by us. Epistemologically speaking, we are active knowers, not passive recipients, cognitive victims, of everything the world all too haphazardly throws our way. His view of experience as active is Dewey's single most valuable, philosophically most transformative insight. But it remains a lesson largely unlearned, the one path most lamentably not taken by the bulk of contemporary philosophers. Thus, to take one glaring instance, John McDowell, in tangling dialectically with Kant, goes out of his way to insist upon the passivity of experience:

In experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content's being available to one, before one has a choice in the matter. The content is not something one has put together oneself, as when one decides what to say about something. ... Because experience is passive, the involvement of conceptual capacities in experience does not by itself provide a good fit for the idea of a faculty of spontaneity. (McDowell 1994: p. 10-11.)

By the same token, Peirce's inferential processes operate unawares, below the level of any consciousness we might have of our own cognitions. Does this render

the cognitions passive? Dewey would deny that it does. McDowell's example about deciding what to say is more instructive than he realizes, though the proper lesson is contrary to the one he draws. The fact of the matter is that we ordinarily find, in deciding what to say, that the particular words we choose have "popped out unawares." Does this render our thoughts any the less spontaneous, any the more passive? Dewey teaches us otherwise. Habits, including those psychological dispositions that conjure up the *mot juste*, do not preclude our activities, including our linguistic acts; rather, such habits facilitate control of those acts, which are no less spontaneous and no more passive in consequence of this facilitation. We must not, to be sure, beg the question of whether experience really is active; but my point here is that McDowell certainly does not establish a negative answer to this question and that, in light of the Deweyan reconception of experience, McDowell's remarks, apparently unbeknownst to him, face a very compelling challenge.

Albeit a fallible philosophical construct, Dewey's reconception of experience might well be thought to rest firmly enough on its own uncommonly good sense; but if further support is wanted, it might be afforded by considerations about some of the pre-conditions for the possibility of individual experiencing. So, for example, unless there is consciousness of something, there is no experiencing whatever. And such consciousness, I should like to observe, is a matter of inherently active prehensiveness (or, grasping). It sometimes seems that the world just serves up experiences to us, like savory meats or bitter poisons; but cases where these things are rammed down our throats are, thankfully, somewhat exceptional. We must, by and large, do something ourselves. Our personal phenomenal transactions with the world are rarely complete until we have taken in what is offered up to us. The mythical Given, which McDowell depicts as the would-be-but-is-not purely sensory 'limit to freedom' for our conceptually schematized experience, would also have to be The Taken, the apprehended – though that is still a gross oversimplification. It is almost as though some sensory ingredients of perceptual experience are, blended together with some operative conceptual capacities, the means whereby we apprehend, while the range of experiencing extends not just to the objects of experience but also to some of the more blatant features of the very acts of experiencing them. Now it might arguably be possible to *approximate* the status of a pure patient, as it were suffering one's own experiences; but, generally speaking, in order to do such a thing, you'd really have to work at it or, failing that, have to be taken more or less by surprise, virtually seized by the experience. (N.B. Dewey does not wish to deny that experiencing involves some undergoing; rather, he wishes to affirm that experiencing essentially involves or amounts to some doing.)

Tejera's wish to promote non-reductive philosophizing is well addressed by further details of Dewey's notion of experience. Like James, Dewey emphasizes some sort of psychological law of habit ingredient to experience. But unlike James, Dewey makes no effort to reduce this law to one about physiological functioning. Dewey even goes so far as to say that experience resides not in the mind or brain but in nature. His version of the Jamesian Law of Habit is cast instead as a Principle

of Continuity of Experience. To wit, 'The basic characteristic of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences.' (Dewey 1938: p. 35) And these modifications are not just within ourselves but in the environment, which is physical, social, and cultural (among other things), so the persistence of experience is also not entirely within the individual. This principle is also importantly combined with another, his Principle of Interaction: "It assigns equal rights to both factors in experience – objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a *situation*." (Dewey 1938: p. 42)

Tejera is favorably disposed toward Dewey's later, mid-career proposal that the reception of his ideas could only stand to gain from systematically substituting the term 'culture' for his all too frequently misunderstood term 'experience.' And Tejera takes exception to R.B. Westbrook's assessment that 'such a terminological shift would not, on the face of it, have addressed the contention that his metaphysics (if not his metaphysical method) was anthropomorphic...' (Westbrook 1991: p. 346) I have quoted Westbrook's own words, because Tejera seems to have ignored the important parenthetical qualification, 'on the face of it'. Tejera notes *inter alia* that 'culture' does connote something 'much more public and objective' than 'experience'; but I can't help thinking that he is fighting a losing battle. Since Dewey wants specifically to invoke the anthropological sense of the word 'culture', he'd be hard put to avoid the charge of anthropomorphism by means of using that word. My own sense is that Dewey wishes to rub his critics' noses in the anthropocentrism of his metaphysical outlook. And what, after all, would count as 'public and objective' in the absence of a distinctively human perspective on Nature? Tejera is right to see some point in the switch, insofar as Dewey was intent on claiming an indispensable role for *objective conditions* in experience, and his claims to that effect seemed to have been lost on readers who got sidetracked by the subjective connotations of the term 'experience.' But I am inclined to think that Dewey himself seriously underestimated the contrary danger, that the substitution would lead many readers to overlook those *internal conditions* for which he wanted to claim an equally indispensable role in experiencing. Besides, I would fear that what I take to be his most valuable move away from the European Moderns, his reconception of experience as active would scarcely survive restatement in terms of 'culture.'

The proper heroes of Tejera's story of Modern American philosophy are surely Peirce and Dewey. He applauds them for 'not [serving] the interest of a readership that comes to philosophy with mostly logical training, with no interest in poetics, rhetoric, semiotics, or the humanities, and with an interest in the sciences that restricts its concern to the discourse of the exact sciences, and the approximations to this exactness of the social sciences.' (p. 187) A related, positive point is put by saying that these American Moderns are responding 'to the challenge of the new ideas coming from Newtonian and nineteenth-century physics as well as from

Darwinism [in the case of Peirce] and [of] ideas arising from new social experience [pursuant to the industrial revolution, in the case of Dewey].' (p. 187) All this is fine as far as it goes, but one might well wonder if similar things could not be said about Plato (as responding, antagonistically, to the social upheavals of democracy), Aristotle (as providing some sort of framework for the sciences of his day), and even Old World Moderns such as Descartes (who tried to reconcile the competing aims of the New Scientists and Elder Theologians of his time).

Peirce should nonetheless be credited with a bold new direction, but more by stepping outside of the history of science than by simply responding to contemporaneous advances within the sciences. In announcing the fallibilism of scientific inquiry, Peirce did not merely answer 'methodological questions which [such] advances provoked....' (p. 187) And while (in one sense of 'historicist') Peirce might be supposed to have noted some historicist trends that would eventuate in truth, his suggestion that truth is the opinion destined to be accepted by the community of scientists at the horizon of inquiry should not be interpreted quite so fatalistically and, I dare say, optimistically. He might have been supposing, rather, that this is the best we might hope to achieve in the way of truth. And if this reading seems slightly too pessimistic, then perhaps Peirce's suggestion should be understood in terms of his pragmatism. It is by now the standard interpretation that Peirce, in express contradistinction to James, did not give a pragmatic account of truth, but that stretches things a bit. Peirce is, in stating his own view of the matter, considering what possible consequences *for human inquiry* truth might have – given the fallibilism that he regards as inherent in inquiry. Final truth, opinion finally infallible, marks an end of inquiry.

REFERENCES

- Descartes, R. (1985 and 1984). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*: Volumes I and II, trans. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Collier Books.
- McDowell, J. (1994). *Mind and World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.
- Murphey, M. G. (1961). *The Development of Peirce's Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.
- Peirce, C.S. (1963). *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Volume V: *Pragmatism and Pragmaticism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.
- Scheffler, I. (1974). *Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Tejera, V. *American Modern. The Path Not Taken: Aesthetics, Metaphysics and Intellectual History in Classic American Philosophy*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996.
- Westbrook, R. B. (1991). *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.