

That rare faculty...and everyting that follows *Aquela “rara faculdade”...e suas implicações*

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Abstract: “The Rare Faculty” is an introductory analysis of how Peirce understood ideas to regulate experience and science. The implications of Peirce’s argument are rich for science and provide an alternative to current forms of scientific reductionism. Simply put, ideas matter! Good science and good philosophy recognize the power and influence of ideas on how we experience and understand the world.

Resumo: “A Rara Faculdade” é uma análise introdutória da compreensão de Peirce em relação ao modo pelo qual as idéias regulam a experiência e a ciência. As implicações de seu ponto de vista são muito ricas para a ciência e constituem uma alternativa para as formas atuais de reducionismo científico. Simplificando, as idéias importam! A boa ciência e a boa filosofia reconhecem o poder e a influência das idéias em nossa maneira de experienciar e compreender o mundo.

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Aim: I begin with a description and analysis of Peirce’s “rare faculty.” I show that the faculty is phenomenological and leads to certain irrefragable issues that must be resolved in further investigation. I extract what I take to be central to Peirce’s argument that these issues are real and unavoidable and then pursue his answer. Last I comment on some implications of Peirce’s view.

On several occasions Peirce refers to a “rare faculty” as essential to his philosophical task. This rare faculty was usually conceived as a phenomenological faculty that was necessary for extracting from the phenomena the fundamental characteristics that are never absent in any experience, be it dream, drug-induced illusion, sensory or mental, scientific, religious or everyday. He says in *On Phenomenology* and *The Basis of Pragmaticism in Phaneroscopy* clearly what this rare faculty involved:

“The first and foremost is that rare faculty, the faculty of seeing what stares one in the face, just as it presents itself, unreplaced by any interpretation, unsophisticated by any allowance for this or for that supposed modifying circumstance.”¹ And again Peirce describes it as “that rare faculty of looking out of his own eyes and seeing what stares him in the face.”² It will help us to understand what this faculty meant to Peirce by an example from *On Science and Natural Classes*. I will not move straight to my example but move through the text to show yet another way that Peirce conceived the pre-scientific reflection to be imperative for successful scientific investigation.

¹ EP2:147

² EP2:363

The first one hundred and seventy pages of the first chapter of the proposed “Minute Logic” were an invitation and introduction to the study of logic and also involved a survey of different logical methods employed throughout history. Peirce’s overall intention was to determine the systematic doctrine of logic, and in order to do that he had to choose a method among many. But before embarking on this task Peirce wrote a “pre-logical” paper, because it was necessary to reflect on the need for searching for such a doctrine. Peirce titled this paper “Chapter II, Prelogical Notations.”³ The first paragraph of the manuscript, absent from EP2, places this paper, MS 427, in the context of Peirce’s larger purpose. He explains in the title that this paper will be of the nature of a pre-logical reflection as prior to engaging in the central task of the “Minute Logic.” He says, “When the best method of doing a thing is in doubt, one of the best aids toward getting set upon the right path is to consider what need of doing it there is.”⁴ Peirce is of course speaking of the best method of “attaining truth,” namely doing logic.

This was an important part of inquiry for Peirce, and it will be central to our discussion. In *The Basis of Pragmaticism in Phaneroscopy* Peirce says,

But in order that a work of observation should bring in any considerable harvest, there must always be a preparation of thought, a consideration, as definite as may be, of what it is possible that observation should disclose. That is a principle familiar to every observer. Even if one is destined to be quite surprised, the preparation will be of mighty aid.⁵

Peirce comments in both papers that these considerations are axiomatic. It amounted to establishing a need for acting. We will see the importance that need plays in Peirce’s philosophy. Let it suffice now to say that by making pre-investigatory considerations or reflections Peirce is establishing the only logical reason there can be for acting. Those reasons he calls the possibilities for taking up the observation. Reason is not a matter of compulsion but of ideas. And so, ideas guide action, and a need is a very urgent species of reason demanding immediate attention.

He says that the need of a method of logic will arise upon a comparison of the study of logic with the “departments of the endeavor to attain truth” otherwise known as the sciences. One might ask why a need of doing logic would arise out of studying the other sciences? Implicit in this statement is Peirce’s notion of precision that stretches back to *On a New List of Categories*. Peirce defines precision as “attention to one element and neglect of the other... Precision is not a reciprocal process. It is frequently the case, that, while A cannot be prescindend from B, B can be prescindend from A.”⁶ This concept of precision has as a rule that one must not disregard the relationships of logical dependence when one class of phenomena is necessarily dependent on another. Since Peirce was anticipating his hierarchy of the sciences, he understood that logic was a necessarily more fundamental investigation of which all the sciences were dependent on. He concludes that investigating the subsidiary departments of “the attempt to attain truth” and understanding how they interact with one another will uncover the need we have of a method of logic, because the success of the sciences will be dependent consciously or unconsciously on their use of a pure method.

³ MS 427. The first paragraph is not found in the EP2 section. The editors note that it does not pertain to the matters presented. But it does provide the reader with the larger context of Peirce’s purpose. And purpose is important in this paper.

⁴ EP2: 115.

⁵ EP2:362

⁶ 1.549

Before being able to compare logic with the departments of science and the departments of science with themselves, one must have a classification of the sciences. Peirce writes this chapter with three goals: First he will establish what a natural class is. Second he will establish what the natural class of science is. Third he will classify the sciences in order to compare and analyze their methods and problems, which they are defined by, in order to extract the necessary need for a systematic doctrine of logic. One need (having a method of logic to attain truth), leads to another need (the comparison of the sciences), which leads to another need (the classification of the sciences), which in turn leads to the investigation about which types of classifications are most appropriate. Since one's ultimate need is to attain truth, a true and natural classification of the sciences is desired.

Peirce next embarks on his reflections that I will summarize this way: First, that which is defined as natural is defined by its final cause. A final cause is general, vague, and expresses longitude or growth. Second, final causation is cause by idea. Objects are the result of law and force, and the idea as final cause mediates between the cause (law) and the effect (force). It follows that ideas cause their objects to exist in the universe, because without the mediation between law and force no object would exist as such. It further follows that ideas have life and power and are able to work out physical and psychical results. Now, Peirce does not mean any extreme idealism or intellectualism. Far from it, he tells us that he means to understand a natural class as how we experience it. He says,

What I mean by the idea's conferring existence upon the individual members of the class is that it confers upon them the power of working out results in this world, that it confers upon them, that is to say, organic existence, in one word, life.⁷

If Peirce has meant to lay all our questions to rest one might ask if he was being ironic. But our questions are not settled any further when Peirce offers his proof which he states this way:

That it is so is a matter of experiential fact. But whether it is so or not is not a question to be settled by producing a microscope or telescope or any recondite observations of any kind. Its evidence *stares us all in the face* every hour of our lives. Nor is any ingenious reasoning needed to make it plain.⁸ (Italics mine).

Peirce's proof that ideas confer natural existence and organic life on their objects is that we only need open our eyes. For those who are not yet clear on Peirce's point, let us explore the nature of these ideas and of course what stares us all in the face. Our conclusions are important, because something may stare us in the face through the open eye or through the microscope or telescope lense. I take Peirce to be saying that this most rare faculty is actually the necessary precursor to establishing our interpretive scheme for experiencing life and growing knowledge.

Peirce offers some hints as to the nature of experience in *On Science and Natural Class*. He says that the objects that exist in the universe, and therefore those that we might conceive of experiencing all have the qualities of efficient and final causation. In fact, for Peirce final causation is the only causation. Everything else is blind force. Any object or event is the result of constraint and force—law and freedom. But that relationship itself is mediated by the idea that governs the idea of the existence of the object.

⁷ EP2:124 (1902).

⁸ EP2:123 (1902).

Peirce argues that what we experience in a broad sense is objects behaving in a general way, but matter would have no regularity if it were not governed by ideas.⁹ Now one might argue that he could explain the object's behavior as a result of the combination of its parts. But Peirce argues that if quantity of parts were to constitute regularity, then as soon as another part or event was added the regularity would be broken and need to be reconceived based on the influx of new events.¹⁰ This is why regularity must exceed multitude by being regularity of a kind, which is regularity by an idea. The idea of the regularity approaches lawfulness and approximates that as its end. Therefore, the end of all regularity is in some sense law. Or put in another way: Regularity is the effect of the mediation of law and force by final cause.

Let us establish one broader definition of our experience of objects and get rid of one myth about experience. The myth of the present is such as long as the present is conceived as some individual indivisible point. There is no such thing in our experience. "The consciousness of the Present is then that of a struggle over what shall be; and thus we emerge from the study with a confirmed belief that it is the Nascent State of the Actual."¹¹ The present is an event consisting of the whole universe. Any consciousness of experience of a more defined and knowable type is generalization. Peirce describes existence as the category of Secondness. It is the experience of resistance and struggle as modification of our ways of thinking conceived as the brutal reality that the world we govern (our minds) are intruded upon forcefully by another world (our external environment) sometimes whether we like it or not.¹² This is one way of conceiving the situation that stares us in the face:

He [anyone] defends himself from the angles of hard fact by clothing himself with a garment of contentment and habituation. Were it not for this garment, he would every now and then find his internal world rudely disturbed and his fiats set at naught by brutal inroads of ideas from without. I call such forcible modification of our ways of thinking, the influence of the world of fact, *experience*... Instead of waiting for experience to come at untoward times, he provokes it when it can do no harm and changes the government of his internal world accordingly.¹³

Peirce describes clearly and concisely that he means no idealism when he says that ideas give objects organic existence. But instead of answering our questions, Peirce has made them more significant. This is the classical problem of mind and world. How does Peirce mean to convey our ability to predict experience and avoid catastrophes? Certainly we do so by gaining knowledge about our experience.

Let us conceive our aim or end, our purpose we might say, as successful mediation of our experience avoiding to the greatest degree possible catastrophe and enabling us to pursue other possible aims, and let us conceive the whole package as some form of the ultimate good. This will involve self-control. Specifically it will involve control of our environment through knowledge. If we experience the world, we desire to keep that experience and save it for further use. How will we do this? Peirce tells us this about our perceptual judgments: "These are necessarily veracious, in greater or lesser degree according to the effort made, but there is no meaning in saying

⁹ EP2:123 (1902).

¹⁰ EP2:269 (1903).

¹¹ EP2:359 (1905).

¹² EP2:369 (1905).

¹³ EP2:370 (1905).

that they have any other truth than veracity, since perceptual judgment can never be repeated.”¹⁴ And this I take to be the crux of the matter for Peirce.

Each perceptual truth may be veracious or trustworthy in so far as I exerted some effort in making it so. It follows that veracity depends on effort, and effort depends on method. Therefore, any truth or falsity that can be ascribed to any individual or set of perceptual judgments is dependent on the logical correctness of the argument that consists in the analysis of the conditions of the judgment determining its veracity. But we have moved beyond experience and entered another realm. For to suppose reflection on perceptual judgments is to suppose a mind in thought representing some experience as it was in the past. “It appears, then, that logical goodness is simply the excellence of argument”¹⁵ which is of three kinds: Abduction, Induction and Deduction. If it be possible to argue deductively that the perceptual judgment was veracious then it will be established for all purposes beyond doubt. But deductive reasoning is necessary reasoning and is of the nature of mathematics which involves abstract general reasoning. Peirce says,

If you object that there can be no immediate consciousness of generality, I grant that. If you add that one can have no direct experience of the general, I grant that as well. Generality, Thirdness, pours in upon us in our very perceptual judgments, and all reasoning, so far as it depends on necessary reasoning, that is to say, mathematical reasoning, turns upon the perception of generality and continuity at every step.¹⁶

Again, for Peirce our experience of existence is of both the efficient and final realm. It is the idea of the object that we take in and this idea is general. It is this notion of the general import of ideas from experience that enables Peirce to consider logic as able to analyze experience for its veracity. For Peirce ultimately veracity and logical correctness are one and the same. To say that *p is true or false* is the same as to say *p has been found to be true and false*. Truth involves logical analysis. We have seen that the “rare faculty” that allows us to see what is staring us in our face enables us to see that the nature of experience is ideal and general. As far as we understand experience to have continuity it must be general. Let us turn then to Peirce’s logic for an analysis of the ideas we apparently must pay attention to in order to conserve experience for the prediction of future experience and avoidance of catastrophe.

Peirce says that logical goodness is the goodness of representation. What this means is not immediately clear. But we noted above that representing our experience was necessary for logical analysis and that logical analysis was necessary to verify the truth of our knowledge. To represent is to bring into the present, back from some point reached or back to a starting point. A representamen is the result or product of the act of representation.¹⁷ Therefore, in order to secure some sense of future certainty about our potential success in the world, we must have some knowledge of the possibility of the future, and knowledge by its very nature is representation.¹⁸ In Peircean terminology the action of representation is called semiosis and the representamen is commonly referred to as a sign. I will use these terms to designate Peirce’s logic from here on.

¹⁴ EP2:204 (1903).

¹⁵ EP2:205 (1903).

¹⁶ EP2:207 (1903).

¹⁷ <http://dictionary.oed.com/> (2005) *Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. *re-*, *represent*, *present*, *representation*, *representamen*, *-amen*

¹⁸ EP2:271 (1903).

Peirce says several things about signs: their mode of being is repetition,¹⁹ a sign is not a real thing but only exists in replica²⁰ and “the repetitory character of the representamen involves as a consequence that it is essential to a representamen that it should contribute to the determination of another representamen distinct from itself.”²¹ If I import an idea from perceptual judgments and it represents that object to my mind, then the only way that any sign can have an impact on any other sign in my mind is by virtue of this rule. And that idea must not leave the object when I partake of it, but it must be general and capable of replicating itself both in the object and in my mind and any other mind that is in need of having that object representing it. Now Peirce says, “Every representamen is related or is capable of being related to a reacting thing, its object, and every representamen embodies, in some sense, some quality, which may be called its *signification*...”²² So, this quality that the idea or sign communicates to my mind is the meaning of the sign. Since Peirce says of meaning that it involves reference to a purpose, we may understand, again, that an idea or sign is a final cause of an object when it communicates some purpose.²³

The signs, then, that we are seeking to lay hold of are ideal causes, exist in replica, are general and are necessary for representation toward knowledge. The nature of experience that stares us in the face is the governance of both law and force by these ideal causes. Now, we can have many experiences of existence without paying attention or have them very rarely. Signs can be possibilities, actualities or laws. Peirce calls these signs Qualisigns, Sinsigns and Legisigns. But the only one of these signs that is general, and so has the capacity for replication is a Legisign, a Sinsign being an actual thing, and a Qualisign a mere feeling or possibility. The only signs we are interested in are signs that are general and exist as replications. Peirce tells us that the Legisign is a conventional sign that represents some law usually established by humans. These are important signs because they represent laws already established. A law by its nature regulates and governs. But a Legisign can represent an object that is of Iconic, Indexical or Symbolic nature. Again, the important ideas that are the final causes of the natural classes of objects existing in the universe are the ideas that we want to regulate experience by. So, if the Legisign is a sign representing a possibility (Icon) then it is of no immediate interest, because it is not a single possibility we are after. The same holds for the Legisign that represents an existing object (Index). This sign would be a law that only represented “that” object but we would need a new sign for every new object however similar. The only Legisign that represents its object as a general object is a Symbolic Legisign. These Symbolic Legisigns represent the laws or conditions for the existence of a class and are replicated in the individuals of the class. These are the important signs that are the ideal causes of the natural classes referred to above.

So you see the desire of thought is to regulate experience of existence efficiently. The sign desires to grow into more general and more law-like classification and by this it gains more power to effect existing things. A sign as a defining idea may begin its life only representing a possibility until it and the facts are realized and it is able to produce another sign into a mind, possibly gaining significance and spreading its influence through replication. It may continue its life as a sign as a possibility of some thing that is referred to on occasion to represent other objects, and it continues to

¹⁹ EP2:203 (1903).

²⁰ EP2:303 (1904).

²¹ EP2:203 (1903).

²² Ep2:203 (1903).

²³ EP2:218 (1903).

replicate and gain significance. If it gains enough power over its object and so over the minds of its interpretants then it may take on a greater classification. It may become powerful enough to exist as a general representing many possibilities or things and being replicated each time it is. The sign has a life of its own and this is just the beginning. When Peirce speaks of the life of a symbol in *The Ethics of Terminology* he speaks of the life of a word in a very real sense. It has a history, it has grown and taken on more significance, and it deserves to be respected for its power if we are the type of people who respect longevity, success and life. The strength of the symbol is that its interpretation is minimally secured. It comes prepackaged as offering its own interpretation. This is a level of generality as opposed to vagueness that the other signs did not offer.

Ultimately Symbolic Legisigns will communicate information or meaning to a mind that will be of the character of a Rheme, a Dicent Sign or an Argument. The Rheme communicates information that leaves the interpretant very open. The Dicent Sign is the nature of an assertion or judgment, and so represents the object to have a certain character. The Argument determines the interpretant completely, leaving no need for guessing. This brings us full circle to the power of logical analysis of perceptual judgments and the governing of secondness or existence by thirdness or generality. Peirce says,

I must and do admit that a symbol cannot exert any real force. Still, I maintain that every sufficiently complete symbol governs things, and that symbols alone do this. I mean that though it is not a force, it is a law... a law is not a mere common character of events.²⁴

A law is a “reason for predicting that an event will have a certain character although the events known to have that character have not other real connection with it than the law.”²⁵

This is a fitting end to our investigation. Let us summarize what we have found to be true. We found first that Peirce recognized a rare faculty that embodied the ability to see what is right in front of one’s face. We took Peirce to mean by this that the evidence for his claims to ideal causation and all that it implied about the nature of ideas in *On Science and Natural Classes* had nothing to do with practical scientific investigation but in fact preceded such a task. The observation Peirce alluded to was that our experience of regularity depended on the mediation of the relationship between law and force or constraint and freedom by Ideas as final causes. Instead of Peirce positing some extra/supernatural purposes acting in nature we found that experience itself is general and was not intelligible without the import of ideas. We then found that our own success in our aim to avoid catastrophe was dependent on thought, which is logic, which is semiotic, which involves the critical life of replicating representations. These “being represented” only exist in replication and have a life of their own. Peirce created a classification of signs that would enable us to understand some of the general characters and also the growth of signs. Last we found that indeed it was symbols that were the ideas giving organic life to existence, and we understood that these signs had their special power, because they had grown to be completely conventional and could represent whole classes or kinds of objects. Ultimately what stares us in the face is the positive conceivability of the life of symbols.

²⁴ EP2:314 (1904).

²⁵ EP2:314 (1904).

I have not discussed the metaphysical issues of the life of signs. I have conceived this largely as a phenomenological investigation of “what stares us in the face.” The metaphysical implications are subordinate to our willingness to train ourselves in the seriously artistic rare faculty of accurate representation of our experience prescindend from the very laws we have sought to justify. Peirce’s ultimate point is that before the many divisions of experience that are possible he finds,

In particular, the synechist will not admit that physical and psychical phenomena are entirely distinct, -- whether as belonging to different categories of substance, or as entirely separate sides of one shield, -- but will insist that all phenomena are of one character, though some are more mental and spontaneous, others more material and regular. Still, all alike present that mixture of freedom and constraint, which allows them to be, nay, makes them to be teleological, or purposive.²⁶

Our experience is by its nature general, and every slice of life is capable of further division.

The absolute individual cannot only not be realized in sense or thought, but cannot exist, properly speaking. For whatever lasts for any time, however short, is capable of logical division, because in that time, it will undergo some change in its relations. But what does not exist for any time, however short, does not exist at all. All, therefore, that we perceive or think, or that exists, is general.²⁷

The regularity that we experience everyday is itself the result of defining ideas that are of the nature of laws. If we will admit this much then there is a common ground for a metaphysical or even scientific discussion. But if we cannot admit this then we live in very different worlds indeed. “And they will hardly know what to say to one another; for neither has seen the world in which the other lives.”²⁸

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²⁶ 7.570 This was written in *Immortality in the Light of Synechism* (1892).

²⁷ 3.93n1.

²⁸ EP2:131 (1902)

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