

THE IMPLICATIONS OF PEIRCE'S MARRIAGE OF SEMIOTICS AND PRAGMATISM

AS IMPLICAÇÕES DO CASAMENTO DA SEMIÓTICA E DO PRAGMATISMO EM PEIRCE

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the implications of Peirce's marriage of pragmatism and semiosis. In providing an account of Peirce's pragmatism and his theory of signs up until the publication of "Pragmatism," a comparison can be made between these two theories as described independently of one another, and as described in terms of one another. From this, it will be shown that the character of Peirce's pragmatism, when formulated in semiotic terms in his essay "Pragmatism," changes into a semiotic principle acknowledging reality and possibility. In order for signs to continually develop and produce interpretants which themselves become signs, there must be supposed an end to the sign chain, hence the final logical interpretant. It is in his attempt to prove pragmatism in semiotic terms that Peirce comes across this need of a final logical interpretant. Pragmatism, then, ceases to be just a theory meaning. It becomes a theory that explains the very nature of semiosis.

Keywords: Semiotics. Pragmatism.

Resumo: O objetivo deste trabalho é explorar as implicações do casamento do pragmatismo com a semiose em Peirce. Ao fornecer uma explanação do pragmatismo de Peirce e sua teoria dos signos até a publicação de "Pragmatismo", pode-se fazer uma comparação entre estas duas teorias como descritas independentemente uma da outra e como descritas em termos recíprocos. Daí demonstraremos que a natureza do pragmatismo de Peirce, quando formulado em termos semióticos em seu ensaio "Pragmatismo", transforma-se em um princípio semiótico que reconhece realidade e possibilidade. Para que os signos se desenvolvam continuamente e produzam interpretantes que, por sua vez, se transformam em signos, deve-se supor um fim para a cadeia de signos, levando ao interpretante lógico final. É em sua tentativa de provar o pragmatismo em termos semióticos que Peirce se depara com esta necessidade de um interpretante lógico final. O pragmatismo, então, deixa de ser apenas um significado teórico. Torna-se uma teoria que explica a natureza absoluta da semiose.

Palavras-chave: Semiótica. Pragmatismo.

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Introduction

Peirce's pragmatism and theory of signs are paramount to his philosophy. Pragmatism determines the meanings of difficult concepts by considering their practical effects, while his theory of signs attempts to explain consciousness and experience. His theory of signs is triadic in structure, consisting of signs, objects, and interpretants. All thought, he claims, occurs in signs. These signs serve as mediators between objects and interpretants by conveying the form of the object to some mind, thereby producing an effect that serves as a new sign of the same object. Being that concepts are thoughts, it seems natural to draw the connection between pragmatism and Peirce's theory of signs. Pragmatism is essentially a method for interpreting a certain type of sign – the concept – by looking for a certain type of interpretant – the practical effects. Peirce, however, is not explicit in this relationship between pragmatism and his theory of signs until his 1906 essay, "Pragmatism," in which he

attempts to prove pragmatism in terms of his theory of signs. This essay is recognized as being representative of Peirce's final development of his semiotics. It is in this period that his theory of signs comes to recognize the need for a final logical interpretant – the ideal understanding of an object that occurs when all possible inquiry has been satisfied. In proving his pragmatism in semiotic terms, Peirce states, "The deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit...is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant." This statement appears to be inconsistent with earlier versions of Peirce's pragmatism and theory of signs. The idea of a final logical interpretant seems incompatible with the generative power of the sign, and Peirce did not refer to practical effects as habits in his initial account of the pragmatic maxim.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the implications of Peirce's marriage of pragmatism and semiosis. In providing an account of Peirce's pragmatism and his theory of signs up until the publication of "Pragmatism," a comparison can be made between these two theories as described independently of one another, and as described in terms of one another. From this, it will be shown that the character of Peirce's pragmatism when formulated in semiotic terms in his essay "Pragmatism," changes into a semiotic principle acknowledging reality and possibility. In order for signs to continually develop and produce interpretants which themselves become signs, there must be supposed an end to the sign chain, hence the final logical interpretant. It is in his attempt to prove pragmatism in semiotic terms that Peirce comes across this need of a final logical interpretant. Pragmatism, then, ceases to be just a theory meaning. It becomes a theory that explains the very nature of semiosis.

1. Peirce's Theory of Signs

Peirce sees philosophy as endeavoring to explain the universe. In 1868, in "On a New List of Categories," Peirce makes his first attempt at drafting a theory of signs. Dissatisfied with Kant and Aristotle's universal categories, Peirce provides his own list, comprised of three types of experience: Quality, Relation, and Representation. These three categories are then used to differentiate amongst three types of representation: likenesses, indices, and symbols. Representations (what later become known as signs) are thus a fundamental category of experience.¹

Though Peirce does not, at this point refer to his first category of experience as "Firstness," it is evident that Peirce's listing of his categories as "1st, 2nd, and 3rd" is intended in the same sense as "Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness." Firstness is that which is present, in general, and unmediated. Peirce compares the concept of Firstness with that of traditional philosophical meaning of "substance." The substance of a thing is its "it-ness;" it is the general recognition of the object as itself, before any other determination can be made of it. It is that very first attention we pay to an object – that very moment when we become aware of its presence and identity. Nothing can be said of this object yet, for Firstness is the most basic and primary category of experience. Before we can ascribe a predicate to an object, and thereby experience Secondness, we must first recognize it as itself, and it is this experience that is Firstness. Representations that occur out of Firstness relate to their objects in some quality, and are therefore called "Likenesses" by Peirce.² He later comes to call this type of representation an icon, or "a sign which stands for its object because as a thing perceived it

¹ Fisch, Max H. "Peirce's General Theory of Signs," in *Peirce, Semiotic, and Pragmatism, Essays by Max H. Fisch*, edited by Kenneth Lane Ketner and Christian J.W. Kloesel. Bloomington: IU Press, 1986, p. 324.

² Peirce, Charles Sanders. "On a New List of Categories," in *The Essential Peirce*, vol.1, edited by The Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1992, p. 7.

excites an idea naturally allied to the idea that object would excite.”³ Photographs are good examples of icons in that they are intended to capture all of the qualities of a specific event.

Secondness is the experience of contrast or resistance. As Peirce states, “Empirical psychology has established the fact that we can know a quality only by means of its contrast with or similarity to another.”⁴ The only way that we can come to distinguish something is by having something with which to contrast it – to differentiate it as itself. Once a correlate is introduced to what is present in general, it interrupts that immediacy, providing qualities to contrast with it. What was once so generally present that it was identifiable only inasmuch as it was itself is now experienced as it is in relation to something else. This simple act of comparing and contrasting seems to involve just two elements: the related thing, which Peirce calls “the ground,” and the correlate.⁵ Representations of this kind are what Peirce calls indices. Two things are brought into relation by some agreement of fact. But, as Peirce notes, there is a third element required to facilitate the comparison – the interpretant. One of the examples he uses to illustrate this dynamic is the French noun *homme* and the English *man* referencing the same correlate. We know that *homme* will translate to *man* because we know that they both refer to the same object. The identification of *man* as representing *homme* signifies that the word *homme* refers to the same thing as the word *man*. There is, then, a representation born of a representation. Peirce, at this early stage in his theory of signs, calls this mediating representation an interpretant because “it fulfills the office of an interpreter.”⁶ An interpreter is a type of insurance – its role is identified as representing accurately to some recipient a conveyed form. This account raises the question of what it means for something to represent. What is the nature of this activity whereby form is communicated from mind to mind? Peirce claims that he is employing the term representation in such a broad sense that he cannot define it.⁷ Rather, he provides examples of instances of representation,

a word represents a thing to the conception in the mind of the hearer, a portrait represents the person for whom it is intended to the conception of recognition, a weathercock represents the direction of the wind to the conception of him who understands it, a barrister represents his client to the judge and jury whom he influences.⁸

Words, qualities, indications, and arguments are all examples of representation. It is this category of experience Peirce identifies as Thirdness. A third is something that is related to two other objects in such a way that one of these two objects stands in the same relation to the third that the third stands in relation to the other object. That is, a third mediates between two objects, causing one to relate to the object which it is standing for in the same way as it relates to that object.⁹ Representations of this kind are what Peirce calls symbols. The words *homme* and *man* are examples of symbols in that we can interpret them as standing for their objects in virtue of some regulatory relationship between the sign and the object it signifies.

Peirce has thus sketched out his first division of signs – icons, indices, and symbols. While his terminology undergoes some changes over time, and his categories of signs expand,

³ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Of Reasoning in General,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, edited by The Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1992, p. 13.

⁴ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “On a New List of Categories,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol.1, edited by The Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1992, p. 5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p.6.

this division between icons, indices, and symbols, and Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness proves to be fundamental to this general theory of signs.

In 1895, in “Of Reasoning in General,” Peirce offers his first formal definition of a sign. He defines it as

a thing which serves to convey knowledge of some other thing, which it is said to stand for or represent. This thing is called the object of the sign; the idea in the mind that the sign excites, which is a mental sign of the same object, is called an interpretant of the sign.¹⁰

According to this definition, a sign is something which fulfills the purpose of passing along knowledge. It accomplishes this task by acting on behalf of a certain object towards the mind. This representation, then, arouses an interpretant, or idea, which, by virtue of its representative nature, is another sign of the same original object.

The second way in which a sign can stand for its object is by being an index of it. Indices can be thought of as fact-based relations between a sign and object. There is some truly existent link in place, or, as Peirce notes, some compulsion which leaves the mind no other choice but to pay attention to the object of the sign. An example of index would a Richter scale reading of an earthquake. If an earthquake produces a Richter scale reading of 4.3, that reading indicates the amount of energy released by the movement of tectonic plates. The connection is fact-based, and the reading of 4.3 in no way perceptually resembles the energy released, but rather possesses a direct, actual relationship with it. A pointing finger can be considered an example of an index that compels the mind to pay attention to its object. Its presence directs the mind toward something else.

The third way in which a sign can accomplish this act of “standing for” is by being a symbol. A symbol can be understood as standing for the unperceivable connection between icons and indices. The two cannot, as Peirce notes, assert anything on their own. They can be connected to one another, but it is only by virtue of the symbol that they can become concepts. The symbol stands for the triadic relation itself; it represents the connection of the icons and indices. It is a rule or convention that defines itself. Looking up a word in a bilingual dictionary to find its equivalent would be an example of this relationship. It is only by the conventions of language that such an act of relating two words could take place. The symbol, then, is the linguistic convention; the connective tissue itself.

From this first definition, then, it can be summarized that a sign is one of three related elements. It is determined and provoked by an object, which the sign seeks to represent. The sign in turn provokes and determines an interpretant, or idea, which then also becomes a sign of the original object. The representation can occur in three ways: icon, index, and symbol, with the symbol being the connective glue.

In 1903, Peirce’s Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism illustrated significant developments in the division of signs. His essay, “Nomenclature and Divisions of Triadic Relations” expands his class of three signs to a class of ten. Depending on whether a sign signifies by being a quality, existent, or law, it is a qualisign, sinsign, or legisign, respectively. Peirce engages in a close examination of the constituents of the sign process – the sign, object and interpretant – as they function within it. By looking at aspects of the dynamic such as how signs “stand for,” in relation to both their objects and interpretants, the degree to which the form of an object is conveyed, and how the effects produced by the sign stand in relation

¹⁰ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Of Reasoning in General,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, edited by The Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1992, p. 13.

to the object as a sign, Peirce can account for many more types of signs than he could in his earlier accounts.

Signs do not employ all of their features when signifying, but rather a certain one depending on the object they are representing. Signs that represent their objects by being of a certain quality are qualisigns. Those that stand for their objects by way of some existent fact are sinsigns, and those that represent by being a law or convention is a legisign. An example of a qualisign can be seen in a photograph. While it possesses many other qualities other than what it depicts (such as its chemical consistency or rectangular shape), it is only what it depicts on its face that does the act of representing its object. The noise of a glass shattering as it hits the floor is an example of a sinsign in that it indicates to someone in the other room that something has been broken. A legisign can be seen at work in something like a traffic light, which stands for its object by way of certain rules surrounding its use. After a continued examination of the role of objects, signs, and interpretants in representation, Peirce ultimately arrives at ten classes of signs, consisting of rhemes, icons, qualisigns, sinsigns, legisigns, dicent signs, indices, icons, symbols, and delomes. The next major development in his theory of signs occurs in his 1906 essay "Pragmatism," when he formulates pragmatism in semiotic terms. After a survey of Peirce's pragmatism, this development will be assessed in full.

2. Pragmatism

Peirce's pragmatism emerges in his 1878 article for *Popular Science Monthly*, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear". He provides a method by which we can gain the highest level of clarity in our ideas. Borrowing from Descartes and Leibniz's principles of clarity, Peirce comes up with his own theory of clarity, which he believes can reach a level of clarity far beyond Descartes' "distinctness."¹¹ This theory consists of three grades, the third of which - the pragmatic maxim, represents the highest stage of understanding.

In his previous essay, "The Fixation of Belief", Peirce, adhering to Alexander Bain's definition, accounts for belief as the willingness to act.¹² We form our beliefs by being in doubt. When we are in doubt about something, it is irritating because we are in a state of suspense. If, however, we form a belief, a willingness to act, then we remove the irritation because we remove the doubt. Once that belief is fixated, we can act. Without that belief, without a willingness to act, we are simply at a loss for action. There is, then, a passage from doubt to belief that is spurred by the irritation that accompanies doubt. Peirce's account of doubt is distinct from Descartes' in that his does not refer to forced, critical doubt, but rather something that occurs at an unnoticeable level.¹³ His statement, "It is as if I had described the phenomena as they appear under a mental microscope," is a metaphor for the ephemeral conditions under which the passage from doubt to belief can occur. Even the faintest hesitation stirs up the mind so that it can establish a belief and thereby act. We also imagine what it would be like to establish beliefs in certain doubtful states, which, according to Peirce, is part of what inspires us to make scientific inquiries. All thought, then, is brought about in order to pass from the irritating state of belief into the quiet state of belief.

It is in this movement from doubt to belief that Peirce observes his categories at work. Using an example involving music and the perception of separate notes within an "air," Peirce

¹¹ Peirce, Charles Sanders. "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in *The Essential Peirce*, vol.1, edited by The Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1992, p. 127.

¹² Fisch, Max H. Fisch, Max. "Alexander Bain and the Genealogy of Pragmatism" in *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism*. Bloomington: IU Press, 1986, p. 96.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 128

distinguishes between those objects which we are “immediately conscious of,” and those we are “mediately conscious of.”¹⁴ Sensations are objects we are immediately conscious of. They are, in Peirce’s words, “completely present at every instant so long as they last.”¹⁵ Thoughts are objects we are medially conscious of. Peirce accounts for these as “actions having beginning, middle, and end, and consist in congruence in the succession of sensations which flow through the mind.”¹⁶ These distinctions of consciousness correspond to the categories of experience Peirce set forth in “On a New List of Categories”. Before we can predicate any subject, we must first recognize the subject as such through what Peirce calls “a community of quality.”¹⁷ That which is present in general and whose mere presence as itself is acknowledged is that which we are immediately conscious of. Mediate consciousness corresponds to Peirce’s third category of experience. All thought occurs in mediation, meaning that it consists in a string of interpretations. Thought, then, is the consistent undercurrent of our sensation.

Thought’s function, according Peirce, is solely to produce belief. While thought may produce results other than belief, such as feelings of frustration or enjoyment, these are merely correlated with thought. To attain the satisfaction of belief is what causes thought. Belief is satisfying because it removes the irritation of doubt. When we are in doubt about something, our ability to act is suspended. If belief is the willingness to act, and doubt is the absence of belief, then when we are in doubt, we cannot act. Not being able to act causes frustration, which causes thought to step in and settle the matter by establishing a belief, just as a judge is called in to resolve an impasse between two quarrelling parties. These beliefs in turn institute in rules for our conduct, or habits. Belief, therefore, is the cessation of doubt and the establishment of habit. That it is of the nature of a habit entails that there will be future doubt and thought, as a rule of action can only be a rule if there is action which can adhere to it. Peirce develops this notion of habit later in his 1906 formulation of the pragmatic principle, where the full metaphysical import of this account of habit comes to fruition.

Peirce’s pragmatic maxim states

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.

The meaning of a concept, then, amounts to our conception of its practical effects. If a concept is a thought, and all thought is aimed at producing beliefs, which are habits, then when it comes to determining the meaning of a concept, we can best describe it in terms of the habits to which it gives rise.

Peirce makes a claim in this initial explication of pragmatism that he will later repudiate, and this repudiation proves to be a key development in his pragmatism. He asks us to suppose of a diamond resting securely at the bottom of the ocean. No one will ever touch this diamond, let alone test for its hardness. Can this diamond, then, be described as “hard?” Peirce, in this early formation of pragmatism, claims that it cannot. If it is not put to the test, we cannot call it hard. In his later pragmatism, Peirce claims that he was mistaken in his earlier assertion. Having shed his nominalism, Peirce develops his conception of the “real.” He believes that though the conditions for the diamond to be touched do not exist; they are real in that they are conceivable. There is a sense in which we can theoretically scratch the

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 129

¹⁵ Ibid..

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 7, p. 269.

diamond. In order for something to be real, then, it does not have to exist. The hardness of the diamond at the bottom of the ocean is real, just as griffins, unicorns, and leprechauns are real. This development marks Peirce's shift from pragmatism to pragmaticism, and plays an integral role in his proof of pragmatism.

What is interesting to note, however, is that the pragmatism Peirce sets forth in this 1878 essay does not provide justification for the pragmatic maxim as a logical principle, which is exactly what Peirce takes it to be. As Paul Forster, author of "The Logic of Pragmatism: A Neglected Argument for Peirce's Pragmatic Maxim" notes, Peirce's account of pragmatism in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" is incomplete.¹⁸ It does not, as Peirce states in his own words, derive "from a logical and non-psychological study of the essential nature of signs."¹⁹ If Peirce is not explicit in the logic that underlies the pragmatic maxim as it appears in 1878, then how do we go about determining how Peirce came up with it in the first place? According to Forster, Peirce's early work in logic contributes to this initial formulation of the pragmatic maxim. Because Peirce accounts for the pragmatic maxim as a logical principle, Forster contends that an examination of what Peirce sees as necessary to justify a logical principle will allow us to determine if the pragmatic maxim qualifies as such. The pragmatic maxim, constructed as a logical principle, is a fortiori, meaning that his remarks about logic in general apply with greater certainty to the pragmatic maxim because it is the principle underlying them. The maxim must also be a priori in order to avoid the circularity that accompanies an appeal to experiential knowledge as justification for logical principles (as experiential knowledge presupposes the truth of these logical principles). The pragmatic maxim, then, cannot rest solely on the a posteriori claims set forth in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear". Forster also notes that the pragmatic maxim must also be formal. Peirce is adamant in his claim that pragmatism makes no claims about the truth of things. What he means by this is that the pragmatic maxim allows for claims that can be deemed true or false, but it does not attempt to be any sort of arbiter in this regard. As Forster states, "The maxim delimits meaningful possibilities but does not describe what is the case."²⁰ It allows for objective claims to be made but it does not state what these objective claims are. Max Fisch also makes note of this, claiming that Peirce's pragmatism entails realism.²¹

Peirce claims that he came about the pragmatic maxim by way of a study of signs, or representations, such as that found in "On a New List of Categories." There is, then, an explicit link between Peirce's theory of signs and his pragmatism. While he did not make this link clear in his 1878 essay, as he admits, his writings provide us with the tools we need to establish this link on our own. In "On a New List of Categories," Peirce states

Logic is said to treat of second intentions as applied to first...Now, second intentions are the objects of the understanding considered as representations, are symbols, that is, signs which are at least potentially general.²²

Logical principles apply only to symbols, as arguments can be built from them and not from icons or indices. Symbols, then, are those representations Peirce is concerned with in that they are cognitively meaningful. Forster contends that

¹⁸ Forster, Paul. "The Logic of Pragmatism: A Neglected Argument for Peirce's Pragmatic Maxim". *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 39.4. Fall, 2003. 526.

¹⁹ Peirce, Charles Sanders. *The New Elements of Mathematics*, vol. 2. 1904, p. 520-521.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 527.

²¹ Fisch, Max. "Peirce's Progress from Nominalism toward Realism," in *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism*. Bloomington: IU Press, 1986.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

Peirce sought to establish conformity to the pragmatic maxim as a necessary condition of cognitive meaning by arguing that symbols can function logically in valid explicative arguments, and thus have content to be explicated, only if they comply with the pragmatic maxim²³

In other words, Forster believes that Peirce arrived at the pragmatic maxim as a method for determining the meanings of difficult concepts by observing that symbols can be used to construct meaningful arguments insofar as they have practical effects.

Explicative arguments, Forster claims, rest exclusively on the premises and terms that comprise them, and conclude nothing more than an explanation of the premises. This is in contrast to ampliative arguments, whose conclusions amplify, or go beyond the premises. It is only terms and premises that are capable of explication, then, that are meaningful. Forster has thus showed us that any logical principle, such as the pragmatic maxim, that attempts to determine the meaning of concepts must be consistent with the logical principles underlying explicative arguments. He continues to point out that since the concepts themselves are determined by how they indicate what they representing, the logical principles of explicative arguments place limits on concepts' representations. A concept, then, must meet these qualifications of the logical principles of explicative arguments in order for symbols to function – to be meaningful. Peirce's task, then, is to show us that his pragmatic maxim is what is required of concepts in order to comprise explicative arguments and thereby symbolic meaning.²⁴

3. "Pragmatism"

As Nathan Houser notes in his introduction to *The Essential Peirce*, volume 2, Peirce would accept the truth of the pragmatic maxim only after "it has passed through the fire of a drastic analysis."²⁵ Realizing that his initial proposal of it in his 1878 essay lacked any explanation of its logical foundations, Peirce sets out to prove pragmatism in its strictest sense. Christopher Hookway agrees with Houser and Forster, calling Peirce's argument in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" a "seductive persuasion"²⁶. Peirce's description of beliefs as habits of actions is, according to Hookway, an example that is intended to reassure us of the method being proposed. Transubstantiation, Hookway claims, is an example of this type of seductive persuasion in that it is meant to boost our confidence in the idea that taking communion involves imbibing the true blood and body of Christ. Transubstantiation gives us what we need in order to be able to believe in the act of communion. Seductive persuasions are just as suspect as they sound – confidence-building illustrations lacking the veracity that is to be found in stricter proofs.

Peirce, then, must do better than a seductive persuasion if he is to prove his pragmatism in a strict sense. According to Hookway, the next best thing is a scientific proof of the pragmatic maxim. He claims that Peirce's attempt to illustrate the correctness of the pragmatic maxim is derivable from an account of beliefs as habits of action is a "scientific hypothesis about the functions of beliefs."²⁷ Peirce's theory of belief is a psychological principle that explains the correctness of pragmatism by illustrating how the use of the maxim

²³ Ibid., p. 528.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 531.

²⁵ Houser, Nathan. "Introduction", in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1998, p. 33.

²⁶ Hookway, Christopher. "The Pragmatic Maxim and the Proof of Pragmatism: Peirce's Strategies Around 1903", in *Cognitio*, vol. 6.1, 2003, p. 30.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

provides clarity for beliefs under this theory. While Houser agrees that Peirce's initial account of pragmatism that rests upon this theory of belief is founded in psychology, he does not agree that this is what Peirce considers a "scientific" proof. Houser claims that Peirce's pragmatism does not reach a scientific proof until 1903, when he restricts his pragmatism to "conceptions that can be expressed in sentential form."²⁸ The meaning of a judgment that can be expressed in the indicative can be found in its tendency to produce a practical conditional sentence that corresponds to the indicative sentence. This conditional sentence is our conception of the practical effects of the concept. Houser calls this "Peirce's proof of pragmatism based on his theory of perception."²⁹

Both Hookway and Houser do agree that Peirce demanded something more than a scientific proof. In his classification of the sciences, Peirce places logic on a higher level of appeal than psychology. As Hookway states, Peirce realized that a science is fallible and impermanent, and therefore sought a proof of pragmatism that would bring with it the same degree of certainty we find in mathematics. Hookway identifies three conditions that Peirce's argument for the pragmatic maxim must satisfy in order to obtain the type of certainty of a strict proof. First, the strict proof must show us why correctness is something we should pursue. Secondly, it must clarify a new version of the pragmatic maxim that will be overtly distinct from any previous versions. Finally, it must maintain the type of certainty that accompanies mathematical proofs. This last criterion is important, according to Hookway, in that it "limits the role of common-sense in the proof of pragmatism."³⁰ Appeals to common sense provide a different type of certainty than that which is accompanied by mathematical proofs. Though they do provide us with a great deal of certainty about some beliefs, this certainty is the result of a quality that is opposite to that possessed by mathematical proofs – imprecision. Mathematical proofs provide us with certainty because they are unambiguous, while appeals to common sense provide certainty by allowing for a wide berth of interpretation. If something is not entirely clear, it can be taken in many different ways and still be considered valid. Because common sense notions are vague, Peirce cannot rely on them to comprise a strict proof of the pragmatic maxim.

Houser, as Hookway points out, provides his standards for a proof of pragmatism. A philosophical proof, he claims, attempts to be sound, not just valid.³¹ That is, a philosophical proof must result in a conclusion that follows from true premises. The deductive form must be intact, but, what proves to be a more difficult task is the truth of the premises. Houser describes this condition as "that each of the premises is either a common assumption or can otherwise be shown to be admissible."³² This account of Houser's appears to be in conflict with Hookway's description of a "strict" proof. Houser's words imply that the common sense appeal of a premise is enough to render it admissible as part of a strict proof. According to Hookway, common sense is not the appeal the premises of a strict proof want to make. The only way that they can "be shown to be admissible" is by way of their ambiguity, which is not nearly as reliable as the precision of mathematical proofs. But Houser does not seem to be merely claiming that a strict proof is one that can rest on sheer common sense. While Hookway claims that Peirce's conception of a strict proof is one that mirrors the certainty that accompanies mathematical proofs, this does not mean that Peirce's strict proof will be of the same nature as a mathematical proof. Houser's point is that Peirce means "prove" in a

²⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

³¹ Ibid., p. 33.

³² Ibid., p. 34.

philosophical sense. His intention is to “provide a convincing rationale or argument for the truth of his maxim,” which does not preclude the inclusion of premises commonly assumed to be true.³³

Despite the differences between Houser’s and Hookway’s accounts of Peirce’s notion of a strict proof, it is clear that they both agree that Peirce sought a high standard for his proof of pragmatism. His initial proposal of the pragmatic maxim in 1878 will have to be revised in order to shed its foundations in psychology and make explicit the role of semiotics in the logic surrounding the maxim.

In 1906, Peirce composed five versions of an article in which he attempts a proof of his pragmatism. These five versions have been blended together in MS 318, “Pragmatism.”³⁴ A thorough analysis of his proof of pragmatism will require accounting for those differences between the five versions as they appear individually and the five versions as they appear in MS 318. In the beginning of MS 318, Peirce alludes to the fact that he has been solicited for an account of what pragmatism “really is,” its past and its future. This statement refers to the discrepancy existing at that time between Peirce’s version of pragmatism and that of other American philosophers, such as William James and F.C.S. Schiller. Peirce’s intent with paper is to give a thorough account of pragmatism, one that explains both its popular application (e.g. James and Schiller) and the reasons why Peirce feels the need to distinguish between this popular application and his own version – pragmaticism.

Peirce claims that pragmatism, at least fundamentally, is nothing new. He traces its roots back to the ancients and up through Comte, claiming that they “bathed in these waters,” which implies that while these past philosophers recognized the principle underlying pragmatism, namely the role of practical effects, they did not fully realize the scope and import of the idea with which they were toying.³⁵ This deficit, Peirce claims, is, specifically in the case of Kant and Comte, the result of an aversion to meticulous logic.³⁶ It is precisely this flaw that Peirce does not commit. He goes back to logic, studying with probably much delight the logical niceties neglected by Kant and Comte. Though this logic is not overt in his 1878 essay, other of his writings, as Forster has shown us, indicate what this logic is. Moreover, his proof of pragmatism contained in MS 318 provides the “close study” of signs Peirce himself deemed necessary to a full explication of the pragmatic maxim.

In its function as a method for clarifying difficult words, pragmatism mirrors the scientific method. In “The Fixation of Belief”, Peirce determined the scientific method to be the most reliable way of fixating belief because it is founded upon an external permanency. This reality is such that it affects every man, but exists independently of him. And despite the relativity with which we issue our reports about being affected by this reality, we are still led, by appealing to it, to reach a consensus and produce beliefs that coincide with fact.³⁷ By asking what the practical effects of a concept are, we are effectively asking what the outcome of certain experiments would be. The meaning of a concept, then, amounts to those conditional hypotheses that we use the term to create.

³³ Ibid., p. 34.

³⁴ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Pragmatism,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1998, p. 388.

³⁵ James, William. “What Pragmatism Means,” in *Pragmatism, Old & New*, edited by Susan Haack. New York: Prometheus Books, 2006.

³⁶ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Pragmatism,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1998. 399

³⁷ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Pragmatism,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1998, p. 120

The variety of interpretations of pragmatism requires Peirce to distinguish his before he can attempt to prove it. In the first original variant of MS 318, this section of Peirce's article is sub-headed the kernel of pragmatism. As Peirce states,

the object of which it comes to be truly affirmed would, under some definitely conceivable circumstances, behave differently from any object of which the same predicate could be truly denied. This, to my mind, is the kernel of pragmatism³⁸

It is clear, then, that the practical consequences of difficult terms and concepts that Peirce sees to lie at the heart of his maxim. Peirce views all of the different accounts of pragmatism as layers of an onion which he has to peel away in order to get to the heart of the theory. He takes pragmatism to be solely a method of determining the meaning of difficult words. Intellectual concepts, those whose clarified meaning can help to reach consensus about reality, are the only subject of this method. Qualities of feeling are excluded from the method because they do not affect anything beyond themselves. Peirce claims that it has no application to theories of metaphysics or truth precisely because it is a method of interpreting a certain type of sign, the concept, by looking for a certain type of interpretant, the practical effects. Concepts are signs that affect the behavior of things, and therefore convey more than just "would acts," or facts about our existence. Rather, concepts convey how things "would be" under certain circumstances. It is the future that confers present meaning. The meaning of a concept lies, then, in the assertion that throughout the course of human experience, it would be or would not be true that specific events occur under specific circumstances. It is this proposition that Peirce calls "the kernel of pragmatism." In other versions of this text, Peirce identifies the "kernel of pragmatism" as this: "the whole meaning of an intellectual predicate is that certain kinds of events would happen, once in so often, in the course of experiences, under certain kinds of existential conditions, provided it can be proved to be true."³⁹ Pragmatism allows for truth claims to be made without making them itself. This notion is a bit clearer in the "kernel" provided in "Pragmatism." Peirce states,

But that the total meaning of the predication of an intellectual concept consists in affirming that, under all conceivable circumstances of a given kind, the subject of the predication would (or would not) behave in a certain way, -- that is, that it either would, or would not, be true that under given experiential circumstances (or under a given proposition of them, taken as they would occur in experience) certain facts would exist, --that proposition I take to be the kernel of pragmatism.⁴⁰

Peirce does not say what these facts would be, only that they would be. Based on the variants of Peirce's "kernel of pragmatism," it is clear that Peirce sees the foundation of pragmatism to be the notion that practical effects in habits of action allow for objective claims to be made.

At this point in MS 318, Peirce begins his proof of pragmatism. In the other versions, however, it is here that Peirce begins his second section, "The Valency of Concepts"⁴¹. He prefaces the beginning of his proof by calling our attention to the distinction between matter

³⁸ MS 318 235.

³⁹ MS 318 140.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 402.

⁴¹ CP 5.469.

and form. Peirce claims that the distinctions and classifications we make that are based on form are more pertinent to a scientific understanding of how things behave than those based on matter. He exemplifies this by comparing combinations of concepts with chemical combinations. All, concepts, he claims, have a “strict valency.”⁴² Peirce is going to show us how the three grades of valency of “indecomposable concepts,” or concepts that cannot be broken down into simpler or smaller parts, correspond to his three categories of experience. Predicates such as “is blue” or “is cold” are univalent, those such as “kills” or “pushes” are bivalent (involving the relation of two things), and predicates such as “gives” or “steals” are trivalent. Univalent predicates correspond to categorical Firstnesses. These are those positive characteristics of a subject that are what they are despite anything else. Bivalent predicates correspond to categorical Secondnesses. These are what Peirce calls “brute actions” between two subjects. The subjects are dependent on each other, not some law. Trivalent predicates correspond to Thirdnesses. These are the “mental influences”⁴³ that one object has on another by way of the mediation of some third. It is this “outgrowth from formal logic” that Peirce sees as his greatest contribution to pragmatism.

It should be noted that this observation of Peirce’s concerning the classification of form and matter is an implication of his objective idealism. As he states in “The Architecture of Theories” in 1891, objective idealism is “The one intelligible theory of the universe...that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws”⁴⁴. Matter is mind that is no longer fruitful. It no longer has the generative power of a triadic relation of the mind as it has been reduced to a mere dyad. When he claims that the formal distinctions we make are more significant to science than those based on matter in terms of comprehending the behavior of things, Peirce is implying that the triadic relations of mind, being generative, will become habitual and thus easier to predict and understand.

The first step of Peirce’s proof is that “every concept and every thought beyond immediate perception is a sign”⁴⁵. This idea has long existed in philosophy and is observable in the dialogic manner of our thinking. Properly defining a sign is not as easy an endeavor. If we are going to use “sign” to refer to all that falls under semiotics, then our definition of it must include only its essential features. One characteristic of a sign is that they do their work between utterers and interpreters⁴⁶. The sign, before it is uttered, is present to the mind of the utterer as a thought. Being that this thought is a sign as well, it too was present to the mind of an utterer in some form of inner dialogue, and this is how all sign utterances occur, in chains of sign that have no beginning. Sign interpretation occurs in the same way. The interpretation of the sign becomes a sign itself, now relating to the object in the same way as the sign of which it is an effect. In addition to beginningless chains of signs, then, there are endless chains of interpretants. The only case in which one of these chains may come to an end is if there is a sign without an utterer or a sign without an interpreter. It is possible, then, or at least conceivable, for a sign to exist without an utterer or interpreter. They cannot be said to be essential to the nature of a sign.

But there are aspects to uttering and interpreting signs which do seem to be essential to the sign’s nature. This *requisitum*, as Peirce calls it, is the object of the sign, and is

⁴² CP 5.469.

⁴³ CP 5.469.

⁴⁴ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Pragmatism,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1998, p. 120.

⁴⁵ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Pragmatism,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1998, p. 401.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 403.

“necessarily unexpressed.”⁴⁷ This is the real object that determines the make-up of the sign, yet is never expressed by it. By collateral observation, or “previous acquaintance with what the sign denotes,” that singular object which is essential to the sign’s representative ability can be arrived at.⁴⁸ In other words, it is prior experience with a sign that allows a mind to understand the real object behind the sign, and thus allow it to go unexpressed. Collateral observation is that background information one must know in order to grasp the very idea of the sign. This notion forms the next step in Peirce’s proof of pragmatism. That the “Object of a Sign, then, is necessarily unexpressed in the sign, taken by itself,” means that the burden of conveying the form of that object falls on the shoulders of the sign. We will never be able to “get at” some individual object that the sign is conveying. The sign is effectively a medium between the object that determines the sign and the effect produced by the sign. The innumerable variances amongst a sign’s partial objects cannot all be determinate individuals. Adequate collateral observation would be impossible. We should not, Peirce claims, lead ourselves astray by thinking that the “object of a sign” is the actual object itself.

There is another essential ingredient to the notion of a sign, which Peirce identifies explicitly in a variant of MS 318. He claims that there are the object and meaning are two correlates essential to the sign, and qualifies “meaning” as “interpretant”⁴⁹. Peirce directly/ identifies the meaning of a sign with its interpretant, which means that the question “How do we interpret the meaning of sign?” translates to “How do we determine the interpretant of a sign?” This notion leads Peirce into his discussion of the various types of interpretants. Collateral observation need not result in a specific, determinate interpretant. The general and indefinite object is the “immediate object.” The important thing about immediate objects is that they do not have to exist. Unicorns, phoenixes, and leprechauns are all objects that do not exist, but are nevertheless real in that we do not deny that they are signs of some thing. As he states in another variant, “It is downright nonsense to assert that a general predicate is real if no existential consequence of it is conceivably possible”⁵⁰. Peirce’s point is that it is absurd to deny the reality of something that has practical consequences. If some thing effects a habit of action, than it can certainly be said to be real in that it has an effect on our reality. “Real objects,” Peirce claims in the published variant “Pragmatism,” are those independently existing objects to which the immediate object corresponds.⁵¹ The object of a sign corresponds, by way of the sign, to the effect produced by the sign in the mind of the interpreter. This effect is the interpretant of the sign, and there are three types: the emotional interpretant, which includes feelings, specifically the feeling of understanding what a sign means; the energetic interpretant, which implies a sense of effort; and the logical interpretant, which Peirce describes as the “conveyed thought” in the form of a would-be. These interpretants are certainly easier to comprehend than the object being signified, for they signify all that the sign signifies about the object. Peirce emphasizes the importance of the logical interpretant to the task of proving pragmatism, foreshadowing his claim that the final logical interpretant consists of “the deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit.”⁵²

The next step in Peirce’s proof is to provide a definition of a sign. He claims that a sign is “anything, of whatsoever mode of being, which mediates between an object and an

⁴⁷ Ibid., 407.

⁴⁸ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Excerpts from Letters to Lady Welby,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1998, p. 477.

⁴⁹ MS 318 339.

⁵⁰ MS 318 236.

⁵¹ Ibid., 409.

⁵² Ibid., 418.

interpretant.”⁵³ A sign, then, can be any form of being, and essentially comes between an object and an interpretant. The sign is determined by the object in order to produce an interpretant that references the object. The interpretant produced by the sign is thus a sign as well, for it too represents the object, and is thereby determined by it indirectly. The object and interpretant, then, are two correlates of the sign, meaning that they are connected to it by a mutual relation. Being that the object, antecedent to the sign, determines the sign, and the sign determines the interpretant, it is to be expected that the interpretant corresponds to the object. And, as Peirce claims, they do, save the logical interpretant. The immediate object corresponds with the emotional interpretant, and the real object corresponds to the energetic interpretant. The logical interpretant, however, does not correspond to any object. Peirce claims that this “defect of correspondence” stems from the fact that the object precedes the sign, while the logical interpretant proceeds it.

He concludes from this that the logical interpretant is in the form of future tense, a would-be. Because it does not correspond to any object, it is “general in its possibilities of reference.”⁵⁴ Peirce claims that there are four categories of mental facts that are of general reference: conceptions, desires, expectations, and habits. Having already identified logical interpretants as concepts, Peirce rules desires and expectations because they can only be general or conditional by way of a relationship with a concept. Habit, he claims, is the only remaining mental fact that can constitute the logical interpretant.

Peirce accounts for habit in his proof of pragmatism as the result of the principle that, after a certain point, behavior that is repeated will tend toward continuing this repetition. Habits, then, are rules of action that have been established through the reiteration of certain behavior. It is well known that we can start and stop habits, and it is this point which Peirce emphasizes. He states

Every man exercises more or less control over himself by means of modifying his own habits; and the way in which he goes to work to bring this effect about...shows that he is virtually well acquainted with the important principle that reiterations in the inner world...if well-intensified by direct effort, produce habits.⁵⁵

The point is that we understand the principle underlying habit, and we can make deliberate efforts to change these habits even if the outer world does not permit us to do so. Being that all thought produces belief, and beliefs are essentially habits of action, we have an internal mechanism by which to manipulate habit. We can reiterate behavior internally and establish new beliefs that will prove to affect our rules of action.

A habit refers to general conditions. It says that given a certain set of circumstances, a certain behavior will ensue. Peirce’s point is that interpreters form habits. Depending on the nature of the inquiry, the interpreter may have a certain vested interest in the result. When a hypothesis, or “experimentation of the inner world,” is formed, Peirce claims that it will (possibly) conclude in a habit. That is, the conclusion of the hypothesis will be that the interpreter will behave in a certain way under certain conditions when a certain result is sought. “The real and living logical conclusion,” Peirce concludes, “is that habit.”⁵⁶

While Peirce said earlier that a logical interpretant is a concept and a habit, he now claims that the final logical interpretant can only be a habit. He states

⁵³ Ibid., 410.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 412.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 413.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 418.

The deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit, - self-analyzing because formed by the aid of analysis of the exercises that nourished it, - is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant⁵⁷

The final logical interpretant, then, is a habit that is formed intentionally. By self-analyzing, Peirce is referring to the fact that the habit is formed by analyzing the type of reiterated behavior that is contributing to it. Peirce continues to reformulate his pragmatic maxim in semiotic terms

Consequently, the most perfect account of a concept that words can convey will consist in a description of that habit which that concept is calculated to produce. But how otherwise can a habit be described than by a description of the kind of action to which it gives rise, with the specification of the conditions and of the motive?⁵⁸

In other words, because the final logical interpretant – the last interpretant in a chain of signs – must be of the nature of a habit, we can say that the meaning of a concept – a sign – lies in a description of the rules of action the concept is intended to bring about. All thought is intended to produce belief, and all thought occurs in sign. Concepts are a type of sign, so it can be said that concepts produce belief. It has already been established that beliefs are essentially habits of action. A concept, then, brings about action – practical effects. The meaning of a concept, then, lies in describing these practical effects. The ultimate meaning, however, lies in describing the habit, the rule of action to which these practical effects adhere. This statement of the pragmatic maxim concludes Peirce's proof of pragmatism. He has, then, through an explication of semiotic terms, couched the pragmatic theory of meaning within sign relations, thereby providing a criterion that explains why it is that meaning can be found in practical effects.

Analysis

Now that Peirce's 1906 proof of pragmatism has been examined, some similarities and differences can be drawn between this formulation and Peirce's earlier formulations of the pragmatic maxim. From this, it can be determined how the changes that the pragmatic maxim undergoes in his 1906 essay affect his pragmatism and general theory of signs.

According to William Alston, "pragmatism amounts to...a more specific semiotic theory."⁵⁹ Though Peirce does not use the term "meaning" in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," his first exposition of the pragmatic maxim, by providing limits to the concepts that we can form, he implies a theory of meaning. If concepts are concepts, that is, if a concept consists of a concept of practical effects, then the meaning of a concept is best expressed in terms of these effects.⁶⁰ Of course, Peirce came to be explicit in his pragmatism as a theory of meaning in later formulations, but he was not explicit in any semiotic implication. Alston claims that "this semiotic bearing of the principle" can be seen when Peirce first asks us to

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 418.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

⁶⁰ Peirce, Charles Sanders. "Pragmatism," in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1998, p. 132.

consider what we mean by calling something “hard.”⁶¹ If all thought occurs in interpreting signs, and if concepts are a type of sign, then Peirce’s theory about the content of concepts is really a theory about the meaning of a certain type of sign.

With such an obvious connection, it is surprising that Peirce did not speak of pragmatism in semiotic terms until 1906, well after his introduction of pragmatism. As Alston states, this neglect cannot be attributed to any chronological incompatibility.⁶² His first attempt at a theory of signs emerges ten years prior to his introduction of the pragmatic maxim. One possible explanation is the audience to whom Peirce was directing his essays on pragmatism and semiotic. “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”, was published in *Popular Science Monthly*, a publication with an intended audience who is less likely to be versed in semiotic. However, as Alston states, this does not account for the absence of an explicit semiotic connection to pragmatism in Peirce’s later formulations of the pragmatic maxim. In his 1903 *Lectures on Pragmatism*, Peirce is in an ideal position to make this connection explicit, as he discusses representation prior to his discussion of pragmatism. He does not, however, comment on the semiotic import of pragmatism until his 1906 paper, “Pragmatism,” and what Peirce says in this paper has caused some to charge him with being inconsistent. His identification of habit as a final logical interpretant appears to be incompatible with the idea of infinite semiosis. What Alston and others argue, however, is that Peirce’s 1906 formulation of the pragmatic maxim in semiotic terms does not mark an inconsistency or weakness in his philosophy, but rather strengthens his pragmatic maxim by making explicit a metaphysical claim that has underlay it since its inception.

Peirce’s reformulation of the pragmatic maxim in his 1906 essay is as follows:

The deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit...is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant. Consequently, the most perfect account of a concept that words can convey will consist in a description of the habit which that concept is calculated to produce⁶³

He directly identifies the final logical interpretant as a habit. This development, according to both Bruce Altshuler, author of “The Nature of Peirce’s Pragmatism,” and Gary Shapiro, author “Habit and Meaning in Peirce’s Pragmatism,” is an expression of Peirce’s metaphysical realism. In another variant of this text, Peirce defines the pragmatic maxim as follows

Consider what effects that might conceivable have practical bearings you conceive the object of your conception to have: then the general mental habit that consists in the production of these effects is the whole meaning of your concept⁶⁴

Peirce originally wrote “these effects,” but scratched it out and replaced it with “the general mental habit.” Peirce claims that this change does not differ fundamentally from his original 1878 version, but rather marks a development in his pragmatism. It was only after using pragmatism, actually practicing it, that Peirce claims to have made this revision. Having recognized the reality of generals and possibility, Peirce makes the necessary revisions to his pragmatic maxim.

⁶¹ Alston, William. “Pragmatism and the Theory of Signs in Peirce.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 17.1, sept. 1956, pp. 79-88.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶³ Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Pragmatism,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1998.

⁶⁴ MS 318 347.

Peirce repeatedly insists throughout his work that pragmatism is strictly a theory of meaning – a method for determining the meanings of difficult words.⁶⁵ He is specifically targeting philosophers like James, who extend pragmatism into metaphysics. What Peirce does not acknowledge, however, is that while his pragmatism is not explicit in a metaphysical account, it certainly presupposes one. As Shapiro points out, Peirce's formulation of the pragmatic maxim in MS 318 can be analyzed in terms of habit.⁶⁶ Peirce states that "Intellectual concepts [are] the "would-act's," "would-do's" of habitual behavior."⁶⁷ The meaning of a concept, then, lies in a habit. As Shapiro states, "These formulations would suggest that Peirce is committed to the existence or reality of habits, if nothing else."⁶⁸ Max Fisch agrees with Shapiro, claiming that Peirce's proof of pragmatism is effectively a proof of realism.⁶⁹ The diamond sitting on the ocean floor that will never be scratched can now be called "hard" with this introduction of habit into Peirce's theory of meaning. His shift from the nominalistic pragmatism to a realist pragmaticism recognized real possibilities.

In an earlier variant of "Pragmatism," Peirce clarifies what he means by "real." He states, "It is downright nonsense to assert that a general predicate is real, if no existential consequence of it is conceivably possible."⁷⁰ By a "general predicate," Peirce means something like "blue" or "tall," and he continues to state that these general predicates can be considered "conceivably real for the sake of argument."⁷¹ The term "real," then, for Peirce, means conceivable, practical differences. Of course, Peirce's pragmatism does not initially account for general predicates such as "hard" as conceivably real. It is Peirce's shift to pragmaticism that reflects this change. His pragmatism can be said to entail realism because it acknowledges the practical effects of concepts on habits of action.

That this is a development for Peirce's semiotic and his pragmatism is evidenced in T.L Short and Paul Alston's discussion of the problems in Peirce's early theory of signs that resulted from his nominalist pragmatism.⁷² If we look at Peirce's initial account of the function of the sign in his Journal of Speculative Philosophy series, we see that he does not provide a sufficient answer the question of what it means for a sign to represent. Peirce tells us that a sign stands for its object by producing another sign that stands in the same relation to the object as the original sign does.⁷³ But what is it about signs that allow them to do this? Peirce does not answer this question for us. As Short states, "He supposed that significance depends on interpretation, but then explained interpretation as consisting in signs."⁷⁴ Or, as Alston states,

⁶⁵ "Pragmatism," MS 5.467, 5.464.

⁶⁶ Shapiro, Gary. "Habit and meaning in Peirce's Pragmatism." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. Vol. 9.1, winter, 1973, p. 25.

⁶⁷ Altshuler, Bruce. "The Nature of Peirce's Pragmatism." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. Vol. 14.3, summer, 1978.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Fisch, Max. "Peirce's Progress from Nominalism toward Realism," in *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism*. Bloomington: IU Press, 1986, p. 195.

⁷⁰ MS 318 236.

⁷¹ MS 318 236.

⁷² Short, T.L. "The Development of Peirce's Theory of Signs," in *The Cambridge Companion to Peirce*. Edited by Cheryl Misak, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 214-240.

⁷³ Peirce, Charles. "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Men," in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1. Edited by The Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: IU Press, 1992, p. 24.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

If we want to know what there is about a sign...which enables it to represent an object...we are told that this representational function lies in the fact that [the sign] determines another sign of its object.⁷⁵

The point these two authors are trying to make is that the problem of accounting for representational function of the sign is not solved, but merely passed along.

A result of Peirce's neglect to account for signification is that we have no way of distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic semiosis. If a sign, in order to be taking part in semiosis, must be interpreted, then it follows that this interpretation will result in an interpretant. But, as Alston and Short note, it does not have to. All that is required is that the interpreter is capable of producing an interpretant. Any meaningless utterance can be interpreted an infinite number of times by producing more meaningless utterances. As Short states, "Peirce's theory entails that certain phrases that signify nothing signify something; and, therefore, his theory is mistaken."⁷⁶ He continues to give an example of a nonsensical statement that is translated from English into an infinite number of languages, the point being that such an activity is permitted within Peirce's semiosis, yet it is not genuine semiosis as nothing is conveyed. Altshuler seems to agree with Alston and Peirce, stating, "each interpretant, being a sign, itself needs another interpretant. So nothing like that could be the meaning of a sign without leading to an unsatisfactory non-terminating series."⁷⁷ Peirce himself states in another variant of "Pragmatism" that "A sign cannot, in any ordinary sense, be an ultimate meaning, since it is essential that a sign itself should bring about a meaning or interpretant."⁷⁸ One possible response may be to claim in these cases the interpretant simply has not been produced yet. If what the interpreter says or thinks is meaningless, and thus not an interpretant, then how can we say that Peirce is claiming that it is a true case of semiosis? The problem lies in the fact that we cannot say a representation has occurred until we know that an interpretant can be produced. If a sign stands for its object by producing a new sign of it, then must be able to determine if this new sign is capable of being produced before we can call something a sign – before we can say that a representation has occurred.

Peirce resolves this problem by making the shift from nominalism to realism. In recognizing the reality of habits and real possibilities, Peirce mends the hole in his earlier theory. His earlier pragmatism did not recognize potentialities, as evidenced in the famous diamond example in *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*. When, however, Peirce came to account for concepts as the "would-dos" or "would-acts" of habitual behavior, he realized that something like hardness is real in the sense would happen under general conditions. The same can be said of the signification of a sign.⁷⁹ A sign can be said to stand for its object if it would, under certain conditions, produce an interpretant. Being that a) all thought is in sign, b) concepts are thoughts c) the sole production of thought is belief, and d) belief is habit, e) the meaning of a concept lies in its practical effects, we can conclude that the practical effect of a concept is the habit it produces. If we want to find the meaning of a concept, then, our best bet is to describe the habit it brings about. Moreover, being that concepts are signs, we can think of these practical effects as interpretants. As Alston states, "it is this sort of interpretant which the interpreter must have a capacity to produce if real understanding is to

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 218.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 152.

⁷⁸ MS 318 341.

⁷⁹ Short, p. 218

take place.”⁸⁰ We can say, then, that a sign is meaningful if it would, under certain circumstances, produce an interpretant. It stands for its object by, at least, producing this type of interpretant. It is Peirce's recognition of real possibilities, then, by way of a new formulation of the pragmatic maxim, that Peirce can account for the representational force of signs. As Altshuler states, “Once he has taken this view of the matter, Peirce makes the move of treating the set of all its possible interpretants as the meaning of the sign.”⁸¹ It is not, then, just the interpretant that is actually produced that allows a sign to represent its object, but rather it is the possibility of an interpretant being produced.

However, as Alston states, Peirce's problem is not exactly solved at this point. It seems that all that has occurred is a calling for the production of a certain type of interpretant in order for a sign to have representational power. That is, we still do not know how it is exactly that a concept's production of practical effects in turn produces a practical effect that stands for the object of the concept. In order for the practical effects of a concept to be capable of representing, there must be something that is not a representation, whose meaning does not need to be accounted for, to confer representational force to these interpretants. Peirce still has to explain to us the reality of interpretants and possibilities.

He accomplishes this task by introducing the final logical interpretant. It is argued by some that Peirce's introduction of a final logical interpretant is incompatible with his earlier notion of infinite semiosis. It is, however, precisely this notion that continues to develop Peirce's semiotic by providing it with a source of representational force, thereby removing the problem of signification previously outlined. Being that it is the whole of a conception, the final logical interpretant will not be further determined. It is produced by a sign, but, unlike all other semiotic activity, is not a sign itself. It does not gain a power of signification by virtue of producing another sign because it has no need to. Peirce realized the need for such a source of signification when he formulated his pragmatic maxim in semiotic terms. By finally bringing these two theories together, Peirce sees the connection between the meaning of a sign and habits of action.

Peirce's formulation of the pragmatic maxim in semiotic terms appears as something like the following: All thought is geared toward producing belief. Beliefs are essentially habits of action. Concepts are thoughts, and therefore produce belief, or habits of action. A meaningful concept references the relevant habit of action; it, in a sense, expresses the belief. All thought occurs in sign, so concepts are a type of sign – namely, intellectual signs. Concepts, then, are intellectual signs that express a relation to a habit. This habit is the final logical interpretant – the source of representational force. The function of all semiotic activity, then, according to Peirce, is habit. A sign, or concept, can thus do the act of representing by relationship with habit. The reason why, then, the most important possible interpretant of a concept is constituted by relevant practical effects is that this type of interpretant represents the very same habit that affords signs their representational power. Peirce has thus explained how his pragmatism works as a theory of meaning by showing us that meaning is derived from the relationship of habit to action.⁸² In formulating his pragmatic maxim in semiotic terms, Peirce has made explicit what it is about sign activity that allows meaning to be captured in terms of practical effects.

Richard Rorty claims, in his essay *Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism*, that “Peirce never made up his mind what he wanted a general theory of signs for, nor what it

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 84.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 150.

⁸² Alston, p. 87.

might look like, nor what its relation to either logic or epistemology was supposed to be.”⁸³ We see now, after examining Peirce’s proof of pragmatism and its implications, that Peirce did forge the connection between semiotics, knowledge and meaning. And, though he perhaps was not aware of all of the implications of such a marriage, he did understand the need to bring pragmatism and semiotics together in order develop both to their full potential.

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⁸³ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism,” in *Pragmatism, Old & New*, edited by Susan Haack. New York: Prometheus Books, 2006, p. 636.