

Reading Peirce Differently: A Response to David Dilworth

Lendo Peirce de uma Maneira Diferente: Uma Resposta a David Dilworth

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Abstract: In response to criticism of an article on Peirce's objective idealism, I raise a question about how the philosophical writings of Peirce should be read. Are writings widely separated in time to be read as developing different aspects of a single, comprehensive system, or are they, at least in some cases, to be read as trying out a sequence of alternative hypotheses? And how is that question to be resolved? And in which way did Peirce himself conceive of his philosophical work?

Keywords: Peirce. Objective idealism. Final causation. Philosophical systems. Philosophical inquiry.

Resumo: *Em resposta à crítica a um artigo sobre o idealismo objetivo de Peirce, levanto a questão sobre como os escritos filosóficos de Peirce devem ser lidos. São escritos amplamente separados pelo tempo para serem lidos como desenvolvendo aspectos diferentes de um sistema único, compreensível, ou devem, ao menos em alguns casos, serem lidos experimentando uma sequência de hipóteses alternativas. Como tal questão pode ser resolvida? E de que modo o próprio Peirce concebia seu trabalho filosófico?*

Palavras-chave: *Peirce. Idealismo objetivo. Causação final. Sistema filosófico. Inquirição filosófica.*

Doubtless the fault is mine that David DILWORTH (*Cognito* 12/1, pp.53-74) misunderstood my article on Peirce's objective idealism (*Cognitio* 11/2, pp. 333-346), failing to grasp its objective and hence the strategy of its argument, as well as ascribing assertions to me that I did not make or would want to make.¹ In light of his critique, I will try to make my meaning clearer, and if I can manage to do that, then I will be in Dilworth's debt. But there is a more important issue, here, than what it was that I meant, which is what it was that Peirce meant. And there is also an issue – a preliminary or broader issue – about the approach one should take, or may take, in reading Peirce. It is, I think, because Dilworth did not grasp the difference in our approaches to reading Peirce, that he misread my article. I would like now to raise

1 Uncaptioned page references will be to the two articles cited: context makes clear whether to Dilworth's or to mine. Citations of Peirce's writings follow the usual conventions: see References.

the question of approach. I want to clarify and defend what I said in my earlier article, but more importantly I want to argue for a different way of reading Peirce: one that finds movement, not stance.

A.

The question of approach is preliminary; but it is not unambiguously preliminary. We are riding round a hermeneutic circle. If Peirce's writings of different periods, A,B,C, are read in a certain way, as in essence expressing the same doctrine, X, then it would be needless, even deeply misleading – in fact, it would impoverish our understanding of X – to distinguish the X(A) doctrine from the X(B) doctrine and both of these from the X(C) doctrine. Rather, the ABC versions have to be combined if we are to see what X really amounts to. But suppose that one day we began by distinguishing the writings of these periods and developed each, so far as was possible, in its own terms, and then *discovered* that X(A), X(B), and X(C) differ from one another in such important respects as not to permit their combination. Should that have happened, then this second way of reading Peirce would have been justified by the results of reading Peirce in that way; whereas, if no fundamental contradictions were revealed, then, of course, the first way of reading Peirce would have been justified. This second way has to be tried, if we are to see which way is right.

The division of Peirce's thought into periods must itself be justified by there being major differences between what is said in one and what is said in another of the alleged periods. (Differences short of contradiction may suffice to distinguish periods, but contradiction alone would preclude combining the doctrines of different periods.) This is the same hermeneutic circle as before. The circle is not vicious. It does not mean that each way of reading is self-justifying and immune to refutation. Rather, it means that different ways of reading have to be tried before it can be determined which way is the right way or the best way. One could phrase hermeneutic theory in Peircean terms: interpretation is abductive; an interpretative hypothesis is tested inductively by comparing what is deduced from it to texts read and re-read.

A last comment on periodization. Any periodization of Peirce's thought will be to a degree arbitrary if his thought was, as I believe it was, always in flux. But a map is useful only by its omitting details. If we focus on the major changes in Peirce's thought, we will better see the direction it was taking, and then the smaller changes, seen falling into place, become more intelligible.

That the ABC versions have to be combined, if we are to understand what X really amounts to, is Dilworth's view, where X is Peirce's idealistic metaphysics. By contrast, I find that he developed his metaphysics in fundamentally different, mutually incompatible ways over different periods, A,B,C. Yes, Peirce always held that knower and known are bound together, that like is known by like, and that there is no Cartesian dualism of body and mind. But he did not always mean the same thing by "mind," and therefore his accounts of the relation of knowledge to reality and of body to mind were not always the same. If that is correct, then the generic doctrine, X, framed by combining the compatible aspects of X(A), X(B), and X(C), must be vaguer than each of those variants; hence, it must be far less interesting than is any one of them, even if each variant is in its own way unsatisfactory.

That may seem to be a conclusion necessarily repugnant to anyone who admires Peirce as a philosopher. But should it be? Do we not learn more from the failure of a specific theory than we do from the non-failure of a vaguer, generic theory? Do we not learn more from Peirce when we read him as engaged in a relatively concrete, rigorous inquiry – one that he did not complete and one, therefore, that we may continue – than we do when we read him as the projector of a vague “system”? Furthermore, if there is no satisfactory way of making the generic specific, then the generic theory itself should be abandoned; and, therefore, if we suppose that Peirce was earnestly seeking the truth, we must suppose that he was seriously trying out the variants and was not satisfied with the vaguer scheme. Besides, surely he meant what he said (putting minor missteps aside and taking due account of irony, hyperbole, and the like) in any given period of his writing.

B.

Dilworth opens his critique of my article by asserting that “Short’s agenda consists of limiting Schelling’s influence to the years 1891-93. It proceeds to the further, more drastic step of rejecting the ascription of a genuine objective idealism to his philosophy” (p.57). I was not aware of having had an agenda or of assuming that I could limit Schelling’s influence. I did point out that Peirce’s uses of the words “objective idealism,” borrowed from Schelling, to denote his own view, and his description of himself as a Schellingian “of some stripe” or as holding a “Schelling-fashioned idealism” all occur in the same brief period, 1891-4. And those are facts that Dilworth does not dispute.² I therefore suggested, not, I think, unreasonably, that the doctrine Peirce himself named his objective idealism was the one that he developed in those same years, primarily in the *Monist* series of 1891-3. And then I raised it *as a possibility* that that doctrine was not one he adhered to in other years. “In light of that possibility,” I wrote, “I propose in this essay to explicate Peirce’s objective idealism entirely with reference to the five *Monist* articles alone” (p.334). It was *then* to be determined whether that doctrine – the doctrine *that Peirce himself named objective idealism* – was a doctrine that he held, perhaps with slight modifications and/or with important additions, before and/or after 1891-3, or whether, alternatively, there are discrepancies, between what he said in that period and what he said earlier or later, so serious as to preclude combining the doctrines. That was, so to speak, my agenda; at least, it was the inquiry that I undertook. To be sure, I proceeded to argue that there *are* major discrepancies and, hence, that the doctrine Peirce said was his Schelling-inspired objective idealism was distinct from, because inconsistent with,

2 In the *Century Dictionary*, 1889-91, Peirce defined “objective idealism” as holding that “matter is extinct mind,” citing Schelling, without disclosing his own attitude toward the doctrine; I quoted the definition at the outset of my article, p.333. Earlier, in 1887-8, he wrote disparagingly of Schelling: *ibid.*, p.334. Peirce made two references to Schelling in 1903 hesitantly suggesting that he, too, embraced three metaphysical categories (1.21 and EP2:522n4 – Dilworth cites the latter, though it consists of words in a manuscript of one of his Harvard lectures that Peirce *deleted*). But espousing three categories, even the same three categories, is not identical with objective idealism, as Peirce himself defined the term, i.e., as holding that matter is “extinct” or “effete” mind.

the doctrines he earlier and later espoused. But that conclusion is not presupposed in first developing the 1891-3 doctrine in its own terms.

In the same paragraph of mine from which I have just quoted, I wrote, “In some broad sense, Peirce continued to be an objective idealist through to the end of his life, and was one long before he adopted the term.” I therefore did not and do not reject the ascription of objective idealism to Peirce’s thought throughout his career – *if* you care to use that term more broadly than Peirce himself used it when he was speaking of his own view. It might even be (I think it is) that in one respect his view of 1868-9 is more Schellingian than is his view of 1891-3, though, with respect to the one thesis that matter is hide-bound mind, the latter is Schellingian in a way that the former is not. This question of labels is unimportant. Choose whatever labels you like. My point was and is that what Peirce wrote in 1891-3 – call it X(B) – is inconsistent with what he said before 1884 – call it X(A) – and what he wrote after 1902—call it X(C).

I choose these periods, because the discrepancies within the period 1884-1902 are less great and more ambiguous than those between each pair of the three periods named. In the years 1884-98, Peirce was trying to make his cosmogonic hypothesis, that the laws of nature evolved from out of an initial chaos, work, and in those years there was a swift succession of variants on that hypothesis; in 1902 there appeared in print a late statement of that program, though already in that same year Peirce was beginning to develop his three categories on a new, phenomenological basis (see Short 2010, the companion piece elsewhere published that I cited in the *Cognitio* article here at issue; Dilworth appears not to have consulted that article). What I designated as Peirce’s objective idealism, and am now calling X(B), was a fairly definite variant in that sequence of variants on the cosmogonic hypothesis.

After the two sentences quoted above, Dilworth writes, “He does this by way of – as I understand it – first arguing that Peirce’s objective idealism is paradoxically tantamount to a form of materialism, but then providing his own version of a phenomenistic idealism associated with the tenets of William James’ philosophy at the expense of Peirce’s position.” That is quite wrong. Both of the claims made are wrong, the second in many ways at once. Let us take the first, first.

I did not argue that Peirce’s objective idealism – i.e., X(B) – is a form of materialism. Rather, in an attempt to understand what the doctrine was – more specifically, what it was as formulated in the *Monist* essay of 1892, “Man’s Glassy Essence” – I contrasted/compared it to subjective idealism, to Cartesian dualism, and to materialism (p.335). In the way it differs from subjective idealism (e.g., Berkeley’s), it is like dualism and materialism: all three affirm the existence of a world that is independent of its being perceived. Unlike dualism but like materialism, X(B) supposes that mind and matter are composed of the same stuff. One calls that stuff of which everything consists “matter” and the other calls it “mind.” “What,” I therefore asked, “gives ‘matter’ and ‘mind’ distinct meanings? That is the key question to which we later return.” May I emphasize? It is the *key* question. And I did return to it later, on the next page. And when I did, it was to distinguish Peirce’s view from materialism.

Briefly: Peirce in 1891-3 made feeling essential to mind, as one of its three elements, the other two being “Sensations of reaction” and “consciousness that a connection among feelings is determined by a general rule” (EP1:290-1) – in 1888 he wrote that feeling forms “the warp and woof of consciousness” (EP1:282) – and it is

by introspection that we understand what is meant by the word “feeling”. Materialists hold that matter is something we know only through perception; they tend to deny the validity of introspection. Peirce’s doctrine, I said, is “that what is most intimate and private, not observable but only introspectable, in fact exists objectively,” composing the physical things we observe. That is to say, it *also* exists objectively. I added that the Law of Mind, that feelings spread and coalesce, which Peirce in those years affirmed and claimed to be fundamental to the evolution of the laws of nature, “must be known by introspection... but applies objectively, so that, by looking within our own minds, we grasp the fundamental law of the universe” (p.336); later (p.341), I quoted Peirce’s words (from EP1:326) to the same effect. This is very far from being materialism! And, by the way, the doctrine *is* paradoxical, in the proper sense of that term, meaning contrary to received opinion. A doctrine’s being paradoxical is no objection to it.³

I could have added, but did not, as it is something philosophical readers can be presumed to know, that materialists limit matter’s properties to those of shape, size, velocity, and so on, that can be treated mathematically, and, hence, that the majority of qualities of feeling, whether of color and sound and scent or of ugliness and beauty, evil and goodness, are a problem for materialists. Their difficulty in accounting for what we feel, and, indeed, for consciousness in general, is one reason alternatives to materialism, such as X(B), are sought.

X(B) is not materialism, but neither is it the sort of idealism that Peirce espoused in 1868-9, in his three *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* articles, in which, as I pointed out (pp.337,339-40), he denied that we have introspective knowledge (EP1:30), and in which he spoke of feelings or sensations as the “mere” material quality of thought-signs (EP1:53-4), and in which he described these thought-signs as having the generality of predicates, that is, as being conceptual – of the nature of words – rather than sensuous (EP1:53). In 1891-3, by contrast, he tried to account for the generality of ideas as being due to feelings spreading and coalescing (I described this at length: pp.337-9).

In an effort better to understand this unusual doctrine, and perhaps to account for its advent, I suggested a comparison to what William James wrote in an article published in 1884, later reproduced as a chapter in his 1890 book, *Principles of Psychology*, on the “stream of thought,” now better known as the “stream of consciousness.” The comparison was not to James’ “philosophy,” which he did not at that time have, but was to the method he employed as a psychologist (in that essay or chapter and in some other chapters of his 1890 book, but not in all its chapters). That was a method that deliberately eschewed theorizing, limiting itself to a description of our mental life – a description that was, so far as possible, without theoretical commitments. Peirce, I averred, turned the resulting description into a theory, as did James himself in his later years, by claiming that feelings exist just as they are experienced, flowing without material substratum. Now, in saying this, I did not imply that there was any

3 I make a point of this, because Dilworth was especially upset by my noting that Peirce’s idea is paradoxical, as he takes that remark to be a criticism. And then he fancies that other things I said were meant to heighten the sense of paradox and thus deepen the criticism, whereas that was not my intent at all.

dispute between Peirce and James on that point. So far as James' description of the stream of thought is concerned, they were engaged in distinct inquiries, and James, in his inquiry, asserted no doctrine that Peirce contradicted. (The whole of *Principles of Psychology* is another matter: it may be read as implying that the stream of thought *does* have a material, specifically, a physiological, substratum). Nor was I presenting any theory of my own, much less a "phenomenalistic idealism" (Dilworth later [p.69] refers to my "advocacy" of this view!). In the first place, a doctrine that feelings exist objectively, i.e., unfelt, cannot be called phenomenalistic. In the second place, there is not a single view in all the views canvassed in my article that I advocated or would ever advocate; they are all equally repugnant to me. And certainly I did not present this ontologization of James' psychological method "at the expense of Peirce's position", since what I said was intended as an explication of that position, i.e., X(B).

Let this suffice as evidence of Dilworth's misreading of my essay. I will not weary the reader with a complete list, as there is scarcely anything he says I said that I believe I did say. Many of the misrepresentations are inexplicable. For example: "Short adds, however, that in that respect objective idealism is 'like' both materialism and Cartesian dualism in bridging the inner and outer worlds in knowledge" (p.62). But I said *nothing* about such "bridging" (neither "bridge" nor any cognate word nor any synonym, close or remote, occurs in my text). Nor did I imply any such absurdity as that materialism bridges the "outer" and "inner"; for it denies that there is an "inner". And the notorious problem with Cartesian dualism is that it cannot be bridged (Descartes himself was of another opinion). Again, Dilworth claims (p.58) that I "suggested" and held it as "a possibility" that Peirce did not persist in calling himself an objective idealist after 1894; whereas, in fact, that is simply a fact and I stated it simply as a fact (p.334). My assertion is thus made to seem much weaker than it was. What *that fact* (I used the word "fact") "suggests," I said, is that the doctrine thus named in the 1890s was not one Peirce held in other years. What is suggested might not be so. It is, so far as merely suggested, only a possibility. That is the possibility that the article explored – and concluded is actual. Which gets us back to the main issue.

C.

The question divides in twain. (a) What is X(B), i.e., the Schelling-inspired objective idealism that Peirce espoused in 1891-3? (b) Is X(B) consistent with what he said much earlier and/or much later? To answer (b) without begging the question, one would have first to answer (a) in terms of what Peirce said about objective idealism in 1891-3 alone, hence, without citing what he said in other years.

That does not preclude one's subsequently explicating Peirce's objective idealism in terms of what he said in other years – *if* (b) can be answered affirmatively *without* begging the question. It was not my aim, as Dilworth seems to have thought it was, to arbitrarily or dogmatically cram Peirce's objective idealism into one narrow period. He missed, I think, what my essay was all about. And therefore he failed to address my argument that (b) cannot be answered both correctly and affirmatively.

Begin with (a). To show, without begging the question, that my explication of X(B) mistaken, Dilworth would have had to have cited the text of "Man's Glassy Essence" and to have argued that it can be – or, better, must be – understood in a

way incompatible with my account of it. But this he does not do. His only citation of that essay pertains to but one point – concerning the inverse relation of consciousness to habitualness of action, aka “the principle of accommodation” – the “whole theory” of which he says I “miss” (p.69), though his own brief statement of it agrees, so far as it goes, with my longer statement of it (pp.341-2). More broadly, other passages from the 1891-3 *Monist* series would be relevant, but he cites none as conflicting with my account.

Dilworth does not explain how the following passages, all of them from the *Monist* series and most of which I quoted, can be understood other than as I have glossed them, namely, as positing feelings as ontologically primary, hence, as not depending on sensitive organisms but as existing even when not felt. Recall that in this series, Peirce was trying to formulate a cosmogony that would explain the evolution of laws of nature. As physical things and material substances are what they are dependently on the laws of nature, it was necessary for him to posit something immaterial from out of which the physical world and its laws evolved. He posited feelings “sporting” chaotically, spreading, coalescing, and forming associations that become habitual, thereby forming both bodies and minds, both laws of nature and ideas. Here are the passages: “[...] in the beginning, – infinitely remote, – there was a chaos of unpersonalised feeling [...]” (EP1:297); “This feeling, sporting here and there in pure arbitrariness, would have started the germ of a generalizing tendency” (*ibid.*); “A finite interval of time generally contains innumerable series of feelings, and when these become welded together in association, the result is a general idea...” (EP1:325); “[...] mechanical laws are nothing but acquired habits [...] the spreading of feelings” (EP1:349). The list could be extended.

Furthermore, Peirce at this time (and often later) identified feeling with consciousness, and while sometimes he seemed to suggest that consciousness consists in a certain organization of feeling rather than in feeling simpliciter, at other times he found consciousness to be most present in feelings sporting in unorganized freshness: “Wherever chance-spontaneity is found, there, in the same proportion, feeling exists. In fact, chance is but the outward aspect of that which within itself is feeling” (EP1:348); and, “[...] that primeval chaos in which there was no regularity was mere nothing, from a physical aspect. Yet it was not blank zero; for there was an intensity of consciousness there [...]” (*ibid.*). Consciousness was most intense before there were any organisms to be conscious! Now, Peirce sometimes distinguished mind from consciousness, but in this period he made consciousness, that is, feelings, essential to mind; they are so, at least, as sporting, “welding”, spreading, and forming habits of association (I quoted and commented on several such passages: pp.336,337-8). When he said that matter is effete mind, he meant that matter is the upshot of this process, as habits become fixed and spontaneity is diminished.

Rather than dispute my interpretation of these passages, DILWORTH (pp.64-7) quotes a number of passages from 1886 to 1903, in which a variety of versions of the three categories are stated, and then contents himself with this conclusion (and others, stated here and there, to like effect): “Short, however, goes on to prefer the terms of a Jamesian ‘free floating’ phenomenalism of Feeling in lieu of the multidimensionality of Peirce’s account” (p.65). Again: an ontology of feelings sporting unfelt, and composing a physical world that exists even when not observed, is *not* phenomenalism; nor did I express a preference for that or for any doctrine. More to the present point:

I *did* portray the “multidimensionality” of Peirce’s account, so far as his account in 1891-3 *was* “multidimensional”: I did say, as I did again, above, that feelings occur (“sport”), interact (“weld”), and spread, forming habits. Its “multidimensionality” is not, in my opinion, consistent with the system of categories, phaneroscopic, modal, and ontological, that Peirce began developing around 1902, which are “multidimensional” in a different way (see SHORT, 2007, Ch.3 and SHORT, 2010, pp.533-7).⁴

Dilworth’s way of interpreting Peirce’s objective idealism, by citing his thought from various periods, begs the question that I was addressing. It appears that he did not apprehend the question. Rather than inquiring, or allowing me to inquire, whether Peirce’s objective idealism of 1891-3 is consistent with what he earlier and later said, Dilworth assumes consistency and, on that assumption, interprets what Peirce said in 1891-3, not by citing what he said in those years, but in terms of what he at other times said. And then he finds my article to be at fault because it does not do the same: “Short’s article does not provide Peirce’s full doctrine [...]” (p.61). Indeed it doesn’t, if, by “full doctrine”, one means a combination of all that Peirce said over many years. That was not its purpose. Its purpose was to determine whether what was said over many years can be consistently combined in one doctrine, $X = X(A)+X(B)+X(C)$. In Dilworth’s view, the full account of each $X(i)$ requires taking every $X(i)$ into account, and therefore $X(A) = X(B) = X(C)$.

D.

Am I being unfair? Perhaps Dilworth did recognize the question and, while not announcing his strategy in so many words, intended to demonstrate the consistency of Peirce’s philosophy over the years, by successfully combining the views he expressed at different periods. Even if that was not his intention, we can examine Dilworth’s text with that question in mind. Does it show that the doctrines of periods A,B,C, for all their important differences, can be combined into one rich and satisfying system, a system superior to that expressed in any one period taken by itself? At the very least, one might suppose that, if Dilworth’s account does not embody any contradictions, then it throws doubt on my assertion that Peirce’s metaphysical theories of different periods are inconsistent with one another.

Unfortunately, Dilworth’s account is not sufficiently clear to permit any such conclusion to be drawn, either that Peirce was consistent over time or that he was not consistent. Its formulations are far too vague. For example, the phrase, “the flexible compresence of the three categories” (p.68), variants of which recur several times

⁴ Yes, Peirce affirmed three relational categories as early as 1867, but these were justified in a way at odds with his later phenomenological or phaneroscopic development of them. He did not write about the three categories again until 1885, and, from that time until about 1902, we find a variety of statements of them, sometimes anticipating, sometimes contradicting his system of phaneroscopic categories. The fact that the categories are always distinguished as orders of relation (monadic, dyadic, triadic) does not mean that they are always conceived of in the same way. The difference is that between a formal system and its interpretation, between syntax and semantics, but is greater. The relational scheme is a sketch that may be completed in different ways, and in each even the formal structure is modified.

here and there in Dilworth's text, is never explained, and, thus, it covers equally well a number of mutually inconsistent versions of the categories, as does, as already noted, his references to "multidimensionality". This vagueness masks confusion, as when he writes of "Peirce's insistence on their [the three categories'] *compresence* in all perceptual judgments" (p.64, Dilworth's emphasis). Peirce did not begin to write about perceptual judgments until 1903, and when he did so it was to distinguish them from percepts on the ground that they are judgments, hence, essentially symbolic and thus lacking the sensuous immediacy of the percept (EP2:155,227, 7.615-34): "[...] there is no relation between the predicate of the perceptual judgment and the sensational element of the percept, except forceful connections" (7.634), "The percept of course is not itself a judgment, nor can a judgment in any degree resemble a percept" (EP2:155). Apparently, Dilworth has confused perceptual judgment with phenomenological analysis. Thus he reverses the relation of inclusion that Peirce asserted: judgment, with its syntax and with its predicates that necessarily are general, is one element within experience, or only in some experiences, and is not the whole of experience. And this error prevents Dilworth from seeing that Peirce's system of phaneroscopic categories is inconsistent with the Kantian, conceptual idealism of his 1868-9 papers (EP1:Chs.2-4) and his 1867 first formulation of the categories (EP1:Ch.1), where all of experience is assumed to be within judgment.

Such fundamental differences are obscured by Dilworth's pell-mell grandiloquence: "[...] the amplification and ramification of that doctrine [objective idealism] in the objective energizing of ideas in the selectively assimilating ad [sic] complexifying nature of things and in the connatural productions of intelligence (in the sciences and arts) – systematically keyed to his three phenomenological and three normative categories" (p.70) means – what? Nor are unsubstantiated claims a help. What are "Peirce's precise phenomenological and metaphysical reflections" that my "strategy ambiguates" (p.63)? Dilworth does not say.

There are many more examples of vagueness and confusion, but I shall here examine just one key assertion. Early on, Dilworth announces that "Peirce came to develop his bottom line of philosophical speculation in three interlacing strands of articulation", of which the third is: "his equally huge claim as to the 'energizing reasonableness' of Ideas in nature that subtends, in interpermeating patterns of efficient and final causation, the plastic, progressive, agapistic [sic], productions of human intelligence" (p.55). The "interpermeating" of efficient and final causation is assumed in later passages, e.g., in this sentence: "Here Peirce again speculates on the vectorial dynamics of his evolutionary cosmology, involving the inner and outer, teleological and mechanistic, aspects of habit formation [...]" (p.69).⁵ The reference to

5 The sentence continues: "[...] in the synechistic progression from molecular protoplasm to the higher stages of freedom in the plasticity of the genetic codes" – Peirce was indeed ahead of his time! – "and of individual animal and human intelligence (in this way he subsumed the aforementioned Epicurean tychastic into his own agapastic account)." We are not told in what way genetic codes are plastic. Is it because they are subject to mutation? And is that what freedom is? Or is it because their expression in ontogeny is conditioned by environmental factors? And is that what freedom is? Or is it because our behavior is not determined wholly genetically? But, then, why mention these codes at all? Perhaps Dilworth associates genetic codes with the languages humans speak. Linguistic rules enable us to

the inner and outer is to Peirce's 1891-3 view that "Viewing a thing from the outside [...] it appears as matter," whilst, "Viewing it from the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness" (EP1:349), which I did not fail to discuss (pp.343-4). Dilworth's associating the outer view as mechanistic (i.e., as subject to efficient causation) and the inner view as teleological (i.e., as subject to final causation), while it goes beyond Peirce's text, is a not unreasonable interpretation of Peirce's view in 1891-3. And, as inner and outer are, to use a Dilworthian word, "co-implicative," so also, by this identification, final and efficient causation must be "co-implicative", which I guess means that they "interpermeate". But while this is a not unreasonable guess about what Peirce in 1891-3 would have agreed to, if in somewhat less inflated language, it is problematic, indeed, doubly problematic, and of the problems Dilworth appears to be unconscious.

The idea of final causation or teleology, very roughly, is that not only an individual's purposeful actions but also sometimes things not purposefully made and events unintended are to be explained by the ends that they serve. In his early writings, Peirce a few times indicated hospitality to such an idea, but that's all. In his cosmogonic period, he was more emphatic, but just twice and enigmatically. In 1887-8, he wrote, "Now it is precisely action according to final causes which distinguishes mental from mechanical action [...]" (EP1:266). And in 1892, in "The Law of Mind", he wrote of personality as a "teleological harmony in ideas" and of the personality being formed by this harmony developing over time (presumably, but here we must read between the lines, by one's forming purposes not fore-ordained); thus he called this is "a developmental teleology" (EP1:331). It therefore seems that, in this period, Peirce supposed that his "law of mind" – that feelings spread and coalesce and that the ideas they thus form continue that process of generalization and organization – was the same thing as final causation. So he indicated in an article *published* in 1902 (6.101). However, he gave only one detailed account of what final causation is, and that was *written* in 1902 (EP2:Ch.9), and that account is inconsistent with any identification of the supposed "law of mind" with final causation. That is one problem. The other is that, in that same account of 1902, the mutual dependence of final and efficient causation is asserted but the discussion that supports the assertion, while profoundly suggestive, is not entirely successful.

As I have written about final causation at length elsewhere (SHORT, 2007, Chs.4-5), I will be brief now. The 1902 account of final causation not only makes no mention of a law of mind and not only contains no hint of feelings or anything else spreading and coalescing but in fact expressly contrasts explanation by final causation to explanation by subsumption of events and processes under laws (SHORT, 2010, pp.540-1; cf. SHORT, 2007, pp.136-9). Explanation by law is explanation by efficient or mechanical causation. In Peirce's later thought, mind is identified with final causation rather than with feeling and rather than with any law (e.g., in 1902 at 7.366).

say, think, and do things (e.g., make a promise) that we could not otherwise say, think, or do, but we choose which of these to enact, and therefore language may be said to be a font of freedom: it expands the range of our choices. But a genetic code is not like that: it is not something there for us to use or not use. This confusion of code with language cannot be attributed to Peirce, as he knew not of genetic codes.

This is inconsistent with the version of objective idealism that he framed in 1891-3. The doctrines cannot be combined into one consistent system. Of course, in some respects the doctrines are similar; e.g., as final causation is supposed to exist both in human thought and in nature, this is an alternative way of unifying mind and nature. Therefore, you might call it an alternative expression of objective idealism. But it is not X(B) and cannot consistently be combined with X(B). It is not the doctrine that in 1891-3 Peirce named objective idealism.

Peirce wrote that “Final causality cannot be imagined without efficient causality; but no whit the less on that account are their modes of action polar contraries” (EP2:121).⁶ The reason is that ends exert no forces and therefore the particular effects they explain must have mechanical causes. A carpenter builds a house: there is a guiding purpose that explains his actions and accounts for the bow window he put in. But, at the same time, the house, bow window included, is brought about by a succession of physical actions: hammer blows, etc. And the actions also have physical causes: muscle contractions, nerve impulses, etc. Why must what is brought about mechanically by physical events also be explained all over again by purposes and ideas and blueprints? There are too many causes here! So, also: every step in the evolution of a biological species has its mechanical causes, as does every step in the maturation of an individual of that species. Why then say that we have eyes in order to see, that their existence is due to their serving such ends as those of avoiding predators and finding food? Again, we seem to have a superabundance of causes. This is a familiar problem not unique to Peirce. One feels that it has to have a solution and that the materialist solution, of explaining everything without reference to ends, is not right. One feels that materialists leave something unexplained, namely, the main thing. But any Peircean solution will have to be found by going beyond what Peirce himself said (thus my effort in *SHORT*, 2007, Ch.5). Saying that these two modes of causality “interpermeate” – and saying this as if its mere assertion suffices to establish the doctrine – simply does not help. I have nothing against metaphors. A good metaphor helps us to see, sometimes it helps us to see what we lack literal language to express. But this metaphor, suggesting that final and efficient causation flow into one another, like clay and water forming mud, is not one of those metaphors.

My point is that Dilworth’s account is not sufficiently clear to enable us to know what Peirce meant either in 1892 or in 1902, and, therefore, that it provides no basis on which to argue either that his 1892 conception of “inner” versus “outer” is consistent with or that it is inconsistent with his 1902 conception of final versus efficient causation. In the darkness of this vagueness, all cows are black.

Now, there are many things that Peirce said early on that he stuck with to the end or further developed and only modified, e.g., his conception of scientific inquiry and its three modes of inference and his probabilistic defense of inductive inference. Furthermore, I agree with Dilworth and many others that there are continuities in Peirce’s thought throughout his career. One continuity is his emphasis on the reality of continua, but he was never satisfied with the definition of continuity, offering seriatim several definitions, mutually inconsistent but progressing. Even

⁶ Peirce also asserted the converse dependence, also for good reason, and it also is problematic.

more importantly, though scholars have not yet said enough about this, his motive or aspiration remained the same, only growing in definiteness over the years. And with respect to some major topics, a general idea of the shape of a solution persists – a formal structure that is differently interpreted at different times. At one point, Dilworth suggests that Peirce’s categories are “heuristic” and a “pattern of conceptualization” (p.56). I do not know how that is consistent with the idea that these same categories are “precise”. Anyway, it is plain false of the categories c.1867 and of the different system developed after 1902. But I think it is exactly right when applied to the categories c.1887-8 (EP1:Ch.19). Furthermore, it is not only right but very useful when applied to the trichotomy of three relational categories differently developed in different periods,⁷ to the tripartite conception of signs also differently developed in different periods, and to the idea of an evolutionary cosmology, again differently fleshed out in different years (most of the variants occurring in 1885-98). I am unsure whether the aforementioned X – call it objective idealism if you wish – is better viewed under the rubric of heuristic or under the rubric of aspiration. But a heuristic, differently followed at different times – a pattern differently realized at different times – does not a system make. Nor is its attractiveness any proof that there must be a realization of it that is true.

E.

How should Peirce’s philosophical works be read? What sort of a philosopher was Peirce? These are the same question. We do not have to accept Peirce’s own answer, which is just as well, since, as on so many matters, he gave contradictory answers. Dilworth quotes passages of both sorts. In 1902, Peirce wrote this in a letter to William James:

But I seem to myself to be the sole depositary at present of the completely developed system, which all hangs together and cannot receive any proper presentation in fragments. (8.255).

To this passage, we might add another that Dilworth did not quote but which further supports his view, as I take it to be, of how Peirce’s system developed; it is from the 1887-8 “A Guess at the Riddle”:

To erect a philosophical edifice that shall outlast the vicissitudes of time, my care must be, not so much to set each brick with nicest accuracy, as to lay the foundation deep and massive. (EP1:246).

But there are, in Peirce’s writings, very few other expressions of a system-building ambition, and those I find to be ambiguous, such as the one in the 1891 *Monist* essay, in which he said that “systems should be constructed architectonically” by first making “a complete survey of human knowledge” (EP1:286). For that implies that a philosophical system, rather than outlasting the vicissitudes of time, will be subject to revision as scientific knowledge advances.

⁷ See above, n.4.

As against such passages, we have the following, from which Dilworth himself quotes (p.58), though without citing the source, and that I quoted, at greater length than I do here, in the article he criticizes. It is from another letter to James, this one of 1894:

I consider Schelling as enormous; and one thing I admire about him is his freedom from the trammels of system, and his holding himself uncommitted to any previous utterance. In that he is like a scientific man. (quoted in PERRY, 1935, vol. II, pp.415-6).

That is to say, ideas are to be tried out, not clung to. That makes sense only if philosophy is conceived of as an on-going inquiry rather than as the construction of a lasting system. In c.1896, he contrasted the scientist, characterized by “love of learning” with the philosopher as “a man with a system” (1.44) and in 1905 he distinguished “seminary philosophy” from “laboratory philosophy” on the same basis, denigrating the former (1.126-9). In 1902, he listed philosophy as one of the “sciences of discovery” (1.180-202).

What did Peirce mean by “laboratory philosophy” and by writing “like a scientific man”? In modern science, theories are not defended dialectically or at a purely verbal level of argument. Theories that can only be so defended are rejected as uninteresting. Rather, a theory has to prove its worth by leading, through application, to new results. It is a mistake to suppose that those results must always be ones of some “practical” use or utilitarian value. It is also a mistake to suppose that this ideal of theorizing is narrowly empirical. In pure mathematics, too, an interesting theorem is distinguished from a trivial theorem by its leading to a large number of surprising additional theorems. In both cases, we may speak of concrete results or discoveries and of theories or theorems being fruitful, or not, of discoveries. In modern science, theory exists for the sake of guiding inquiry. This, I take it, is what Peirce’s early so-called pragmatic maxim (1878, EP1:132) is all about: it is part of a suggestion that philosophy should adopt the intellectual ideal of modern science, that it should spurn merely verbal theorizing and, instead, attend only to ideas that may be distinguished from one another by the differences they would make in application (again: not necessarily practical applications of utilitarian value). In other words, pragmatism is less a semantic theory than it is a prescription for philosophy to replace the classical philosophical ideal of a system of final and comprehensive truths – one in which we may come comfortably to rest – by the modern – if you will, the “romantic” or even the “agonistic” – ideal of endless pursuit of knowledge. And I venture to suggest that the conceptions of phaneroscopy and of normative science that he developed later, beginning in 1902, and his later reconception of semeiotic, beginning around 1903, are a trio of brilliant suggestions of concrete, specialist, and *a fortiori* never-to-be-completed inquiries that may be identified as “philosophical sciences”. The same suggestions expand our concept of the empirical and throw into question what should be meant by referring to Charles Peirce’s “empiricism.”

Ironically, it is during the years that Peirce was most inclined to seek a system, or to announce that he had one, that he was in fact most definitely engaged in an inquiry of a scientific kind. He wanted the cosmogony he was working on to yield testable predictions and to guide discovery in physics (see the passages cited in

SHORT, 2010, pp.525-9). It is for that reason that he moved rapidly from one specific version of the cosmogony to another, as he tried, somewhat desperately I think, to make good on his stated aims. He made grand pronouncements, e.g., that the laws of nature all evolve out of an initial chaos and that matter is “partially deadened” mind, but he did not suppose that those pronouncements suffice of themselves. They had to be developed to the point of yielding concrete results, indeed, testable predictions. And in that task he appears to have failed. But that is what I wrote about in SHORT, 2010, so I will not repeat its argument here.

In conclusion, I will attempt to formulate the issue between Dilworth and myself more exactly. Dilworth does not view Peirce’s thought as being entirely static. Far from it! He writes ecstatically of “the organic growth and complexification” in Peirce’s “continuously developing philosophical career” and of his “gradually unfolding (and blossoming) career-text” (p.68), for example. Nor do I deny that there are continuities in Peirce’s thought throughout his life. We differ, rather, in how we understand that development. Let me put it in terms of addition and subtraction. I do not deny that Peirce retained some important early ideas and added to them. And Dilworth, presumably, would not deny that on some points Peirce changed his mind, subtracting some early views. But Dilworth sees Peirce’s progress as consisting essentially in the blossoming of a single system, whereas I see it as consisting, not in every respect but in important respects, in trying out a sequence of alternative hypotheses or alternative specifications of roughly the same formal structure, dropping those that prove fruitless and moving on to others that have better promise. That is, I see him proceeding in much the way that progress in the natural sciences takes place. Dilworth sees subtraction as a defect, regrettably sometimes necessary, whereas I see it as being, like addition, essential to inquiry and as being, at least in many instances, an advance in our understanding. As I said at the outset, we have more to learn from the failure of a definite theory than from the non-failure of a vague theory. Thus I see Peirce not as having the answers, even in outline, but as engaged in an inquiry that we are to continue, employing his powerful technical innovations, developing his potent suggestions, possibly fulfilling some of his aspirations, possibly having no greater success than he had.

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Data de envio: 22-12-2011

Data de aprovação: 20-01-2012