The Belief Story: Peirce's Anti-Kantian open Perspectives

A História da Crença: As Perspectivas Abertas Pelo Antikantismo de Peirce

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Abstract: At the end of the past century, both hermeneutics and analytic philosophy entered a severe crisis, paving the way for a "pragmatic turn" that combined respectively a methodical pattern that avoided irrationalism or crude nihilism (Habermas), and an interpretative context that avoided the infinite analysis bereft of any meaningful, ideal horizon (Brandom, Marconi, Putnam). This paper tracks the crisis in a common Kantian background that has shown its insufficiency in many fields: hypothetical reasoning, creative processes, daily acts of trust, beliefs. Using Peirce's insights, here I will try to explore beliefs because they have a peculiar rationale that classic philosophy, and *a fortiori* Kant's critic and followers, have overlooked. As we are going to see Peirce's view of belief stems from the continuity between reality and thought, and opens up a new understanding of reasoning, beyond the Kantian analytic-synthetic distinction.

Keywords: Belief. Continuity. Analytic/synthetic judgment. Anti-Kantism. Realism.

Resumo: *No final do século passado, tanto a hermenêutica quanto a filosofia analítica entraram em grave crise, preparando o terreno para uma "virada pragmática" que combina, respectivamente, um padrão metódico que evitou o irracionalismo ou o nilismo cru (Habermas), e um contexto interpretativo que evitou a análise infinita desprovida de qualquer significação, um horizonte ideal (Brandom, Marconi, Putnam). Este artigo acompanha a crise em uma base comum kantiana que demonstra sua insuficiência em vários campos: raciocínio hipotético, processos criativos, atos diários de verdade e crenças. Usando os insights peircianos, tentarei explorar crenças, porque elas possuem um raciocínio peculiar que a filosofia clássica e,* a fortiori*, críticos e seguidores de Kant têm negligenciado. Conforme veremos, a visão de Peirce sobre a crença decorre da continuidade entre realidade e pensamento, e abre um novo entendimento do raciocínio, para além da distinção kantiana entre analítico e sintético.*

Palavras-chave: *Crença. Continuidade. Juízo analítico/sintético. Antikantismo. Realismo.*

In the twentieth century, philosophy presented two main streams[1]. Hermeneutics

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stressed the importance of interpretation over the methodological understanding of natural sciences. Its unwavering investigation of meaning and its problems brought it to the extreme position of disallowing any fixed interpretation. In contrast, analytic philosophy over-emphasized the role of method to counter the irrational, meaning-driven implications of hermeneutics. Its research program produced many results in formal logic, often limiting meaning to linguistic features. Both views entered a severe crisis at the end of the past century, paving the way for a "pragmatic turn" that combined respectively a methodical pattern that avoided irrationalism or crude nihilism (Habermas), and an interpretative context that avoided the infinite analysis bereft of any meaningful, ideal horizon (Brandom, Marconi, Putnam). Many authors seem to be inspired by the pragmatic maxim but often they do not understand the kernel of pragmatic epistemology of which the concepts of sign and continuity are main characteristics.

After many years of research on pragmatism, especially on that of C. S. Peirce, and about the relationship and the comparison between pragmatism and contemporary philosophies, I came to realize that both hermeneutics and analytic philosophy started from a common Kantian background that restricted them to seeing and conceiving only one kind of reasoning, the combinatory form (division and composition) that we call "analysis", based on a fixed idea of logical "identity". Kant of course was looking for a reasoning which would have respected experience but the strict connection among a-prioricity, analyticity, and necessity obliged any synthetic reasoning to be shaped by the categories that defined analyticity. At the bottom of this idea of reasoning there is the famous distinction between "phenomenon" and "thing in itself" that forms a gap that keeps knowledge and experience separated from an unconceivable not-analytical "reality". To use a Peircean joke (referred to God), Kant made knowledge "all-sufficient, self-sufficient [but also] insufficient" (EP2: 161).

There are many fields in which this insufficiency emerges: hypothetical reasoning, creative processes, daily acts of trust, beliefs[2]. Here I will try to explore these latter because they have a peculiar rationale that classic philosophy, and *a fortiori* Kant's critic and followers, have overlooked. The classic view regarded belief as something that has to be substituted by truth when sound knowledge criteria appear. After Kant's intervention belief is even more detached from truth, because belief concerns the practical and not the speculative use of reason so that it does not allow any true (necessary) knowledge while truth is "conformity to the general necessary laws of intellect". In this way reality in itself, belief and truth are completely detached.

But our experience of scientific discoveries, medical diagnoses, trials based on circumstantial evidences seem to deny Kant's approach. As we are going to see Peirce's view of belief stems from the continuity between reality and thought, and opens up a new understanding of reasoning, beyond the Kantian analytic-synthetic distinction.

I will briefly describe in chronological order three progressive steps in Peirce's

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[2]   As for hypothetical or abductive reasoning, it has been one of the most studied chapter of Peirce's epistemology. For a more detailed discussion see *Semiotica* 153 1/4 (2005), completely dedicated to it. It is also important to recall D. Niño's work (NIÑO, 2007), which is a huge and complete summary of every single entry of the word abduction or retroduction in Peirce's works. I tried my own solution in Maddalena, 2009, p. 57-78.

awareness of the entanglement belief-truth-reality. Then I will try to show some shadows that Peirce's late opinions cast upon his same solutions and which philosophical suggestions arise from them.

1. Peirce and Belief

The first character we have to notice is a positive attitude toward belief which is at odd in an eighteen century scientist as Peirce was.

Peirce considered the topic of belief as a logical matter. In the series written for the "Popular Science Monthly" (1877-1878) he identified truth, belief (after inquiry) and reality. In this identification lies the core of the pragmatic rule.

Truth is here an ideal-real term. Our path of inquiry will end with truth, even if this will happen in the long – and possibly infinite – run of our research. Namely, we all will reckon truth, which is independent from what any thinker thinks, even though such a process can take the whole time of history. On the other hand, truth coincides with the final opinion or belief reached by the community of inquirers. This is a deep teleological understanding of truth very much connected to the scholastic realism Peirce professed. Truth is the fated belief whose object is what we call reality. "The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality." (CP 5.407).

This first approach must be understood with one of the main characteristics of Peirce's pragmatism (and of every sort of pragmatism): fallibilism. We cannot be absolutely sure because we are not living at the end of times. Being is in evolution and so it is our understanding of it. Our beliefs will reach truth in the long run but cannot claim infallibility. On the other hand, pragmatism is as far as possible from scepticism, even in the hypothetical form Descartes allowed. Research does not begin with doubt and does not finish with doubt. This sort of beginning from doubt is just a way to state a "paper doubt" through which you can only return exactly at the same starting point. The real and living doubt stems from a surprising phenomenon which strikes out our previous certainty and puts us on the path of inquiry striving for a new certain belief and eventually leading us towards truth.

Truth in the long run and fallibilism are the theoretical results of Peirce's early attempt to understand how human knowledge works. According to what Peirce had already achieved by that time, knowledge (the relationship among belief-truth-reality) lies in the development of representation that allows us to have different degrees of clearness of ideas. In "How to make our ideas clear" (1878) Peirce explains that there are three degrees of clearness of ideas and not only the two provided by the classic Cartesian view. After "familiarity" – that can also be "vagueness" (to use a Peircean term) – and "definitions" – the famous "clearness and distinction" which Descartes himself and Leibniz helped to shape – Peirce points out the "pragmatic" degree, the habit of action in which meaning consists (W3: 257-275; PEIRCE, 2005, p. 205-227).

The final view Peirce proposes in his early articles is an evolutionary conscience of being or "reality" he never abandoned. In this view there is a growth of belief toward truth through enquiry, errors, and scientific method.

At the turn of the century Peirce's studies about "continuity" led him to a new concept of "reality"[3]. The independent discovery of Cantor's theorem and paradox brought him to a profound view of a true continuity, well beyond any possibility of being caught by the set theory of his time[4]. "True continuity" which coincides with reality is beyond the set of all sets, because the totality that sets can reach remains within the boundaries of the semiotic divisions from which every set, even though a large one or the largest one, stems. Peirce thinks that "true continuity" is the development of reality from which we have to start thinking and not something that we have to reach. Every singularity is an interruption of this continuity as it is the sign of chalk to the continuity of the blackboard. That is why our analytical reasoning cannot build or reach the totality that Peirce identifies with "true continuity" or "reality" by analytical composition and division. Belief is not analytical in this sense and that is why its decisive importance as a sign of that continuous reality grows in those years.

Epistemologically speaking, Peirce started talking here of a fourth level of meaning that he called "concrete reasonableness" a level superior to the pragmatic one, a level in which Reason governs individual events (EP2: 255). This degree should correspond to the "true continuity" Peirce had reckoned in mathematics.

In this period he did not issue his previous ideas about beliefs but a new question grew more and more through his papers. The question concerns the origin of belief and, furthermore, the origin of their power to get to the solution of a problem in a small number of attempts. In 1901 in the article "On the Logic of Drawing History from Ancient Documents", Peirce starts putting a form of "rational instinct" as ultimate assurance for our scientific reasoning. Up to that time he had conceived instinct as a strong source of our beliefs, but its rationale was excluded from any scientific point of view. Instinct was the source of our practical certainties, well detached from scientific beliefs. But in 1901, he realizes that instinct plays a role in the "economy" of our formulation of Hypotheses. The view of continuity we mentioned pushes Peirce toward a perfect unity in the epistemological path and this is why he could not think anymore to some practical belief with a different rationale in respect to inferential reasoning.

There is a third chapter in the history of Peirce's identification of belief, reality, and truth. In 1909 P. Carus asked Peirce to republish on "The Monist" the articles written in the '70s. Peirce tried to write a new introduction that would have corrected

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[3]   Peirce's positions at the turn of the century can be tracked by the Cambridge Conferences (PEIRCE, 1998b), the letter to Cantor written in 1900 (NEM 3: 774-780), and some important passage of the Harvard Lectures held in 1903 (EP2: 226-241; NEM 3: 129-131), plus several other passages drawn from the Collected Papers (CP 6.168; 7.652).

[4]   For these studies see both M. Moore, 2007 and J. Havenel, 2006. My chronology of Peirce's conception of continuity (MADDALENA, 2009, p. 193-224) corresponds to the one given by Havenel in "Peirce's Clarifications on Continuity" (2006). Confirming the objectivity of results reached, I elaborated independently my setting of Peirce's ideas in the years 2003-4 and I exposed them on October 29, 2004 in the paper "Continuidad del tiempo como modelo epistemológico, desde Peirce" [*Continuity as epistemological model in Peirce*] held during the Conference "Acción, temporaliad y alteridad" (II Jornadas de Fenomenología y Hermenéutica, Santa Fe – Paraná, at Universidad Nacional del Litoral).

his previous mistakes. Moreover, he thought to have the chance to put the problem of belief and meaning within his new semiotic, epistemological, and metaphysical view.

Taking as given the unity among truth, reality and belief, let us see now what are the changes in Peirce's latest account.

Peirce maintains that the big mistake he made in his '70s papers was to consider truth as the sum of every possible effect of a concept which "will happen" placed in the long run of inquiry, not realizing that he had to correct the formula stressing the conditional future of the phrase. Rephrasing the famous motto: meaning consists in the effects that "would happen" in the long run of inquiry (EP2: 456).

This first change means the acknowledgment of modalities as the path through which reality itself evolves. Possibility, actuality and necessity are respectively the metaphysical realms to which vagueness, definition and pragmatic meanings refer. Without "transit" among these modalities there is no development of knowledge. There are beliefs in anyone of the three realms and all are part of the same path.

Conditional truth corresponds to a view of reality as "true or perfect (as Peirce started calling it) continuity". On this topic Peirce changed his mind once again around 1905 (and definitely in 1907)[5]. "Perfect continuity" is a general not only in the sense of "necessity" (what is not subjected to excluded third) but also in the sense of pure "possibility" (what is not subjected to principle of contradiction) that "would become" a necessary habit. This change means that he was trying to think continuity as a model in which there would be room for any particular so that every single point would be more a realization than a rupture of continuity.

Consequently, belief had to become something more than the outcome pursued earnestly through research. We must consider belief as an initial fulfilment of our possible understanding of our continuous reality. If reality is continuous, belief must reveal it at the outset and at the end of inquiry. In this new version belief is born as rational instinct and is the source of correct truth. When we start reasoning, we have to rely on instinct looking for that "plausibility" (EP2: 441) that an esthetical and ethical level of acquaintance with the totality of signs allows. Only through this epistemic view that unites the three normative sciences by the rising of rational instinct we can understand how reasoning can guess the truth. "Guessing" is a fast inference through the continuity of signs[6].

Metaphysical continuity makes us see a different starting point as Peirce had already maintained at the beginning of the century: you have to consider belief as detached from truth when you begin your inquiry with discrete measures and you do not conceive any form of continuous growth. If reality is measurable according to discrete quantities, which is the outcome of Kant's attitude towards judgments, you have a "copy theory" of belief which coincides with truth (see for example the first Wittgenstein or Ruth Marcus). Either you have the same number of elements in the state of facts you are examining and in knowledge or you do not. In the for-

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[5] For the period of crisis see CP 4. 639-640, 5.528, 6.174, 6.325; for the definitive change see CP 4.642; MS 204.

[6] I tried to develop this reading of instinct as part of the abductive pattern and the progressive growth of Peirce's awareness of reasonableness in our instinctive reasoning in Maddalena, 2009, p. 79-96. One can find a similar understanding of instinct in Nubiola 2005 and an interesting link between vagueness-instinct-abductive reasoning in Ibri, 2006.

mer case you have truth. In the latter you have falsity. On the other hand, you can always say that there is a gap between our knowledge intended as a perfect copy and reality and you can say that we have only falsity or that there is no truth (as in Rorty's radical view). Both solutions are embedded of the philosophical thought that Peirce called "nominalism", a detachment between reality and thought. On the contrary, if you start from continuity, belief is part of growth towards that ideal/real term called truth: belief is that sign which will attain perfect independence from any thought (and wrong beliefs witness this self-correcting property of reality). In his latest manuscripts Peirce adds that perfect continuity means that there is a perfect (essential?) connection among particulars. This continuity is the reason why we can read new phenomena as signs and we can reason on them. Moreover, we can believe our provisional knowledge as a step of evolution of reality. Beliefs make us see that a metaphysical understanding of reality and truth is the only way to explain how reasoning can work on a semiotic, logic, methodological, epistemological level.

Peirce was not satisfied with his results. Many of his last manuscripts are still on continuity. Nevertheless, what he wrote between 1907 and 1914 can give us some suggestions I want to explore.

2. Suggestions

Here comes the problematic point I want to suggest. Peirce's understanding of continuity as a possibility that exceeds the metaphysical modality of existence remained unfinished even though the direction of his thought was clear. He was unsatisfied with what he reached because it was not precise enough to understand both generality and singularity, the model of reality and the fruit of a complete reality, the generality of necessity. Accordingly, he never succeeded in giving examples of his definition of "concrete reasonableness", the last degree of clearness of meaning and he even showed doubts on his pragmatism when he understood how powerful was the driving toward truth promoted by rational instinct and its esthetical and ethical reading of signs. As he wrote: "Yet the maxim of pragmatism does not bestow a single smile upon beauty, upon moral virtue, or upon abstract truth; – the three things that alone raise Humanity above Animality" (EP2: 465).

The problem is that Peirce himself was feeling how far his studies on continuity could lead but could not fully realize it. Contemporary mathematics has shown that his understanding was right and that there are possible mathematics based on his metaphysical modalities (possibility and necessity) and on evolution (ZALAMEA, 2008). Peirce could not find this kind of mathematics and its philosophical consequences because he was still blocked – notwithstanding his late rejection of him – in a Kantian scheme of analytic and synthetic reasoning where synthetic reasoning is shaped according to analytical a-prioricity and necessity and eventually according to the categories and judgments of intellect (and therefore accepting willy-nilly the nominalist separation between reality and knowledge). If he had not been, he would have realized that what he was looking for and somehow anticipating was a kind of reasoning which could be complementary to the analytical thought. Peirce could not reach a complete overturn of Kantian premises and his semiotic analyses are methodically stalled into an analytic pattern in which we have to list every single

item. However, it is pretty clear that Peirce was aiming toward this direction if we think to the epistemic path signalled by the Classification of Science (as Short pointed out [SHORT, 2007]), by the reference to Scots philosophers and common sense, by abduction and concrete reasonableness. Maybe this anti-Kantian view and epistemic dynamic can be well symbolized by one passage from MS 636:

> There is a celebrated passage in the second edition of the Critick der Reinen Vernunft and a very notable one, in which Kant says that the "I think" –Das Ich Denke – must be able to accompany all his ideas, "since otherwise they would not thoroughly belong to me". A man less given to discoursing might remark on reading this: "For my part, I don't hold my ideas as my ownty-downty; I had rather they were Nature's and belonged to Nature's author". However, that would be to misinterpret Kant. In his first edition, he does not call the act "the I think" but "the object=x". That which that act has to effect is the consecution of ideas; now, the need of consecution of ideas is a logical need and is due not, as Kant thinks, to their taking the form of the Urtheil, the assertion, but to their making an argument; and this is not "I think" that that always virtually accompanies an argument, but it is: "Don't you think so?" (MS. 636, p.24-26).

In this sense, I will propose a definition which has to be examined. If we understand as "synthetic" the kind of reasoning that acknowledges identity through changes and as "analytical" the kind of reasoning that loses the identity of its object through changes, while "vague" is the reasoning or the judgment that does not acknowledge identity through changes, we would have a much more complete picture of our reasoning. A dynamic view to which Peirce's analysis of reasoning was more and more aiming to and in which signs and gestures stemming from them can play a perfect role in understanding identity and acknowledgment.

But Peirce's conception of belief was already a step toward this dynamic view and as time was going by it showed its deep anti-Kantian vocation. Belief is a step toward truth in the Peircean sense because is a partial gesture of a synthetic understanding of reality. We do not have any paper doubt because paper doubt is analytical and we can be optimistic in our fallibilism because failure is part of a general more profound relationship – a relationship of continuity – between reality and inquiry. In *Contra Academicos*, Saint Augustine blamed the Aristotelian formal definition of error as "negation of what is true, affirmation of what is false" because it does not make room to the original relation with truth that precedes any logical statement. Neither Augustine nor Peirce succeeded in giving a different account of what they meant but both were sure that formal definition could not explain our profound need of believing and the fact that our beliefs – in their transit from vagueness to concrete reasonableness – are so often correct.

Conclusion

In a philological perspective, this paper suggests how Peirce's late epistemology understands his famous identification among truth, belief and reality. Peirce's starting point has deepened but not overcome: Peirce understood that reality is a "true continuity" not analytically analyzable; correspondently he understood truth as a conditional future according to different metaphysical modalities that have to take

into account not only existence but also possibility and necessity; belief is a sign of truth from its origin in "rational instinct" toward its end in habits governed by reason, passing through esthetical and ethical judgment, and the abductive-deductive-inductive pattern of reasoning.

Second, continuity between belief and truth stresses the importance of undertaking any inquiry starting from our beliefs because, if they are correctly read as signs, they will lead us – in the long run – toward truth. As much as time was going by, Peirce was more and more sure that our rational but instinctual beliefs share with everything in Nature and Reality their profound rationality, namely to be an inference conducted through and on signs. In this strenuous defence of common sense as the beginning of inquiry and in a final verification by reality lies what I call "the optimism of fallibilism" which is the only resource we have to avoid ideologies of any kind. On the one hand, Peirce's study of belief puts him in the same row of hermeneutics in thinking that the Enlightened and positivist view of an objective truth without prejudice is impossible, since our knowledge is always an interpretation. On the other hand, interpretation is neither subjectivism nor relativism: we all live in continuity with reality and there is a truth, even more, there is "the" truth that we will reach at the end of inquiry. For this continuity we can read reality to which we belong.

Third, Peirce's late attempts to describe continuity and belief show that probably we have to understand a new paradigm of knowledge, following contemporary mathematics. Both analytic philosophy and hermeneutics (and pragmatism of course) could not change the Kantian idea of a separation between some incomprehensible "depth" and methodical reasoning. This definition has remained settled even when – as in Peirce's case – philosophers tried to enlarge the boundaries that Kant established for certain theoretic knowledge, practical instances, and aesthetic needs. It seems to me that they could not get out from Kant's definition of synthetic and analytic judgment, accepting that judgment can only be a sum of combinations and calculations.

Peirce felt that something was missing in the picture and enlarged the boundaries of knowledge as far as he could but his phenomenological sketch and his more complex and complete semiotic pattern are still too analytical for getting to the comprehension of the "thickness" of experience. Following his insight, I think it is necessary to change Kantian definition of synthetic and analytical judgment replacing them with a definition that should involve modalities, transit among them, and the semiotic step implied in belief (acknowledgment).

This means that we can think about reality, belief, and truth in a way even more natural than what Peirce did. But we have to look at the great American philosopher as one of the few that understood from within the analysis a path of inquiry well beyond any analysis encouraging everyone of us to try thinking the real way in which our thought works.

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