

Logical Normativity and Individual Accountability: Remarks on Peirce's Perspective

*Normatividade Lógica e Responsabilidade Individual:
Comentários sobre a Perspectiva de Peirce*

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Abstract: Peirce's philosophy seems quite uninterested in tracing a "theory of the subject" understood as a possible foundation for both theoretical and ethical truths. Rather, Peirce stresses the importance of comprehending the event of signs as an original possibility to get in touch with truth. Of course this implies also a metaphysical position but Peirce – taking any possible distance from the Cartesian philosophical style – does not want to allow for any metaphysics of subject.

However, there are many passages in Peirce's philosophy that sketch a sort of phenomenology of conscious subject, in which traditional concepts and problems dealing with ethical requirements emerge. Facing those problems, Peirce's view does not seem to favour the so-called "dissolution of subject", rather he helps for a post-cartesian way of "de-centering subject". Many crucial and interwoven features of Peirce's work play an important role in the makeup of such a perspective: the critique to intuitionism that he worked out in a completely original way; the epistemic notion of sociality; the constitutive function of interpersonal communication for both the development of self-consciousness and of the awareness of believes' fallibility; the identification of the social nature of the meaning of signs and the validity of the notions of truth and reality. In a few words, what comes into play is his "logical socialism", according to which community – with its languages and practices – has a decisive role in order to understand subjectivity and practical criteria of human action.

In this paper I will try to deepen my previous analysis of the anti-dogmatic element as well as the ethical consequences of this view of subjectivity, and of their merging into a form of "externalism" representing an alternative to rational and ethical models centred on the "first person". More precisely, based on these analysis, I will now focus on a problem representing the inevitable premise to any philosophical discussion about ethics: that is to say the problem of human responsibility. I will try to grasp its different features through some crucial passages in Peirce's writings, including the text on normative sciences. The main question will be the following: does peircian idea of "final" logical rationality imply a problematic relationship with freedom and responsibility? The ambiguity of this idea suggests getting back to Kant's underlining of subjective responsibility as a core element of reason's potentialities as well its of the awareness of its limits.

Keywords: Normative sciences. Peirce. Rationality. Responsibility. Subjectivity.

Resumo: *A filosofia de Peirce parece pouco interessada em traçar uma “teoria do sujeito”, entendida como um fundamento possível para as verdades tanto teóricas quanto éticas. Ao contrário, Peirce enfatiza a importância de se compreender a ocorrência de signos como uma possibilidade original de entrar em contato com a verdade. Naturalmente, isso implica também uma posição metafísica, porém Peirce – distanciando-se o quanto possível do estilo filosófico cartesiano – não deseja permitir nenhuma metafísica do sujeito.*

Todavia, há muitas passagens na filosofia de Peirce que delineiam uma espécie de fenomenologia do sujeito consciente, onde emergem conceitos e problemas tradicionais que tratam de exigências éticas. Enfrentando esses problemas, a visão de Peirce não parece favorecer a chamada “dissolução do sujeito”; ao invés, favorece uma forma pós-cartesiana de “descentralizar o sujeito”. Muitas características cruciais e entrelaçadas da obra de Peirce desempenham um papel importante na composição de tal perspectiva: a crítica ao intuicionismo, que ele elaborou de forma totalmente original; a noção epistêmica da socialidade; a função constitutiva da comunicação interpessoal, tanto para o desenvolvimento da autoconsciência quando da percepção da falibilidade dos crentes; a identificação da natureza social do significado dos signos, e a validade das noções de verdade e realidade. Em suma, seu “socialismo lógico”, de acordo com o qual a comunidade – com suas linguagens e práticas – é determinante para se entenderem a subjetividade e os critérios práticos da ação humana.

Neste trabalho tentarei aprofundar minha análise anterior do elemento antidogmático, como também as consequências éticas dessa visão da subjetividade, e do fato de sua fusão em uma forma de “externalismo” representar uma alternativa a modelos racionais e éticos centrados na “primeira pessoa”. Mais precisamente, com base nessas análises, focarei agora um problema que representa a premissa inevitável a qualquer discussão filosófica sobre ética: ou seja, o problema da responsabilidade humana. Tentarei apreender suas características distintivas por meio de algumas das passagens cruciais da obra de Peirce, inclusive de seu texto sobre ciências normativas. A questão principal será a seguinte: será que a ideia peirciana de racionalidade lógica “final” implica uma relação problemática com liberdade e responsabilidade? A ambiguidade dessa ideia sugere voltar à ênfase de Kant na responsabilidade subjetiva como elemento crucial das potencialidades da razão, como também da conscientização de seus limites.

Palavras-chave: Ciências normativas. Peirce. Racionalidade. Responsabilidade. Subjetividade.

1. At an overall glance, Peirce’s philosophy looks rather alien to the intention of providing a systematic theory of subjectivity on which the dynamics of rationality can be founded, both in the theoretical and in the ethical domains. Indeed, for the founder of pragmatism, what mostly counts is understanding the event of signs as an authentic possibility of grasping the truth and this issue implies his metaphysical research. As is well known, his quest, however, has little to do with the modern trend

established by Descartes, that is, with the metaphysics of the subject.

There are however several passages in Peirce's work describing a sort of phenomenology of the knowing subject with issues and concepts bringing to the foreground the ethical instance entailed by most of the conventional theories of subjectivity. If we address this aspect, it can admittedly be said that Peirce's view is not aimed at the so-called "dissolution of the subject", but that it rather points to a lively expression of the contemporary trend to promote "decentralization". With respect to the latter, I confine myself to recall some key elements: his criticism to intuitionism and the epistemic notion of sociality, the constitutive role attributed to inter-subjective communication for the development of self-consciousness and the awareness of the fallibility of the ego, the identification of the social nature of the meaning of signs, as well as of the criteria of truth and reality; in a nutshell, his "logical socialism" whereby the community – its languages and practices – becomes crucial and takes priority on subjectivity and its operating principles.

On other occasions I have tried to illustrate the anti-dogmatic component and the ethical implications of these aspects and, more generally, their convergence into a form of "externalism" exemplifying the pursuit for an alternative to the models of rationality and of ethics based on the "first person" i.e. the ego intended as a system of pre-set and pre-determining logical-semantic structures. Instead, I would like to focus on an issue that inevitably becomes preliminary to the philosophical discourse on ethics, that is, the question of human responsibility. I will investigate it through some paradigmatic passages of Peirce's work, in the hope of providing a contribution to the debate around his approach to normative sciences. As Peirce himself says, this topic is key to his pragmatism, to understand its meaning and theoretical value.

2. Whoever addresses to Peirce's philosophy with the intention of finding elements for a theory of ethics knows very well that he/she will have to shoulder the burden of exploring an almost uncharted ground. Although his attention to the practical dimension of the cognitive process lays itself open to a broadening of the field to include its ethical and moral connotations, that line of thought was actually developed only by other exponents of pragmatism. Peirce's ethical reflections are few and, at any rate, so well set into discourses of other nature that it is almost impossible to avert the risk of strained interpretations.

On the other hand, Peirce's interest in ethics and, above all, the idea of it being a normative science on an equal footing with esthetics and logic, begins to take shape only towards the end of the Nineties (CP 2.197-198), a time when he continued to try to justify his pragmatism by placing it into an ontological-metaphysical system. To be sure, an attempt full of theoretical tension to the extent to which it became inevitable to recognize the interconnections of metaphysics with the scientific endeavor, and also remarkably weakened by its underlying aim: to provide a safe guide for the progress of physical-natural sciences through the implementation of the logical-semiotic triadic relation of *Firstness*, *Secondness*, *Thirdness* on the plane of an evolutionist ontology.

I will not delve into a discussion about the intricacies inherent to this insidious development of Peirce's thinking. Similarly to other interpreters, K. L. Ketner and H. Putnam observed that, despite acknowledging to Peirce's metaphysical discourse the

merit of anticipating some of the concerns that sciences would have to face in the subsequent century, many of the conclusions reached by that thinking are entirely contrary to many aspects of today's most accredited scientific theories (RLT: 86 ss.).

One might object that, from Peirce's viewpoint, this point is not enough to declare the failure of its metaphysical endeavor, since the validity of every assumption or conceptual expression is entrusted to the infinite future of research, to its constant and never entirely foreseeable developments. On the other hand, if we admit that the fecundity of philosophical works does not lie so much in the individual outcomes reached in this or that particular segment of it, but rather in the suggestions or, to express it with Peirce's words, in the semiotic processes that the various components of a work imply, one might perhaps feel authorized to put into brackets his claim of identifying the metaphysical foundations of scientific progress.

To the purpose of our subject, however, it is necessary to make a few observations about the ontological principles on which this claim seems to be grounded, that is the notion of the universe disposition to progress towards a legal order. This is notoriously a rather controversial extension of the logical-semiotic category of Thirdness, leading to a shift of perspective that points to an objective pattern related to both the physical-natural world and to the sphere of thinking. In other words, according to Peirce, the tendency towards legality is the backbone of physical reality as well as of the logical meanings allowing human thinking to relate to things in such a way as to gather a non trivial experience, an experience aimed at the knowledge of truth.

Perhaps one of the main contributors to this double track is the idea of "progress" shared with many of his contemporaries, in a perspective nurtured by the solid trust that the path of science leads to a positive regulation of human life. A trust that leads him to define scientific activity as the process of research "destined" to the production of beliefs capable of grasping the truth of reality and to point to the cosmic tendency towards legality, the ontological foundation of scientific progress. He certainly connects the double value of Thirdness, its logical-semiotic and ontological-metaphysical figure to the ability of scientific theories to understand the world of real events: they are such in as much as they express the rational character of the laws and, conversely, their legality is what makes them intelligible. Legality after all is the condition of existence of real events – what subtracts them to the uncertainty of chance and, at the same time, is the sine qua non for the human possibility to understand them.

Suggesting the law as condition for the intelligibility of the real is clearly something different from affirming the disposition of the universe to a legal order, and it is superfluous to insist on the purely conjectural aspect of this second assertion. I simply observe that the ontological-metaphysical connotation of Thirdness leads to conform human operations to the mechanisms of an overlying reality that incorporates and determines them, pushing aside the idea of responsibility as an integral part of thinking developments. Responsibility attains a different reach instead, in the light of the logical-semiotic role of Thirdness and its inextricable link with the categories of Secondness and Firstness. It is appropriate to recall a passage where Peirce points out his divergence from Hegel. Unlike what the latter thought – Peirce says – Thirdness is not the absolute that must "remove" Firstness and Secondness:

Thirdness it is true involves Secondness and Firstness, in a sense. That is to say, if you have the idea of Thirdness you must have had the idea of Secondness and Firstness to build upon. But what is required for the idea of a genuine Thirdness is an independent solid Secondness and not a Secondness that is a mere corollary of an unfounded and inconceivable Thirdness; and a similar remark may be made in reference to Firstness. (CP 5.91)

I would now like to dwell on the relation between the second and third category, since it is in this area that accountability appears to take up a considerable role in the knowing subject's capability to translate the ambiguous but binding signs of Secondness into the terms of Thirdness. The main dimension of Secondness designates the world of experience, of what happens and occurs without any other reason if not that of its very occurring. Therefore, it mainly represents the experience of the otherness of knowable events, with respect to which, thinking cannot make any immediate correspondence, if not just the capability to interpret them according to directives relevant to the grasping of meanings intersubjectively valid. Peirce's principle of the impossibility of a direct access to the "true reality" of knowable events entails, as is well known, the fallibility in principle of the processes and the outcomes of interpretation, but this is not tantamount to deny the potential for truth of the interpretive process. Peirce's cognitive semiotics, just by virtue of the category of Secondness substantiating it, rejects such instance. Interpretation is a rational act and, like the abduction that represents it very closely, it is subject to the epistemic value of experience not to a lesser extent than to the normativity of the logic. Commitment to a constant balancing of these two indivisible aspects is integral part of Peirce's notion of the interpretive activity and quite clearly, referring to constant commitment is just a way of talking about liability.

Although all this is more directly related to the definition of the method of physical-natural sciences, it is legitimate to attempt to identify its repercussions on the theory of ethics. The most immediate observation on the subject is the following: since Secondness pertains to the material of experience to which thought tends to attribute the legal form of Thirdness, the first condition for a reflection on possible ethical values and principles should be that of taking the responsibility of crediting the concrete experiential reality of "human facts". Of course, especially in this case the interpretative activity is decisive, and it is clear that the fallibility of interpretations, as far as "human facts" are concerned, is no doubt particularly disquieting. Anyhow, if we accept the image of Thirdness as "rational" mediation of Secondness, it would still be incongruent to allow for a dissociation of human interpretive processes underlying the development of the ethical theories from the responsibility of listening to the face-to-face voice of experience. Except that Peirce's texts do not offer any support to that and one must therefore turn to other considerations.

The rational form of the interpretive relation allowing thought to link up to experience is equivalent to what Peirce considers the distinctive factor of human beings, i.e. self-control. "Thinking" – he says in *What Pragmatism is*, of 1905 – "is a species of conduct which is largely subject to self-control. In all their features (which there is no room to describe here), logical self-control is a perfect mirror of ethical self-control – unless it be rather a species under that genus" (CP 5.419). In any case, thought's function coincides with the process of "self-preparation of action", mentioned by Peirce in this context.

Among the things which the reader, as a rational person, does not doubt, is that he not merely has habits, but also can exert a measure of self-control over his future actions; which means, however, not that he can impart to them any arbitrarily assignable character, but, on the contrary, that a process of self-preparation will tend to impart to action (when the occasion for it shall arise), one fixed character, which is indicated and perhaps roughly measured by the absence (or slightness) of the feeling of self-reproach, which subsequent reflection will induce. Now, this subsequent reflection is part of the self-preparation for action on the next occasion. (CP 5.418)

These phenomena seem to be the fundamental characteristics which distinguish a rational being. Blame, in every case, appears to be a modification, often accomplished by a transference, or “projection,” of the primary feeling of self-reproach. Accordingly, we never blame anybody for what had been beyond his power of previous self-control. (CP 5.418)

Guilty feelings, blame, self-criticism, self-control: the passage establishes a close “family resemblance” between these expressions at which Peirce just hints but that would deserve instead a more in-depth study, to advocate with sufficient plausibility that “logical self-control is the perfect mirror of ethical self-control.” Nevertheless the common denominator of these expressions is clear: the ability by the human subject to organize his/her future actions according to sufficiently weighted criteria. The use of the term “sufficiently” is compulsory in this matter, since self-control in itself is no guarantee for the absence of mistakes. Unless we consider it a sort of “super-faculty” that can transcend the semiotic pattern of human intelligence. Both the logical and ethical figure of self-control cannot exclude the uncertainty originating from the interpretive essence of the materials on which it operates, nor of its purpose: the uncertainty of the relations – always mediated anyway – of human being with the world of things and with the other human beings, as well as the uncertainty of the identification of a norm to regulate them in the future.

However, when Peirce describes self-control, he endeavors to set every subjective element aside – approval, feeling of satisfaction (including the rational type à la Sigwart) (R 637: 17-18), personal decision. As regards the process through which “habits of deliberate actions” are formed, in a manuscript dating back to 1902 he states:

In the formation of habits of deliberate action, we may imagine the occurrence of the stimulus, and think out what what the results of different actions will be. One of these will appear particularly satisfactory; and then an action of the soul takes place which is well described by saying that that mode of reaction “receives a deliberate stamp of approval”. [...] This act of stamping with approval, “endorsing” as one’s own, an imaginary line of conduct so that it shall give a general shape to our actual future conduct is what we call a *resolve*. It is not at all essential to the practical belief, but only a somewhat frequent attachment. (CP 5. 539)

What is then “essential” to practical belief? Exactly what is essential to a “purely theoretical” one: unless it is “pure metaphysical jargon or chatter” – says Peirce – theoretical belief (albeit indirectly) is always a practical belief at the same time, i.e. “it must have some possible bearing upon practice” (CP 5.539); moreover, “the true essence” of a belief is that it “has to involve expectation” (CP 5.541). But why Peirce

says that the decision affects the formation of habits of deliberate action and yet it is just a “rather frequent belief constraint”?

Sure, no “expectation” is in itself a habit of action, and it is precisely this that he wants to highlight. Nonetheless, saying “expectation” in common language is tantamount to “future prospect” and – provided it is not just a mere a tangle of thoughts or unconscious fantasies – it is unclear whether to have one instead of another, one can actually do without a decision. On the other hand, insisting on the discrepancy between belief and habit would not help maintain what Peirce states in principle, that is to say the actual influence of belief on practical conduct. All the more so considering from a general perspective that, beliefs are signs or symbols of thought, and he indeed affirms that the meaning of a symbol “consists in *how* it might cause us to act” (MRT: 214).

The discrepancy between belief and habit is remarkably reduced in the important article written between 1906 and 1907, appeared in *Collected Papers* and entitled *A Survey of Pragmatism*. When Peirce tries to reach a final clarification about semiosis and, more specifically, about the notion of “interpretant” he sets up an important correlation between self-control, belief and habit, that can be summarized as follows: the habit is a “disposition to act in a certain way in given circumstances and for a given reason”, and belief is precisely a “deliberate or self-controlled habit” replacing the “conjectures” suggested by a certain phenomenon, i.e. the “first logical interpretants of the phenomena” (CP 5.480). The self-control qualifying the belief is then the crucial hallmark of the changes of habits that, according to Peirce, are “the living, the veritable and final logical interpretant” (CP 5.491). The formation of new habits is the outcome of an interaction of inborn dispositions, of already consolidated habits and of actual intellectual experiments – Peirce refers to “inner efforts”, “acts of imagination” – that may truly affect behavior especially if their repetition is “accompanied by a peculiar strong effort that is usually likened to issuing a command to one’s future self” (CP 5.487).

This last aspect is indeed vital. Not only “no entirely new habit can be created through involuntary experience” (CP 5.478), i.e. without the intervention of intellectual activity, but Peirce specifies what he considers the really critical element – there are no new habits without a true self-control, that is to say: “every man exercises more or less control over himself by means of modifying his own habits” (CP 5.487).

But in the name of what one exerts self-control on oneself and modifies one’s habits? Common sense, so dear to Peirce, suggests that in order to exert self-control and change one’s habits one must have a reason to think that doing it “is better” than not doing so. But common sense also suggests that if we think that doing something is “better” than doing something else is precisely because we are able to make distinctions and we can make choices, take decisions that, as a general rule, we will then try to implement.

However, if we ask common sense to find a justification to these choices and, in the case in point, a justification of the choice in favor of self-control, we will get answers that only partly match Peirce’s view. To be sure, he collects the common intuition that human beings do have the chance of choosing their behavior based on a distinction between what “is better”. On the other hand, he raises this intuition up to the plane of philosophy by relating it to a “final purpose”, a universal interest for

rationality as a rule and meaning of human conduct. We are talking about a purpose that is imposed, according to his discourse on normative sciences, to esthetics and ethics, the latter –precisely as normative science – being “the study of what ends of action we are deliberately prepared to adopt”: to adopt as ultimate aims, i.e. as aims to which individual actions – to be ethically correct – will have to conform (MRT: 212).

It is worth underlining that, in Peirce’s view, “deliberate”, “self-controlled”, “logical”, are all perfectly synonymous:

A logical reasoner is a reasoner who exercises great self-control in his intellectual operations; and therefore the logical good is simply a particular species of the morally good. (MRT: 214)

This is to say, to go back to a previous note, that ethical self-control and logical self-control are the two sides of the same coin, i.e. they both have to do with the rational dimension of the human being. It is evident, however, that it makes no sense to talk about self-control if not in the terms of a possibility of the human being, a possibility susceptible of being denied and not only acknowledged and pursued, no more and no less than the rational dimension it relates to. Peirce acknowledges it when he relates the notion of “ultimate aim” of the categorical imperative by Kant, observing that it is such not because “the voice of conscience” dictating it goes beyond any control of ours, but because what that voice tells us can also be ignored and, only because of the fact that we are “free to control ourselves”, ethical science is a normative science with full rights. (MRT: 214)

This is very close to the Kantian doctrine of the human being as a “rationable” being. In the *Lowell Lectures*, Peirce specifies the notion of self-control in close correlation with the idea of Kant that the human being is free and that the core of his freedom lies in the choice of realizing what is mostly proper to him, i.e. rationality, shouldering the responsibility of turning it into his main imperative:

My account of the facts, you will observe, leaves a man at full liberty, no matter if we grant all that the necessitarians ask. That is, the man can, or if you please is compelled, to make his life more reasonable. What other distinct idea than that, I should be glad to know, can be attached to the word liberty? (CP 1.602)

3. To understand what Peirce intends by “reasonable”, one must address to his “logical socialism”. According to the “social principle” of logic, the reasonable person is the one who is able to think and act for the benefit of the community, FOR the construction of logical and practical meanings validated by inter-subjective criteria and, above all, in the hope that human endeavor towards the truth can go on endlessly. This sentiment of hope transcends the means of logic, yet it constitutes a “firm requirement” of it (CP 5.377).

The attribution of such a crucial meaning to sentiment requires a shift of perspective *versus* the Kantian idea of the human being as “rationable” being. Perhaps Peirce is only emphasizing a well-defined phenomenological fact: the fact that feelings are not neutral, neither from the point of view of ethics nor of logic, but, rather, some of them turn out to be better than others in conforming to the ethical criteria and logical norms that we endorse. It is a fact that to know it we can only trust our experience of beings able to reason and to our liability of applying this capability

also to the apparently most inscrutable subjective conditions.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the first of the *Cambridge Conferences* of 1898, *Philosophy and the Conduct of Life*, that in my opinion represents a key stage in the development of the interweaving of the three normative sciences: indeed the issue of the relation between ethics and science, to which this paper is devoted, is an integral part of this development, since many key features of Peirce's logic – first and foremost fallibilism – are drawn from the analysis of scientific research.¹

In the above-mentioned work, Peirce, similarly to Hume, discards the ethical-cognitive parallelism and attributes the prerogative of ethics to feelings and to the most immediate forces taking root in the biological history of the individual, rather than to scientific rationality. At the same time, though, he resorts to an implicit aspect of his proposal to intend logic, ethics and esthetics as normative sciences, i.e. shelving the ontological component characterizing Hume's paradigm of the dissimilarity between the sphere of feelings and the sphere of knowledge. The idea that they are two ontologically different domains is replaced by a clear allusion to that peculiar form of experience that can be defined "cognitive experience of feelings", thereby referring to an exercise of reflection mirroring the "internal" and "external" factors of the rational activity. After acknowledging the possibility that feelings themselves "might act to bring the vital crises under the domain of reason" (RLT: 112-113), Peirce states:

Just as reasoning springs from experience, so the development of sentiment arises from the soul's Inward and Outward Experiences (such as meditation, on the one hand, and adversity on the other). Not only is it of the same nature as the development of cognition; but it chiefly takes place through the instrumentality of cognition. (RLT: 121)

Though being referred to as "the surface" of a human being, that is to say, the peculiar product of rational activity being its most striking but at the same time uncertain aspect, cognition is in fact – Peirce concludes – the only way to access his "deepest parts", i.e. his feelings and the most pressing forces guiding behavior.

Given the insistence – in this context again – on the critical and fallibilistic pattern of the rational activity, this assertion can only imply the recognition of the inevitable trickiness of the relation between the affective and the cognitive sphere. Therefore, the denial of the ethical-cognitive parallelism seems to be aimed at disproving the illusion that our logical-rational knowledge can provide ready-made answers to ethical questions – notions to be used just like kitchen recipes or chemist's prescriptions, to borrow John Dewey's words.

And perhaps Peirce's discourse tends to bring to the foreground a hardly disputable evidence: the fact that, after all, human feelings are really such to the extent to which, "normally" we tend to make sense of our esthetic aptitudes through the possibility to draw on possible meanings and truths that can be shared. This tendency is characteristic of our ability to reason but it remains problematic and, thus, it is up to our sense of responsibility to choose and increase it.

1 *Philosophy and Conduct of Life* appears in RLT (105-122). We are here referring to the CP edition. I hereby report the outcomes of a more detailed analysis of this text: *Lo spazio normativo dei sentimenti nell'ottica di Peirce*, in Calcaterra (2003).

Harvard's lesson on normative sciences seems, though, to lose sight of the idea of rationality as the possibility to choose deliberately because it is always subject to the risk of denial, an idea suggested, as we have seen, through the reference to the Kantian categorical imperative. And I wonder whether considering the rational dimension as a strong imperative, though burdened by all the challenges of our "regulatory ideas", would not help resolve a number of evident difficulties in this fundamental text by Peirce.

I am referring in particular to Peirce's assertion whereby the "ultimate end" of ethics should be harmonized with "a free development of the agent's own aesthetic qualities", i.e. with his feelings, and must also be such that "it should not be disturbed by the reactions upon the agent of that outward world which is supposed in the very idea of action" (MRT: 215).

The two conditions are clearly sustainable only at the price of an improbable coincidence of the human being – of the complexity of feelings and the relations with things and his fellows constituting the concrete figure of it – with a rationality fully deployed in the universe, i.e. with the *Thirdness* as a real entity.

In the light of the structural link established by Kant between rationality and human liberty, this view would certainly be dropped, and perhaps Kant's understanding of the limits and the power of rationality to affect the "inner" reality and the "external" one of the human being would help restore a more convincing meaning to the intimate relation assumed by Peirce between the objects of normative sciences – the sphere of feelings, that of action and the sphere of logic. However, to earn this possibility, one should also admit that the word "rationality" is, after all, only a sign of our image of man and, as such, is part of the dynamics of interpretations conferring meaning to it. In Peirce's terms, one might go as far as to say that rationality should be thought in the logical-semiotic sense of Thirdness², it should be intended as a representation of thought that succeeds in impressing a rule on reality, precisely as it tends to mediate between Firstness and Secondness, the indeterminate world of feelings and that of the conflicting events of experience where they take shape and flow into.

² CP 5.104: "*Thirdness is synonym of representation.*"

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