Resenha

Book Review

TROUT, Lara. *The Politics of Survival*: **Peirce, Affectivity, and Social Criticism**. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010. 362 p. [As Políticas da Sobrevivência: Peirce, Afetividade e Criticismo Social.]

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Several years ago, at a meeting of the *Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy*, Guatemalan philosopher Moris Polanco told me that even though he was interested in the thought of all the American pragmatists, he found most interesting the work of John Dewey because of its direct relevance to the sociopolitical questions that are most pressing in Latin America. Though I agreed with the importance of Dewey's thought to such questions, it seemed to me that Peirce's thought should not be underestimated in this regard. Even if Peirce did not write much explicitly about sociopolitical issues, and even if Peirce scholarship tended to neglect the potential sociopolitical relevance of his thought, it appeared to me that Peirce's systematic thought could be fruitfully developed in that direction. Lara Trout's *The Politics of Survival* is an outstanding work that develops Peirce's thought precisely by showing its cogency to philosophical questions of social justice. In this sense, Trout's seminal contribution should prove important to pragmatist scholars interested in social and political philosophy in Latin America and elsewhere.

Trout interprets and deploys Peirce's philosophy, first, to explain how it can help us to understand the origins and workings of various forms of social oppression and discrimination and, second, to suggest ways in which such oppression and discrimination may be individually and socially overcome. In terms of social justice, Trout is specifically concerned with showing how nonconscious racism and, to a lesser extent, sexism arise and operate in the United States of America (USA). In other words, she is interested in studying how persons belonging to hegemonic groups, especially white people, in the U.S.A. may act on the basis of discriminatory beliefs to cause social injustice, even in cases when they are well-meaning and unaware of their own biases and prejudices. In the course of studying racism and sexism as specific forms of social injustice, Trout develops a general interpretation of Peirce's philosophy that, I suggest, may be applied fruitfully to the analysis of other forms of sociopolitical injustice in diverse cultural contexts.

Trout introduces her argument by specifying the main premise of her work, namely, the compatibility between the affective dimensions of Peirce's philosophy and social criticism. By "social criticism" she means "any type of critique, such as feminism and race theory […], that acknowledges the reality of oppression, as well as the theoretical and practical mechanisms by which oppression can be perpetuated.

I understand social justice to be the ultimate goal of social criticism." (p. 2). Trout begins to show the compatibility between Peirce's philosophy and social criticism by emphasizing that social justice – in the form of inclusivity of all reasonable inquirers and their perspectives in the community – is a necessary condition for the Peircean practice of science and that such justice is promoted by agapism and Critical Common-sensism:

> Taking as its ideal an infinitely inclusive community of inquiry, Peircean science *requires* social justice. As ideally practiced, it also demonstrates agapic love, whereby it embraces new ideas as sources for on-going growth and self-critique, even and especially when these ideas challenge existing beliefs. It follows, therefore, that the Peircean community of inquiry eschews exclusionary prejudice. Moreover, Peirce's epistemological doctrine of Critical Common-sensism (CCS) calls humans to expand self-control over their common-sense beliefs and provides conceptual tools to address gaps that exist between his communal ideal and the concrete realities of heterosexism, racism, sexism, etc., which undermine actual inquiry and growth in flesh-and-blood communities. (p. 3).

Expounding this intricate and mutually supportive relationship between science, agapic love, and Critical Common-sensism in Peirce's philosophy and developing its implications for social justice becomes the focus of Trout's analysis throughout the book.

The starting point of her argument is the recognition that human beings begin life as children – uniquely embodied beings immersed in a social, cultural, political, and natural environing reality – and that they can internalize habits and beliefs nonconsciously – that is, without conscious awareness – before they are able to criticize them. This is how nonconscious racism may arise among members of hegemonic groups such as whites, males, or heterosexuals for example. Without criticism of their own habits and their sources, these people tend to understand their own privileges as social norms (p. 4-6). In order to substantiate this view, Trout will offer a proactive reading of Peirce's texts that foregrounds post-Darwinian embodiment themes and compatibilities with social criticism in his work.

Her definition of "affectivity" in fact highlights the post-Darwinian aspects of Peirce's philosophy:

> By "affectivity" I mean the on-going body-minded communication between the human organism and its individual, social, and external environments, for the promotion of survival and growth. This communication is shaped by biological, individual, semiotic, social, and other factors. My treatment of Peircean affectivity includes feelings, emotion, instinct, interest, sympathy, and agapic love, as well as belief, doubt, and habit. (p. 9).

This definition involves Peirce's understanding of the human person as an animal organism and the corresponding view of cognition and habit-taking as embodied and therefore affective.

Trout introduces five contributions of Peirce's philosophy to social criticism. First, Peirce's phenomenology provides us with conceptual tools to understand how sociopolitical factors are constitutive of a person's experience (p. 12). Second, his account of human cognition supports the social-critical position that no one can achieve a detached, disembodied, "god's eye" view of the world (p. 12-13). Third,
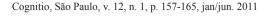
Peirce articulates the nonconscious influence that our habits can have on our reasoning processes (p. 13). Fourth, Peirce's arguments to propose that *all* human beings have the reasoning and intellectual capacities required to grasp regularities in their environments and to form their own aims for conduct goes against the prevalent racist and sexist biases in the Western philosophical cannon regarding who is rational, intelligent, or objective (p. 14). Fifth, Peirce's evolutionary conception of reason propounds that our belief-habits grow in complexity, and this growth can be steered towards a better understanding of social critical issues (p. 14). In turn, Trout points out that social criticism can make a significant contribution to Peirce's work by identifying sociopolitical blind spots – nonconscious exclusionary habits through which non-hegemonic groups are oppressed – and by extending its scope: "Social criticism helps Peirce's philosophy extend its reach by extending its inclusive ideals beyond the borders of an imagination limited by hegemonic viewpoints that are circumscribed by whiteness, maleness, economical security, heterosexuality, and so on" (p. 15).

Throughout the five chapters that follow this introduction, Trout develops these themes thoughtfully and convincingly. She is always careful to ground her assertions in Peirce's own texts, sometimes by highlighting what Peirce argued explicitly and sometimes by developing his views in ways suggested by and compatible with his own writings.

In chapter one, entitled "Peircean Affectivity," Trout lays the theoretical groundwork for her analysis of the sources and ways of functioning of nonconscious racism in the U.S.A. She begins by stating Peirce's view of the human individual: "Peirce viewed the individual human organism as a body-minded, social animal who interacts semiotically with the world outside of her. He had little patience for the Cartesian portrayal of the individual as a disembodied, solipsistic knower with immediate epistemic access to truth." (p. 25). She restates the definition of affectivity quoted above, and then she proceeds to describe the process of habit-taking, which is one of the processes that promotes organic survival and growth, in affective terms: "Human habit-taking is an affective venture, whereby individuals and groups communicate with their various environments in order to successfully cope and grow, without undue interruptions from environmental factors outside their control." (p. 27). Habit-taking is thus an embodied process – it is a way in which body-minded human organisms transact with their environments. Habits are embodied. In particular, habits as body-minded patterns of behavior are embodied as "patterns of nerve-firings" or as "nervous associations" as Peirce sometimes calls them (p. 27).

With this general background laid out, Trout then announces her own topic for inquiry: "The subtle and often unnoticed influences on human belief-habits that stem from two interrelated sources, the unique embodiment of each person and social-shaping." (p. 29). Trout develops carefully the post-Darwinian theme of embodiment in Peirce's philosophy and, notably, brings it into dialogue with the contemporary work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. For the sake of brevity, however, I will emphasize her treatment of how our habits may be shaped socially. In particular, I will discuss two concepts introduced by Trout, namely, "socio-political secondness" (p. 57-60) and "socialized instinctive beliefs" (p. 63-68).

Regarding the first concept, Trout presents two interrelated definitions. First she defines "social secondness" as "socially dictated environmental resistance" (p. 58).

This is environmental resistance due to "social conventions that are largely outside of one's control" (p. 58). This definition is based on the category of experience that involves reaction and resistance, and that is usually associated with physical or biological environmental resistance but need not be circumscribed that way, even for Peirce. Second, she defines "socio-political secondness" as "social secondness that is not encountered equally by all members of society […] [but rather] involves constraint that is directed at non-hegemonic groups. It includes prejudice and discrimination based on factors such as economic class, race, sex, sexuality, and so on." (p. 58).

Trout deploys this concept to explain how Euro-American whites may develop habits of "false universalization" that lead them to deny the reality of racism in the United States. The example is illuminating:

> People who are Euro American, born and raised in mainstream United States, are often not familiar with the socio-political secondness based on race. This is because mainstream U.S. society remains socio-politically structured to support and promote whiteness. Thus whites often experience an absence of socio-political secondness. This absence promotes habits of false universalization, whereby a Euro American experience – where race is not an obstacle – is conceptualized as the norm, both in mainstream U.S. society and in the belief-habits of white people. False universalization occurs when a person or group assumes their experience is representative for all of humanity. When false universalization of a Euro American experience occurs, it can be difficult for whites to take seriously the testimony of people of color who report on the socio-political secondness they experience based on their race. Yet to deny the latter's input regarding racism perpetuates a hegemonic norm that blocks inquiry and obstructs societal growth. (p. 59-60).

I suggest that this concept of "socio-political secondness" is key to be able to extend the range of application of Peirce's philosophy to social and political problems related to systematic, societal prejudice based on race, sex, sexual orientation, economic class, and so on. It in fact provides a germane way to make Peircean analysis evidently and explicitly relevant to such problems in Latin America, for example. When people of a specific ethnic or economic background are denied opportunities for education or employment due to social norms or even systematic policies they are experiencing "socio-political secondness". Peirce's philosophy provides the conceptual architectonics to be able to analyze in detail how such resistances arise and operate. In turn, understanding those ways of operating is necessary in order to be able to eliminate such resistances with the help of effective, conscious self-control and Critical Common-sensism.

The importance of self-control and Critical Common-sensism to constrain and guide the operation of socially generated habits is evident from Trout's treatment of the second theme mentioned above, namely, "socialized instinctive beliefs". She expounds Peirce's use of the term "instinct" which "can be broadly construed to reflect both in-born habits, as well as socialized ones" (p. 63). Instincts are belief-habits that may be either naturally in-born or socially acquired, especially in childhood. Trout then shows how a discussion of socialized belief-habits is implicit in Peirce's discussion of the method of authority in "The Fixation of Belief". Taking her cue directly from Peirce, Trout proposes the following: "Extrapolating socio-politically, I include in the category of 'socialized instinctive beliefs' ideas about race, sex, and

other socio-political classifications. Socialized instinctive beliefs are included in one's common-sense or background beliefs." (p. 65). As a result,

> Instinctive beliefs not only take on common-sense certainty, they also often func-
> tion non-consciously, that is, without one's conscious awareness […] [I]instinctive
> beliefs promoting racism, sexism, and other social ills can function without the
> conscious awareness of those acting on them. At the same time, instinctive beliefs
> – at least in some cases – can be raised to conscious attention and scrutiny, which
> is an exercise of self-control undertaken by Critical Common-sensists. (p. 65-66).
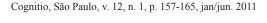
This is why Critical Common-sensism, which brings logical self-control to bear on background instinctive beliefs, is crucial for the detection and elimination of perni-cious social habits of prejudice and exclusion. This conclusion presupposes Trout's discussion of "self-control" (p. 36-37) and the conditions of sympathy and agapic love for the detection of prejudice and elimination of habit to be possible through self-control (p. 37-38). Trout's key insight is that self-control is both purposeful and inhibitory. Self-control enables people to have loving purposes that promote social justice. Sympathy and *agape* aid the inhibitory function of self-control by keeping us from rejecting testimony and remaining open to conversation concerning prejudice and oppression out of agapic regard for others.

Having laid out this groundwork on Peircean affectivity, in chapter two on "The Affectivity of Cognition", Trout focuses on the embodied, affective nature of cognition as developed by Peirce in his *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* "Cognition Series" of the 1860s. Trout focuses on showing how, according to Peirce, human cognition is shaped at once by individual and social factors. Taking account of the epistemological relationship between the individual and the community is crucial to understanding human cognition. On the one hand, the individual must rely on the wider epistemological perspective that her community affords her in order to foster her own survival and growth. On the other hand, the individual can be a source of insight and discovery when the community holds false beliefs or when communal inquiry is mired and growth in knowledge is threatened. While most of the emphasis in the "Cognition Series" is on the former relationship of individual dependence, Peirce does hint at the latter relationship of "maverick" individuality that will be developed later, in the series of "Illustrations of the Logic of Science" (p. 69-70).

Trout's central thesis in this chapter is that feelings, as cognitions, result from both individual and social influences – such as unique embodiment and communal education – and may become habits that function nonconsciously at the level of instinct or common-sense, sometimes in the form of prejudicial beliefs (p. 72). Throughout the chapter she develops a detailed, carefully argued elaboration of this thesis – both individual and social factors shape the belief-habits that become part of a human organism's instinctive common-sense. Our individual embodiment, and the affective dimension of cognition that it involves, is crucial to our cognitive, epistemic deve-lopment. And we are especially vulnerable to the influence of social factors during child-development because we are dependent on our caretakers, their authority and trustworthy testimony, for survival. Both of these dimensions of development shape the politics of child development and habit-taking then.

Trout's discussion of socialized affectivity and habit formation in relation to the politics of child development is noteworthy (p. 103-127). She argues that, for

Peirce, to be logical, an individual must adopt a social perspective. Fixing beliefs and forming habits on the basis of strictly individual experience and perspective most likely leads to false beliefs and ineffective habits. Thus, logicality – the drive for adopting true, probable, or plausible belief – requires adopting a social/communal perspective, based on the wealth of collective experience and evidence. In the case of human organisms, survival itself requires adopting a social perspective. Children, in particular, depend on the guidance and testimony of caretakers for survival. Thus they must accept that guidance as they begin to adopt beliefs and form habits. The problem is that communal influence can shape both habits that foster and habits that inhibit growth. And children are too vulnerable to adopt a critical stance. This is how socialized, growth-inhibiting habits can arise and be incorporated at the level of instinct and common-sense so as to operate non-consciously and without criticism later in life. Racist and prejudicial habits can arise in this way. This creates a "coercive survival dilemma", namely, that children must trust the testimony of their adult caretakers to survive, but this testimony may instill in them growth-inhibiting beliefs such as prejudices based on race, ethnicity, and gender.

However, Trout finds a "Seed of Hope" or rather, two seeds, in Peirce's thought (p. 124-127). The first is that insightful, resilient individuals can develop critical perspectives on their own habits and the habits of the community. The second is that the method of science for the fixation of belief can prevent the communal formation of growth-inhibiting habits in the first place.

Thus in chapter three, "The Affectivity of Inquiry," she moves to discuss the method of science as presented by Peirce in his "Illustrations of the Logic of Science Series" published in the *Popular Science Monthly* in 1877-78. She begins by emphasizing two aspects of Peirce's method of science. First, Peirce presents a robust individual inquirer who is able to challenge her authoritative, hegemonic community's beliefs. Second, Peirce presents the method of science as the preferred method for the fixation of communal beliefs (p. 128). A balanced relationship between the insightful, creative individual inquirer who challenges communal opinion and the community's commitment to settle belief publicly is necessary for the successful application of the method of science.

The most insightful aspect of Trout's discussion of Peirce's method of science, however, consists in her pointing out some potential problems for the application of the method that Peirce leaves unaddressed in the "Illustrations" series. Trout conjoins the concept of "socio-political secondness" with that of "false universalization" to demonstrate that "hegemonically exclusionary accounts of reality result in societal-level exclusionary habits, which can be internalized *conceptually* by individual community members, such that the very concepts by which individuals think about their world can reflect hegemonic, exclusionary habits" (p. 129). This leads to a description of "socio-politically biased conceptualization" as follows:

> Socio-politically biased conceptualization occurs, for example, when the experience of a hegemonic group or groups (such as whites, men, the economically secure, etc.) becomes internalized as the falsely universalized concept of "human experience." A byproduct of this exclusionary conceptual internalization, which can function non-consciously or instinctively, is the perception that non-hegemonic perspectives (voiced by people of color, women, the poor, etc.) are problematic

conceptually, that is, crazy, over-reactive, off-base, or simply irrelevant. This can lead to the dismissal of non-hegemonic perspectives. (p. 129).

For example, a member of a racial minority who denounces prejudiced treatment may be dismis,sed as over-reactive or resentful by white people who sincerely believe that racism is over in the USA. Trout then explains how in the "Illustrations" Peirce leaves unaddressed the problem of how background "common-sensical" beliefs can operate nonconsciously to influence and bias the application of the method of science for settling communal belief (p. 129).
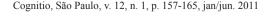
This leads to what Trout calls the "application problem" of the method of science (p. 146-149). When exclusionary, prejudicial, growth-inhibiting belief-habits are internalized nonconsciously by members of the community in positions of power, such beliefs become part of their internalized common-sense. As a result, even when people consciously pursue the method of science, they may discount or disregard, for the articulation of reality, the testimony or experience of oppressed people in the community. These prejudicial belief-habits, therefore, may thwart the application of the method of science, since crucial data –testimonies and experiences – are ignored. Trout discusses the example of "craniology," a pseudo-science that purported to demonstrate the superiority of the white race (p. 147-149).

In the "Illustrations" Peirce only hints at, but does not develop, the solution to the application problem. The solution is two-fold. First, it involves the model of agapic evolution, and especially, the agapic sympathy that individual community members offer to each other, in order to validate and respond to the testimony and unjust experiences of oppressed people. Accordingly, in chapter four, Trout discusses the *Monist* "Cosmology Series" and association writings of the 1890s. Second, the solution involves the active work of Critical Common-sensism to detect, criticize, and transform growth-inhibiting and exclusionary habits. Accordingly, in chapter five, Trout discusses Peirce's doctrine of Critical Common-sensism of the 1900s.

In "The Law of Mind, Association, and Sympathy" (chapter four), Trout develops the idea that individual experience – via association by contiguity – and creativity – via association by resemblance – are a potential source of insight, novelty, and growth for the community; therefore, agapic love is the ideal that the community should seek in its relationship to its individual members, especially to insightful, creative ones who may resist communal habits and who may belong to non-hegemonic groups. However, applying the agapic ideal in actual communities can be undermined by the functioning of nonconscious exclusionary background beliefs.

Trout defines sympathy as "the term Peirce uses to describe the law of mind as it functions in human communities" (p. 195). She distinguishes between two forms of sympathy, agapic and non-agapic. Regarding agapic sympathy she writes, "In its ideal agapic form, sympathy embraces as sources of growth the creative bursts of spontaneity that arise within the existing habit systems of a community." (p. 195). However, "Sympathy can also play out non-agapically, excluding opportunities for growth by rejecting new elements that arise from existing habits." (p. 195). An example of exclusionary sympathy may be patriotism – patriotic citizens may love their country in a way that rejects any fair criticism of it and ostracizes the critics.

The resulting thesis is that nonconscious exclusionary sympathy can curtail the possibility of communal growth through agapic sympathy by undermining the

perspectives of non-hegemonic groups or individuals who deviate from or challenge communal norms (p. 195-196). To substantiate her thesis, Trout describes the "motion of agape" as circular, involving two movements: "First, a creative projection of new-ness, and second, an embracing and stabilizing of this spontaneous novelty. When human sympathy is agapic, it completes the circle by allowing for both movements." (p. 203). The creative projection can consist in the experiential feedback of creative or insightful individuals to the community about its habits. The embracing would then consist in evaluating this feedback with an attitude of care and concern for the individual, and revising or transforming communal habits or norms if necessary. The second motion, however, is thwarted by exclusionary sympathy (p. 206-207). This dynamic leads to a problem regarding the agapic ideal that is analogous to the application problem regarding the scientific method, namely, that nonconscious exclusionary belief-habits can curtail growth through the agapic ideal. This can happen even to individuals who think themselves to embrace the agapic ideal and to be anti-racist or anti-sexist (p. 222).

The critical evaluation of common-sense, therefore, is crucial to overcome the threat of nonconscious exclusionary beliefs. Thus, in "Critical Common-sensism, 1900s" (chapter five), Trout defends the following thesis:

> Critical Common-sensism (CCS) is an epistemological doctrine that calls for a critical examination of the common-sense beliefs that underwrite human cognition. It is thus uniquely suited to address social critical concerns about discriminatory beliefs that can become ingrained within one's background beliefs without her or his awareness. The self-controlled scrutiny of background/common-sense beliefs called for by Critical Common-sensism provides the missing piece in terms of the application problem faced by both the scientific method and the agapic ideal. (p. 229).

Trout is indeed preparing the ground for the ultimate upshot of her entire analysis, which is worth quoting at length:

> [W]hen Critical Common-sensism is ideally applied, it does not leave scientific and agapic ideals behind. Rather the strands of science, agape, and Critical Common-sensism weave into a tapestry of loving reasonableness, where the embrace of diverse perspectives promotes growth in knowledge and self-control. Thus Critical Common-sensism provides those in hegemonic groups with consciousness-raising tools that can help them address their blind spots towards discrimination faced by those in non-hegemonic groups. Scientific method and agape provide the epistemological and loving motivation to put this awareness into practice by resisting exclusionary instinctive beliefs despite how strong their influence can be. (p. 229-230).

The core of the argument is the following. Critical common-sensism, when working in unison with the method of science for the fixation of beliefs and with agapic love in human transaction, promotes the growth of the *summum bonum*, namely, loving reasonableness. In particular, the rigorous application of critical common-sensism for the identification and eradication of discriminatory, prejudicial instinctive beliefs solves the application problem that threatens both science as the guide to knowledge and truth and agapic sympathy as the guide to human transaction.

Recall that the problem consists in the threat that nonconscious discriminatory, prejudicial beliefs pose to the application of the method of science and the functioning of agapic sympathy in human communities. Critical common-sensism – through its tools of logical analysis, experience, experimentation in imagination, and testimony – addresses the problem by identifying and eradicating such threatening discriminatory biases. In order to do its work, Critical Common-sensism requires the cultivation of legitimate, critical doubt. This doubt is to be distinguished from Cartesian paper-doubt by the fact that it not only identifies dubitable belief-habits but also works consciously to transform or eliminate them *as embodied, affective habits*. That is, while paper-doubting is to act as if beliefs were merely contents of a mind separated from the body and is therefore to delude oneself by thinking that merely to doubt a belief-habit is enough to eliminate its effective influence over one's actions, critical common-sensist doubting acknowledges that belief-habits are embodied and affective and that therefore especial critical effort is necessary to change or eliminate them.

In the kinds of sociopolitical contexts that Trout analyzes, critical common-sensist doubt takes the form of the "non-hegemonic hypothesis" to the effect that (a) when an oppressed individual or group claims that they are experiencing discrimination, their testimony and experiences ought to be a matter of agapic concern and (b) their claims deserve investigation by the communal application of the method of science. The cultivation of this form of doubt requires self-control. The cultivation of this "non-hegemonic hypothesis," as supported by Peirce's entire system of philosophy, is our main starting point for redressing some prevalent, though often nonconscious, forms of social injustice.

In her "Conclusion," Trout first summarizes her central argument and, second, proposes a way to promote awareness and to address discriminatory belief-habits in contemporary US society, specifically in the context of elementary school education. Trout closes her book in fallibilistic spirit, acknowledging further work to be done and reaffirming her deliberate choice of developmental *telos*, namely, Peirce's ideal of "giving a hand toward rendering the world more reasonable" (p. 283).

Overall, the upshot of Trout's analysis is that the coordinated, mutually supportive relationship between the method of science, agapic love, and Critical Common-sensism provides the way to overcome forms of social injustice that are brought about by nonconscious, hegemonic, prejudicial belief-habits in a community. She discusses some specific forms of social injustice in the USA, but her analysis provides a model to extend the application of Peirce's philosophy to understand other forms in social injustice in a variety of cultural and historical contexts, including Latin American ones.

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