

Peirce on the Medievals: Realism, Power and Form

Peirce acerca dos Medievais: Realismo, Poder e Forma

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Abstract: In the first section, I discuss Peirce's ambivalence attitude towards medieval thinkers – some high praise, some harsh criticism. In the second, I consider three criticisms Max Fisch made of my book *Charles Peirce and Scholastic Realism*. My book had presented Peirce's realism as if it were a single position from first to last. And I want to adjust that in the light of Fisch's points. I now want to distinguish his scholastic realism from his ongoing development of realism. To this end, I offer a more restricted and precise meaning to "scholastic realism" – roughly an anti-platonism in which the common nature is found as an element in things. That meaning does, I think, remain constant for Peirce; though I agree with Fisch that this is only a part of his developing realism. In the third section, I bring out the connection between the scholastic notion of potentiality and Peirce's "would-be's." Interestingly enough (to me), this is not an influence that Peirce himself acknowledges. I also point out there that Peirce is rather dismissive of the scholastic notion of form, which he thinks is a perversion of Aristotle's more useful (if vague) position.

Keywords: Realism. Potentiality. Form. Matter.

Resumo: *Na primeira seção, discuto a atitude ambivalente de Peirce para com os pensadores medievais – algumas avaliações elogiosas, algumas críticas duras. Na segunda parte, considero três críticas feitas por Max Fisch ao meu livro Charles Peirce and Scholastic Realism. Meu livro apresentou o realismo de Peirce como se fosse de cabo a rabo uma única posição. E eu quero ajustar isso sob a luz dos argumentos de Fisch. Desejo agora distinguir seu realismo escolástico de seu desenvolvimento contínuo do realismo. Para esse fim, ofereço um significado mais preciso e restrito para "realismo escolástico" – grosso modo, um anti-platonismo no qual a natureza comum é encontrada como um elemento nas coisas. Esse significado, penso, permanece constante para Peirce; embora eu concorde com Fisch, em que isso é somente uma parte do desenvolvimento de seu realismo. Na terceira seção, desenvolvo a conexão entre a noção escolástica de potencialidade e os "would-be's" [seriam] de Peirce. Ainda que suficientemente interessante (para mim), essa não é uma influência que o próprio Peirce reconheça. Também indico ali que Peirce chega a dispensar a noção escolástica de forma, que ele pensa ser uma perversão da posição mais útil (se não vaga) de Aristóteles.*

Palavras-chave: Realismo. Potencialidade. Forma. Matéria.

The chief value of the study of historical philosophy is that it disciplines the mind to regard philosophy with a cold and scientific eye and not with passion as though philosophers were contestants (CP 1.29; cf., 8.9).¹

Although he was not what we would call a specialist, there is ample evidence – beyond his self-described “Scotistic realism” (CP 5.503) – that Peirce had extensive knowledge of medieval philosophical writings.² In fact, it would be worth another book to do service to Peirce’s analysis of medieval logic and philosophy. However, I am going to concentrate on the issue of Peirce’s realism; though I want to say something first about his ambivalent attitude towards medieval thought generally.

His praise of the high scholastics can be extravagant. Duns Scotus is a genius (CP 2.166), “one of the greatest metaphysicians of all time” (CP 4.28) and at least the greatest defender of realism, while Ockham is the greatest nominalist (CP 1.29). And along with some later British logicians, Scotus and Ockham “can be used to lay a solid foundation on which to erect a new logic fit for the life of twentieth century science” (CP 7.161).

Such praise, however, is often mixed with a critical note:

[Their] logic, relatively to the general condition of thought, was marvelously exact and critical. [But] they can tell us nothing concerning methods of reasoning since their own reasoning was puerile, but their analyses of thought and their discussions of all those questions of logic that almost trench upon metaphysics are very instructive as well as very good discipline in that subtle kind of thinking that is required in logic. (CP 1.15)

But sometimes his criticism comes without qualification: “During the middle ages, purely formal syllogistic made no progress worth mentioning” (CP 1.567). And: “[A] beastlike superficiality and lack of generalizing thought spreads like a pall over the writings of the scholastic masters of logic ...” (CP 1.561).

To some extent, we can deflect these critical remarks as directed primarily towards the very early Middle Ages and especially the late period of decadent scholasticism. The latter is of special interest for its reference to the followers of Scotus who had gained control of the universities and were given (by the humanists) the sarcastic title of “dunses” or “dunces” (CP 1.17-18; 2.166-68). Peirce says, they “set up their idle logical distinctions as precluding all physical inquiry” (CP 6.361). And while they were on the

¹ My references to Peirce are all to *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, v. 1-6, ed. by C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss, 1931-35; v. 7 and 8, ed. by A.W. Burks, 1958. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press. “1.11” indicates v. 1, paragraph 11. I have also drawn in the text and notes on my article for the *Cambridge Companion to Charles Peirce* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

² Max Fisch has provided an account of the impressive collection of medieval material Peirce sold to Johns Hopkins: KETNER, K.; KLOESEL C. (eds.) *Peirce, Semiotic, and Pragmatism: Essays by Max Fisch*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 52-3. And Peirce provided extensive entries on medieval logic and philosophy for Baldwin’s dictionary. These are unfortunately (but typically) scattered throughout the *Collected Papers*. But see for example CP 6.353-394.

right side of the realist-nominalist issue, “their dunsical opposition to the new learning and their dreadful corruption of the university disgusted the new men” (CP 7.666). Interestingly enough, Peirce’s putdown of the humanists’ reaction to the scholastics is, if possible, even more rude. The humanists, he says “were weak thinkers” (CP 1.18). “The *renaissance* [...] condemned the scholastic terms as not being Ciceronian, with the result of making *renaissance* philosophy as soft and savorless as a sage pudding” (CP 7.494n9).³

In short, Peirce says one should no more confuse the decadent scholastics with the work of the preceding high scholastic period than link “the humanists” with the modern philosophy and science that followed them. (CP 8.11). But that cannot be the whole story. To oversimplify the paradox a bit, Peirce thinks that the entire era, with the possible exception of Roger Bacon, was lacking in a scientific appreciation or outlook.⁴ And yet he compares the schoolmen favorably with men of science:

[A]bove all things, it is the searching thoroughness of the schoolmen that affiliates them with men of science and separates them, worldwide, from so-called philosophers. The thoroughness I allude to consists in this, that in adopting any theory, they go about everywhere, they devote their whole energies and lives putting it to tests *bona fide* [...] Having a theory, they must apply it to every subject and to every branch of every subject to see whether it produces a result in accordance with the only criteria they were able to apply – the truth of the Catholic faith and the teaching of the Prince of the Philosophers. (CP 1.33)

Both the paradox and its explanation come through most clearly, I think, in what Peirce has to say about the appeal to authority. “The most striking characteristic of medieval reasoning, in general, is the perpetual resort to authority” (CP 5.215n). And:

[T]he schoolmen, however, attached the greatest authority to men long since dead, and they were right, for in the dark ages it was not true that the later status of human knowledge was the most perfect ... (CP 1.32)

Given what Peirce has to say about the method of authority in *How to Make our Ideas Clear* (CP 5.379ff.), one must wonder that he did not dismiss the period entirely. So it is a surprise when he gives a special twist to the scholastics’ dedication to authority:

The great object of the metaphysics of Duns Scotus is so to state the results of ordinary experience, that it shall not close any positive experimental inquiry, or pronounce anything possibly observable to be *a priori* impossible. In Scotus this naturally led to loyalty to Authority, then the recognized fountain of truth; in our day it will produce unflinching faith in Observation. (CP 7.395)

³ The Dunses defended their position “with a logical accuracy, born of centuries of study, with which the new men were utterly incapable of coping”; they needed to formulate objections to the Dunses’ positions, but it was “a business for which they were utterly unfitted” (CP 6.361).

⁴ “The schoolmen, who regarded Aristotle as all but infallible, yet to whom the ideas of a naturalist were utterly foreign ...” (CP 6.357; and see CP 6.361 which is a paragraph worth reading in its entirety); though for contrast: CP 1.32-3. On Bacon, see CP 1.29; 5.360).

This loyalty to authority meant that the medievals were less interested in originality than in consistency of interpretation; and they were remarkably free of “the vanity of cleverness” (CP 1.31). Peirce continues:

All these characters remind us less of the philosophers of our day than of men of science. I do not hesitate to say that scientific men now think much more of authority than do metaphysicians; for in science a question is not regarded as settled or its solution as certain until all intelligent and informed doubt has ceased and all competent persons have come to a catholic agreement... (CP 1.32)

Clearly, Peirce has a moral to preach here as much about modern as about medieval thought. While his peers in the United States and Europe saw themselves as (critically) advancing the cause of modern philosophical thought, Peirce increasingly saw himself, if not in opposition, at least as proposing a radical overhaul. And perhaps nothing would get the attention of his readers so much as flagrantly lining himself up with the thought of a “backward” age and outlook. “The medieval universities (he says) were places of learning where ours are institutions for teaching” (CP 5.582).

But his remarks carry a substantive philosophical point as well. Consider:

The logical upshot of the doctrine of Scotus is that real problems cannot be solved by metaphysics, but must be decided according to the evidence. As he was a theologian, that evidence was, for him, the dicta of the church. But the same system in the hands of a scientific man will lead to his insisting upon submitting everything to the test of observation. (CP 4.28)

Peirce was writing at a time when grand system-building was prominent, and it is part of his pragmatist outlook to insist that the real world does not reveal itself to armchair theorizing. What he recognized in the medievals’ respect for authority was a check on the penchant of philosophers to let their theorizing dictate what the world is really like.

II

Let me now turn to the main purpose of my paper. There have been a number of criticisms and suggestions made about my book *Charles Peirce and Scholastic Realism* since it was published in 1964.⁵ I cannot respond to all of them, but I want to concentrate

⁵ BOLER, J. *Charles Peirce and Scholastic Realism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963. All the book-length studies take up the topic of Peirce’s realism. Among articles devoted to it, the earliest are: MCKEON, C. Peirce’s Scotistic Realism. In WIENER, P.; YOUNG, P. (eds.) *Studies In the Philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952, p. 238-50; MOORE, E. The Scholastic Realism of Charles Sanders Peirce. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, v. 12, p. 406-17, 1952; BASTIAN, R. The Scholastic Realism of C.S. Peirce. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, v. 14, p. 246-49, 1953; and GOODWIN, R. Charles S. Peirce: A Modern Scotist? *New Scholasticism*, v. 35, p. 478-509, 1961. There are a host that follow. My account needs qualification as you can see if you read these articles.

here on three proposed by Max Fisch.⁶ Fisch claims (these are my words): (1) that Peirce was a nominalist to begin with and converted to realism under the influence of Francis Abbot; (2) that he came to develop a doctrine of realism that is more objective idealism than “scholastic realism”; and (3) that his final notion of realism was focused primarily towards a doctrine of direct perception. There is something to these claims – there is something to anything Max has to say about Peirce! I will take them up in order.

As Aristotle points out in his discussion of vice and virtue, we judge differently an act performed by a fully mature agent (an act “from character”) and an act performed by someone in the early stages of developing character. In Peirce’s formative years, to call oneself a nominalist was a way of indicating a hard-headed and enlightened attitude. It did not entail that its user claimed a developed semantic or metaphysical theory; and I do not see anything in Peirce’s writings at the time that would indicate that he had or was promising one by adopting the label of nominalism. His advice that one should start with nominalism and accept realism only when forced to (CP 4.1) may suggest how a realist theory should be developed without implying that nominalism should be fully developed and then abandoned. He says later that nominalism is an “undeveloped state of mind” (CP 5.121), which suggests to me the same attitude. What Peirce came to realize upon reading Abbot was that realism actually fit best with what he had all along thought about science.⁷ In short, I think Peirce simply dropped a misleading, if popular, label with little or no change in his thinking.⁸

Fisch’s second point is the more serious one, and requires an adjustment in how we should think of Peirce’s scholastic realism in the context of his realism overall. It is not a distinction I made in my book; but it is also a distinction Fisch overlooks in his account.

Fisch describes the account of scholastic realism in the early *Berkeley* review (CP 8.7-38) as only a “step towards realism,” where he is thinking of the later realism developed by Peirce only after the turn of the Century.⁹ As Fisch makes clear, talk of (scholastic) realism is conspicuously absent during the middle portion of Peirce’s writing career, just when he is developing some of the most important features of his thought:

⁶ KETNER; KLOESEL (1984), p. 184-200.

⁷ Cf. 1.20. The influence of Abbot is discussed in O’CONNOR, D. Peirce’s Debt to F.E. Abbot. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, v. 25, p. 543-64, 1964.

⁸ Roberts disputes Fisch’s evidence, holding that Peirce was a realist all along: ROBERTS, D. On Peirce’s Realism. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, v. 6, p. 67-83, 1970. F. Michael defends Fisch on the early nominalism: MICHAEL, F. Two Forms of Scholastic Realism in Peirce. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, v. 24, p. 317-48, 1988; and Short returns to its criticism: SHORT, T. L. Review Article. *Synthese*, v. 106, p. 409-30, especially 416-20. 1996. Both Michael and Short think Fisch’s “first step” is really only a change of labels, though (if I have them right) Michael claims that Peirce’s “early realism” was nominalistic (p. 339) while Short holds that his “early nominalism” was realist (pp. 416-22). The issue is complicated because Peirce early on was willing to call himself an idealist. And the discussion of “real/reality” in the *Berkeley* review has an idealist tinge that may be a carryover from that. (CP 8.12-14).

⁹ KETNER; KLOESEL (1986, p. 188). He does not think that Peirce retreated from that early position, but the implication is that he moved significantly beyond it to a position more like objective idealism.

e.g., developments in the logic of relations, a revision of his theory of the categories, his pragmatic commitment to “would-be’s, and mathematical preparations for his theory of continuity.¹⁰ Perhaps the most important of these affecting his realism is the development of the new logic.

Peirce’s early account of the categories (the New List), and his description of scholastic realism (in the review of Frazer’s *Berkeley*), made use of the traditional subject-predicate form; but that was left behind with his development of the new logic – and the more extensive structure of his categories.¹¹ That whole development, Fisch says, resulted in a form of realism that is no longer really recognizable as scholastic realism.¹²

It would take a more extensive discussion than I want to engage in here to develop the details of Fisch’s argument. But I am willing to grant the claim that Peirce develops a “realism” that goes well beyond medieval theories about universals. And I admit that I did not fully work out the details of that difference in my book. What I want to defend here is a rather limited claim: namely, that, throughout this development, Peirce did not, and did not need to, change or abandon his own idea of what constituted “scholastic realism.” Let me explain.

There are two features that Peirce uniformly cites when he calls attention to scholastic realism. The first is that, in an improvement over nominalism, the scholastics recognized more than the one mode of being that is individual existence (CP 1.22, 2.116.). That is to say, they allowed for real generality. The second feature is that they did not take real generals to be independent things, but rather a mode of being in things: “no great realist held that a *universal* was a *thing*” (CP 1.27n). While this latter feature is opposed to a Platonic picture of separately existing Ideas, it is important not to mistake it for what makes the realism of the scholastics “moderate.” It is what for Peirce constitutes their realism as “scholastic.” What Peirce finds too moderate about Scotus’s position – which is “separated from nominalism only by the division of a hair” (CP 8.11) – is that he holds the nature to be “contracted to the mode of individuality” when it exists in individual things. In Peirce’s theory, Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness are indeed not themselves independent things but are found in things – in his mature theory, in continuous processes. That justifies, I think, his continued claim to be a “Scotistic realist.” What makes his position a more “extreme” realism is that the non-individualistic components of Firstness and Thirdness are not in any way contracted in external reality.

As Peirce’s own thought develops, he comes to emphasize what he sees as the limited character of the scholastics’ advance over nominalism. Generality is but a limiting case of continuity, which is an essential aspect of Thirdness.¹³ The shift from generality

¹⁰ KETNER; KLOESEL (1986, p. 188-89).

¹¹ HOOKWAY, C. *Peirce*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1985, p. 80-117, has an extensive discussion of the “New List” and most importantly of the transformation in Peirce’s approach to the derivation of categories, both in the more abstract device of valencies as well as the more concrete “phenomenological” approach.

¹² KETNER; KLOESEL (1986, p. 198, n. 3).

¹³ Fisch finds Firstness a crucial element in Peirce’s development, the scholastic realism involved in Thirdness having got Peirce only half-way out of the clutches of nominalism: KETNER; KLOESEL (1986, p. 228). I admit to not having a very firm grip on Firstness, loosened further by Peirce’s remark in 6.201 that “whatever is First is *ipso facto* sentient,” and in 6.202 where he speaks of “Firstness or chance.”

to continuity becomes more important, or perhaps more obvious, as Peirce abandons a subject-predicate analysis as the basic logical form. From a metaphysical point of view, what is left behind is the basic picture of substances and their modification – a scheme that was implicit even in Peirce’s own New List of the categories. But while that, along with other important developments, produces a position that goes beyond the realism of the medievals, there is no conflict in claiming that Peirce is still justified in describing himself as an extreme sort of scholastic realist (CP 5.77n1). The new scheme recognizes two modes of being beyond individual existence, but both Firstness and Thirdness are [still] components and not independent things.

It is true, of course, that during an important formative period of Peirce’s thought, the talk of “scholastic realism” drops out. And when he takes it up again, it appears in the context of a somewhat new, or at least developed, sense of “realism.” But I do not see this as a development or rejection of Peirce’s *scholastic* realism. Once we identify the features that constitute scholastic realism for Peirce – as I have done above – we can locate scholastic realism as a (permanent) part of his fully developed realism. It may turn out that when we identify all the features of that fully developed realism, scholastic realism may play a relatively minor role. But that is quite a different result from claiming that *it* has been changed or abandoned.¹⁴

That there has been a radical break in Peirce’s thought about realism comes up more directly in Max Fisch’s third point. When talk of “Scotistic realism” does reappear in Peirce’s later writings, the emphasis shifts from Scotus’s treatment of generality (in the common nature) to his theory of *haecceitas* or “thisness” as a positive principle of individuation.¹⁵ The context is pretty clearly Peirce’s opposition to apriori system-building.¹⁶ We are, however, still in the context of Scotus’s “formalities” here, and the shift of focus from common nature to haecceity can be seen as something internal to Scotistic realism with its multiple modes of being. Fisch, if I understand him, thinks this is already a step on Peirce’s way to a doctrine of “immediate perception” which Fisch

¹⁴ For some, the difference is enough to justify the claim that Peirce gives up on scholastic realism: McKEON (1952, p. 247 ff.); THOMPSON, M. The Paradox of Peirce’s Realism. In: WIENER; YOUNG (1952, p. 133, 136f.); BASTIAN (1953, p. 246-49), with Moore’s reply: MOORE, E. Professor Bastian’s Comments on Peirce’s Scholasticism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, v. 14, p. 250-51, 1953; MURPHEY, M. *The Development of Peirce’s Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961, p. 138 ff., 401; PIHLSTROM, S., Scholastic Realism and Transcendental Arguments. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, v. 34, p. 382-413, 1998; GOODWIN, (1961, p. 509) seems to me to have a sensible approach to the problem.

¹⁵ I think Peirce comes back to haecceity from his (later) interest in Secondness. In 1901, Fraser produced a new version (not merely a re-edition) of the works of Berkeley, and Peirce reviewed it in the *Nation*. While he mentions Scotus in connection with haecceity, his concern here is to criticize the sort of absolute idealism that takes insufficient (or no) notice of the brute encounter with the existent: *Nation*, v. 73, p. 96, 1901.

¹⁶ DiLeo devotes an article to haecceity: DILEO, J. Peirce’s Haecceitism. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, v. 27, p. 79-107, 1991. For other references to thisness/haecceity: CP 1.405, 408, 458; 3.434, 460-2, 475, 479, 535, 543.

seems to take as the culmination of Peirce's realism.¹⁷ I do not mean to deny Peirce's emphasis on "direct perception" in his later works; but the shift from a realism about generals (or even continuity) to epistemological realism seems to me to represent a change of topic rather than a change of mind.

III. Others

Let me take up briefly a different criticism of my earlier treatment. In an early review of my book, Timothy Potts pointed out that, in focusing on the problem of universals, I neglected Scotus's treatment of power or potentiality as a possible influence on Peirce.¹⁸ It is an important insight, for the "would be's" that come to play such an important role in Peirce's mature pragmatism bear a strong resemblance to the scholastic/Aristotelian notion of power and disposition (CP 1.27n, 5.453). And Peirce cannot be unaware of that.¹⁹ It is almost certain that Peirce read the discussions of potentiality in Scotus's *Questions on the Metaphysics*,²⁰ a work he quotes in connection with Scotus on the common nature (CP 5.312n) and paraphrases in the Review of Berkeley [8.18]. In fact, the notion of potentiality might have served Peirce's purposes better in some ways than the commonness of natures. The nature, for Scotus, "loses" its commonness when instantiated. But potentiality can transcend its exercise, a point Peirce makes repeatedly in connection with his "would-be's" (e.g., CP 4.172, 5.436, 5.528).

The problem, however, is that while Peirce repeatedly identifies Scotus in connection with his realism, both with respect to the common nature and haecceity, I do not see anything of the sort in connection with potentiality and "would-be's." As it happens, there are many cases where similarities in doctrine might suggest possible medieval influences on Peirce's thought, even if not explicitly identified by Peirce.²¹

¹⁷ "The novel doctrine of these lectures, so far as concerns realism, is the theory of Immediate Perception. It is in this connection that he first makes it quite clear that his realism is now opposed to idealism as well as nominalism": KETNER; KLOESEL (1986, p. 195). For a detailed account of the doctrine in Peirce, see BERNSTEIN, R. Peirce's Theory of Perception, In MOORE, E.; ROBIN, R. (eds.) *Studies in the Philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce* (second series). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1964, p. 165-89.

¹⁸ POTTS, T. Review of Boler. *Philosophical Quarterly*, v. 15, p. 361-62, 1965.

¹⁹ Peirce says that "the general has an admixture of potentiality" (CP 1.420). "Its mode of being is *esse in futuro*" (CP 2.148; cf. 5.48 and MCKEON (1952, p. 239)). It is central, of course, in Peirce's notion of the would-be: e.g., CP 3.527, 5.77 (n. 1), 428, 527, and 6 Bk. 1, chs. 1, 2. On the thing as a bundle of habits/powers: CP 1.414. See: GOODWIN (1961, p. 497-507); OLSHEWSKY, T. Realism and Semiosis. In: KETNER; KLOESEL (1986, p. 87-92); ENGEL- TIERCELIN, C., Vagueness and the Unity of C.S. Peirce's Realism. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, v. 28, p. 51-82, 1992; RAPOSA, M., Habits and Essences. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, v. 20, p. 147-168, 1984. For Scotus, see KING, P. Scotus on Metaphysics. In: WILLIAMS, T. (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 67.

²⁰ See my discussion of Scotus on potentiality in: HONNEFELDER, L. et al. (eds). *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996, p. 145-60.

²¹ PERRIAH, A. Peirce's Semiotic and Scholastic Logic. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, v. 25, p. 41-9, 1989.

But that project, while interesting deserves a word of caution. It is not an easy task to distinguish cases where Peirce finds something he agrees with in a medieval text from cases where his own position was influenced by such a text. Its definitive resolution requires familiarity with the latest scholarship on both Peirce and the scholastics, as well as a firm grasp of the philosophical issues involved.

The case with potentiality, I think, may introduce a somewhat different question. My suspicion is that Peirce associates potentiality with Aristotle, especially as part of his outlook as a naturalist or scientist.²² The appeal to potentiality is to be found – and even developed – in the scholastic Aristotelians; but that would not be what Peirce would credit as its primary source. I am led to this hypothesis because of a related issue in Peirce's attitude towards hylomorphism.²³

As it happens, I had made no great distinction between the account of common natures and of forms in Peirce's account, taking them both as instances of his qualified approval of the scholastic Aristotelians' halting step beyond nominalism. Now that I have gone back to look at Peirce's texts, I am struck by the fact that his favorable references to hylomorphism have to do with Aristotle and not the scholastics. That is, Peirce associates the matter-form distinction with Aristotle's scientific concerns as a naturalist, something as we have seen he thinks the medievals lacked (CP 6.357; cf., 5.360).

Here are some texts: "Aristotle builded upon a few deliberately chosen concepts – such as matter and form, act and power – very broad, and in their outlines vague and rough; but solid, unshakeable, and not easily undermined" (CP 1.1). And: "Everybody is familiar with the useful, though fluctuating and relative distinction of matter and form" (CP 5.469). He explains the importance of the theory, maintaining that distinctions based on form are usually more important than those based on matter. "Originality is not an attribute of the *matter* of life, present in the whole only so far as it is present in the smallest parts, but an affair of *form*, of the way in which parts none of which possess it are joined together" (CP 4.611). "The intellectual life of thought resides in its forms – its patterns" (6.320). And its relevance for pragmatism: "The pragmatist does not make Forms to be the *only* realities in the world" (CP 5.434; cf., 429, 436).

But the scholastic's treatment of form, especially substantial form, draws strong criticism.

The schoolmen, who regarded Aristotle as all but infallible, yet to whom the ideas of a naturalist were utterly foreign, who were thoroughly theological in their notions, admitted the soul was a form. But then they had great difficulty with those opinions of the master which depended upon his conceiving of matter as more primitive than form. Their notions of form were rather allied to those of Plato. (CP 6.357)²⁴

And even stronger:

When men's thoughts became turned from theology to the investigations of physics, those who were animated by the new spirit found themselves confronted

²² Peirce's "would-be's" are set in the context of testing.

²³ Peirce does not use the term. See "matter and form" in the indices.

²⁴ Plato's forms, Peirce says, are the characteristics that a thing *ought* to have (CP 6.355).

with objections based on allegations of substantial forms. Those substantial forms, so used, were merely a hindrance to the progress of science. History proves that there was something vicious about the theological application of substantial forms. (CP 6.361)

The implication is that modern scientists were thus blocked from taking advantage of what was valuable in Aristotle's theory.²⁵

It is true that there is a tendency, especially in the later scholastics, to treat the human soul as the paradigm of substantial form. And when form is taken to be capable of a kind of separate existence (as in immortality), this leads to a distortion of Aristotle's scheme. Whatever is to be said about the practitioners of the New Science, had Peirce spent more time on the various commentaries on the *De Anima*, he might have been able to see the Aristotelian form as itself a power, i.e., a higher-order power that consists in the ordering of the particular powers of things. As I suggested above, the association of form with power (cf., "would-be's") might have served Peirce's purposes better even than the reality of common natures. Such historical counterfactuals, of course, carry no interpretive weight.

IV. Conclusion

If we can be satisfied with a minimal and somewhat vague notion of scholastic realism within the context of Peirce's realism generally, it should be clear why he does not think he needs to change his mind about what scholastic realism consists in or whether he can rightly claim the label for himself throughout his writings. However, when I wrote my book I did not recognize the need to distinguish Peirce's scholastic realism from his more general and developing realism. Were I to revise it now, it would be necessary to assign various elements described there to different aspects of Peirce's realism (opposed to nominalism) and even to different "realisms." That scholastic realism, once specified, is not to be identified with Peirce's developed realism may somewhat reduce the importance of the former; but the result should be a clearer picture of Peirce's overall position – warts and all.

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²⁵ Peirce provided an extensive account of matter and form for Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (CP 6.353-363). See especially the treatment of Aristotle (CP 6.355-56) and of Aquinas (CP 6.359), as well as the important account of "substantial form" referred to above (CP 6.361).

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