

# Peirce, Perry and the Lost History of Critical Referentialism

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**Abstract** This paper traces a lost genealogical connection between Charles S. Peirce's later theory of signs and contemporary work in the philosophy of language by John Perry. As is shown, despite some differences, both accounts offer what might be termed a multi-level account of meaning. Moreover, it is claimed that by adopting a 'Peircian turn' in his theory, Perry might overcome alleged shortcomings in his account of cognitive significance.

**Keywords** Peirce · Perry · Language · Reference · Signs · Multiple-propositions · Cognitive significance

## Introduction

One concern in twentieth century analytic philosophy has been to provide a workable account of meaning for singular terms. The debate is well marked out by adherence to a broadly Fregean, or descriptivist, account in the early part of the century, and adherence to a broadly Millian, or referentialist, account in the latter half of the twentieth century. A key player in this debate has been John Perry whose work, especially on indexicals, has been instrumental in establishing the referentialist picture as orthodox<sup>1</sup>. In recent work,<sup>2</sup> however, Perry has developed what he calls a Critical Referentialist account of meaning for singular terms. What makes Critical Referentialism distinct from both descriptivist and referentialist accounts of meaning is that it takes any utterance to have more than one level of content. For Perry, by positing multiple levels of content we can overcome the problems facing both descriptivist and referentialist accounts with a single unified theory. Perry and

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<sup>1</sup>See (Perry 1977) and (Perry 1979) in particular.

<sup>2</sup>See for example Perry's (1997a), (1997b), and (2001).

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his theory, then, will take up one strand of this paper. The other strand, however, will focus on the work of a philosopher from an earlier tradition altogether: C.S. Peirce.

Despite some shared interests, and, arguably, an important role in the development of analytic philosophy (see Soames 2008) we could never conceivably construe Peirce as part of the twentieth century analytic movement: in some important respects, his method and approach are too traditional. All the same, some eighty years before Perry's claim that utterances and sentences have multiple levels of content, Peirce developed his most complex account of signs and signification. In that account, we find the surprising suggestion that any sign will have multiple interpretants, that is, multiple levels of meaning. Although there are, as we might expect, significant differences between the claims made by Peirce and Perry, there are also, as we shall see below, some striking and intriguing similarities. Especially interesting is that there exist some genealogical connections between the work of Peirce and Perry. We shall explore the genealogy more fully below, but in short, there is a connection between Perry's theory and Peirce's general semiotic via the work of Arthur Burks. However, as I shall show below, the connection is rather curious and by no-means straightforward. Moreover, I contend that a potential shortcoming in Perry's account does not affect Peirce's multiple interpretant account of signification.

In what follows, then, I shall give brief summaries of Perry and Peirce's multiple content accounts before comparing the two. I will then show how these accounts are connected through the work of Arthur Burks, and that Peirce's theory might properly be thought of as something of an ancestor to Perry's account. I shall also suggest some reasons why this connection has been lost. Finally, I will conclude by showing why a potential problem in Perry's handling of the problem of cognitive significance does not pose similar difficulties for Peirce.

## Perry's Critical Referentialism

It is perhaps easiest to see Perry's account as a response to Howard Wettstein's claim that referentialist theories cannot account for cognitive significance. In his 1986 paper, "Has Semantics Rested on a Mistake?", Wettstein suggests that direct referentialists, that is, those who treat names and indexicals as tags which refer directly to their referent without a mediating identifying description, cannot capture the cognitive significance that identity statements such as ' $X = Y$ ' have over identity statements such as ' $X = X$ '. Since, on the referentialist account, the same object is identified by both ' $X$ ' and ' $Y$ ', the two identity statements say the same thing. But, this does not account for the former's being more informative. Descriptivists on the other hand, that is, those who treat the meanings of names and indexicals as descriptions which function as identifying conditions for referents, are able to explain the cognitive significance of ' $X = Y$ ' over ' $X = X$ ': the identifying conditions of the terms in the former statement differ.<sup>3</sup> However, says Wettstein, this should not be seen as a problem for the referentialist. Rather, the referentialist should

<sup>3</sup> Of course, as is well known, descriptivist accounts of names and indexicals fail for epistemological and metaphysical reasons, reasons which have largely been taken as reason for being a referentialist on such matters regardless of issues of cognitive significance.

feel no onus to account for cognitive significance since this is the driving aim of descriptivist, not referentialist semantics. Perry, however, rejects this proposed dissolution of the problem and instead claims that if we distinguish between various levels of content for any utterance, we can, *pace* Wettstein, be referentialists whilst accommodating the descriptivist compulsion to explain cognitive significance.

The most developed account of critical referentialism that Perry gives comes in his (2001) book, *Reference and Reflexivity*. There Perry identifies two broad classes of content that any utterance may have. These he terms *referential content* and *reflexive content*. The referential content of an utterance, the content we tend to identify with what-is-said, is the same type of content identified by referentialists and makes use of truth-conditions about the referents of utterances. Take for instance, my utterance:

1. Bob is thirsty

The referential content of 1. is a proposition which attributes the property of thirstiness to the object to which ‘Bob’ directly refers, namely Bob. Similarly, take Bob’s utterance:

2. I am thirsty

The referential content of 2. is a proposition which attributes the property of thirstiness to the object to which ‘I’ directly refers; namely Bob, since he utters ‘I’. Of course, this is the same proposition expressed by 1., and this seems to accord with our straightforward intuition that with my utterance of 1. and Bob’s utterance of 2., Bob and I are, in one sense, saying the same thing.

Reflexive content, on the other hand, makes use of truth conditions about the utterance itself, rather than the referents of the utterance. Take 1. again. As Perry sees it, since this utterance contains a name, the reflexive content of 1. involves, not the referent of the name, but rather the linguistic and conventional meaning associated with names; that is, the socially embedded conventions and practices that allow me to use ‘Bob’ to refer to Bob. The reflexive content of 1., then, is:

1. <sup>r</sup>. That the person whom the naming convention used in 1. allows us to designate with ‘Bob’ is thirsty.

Notice that the reflexive content, given in 1<sup>r</sup>., makes reference to 1.; hence the reflexivity of the content.

Similarly with 2. The reflexive content of 2. again involves the linguistic meaning of the terms involved, in this case the indexical ‘I’, rather than the referents of the terms. So, the reflexive content for 2. is:

2. <sup>r</sup>. That the speaker of ‘I’ in 2. is thirsty.

Again, notice that the content given in 2<sup>r</sup>. makes reference to 2., thereby making the content reflexive.

If utterances have both reflexive and referential content, as Perry’s account suggests, then it seems that we can go some way toward explaining cognitive significance on a referentialist account. An utterance such as:

3. Hesperus is Hesperus

has the same referential content as the sentence

#### 4. Hesperus is Phosphorus

since all names pick out the same object. At the level of reflexive content, however, there are clear differences since:

3. <sup>r</sup>. That the object which the naming conventions for the first use of ‘Hesperus’ in 3. allow us to designate, is the same as the object which the naming conventions for the second use of ‘Hesperus’ in 3. allow us to designate.

is clearly different from the reflexive content of 4.:

4. <sup>r</sup>. That the object which the naming conventions used in 4. allow us to designate with ‘Hesperus’, is the same object as the object which the naming conventions used in 4. allow us to designate with ‘Phosphorus’.

There are, then, clear differences at the level of reflexive content. The difference in content between 3. and 4. at the reflexive level, should, if Perry is correct, explain the cognitive significance that 4. has over 3..This is certainly Perry’s candidate for explaining cognitive significance (2001, 74). Furthermore, it is clear that the most important level of content in play in Perry’s account is referential content since this most accurately reflects what speakers take themselves to be saying when they utter sentences like 1.–4.<sup>4</sup> It seems, then, that Perry’s critical referentialism is still a referentialist account, even though it purports to explain cognitive significance by invoking reflexive content: we have a referentialist account that is apparently able to accommodate descriptivist desires to explain the informativeness that some sentences have over others.

We shall not examine the pros and cons of Perry’s account here, but it is important to note that there is, at least, one problem given his stated aim of explaining cognitive significance. The problem seems to be that, as Frege pointed out whilst rejecting his own early attempts at explaining the meaning of singular terms (1892), the cognitive significance of a sentence seems to come from what we might discover about the referents of utterances, not the symbols or sentences themselves. If this is correct, then it is unfortunate for Perry that the primary focus of reflexive contents are utterances and not their referents. We shall return to this complaint below, but first we must turn to Peirce’s multiple interpretant theory of signs, the account that I think is a lost ancestor to Perry’s account.

#### Peirce’s Multiple-Interpretant Account

A central concern of Peirce’s often complex philosophy is the question of how one thing, a sign, can stand for another thing, an object. The question of signification, or representation, was something to which Peirce returned frequently throughout his life, the result being a series of ever more complex accounts of signs. What is of

<sup>4</sup> We seldom take ourselves to be saying anything about the sentences we are uttering when we say such things as 1. – 4. This is the prime argument against Reichenbach’s (1947) token-reflexivity account of indexicals.

interest here is that by the time of his death in 1914, this sign theory contained a multiple-levels account of meaning.

Central to all of Peirce's attempts at a sign theory is his notion of sign-structure. Any instance of signification, according to Peirce, consists of three inter-related parts: a sign, an object, and an interpretant. For the sake of simplicity, we can think of the sign as the signifier, for example, a written word or an utterance.<sup>5</sup> The object, on the other hand, is best thought of as whatever is signified, for example, the object to which the written or uttered word attaches. The interpretant, the most important feature for our concerns, is best thought of as the understanding that we have of the sign/object relation. The importance of the interpretant for Peirce is that signification is not a simple dyadic relationship between sign and object: a sign only signifies if it can be interpreted. This makes the interpretant central to the content of the sign, in that, the meaning of a sign is manifest in the interpretation that it generates in sign users. As Christopher Hookway puts it, "The semantical relation between a sign and what it signifies [...] depends upon our *using* or *understanding* such objects as signs of such things." (Hookway 1985, 33). Bear in mind that Peirce also thinks that such interpretations are determinate, and we can see that the meaning or content of a sign just is its interpretant, albeit that the meaning must be expressed in terms of the interpretation it generates.

In his later philosophy, roughly between 1906 and 1910, Peirce began to think that signification and sign-structure were more complex than this. In particular, he thought that there were three ways in which a sign determines understanding of the signified object, that is, three interpretants for any sign.<sup>6</sup> These he called *the immediate interpretant*, *the dynamic interpretant* and *the final interpretant*.

The immediate interpretant is a schematic understanding of the relationship between the sign and object which focuses in particular on the features of the sign. In an extended example, where the object is stormy weather, Peirce describes the immediate interpretant as "the schema in [our] imagination, i.e. the vague Image of what there is in common to the different images of a stormy day" (CP8.314 (1907)). The immediate interpretant, then, is something like recognition of the syntax of the sign and the more general features of its meaning. In terms of sentences and utterances, immediate interpretants will be our recognition of grammatical categories, syntactic structures and conventional rules of use.

The dynamic interpretant is simply our understanding of the signified object when many of the contextual features surrounding signification are filled in. Strictly speaking, the dynamic interpretant is roughly the interpretant as Peirce originally envisioned it. However, Peirce now wants to capture the fact that any particular instance of understanding a sign/object relation is dependent on a range of features about the context in which the interpreting sign user is placed. In many ways, we can

<sup>5</sup> Peirce scholars will be aware that, strictly speaking, Peirce thinks that signs as a whole do not signify. Rather, some limited part of the sign will signify. For example, a color swatch will signify in virtue of its color, not its shape or size etc. This led Peirce to speak of the ground of the sign or the sign-vehicle, amongst other terminology, rather than the sign. For the sake of simplicity and ease of exposition, I don't use this distinction here.

<sup>6</sup> Peirce also thought that signs signified two objects: the actual mind independent object, which he called the dynamic object; and that object as we are able to conceive of it, which he called the immediate object. I shall not examine this part of Peirce's later semiotic.

think of the dynamic interpretant as attempting to capture the often perspectival features of signification; the things that are peculiar to the agent involved in a given instance of signification. This leads Peirce to describe the dynamic interpretant as the "effect actually produced on the mind" (CP8.343 (1908)), or as the "actual effect which the sign, as a sign, really determines" (CP4.536 (1906)). The dynamic interpretant, then, is the understanding that some participant would reach, or which the sign determines, at a particular instance.

Peirce describes the final interpretant as, "that which would finally be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter were carried so far that an ultimate opinion were reached" (CP8.184 (1909)). Elsewhere he describes it as the "effect that would be produced on the mind by the sign after sufficient development of thought" (CP8.343 (1908)). The final interpretant, then, seems to be what the understanding of the object would be when all facts are in and we have reached a true understanding of the object. As Hookway puts it, "it is the interpretant we should all agree on in the long run", (Hookway 1985, 139).<sup>7</sup> It is possible, then, to think of the final interpretant as the ultimate, perspective free, understanding of the signified object which underlies or connects a range of dynamic interpretants which may exist for any given sign.

For those unfamiliar with Peirce and Peircian semiotics, these explanations of multiple interpretants or meanings for signs can often seem bewildering. Indeed, these are concepts which Peirce was still formulating and clarifying at the time of his death and it is not clear that he ever formulated his most complete sign theory in a way which was satisfactory to him. However, it is possible to see what Peirce was trying to capture and what he thought these multiple interpretants were doing by way of a simple example. Suppose that one morning the British Chancellor of the Exchequer (who lives at 11 Downing Street) receives a letter which has been mistakenly posted and is addressed to "10 Downing Street". We'll call this case  $\alpha$ . On that same morning the Prime Minister receives a letter which is correctly posted to him and is addressed "10 Downing Street". We'll call this case  $\beta$ . What interpretants are determined by the signifying sentence "10 Downing Street" and its relation with the signified object, 10 Downing Street, in these cases? Well, in both  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , the immediate interpretants are the same, namely, the understanding that this sentence is an address. The dynamic interpretants in  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , however, differ. In  $\alpha$ , the dynamic interpretant of "10 Downing Street" will be something like, *the house next door*, or *the Prime Minister's house*. In  $\beta$ , the dynamic interpretant will be something like *the house where I am presently*, or *the house where I live*. And the final interpretant will be the same in both cases, namely, that the object signified by "10 Downing Street" is 10 Downing Street.

In summary, then, Peirce thinks that any sign will have multiple interpretants. The first is the immediate interpretant, and this captures the purely abstract and syntactic meaning of the sign. The second is the dynamic interpretant, and this captures the

<sup>7</sup> As this may suggest, Peirce's later multiplication of interpretants is connected to his famous account of inquiry, whereby scientific investigation will lead us, at the end of inquiry, to a complete body of truths and an accurate account of reality. I do not want to pursue this connection here but see, for instance, T.L. Short's (2004) for a useful account of Peirce's later sign theory where its teleological/inquiry driven aspect is made clear.

object of the sign, but from a perspectival standpoint. The third is the final interpretant, and this captures the object wholly and accurately, free from any particular interpretative perspective.

## Comparison

Although we are interested in the similarities and connections between these two views it is worth pointing out that I am not claiming any kind of isomorphism between these accounts. Indeed, there are some quite obvious and fundamental differences. For instance, Perry's account is driven by a range of problems stemming from the contemporary, analytic, project in the philosophy of language. Peirce obviously pre-dates this project. Indeed, Peirce's main objective with his sign theories is to account for the roles that understanding, thought, and information play in the process of inquiry and the growth of knowledge. This obviously leads to significant differences between the two. Where Perry is happy to describe meaning in terms of propositions and propositional content, Peirce describes meaning in terms of understanding. This, however, is not a simple 'meaning as use' claim. Rather, Peirce thinks that since signs determine particular interpretations, the interpretations can be used to express the meanings of the signs. These two ideas, meaning as propositional content, and meaning as interpretant, are plainly very different. However, it is not the differences that we are interested in here. Rather, it is the similarities and what underlies them.

The main similarities between Peirce and Perry's accounts are, I take it, quite obvious. First, both Peirce and Perry attempt to explain the signficatory relation between words or signs and their referents or objects, that is, both are attempting to give us an account of meaning (albeit for different reasons). Second, both Peirce and Perry conclude that an adequate account of meaning must include multiple levels of content if it is to capture fully how a word stands for an object. There are, however, some richer similarities behind these obvious points of contact; in particular, there are some interesting parallels between the multiple levels of meaning that Peirce and Perry identify.

First of all, there are clear parallels between Peirce's final interpretant and what Perry calls referential content. We can see this clearly when we look at the referential content and final interpretants generated for utterances 1. and 2. above. First of all, there is no difference in referential content for these two sentences; both express the same proposition, namely *that Bob is thirsty*. And similarly, both of these sentences determine the same final interpretant, namely the final and complete understanding that Bob is thirsty.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this does not mean that referential contents and final interpretants are the same thing, but they do seem to behave in similar ways,

<sup>8</sup> What is also interesting here is that this also suggests that Peirce's final interpretant has more in common with the referentialist notions of propositions than with Fregean propositions, or 'thoughts'. We can see this since 1 and 2. generate only one referential proposition, one final interpretant, but two Fregean 'thoughts' (since 'Bob' and 'I' have different Fregean senses). If the final interpretant relied on mediated reference, as with the Fregean 'Thought', we can assume that 1 and 2 would generate different final interpretants.



suggesting that at this level of meaning, Peirce and Perry are attempting to explain the same thing.

Second, there are very close parallels between Perry's reflexive content and Peirce's immediate interpretant. For Perry, the reflexive content of an utterance concerns the utterance itself rather than its referents; for Peirce, the immediate interpretant concerns the sign itself rather than the object of the sign. Even more instructive, I think, are the following quotes which suggest that given similar signs we will find similar reflexive contents and immediate interpretants. Perry explains the reflexive content of an utterance thus:

Imagine seeing a token, or hearing a token without being in a position to perceive the existential facts or context. For example, you find a note that says, "I plan to kill him tomorrow". You don't know who wrote it, in reference to whom and when. You have the token, but not the context. So you grasp [...] the [reflexive] meaning.  
(Perry 2001, 73)

David Savan, a leading interpreter of Peirce, explains the immediate interpretant of an utterance thus:

Walking along the street, I come upon the chalked scrawl on a pavement, "I love you". Here the [immediate interpretant] is not only that one individual loves another, but also that whoever inscribed "I" loves someone who is being addressed. Still, it is not part of the [immediate interpretant] that the lover in this case is a child living in this particular neighborhood, etc.  
(Savan 1988, 54)

The examples in these quotes are remarkably similar. Moreover, if Savan is right and we can think of the immediate interpretant in this way, then it is striking that this utterance determines an immediate interpretant that looks so like the reflexive content for the utterance used in Perry's case. Indeed, I take it from these cases, that Perry's reflexive content and Peirce's immediate interpretant are rough parallels and an attempt to explain the same level of meaning.

So, there are clear similarities and parallels between Peirce and Perry, but of course, this may mean nothing more than that Peirce has pre-empted an interesting theory in contemporary philosophy. In this case, however, I want to suggest more than simple coincidental prescience; rather, I think that the similarities are connected and that an interesting genealogy runs from Peirce, via the work of Arthur Burks, through to Perry's Critical Referentialism.

## Genealogy

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Arthur Burks published a range of papers developing Peircian ideas, one of which is especially important for tracing the connection between Peirce and Perry. In "Icon, Index, and Symbol" (1949), Burks uses Peirce's theory of signs as a starting point for developing his own account of meaning for indexicals. In this account, Burks feels it is important to distinguish what he thinks of as the meaning associated with the general sign *type* from the



meanings of particular *tokens* of indexical signs used *in situ*. Burks calls these two meanings *symbolic meaning* and *indexical meaning* respectively (Burks 1949, 681–2). So, for Burks, an utterance of the word ‘now’ has two meanings: the symbolic meaning, which is something like “*the time at which ‘now’ is uttered*” (Burks 1949, 682), and an indexical meaning which Burks says is “not only its symbolic meaning but its temporal location as well” (Burks 1949, 692). Again, the similarity of these views to the account of Peirce and Perry should be obvious. But, with regards Perry at least, this is no accident. Perry expressly claims Burks’ account as ancestor to his own, and sees critical referentialism as developing some of the basic insights of Burks’ theory of indexicals (Perry 2001, 35)<sup>9</sup>. For instance, Perry takes Burks’ ‘indexical meaning’ to identify a crucial, intermediate level of meaning for indexicals which orthodox accounts, e.g. David Kaplan’s (1989), ignore. Perry’s belief is that by generalizing *indexical meaning* to a level of meaning for all types of utterance, that is, by developing reflexive content, we can build upon the basic framework that Burks gives us. Clearly then, Burks’ theory of meaning for indexicals is the parent of Perry’s critical referentialism for singular terms generally: the parallels are obvious, claimed and noted.

Less obvious, however, is the relationship between Burks’ account and that of Peirce. Indeed, despite the similarities, the relationship is one of misunderstanding and, in some ways, missed opportunities.<sup>10</sup> The reason that the connection between the accounts of Burks and Peirce is unclear is that although Burks uses elements of Peirce’s sign theory, the elements he uses do *not* include the multiple interpretant account in which we are interested. Burks generates his own account by using Peirce’s basic sign/object/interpretant distinction and the famed icon/index/symbol typology of signs. He goes on to reject much of it since it fails to reflect what we know about indexical words. According to Burks, Peirce fails to distinguish carefully enough between indexical signs where sign and object have a physical connection, for example, smoke as a sign fire, and indexical signs where there is some important symbolic connection too, for example, indexical words such as ‘I’ and ‘now’. As far as Burks is concerned, Peirce lets cases like the former dictate his thinking on indexical signs and fails to notice that the most interesting indexicals, context-sensitive words, have what seems to be an additional, general and symbolic level of meaning. The answer, for Burks, is to develop a multiple-level account of meaning for indexicals which can account for the apparent symbolic and general element of such signs. Burks’ account, then, with his division between symbolic and indexical meanings, is meant to develop, and remedy defects in, Peirce’s work.

What does this mean for the genealogy? Clearly, Burks is interested in Peirce’s sign theory, but wants to capture something more general, and less grounded in the physical connection between the indexical sign and its object. But, equally clear is that Burks is not using Peirce’s multiple interpretant account of signs to do this. It looks, then, as though the similarities between Peirce and Perry’s accounts may be a coincidence after all: Burks does not base his account on Peirce’s multiple

<sup>9</sup> Also interesting is that Perry makes no mention of the Peircian background to Burks’ work.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Burks approach use and appreciation of Peirce’s account of indexical signs, see (Atkin 2005).

interpretant theory of signs. However, that is not all there is to say and an interesting connection still remains: the development which Burks makes, and the problems he notices in Peirce's early account are problems which Peirce himself became aware of, and which he sort to remedy with the multiple interpretant account we detailed earlier.

In his later work, Peirce wanted his sign theory to reflect the process of inquiry. Peirce's account of inquiry is well known, but briefly, he argued that through a progression from settled belief, via doubt arising from recalcitrance, through rational inquiry, to a further settled belief, understanding and inquiry tend towards a definite but idealized end. In particular, since the only way to form beliefs that are immune to recalcitrance is to use a method of inquiry that is sensitive to the way the world is, Peirce felt that the understanding reached at the idealized end of inquiry represents a body of truths which accurately reflect reality. In order to capture this process, Peirce wanted an account of signs that was able to accommodate the teleological nature of our inquiries.<sup>11</sup> He very quickly came to realize that in such a process, the various respects in which we understand signs are related to the various stages that an inquiry must go through, and at which we find ourselves. Crucially, he realized that whilst we understand the meaning of signs in particular instances, there has to be something that allows us to see this sign relative to a broader process of inquiry. That is, there must be general features which allow us to recognize the sign as being of a particular type, and as contributing to the same end process as other signs, where all interpreters would reach the same understanding of the signified object. He also realized that an account with only one type of interpretant could not capture these various dimensions, and so he posited multiple interpretants.<sup>12</sup> Although this is a broader instance of Burks' problem of capturing those dimensions of our understanding that arise from both the instance specific and general features of the sign – he was concerned only with indexical signs – the problem, nonetheless, is the same. What's more, so is the proposed solution: posit multiple types of meaning or interpretant.

The connection between Burks' account and Peirce's later account, then, is an interesting one: Burks *does* use Peirce's account of signs as the framework for his account of multiple-meanings for indexicals, but he *does not* use the multiple-interpretant account. However, the reasons behind Burks' development of Peirce's early semiotic are the same reasons which led Peirce to make similar developments to his own theory: the need to account for both the instance-specific and general elements of a sign or utterance's meaning. What, then, does this mean for the connection between Perry and Peirce?

The most straightforward genealogical connection between Peirce and Perry runs from Peirce's early sign theory, through Burks' development of it for indexicals, to Perry's Critical Referentialism: this is clearly not a direct ancestral connection

<sup>11</sup> See for instance (Short 2004) for this change in Peirce's account.

<sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact, Peirce was quick to recognize that he had earlier noted different types of understanding in outlining his three grades of clarity in his famous 1878 paper "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (W3, 257–275). According to this paper, clear understanding of a concept requires, quotidian familiarity with it, the ability to offer a general definition of it, and knowing what effects to expect from holding it true. The latter, of course is his famous Pragmatic Maxim. Peirce explicitly connects these grades of clarity with the three types of interpretant in his (CP8.185 (1909)).

between the two accounts. However, there remains an interesting connection nonetheless. Peirce's early theory of signs seems to contain a problem for anyone wishing to capture both the instance-specific and general features of any given sign's meaning. This problem led to Burks' account of meaning for indexicals and Perry's Critical Referentialism on the one hand, and Peirce's multiple-interpretant account of signification on the other. Moreover, as we have seen, the results of these two different responses to this problem are broadly similar. Of course, Perry's account is not an attempt to solve a problem with Peirce's early sign theory; nonetheless, it is a development of just such an attempt. This, I think, certainly suggests that Peirce's account should be thought of as an ancestor to Perry's theory. However, rather than being the long-lost grandfather to Perry's critical referentialism, Peirce's multiple-interpretant account is perhaps more like a long-lost cousin.

This ancestral connection is, I think, interesting and the apparent parallel evolution intriguing, but it is worth pausing to answer an obvious question. Given that Burks' work was written roughly thirty-five years after Peirce's death, when Peirce had already developed his multiple-interpretant account in response to these problems, why does Burks fail to take note of it? The reason is simply the state of Peirce's papers at the time Burks was working. As is well known, upon his death Peirce left thousands of pages of unpublished manuscripts. The editorship of this work fell to various people,<sup>13</sup> before it finally resulted in *The Collected Papers*, with the initial six volumes edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss between 1931 and 1935. Despite this work making much of Peirce's philosophy widely available for the first time, it was still incomplete. Moreover, it gathered Peirce's work together thematically rather than chronologically. Given that Peirce's work covers some fifty or so years, this makes much of the material appear idiosyncratic, opaque, and at times contradictory. To make matters worse, the best source of Peirce's later work on signs and multiple interpretants, the correspondence with the English aristocrat Lady Victoria Welby, was not published in complete or coherent form until 1977 (Hardwick 1977). It is unsurprising, then, that Burks did not take account of Peirce's more complex and subtle later accounts of signs.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the secondary literature on Peirce's sign theory was still underdeveloped, and it is only following Burks' pioneering work in the 1940s and 1950s that interest in Peirce's sign theories grew. It seems clear, then, that Burks' failure to take account of Peirce's later multiple-interpretant account of signs is simply down to the embryonic state of Peirce scholarship when Burks was writing his pioneering work.

## Final Remarks

I take exploring and clarifying the connections between Peirce's multiple-interpretant account and Perry's Critical Referentialism to be interesting in and of

<sup>13</sup> Initially Josiah Royce took control of the Peirce papers but died shortly afterwards. C.I. Lewis then took over editorship, but made little progress with the manuscripts before relinquishing responsibility for them. For the peculiar history of Peirce's Manuscripts, see (Houser 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Burks is, of course, a central figure in Peirce scholarship generally and is responsible for editing the final two volumes of *The Collected Papers* in 1958.

its own right. There are, however, other elements of interest. For instance, as should be obvious, there is a level of meaning in Peirce's account that does not have a counterpart in Perry's theory: namely the dynamic interpretant. By way of conclusion, then, I will briefly explore an interesting effect that this extra level of meaning has for Peirce's account in relation to Perry's, namely that it enables the multiple-interpretant account to disarm some concerns with Critical Referentialism's explanation of cognitive significance, and the claim to capture the spirit of Frege's descriptivist concerns.

To see the significance of the dynamic interpretant here, we need to look again at the problem of cognitive significance. As we saw, Perry's notion of reflexive content is required to take the weight of explaining cognitive significance. However, there are some reasons for thinking that this is too much weight for it to bear. Recall that for Perry, the candidate for explaining cognitive significance is reflexive content, that is, content about the words or sentences used. However, this sounds similar to the answer Frege originally gave to the problem of cognitive significance, but later rejected. According to Frege (1892), in his 1879 *Begriffsschrift*, he had proposed to treat the cognitive significance of " $X = Y$ " over " $X = X$ " as stemming from the different uses of signs. In his later work, however, this meta-linguistic solution struck him as problematic since the informativeness of " $X = Y$ ", and indeed, the subject matter of identity statements broadly, is a matter of the relations between objects, not signs: "Hesperus is Phosphorus" purports to reveal an astronomical fact, not a meta-linguistic one. This is why Frege invokes *sense* as a means of explaining cognitive significance.

Put this way, then, it looks as though Perry's Critical Referentialism explains cognitive significance in a manner which has, traditionally, been thought inadequate to the task. What is more, it seems to question whether Critical Referentialism really does do justice to the phenomena that concerned Frege. To be clear, there are two concerns here. First, is reflexive-content up to the task of explaining cognitive significance? Second, does reflexive-content do justice to Perry's stated aim of capturing Fregean insights and answering Fregean concerns? These may or may not be serious problems for Perry's account. For instance, Corazza (2003) seems to think that the apparent parallel between reflexive-content and Frege's rejected meta-linguistic answer is only a problem if this is assumed to be the only kind of content, which, of course, is precisely the assumption which critical referentialism bucks. And Reimer (2002) thinks that whatever claims Perry might make for reflexive-content, it is not clear that he can justifiably lay claim to it being Fregean in spirit. However, whether such complaints are damaging or not, what is of interest here is that they do not even arise for Peirce's account. And this seems to be simply because he has an additional level of meaning.

For Peirce, the meta-linguistic differences between " $X = Y$ " and " $X = X$ " might well be captured at the level of immediate interpretants: the immediate interpretant for "Hesperus is Hesperus" will tell us that we have two occurrences of one name, and for "Hesperus is Phosphorous" one occurrence each of two different names. But, with the apparatus we have at our disposal here, we can accommodate the view that " $X = X$ " and " $X = Y$ " are separable at the meta-linguistic level without being committed to the idea that such differences explain cognitive significance. Rather, we can rely on differences in dynamic interpretants.

The differences between the dynamic interpretants of “Hesperus is Hesperus” and “Hesperus is Phosphorus”, then, are just the differences in the way we come to understand the objects of those utterances in particular circumstances of use. So, assuming that we look at Venus first thing in the morning and again first thing at night, the dynamic interpretant for “Hesperus” will be something like my understanding that “Hesperus” denotes the last star visible at sunrise. Similarly, my dynamic interpretant for “Phosphorus” will be my understanding that “Phosphorus denotes the first star visible after sunset. Consequently, the dynamic interpretant of “Hesperus is Hesperus” will be that the last star visible at sunrise is the same as the last star visible at sunrise. The dynamic interpretant of “Hesperus is Phosphorus” however, will be that the last star visible at sunrise is the same as the first star visible after sunset.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, this marks a difference over and above the meta-linguistic differences captured by the immediate interpretant.

Given the two issues which we have raised for critical referentialism above, this Peircian explanation of cognitive significance is interesting. In particular, it bears marked similarities with Frege’s own explanation, namely *sense* as a mode of presentation. The dynamic interpretant is the grasp or understanding we have of the object in a given instance, and, as Michael Dummett puts it, Fregean sense is “a mode by which reference is apprehended” (Dummett 1981, 634). This makes the Peircian and Fregean explanations look similar.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to Perry’s reflexive content, then, the dynamic interpretant seems to capture more fully our sense of what makes an identity statement informative. What is more, if we are inclined to capture Fregean insights and answer Fregean concerns, it seems that Peirce’s multiple-interpretant account might be well placed to enable us to do so. Ultimately, this may mean very little for the critical referentialist account, but it is at least suggestive that there is scope, and maybe even reason, for introducing a further level of meaning of roughly the same stripe as Peirce’s dynamic interpretant. In short, the connections between Peirce and Perry’s accounts might well be interesting for more than simple historical reasons.

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<sup>15</sup> There are many ways in which we can come to understand objects, and so many different potential dynamic interpretants.

<sup>16</sup> See (Atkin 2008) for more on the connections between Peirce’s later account of signs and Frege’s *Sense/Reference* distinction.

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