The Continuity of Life: On Peirce's Objective Idealism

Ivo A. Ibri

> "Now, in obedience to the principle, or maxim, of continuity, that we ought to assume things to be continuous as far as we can, it has been urged that we ought to suppose a continuity between the characters of mind and matter, so that matter would be nothing but mind that had such indurated habits as to cause it to act with a peculiarly high degree of mechanical regularity, or routine." (CP-6.277).

A Short Foreword

Peirce's metaphysics is a complex system of concepts constitutive of a *theory of the world*. Among them, there is one of continuity, or *Synechism* as Peirce called it, and another of *Objective Idealism*. Both are interconnected doctrines, as the former claims that all reality is somehow continuous, notwithstanding an imperfect or incomplete continuity, and the latter refutes all ontological splitting between matter and mind, affirming that both are manifestations of one and the same substance, namely, *ideality*.

Synechism is, in fact, a synthesis of Peirce's idealism and realism, in the way that it is possible to conceive a reality constituted by general relations and possibilities under only one substance, viz., *eidos* or ideality.

Reader of German Romanticism authors, mainly Schiller and Schelling, Peirce was also committed to the conception of life, so dear to that philosophical movement. With his own metaphysics he achieved the Romantic targets, namely, highlighting Nature as a living organism, in which, from the stone to the human being, life was scaled in degrees of vivacity measured by its capacity of spontaneity. In this regard, this essay will show how Peirce's conception of different degrees of life interact dialogically by interchanging signs that require the new and important science of Biosemiotics for taking into account the grounds and meaning of that dialogue.

I. A. Ibri (✉)
Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
e-mail: ibri@uol.com.br

V. Romanini, E. Fernández (eds.), *Peirce and Biosemiotics,* Biosemiotics 11,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-7732-3_3,

On Philosophical Terminology—Setting the Stage for a Better Understanding of Some Peircean Concepts

A long acquaintance with a great author of the history of philosophy whom we admire, allows us to develop, along with an absorption of his concepts and vocabulary, a kind of instinct for guessing[1], that not only tries to decipher what there is of *spirit* behind the *letter,* hence something that hovers beyond the text as unsaid, but also that which the author said, but did not make sufficiently clear.

Charles Peirce is one of these authors, and certain peculiarities of his work spur the emergence of that guessing instinct, given the fact that it is comprised mainly of manuscripts that he never saw published in his lifetime, nor was able to review, suppress and, I suppose, add passages that the imminence of a publication stimulates for the sake of quality and precision. Clear terminology, however, was always a cause of worry for him[2], nearly obsessed with giving new names, often unprecedented, to the new concepts he created during the development of his work, many rooted in tradition but receiving from him an original approach, coherent with the theoretical edifice of his philosophy.

This concern with a biunivocal terminology of concepts probably derives—and here is an example of guessing—from his education and practice in natural sciences.[3] Indeed, the so-called sciences of Nature, and even their derivatives such as the applied sciences, enabled the practice of a biunivocal terminology between terms and their objects, which supposedly contributed very much to the advancement of knowledge in these fields. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said, for various reasons, of the so-called human sciences, especially philosophy.

Among the causes of the *illness of language* of which many contemporary authors accuse philosophy, there has rarely been, prioritarily, the *virus of bad terminology* that infected doctrines with the vagueness and polysemy that preclude the clarity of concepts, but rather, the illness would lie in the metaphysical intentions inherent in the use of philosophical language. It must be acknowledged that the insistence in an indispensable analysis of the logical soundness of the arguments, to which philosophical theories ought to be subjected, should be preserved from this criticism.

It is not uncommon to say that the objects of human sciences in general, and philosophy in particular, are of greater complexity than those of the sciences of Nature, requiring, thus, the renouncing of terminological biuniqueness in favor of a language that expresses such complexity, thereby justifying a certain (and allowed) semantic vagueness. However, if this line of argument, on the one hand, errs in ignoring the complexity of the objects of the countless fields of knowledge of natural sciences, on the other hand, it seems to want to preserve the right to use philosophi-

[1] Incidentally, a Peirce expression, as a necessary faculty for the success of a heuristic logic, defined by him, as we all know, as abduction.

[2] See his *Ethics of Terminology* (CP- 2.219-226).

[3] On Peirce's education in Natural Sciences and how it forms part, in a special manner, in his Philosophy, interesting approaches may be found in (Fisch 1986, pp. 376–383) and (Lenzen 1964, pp. 33–50).

cal language in such a way as to maintain, to an unsuspecting reader, the dangerous ambiguity between conceptual difficulty and linguistic obscurity, in which a terminologically confusing discourse often takes on a sham guise of profundity.

The history of philosophy shows that each author, and one could rarely generalize for a whole period, keeps his own vocabulary, which, if it cannot be agreed in favor of a biunivocal terminology, should be at least respected in its own context. This is a way of being fair to philosophical concepts, namely, to seek in each theoretical system the clearest sense that an author wished to give to a concept, since a similar term may appear under distinct meanings in distinct authors.

Without a doubt, this respect for a terminological context entails a non-trivial study of the history of philosophy that will be beneficial in many ways. A first would allow one to become terminologically acquainted with the respective author concerned. A second would be to understand the concepts in their historical context. It is not uncommon to fall into a kind of *historical parallax*—if I may be allowed this metaphor—when judging concepts in light of contemporary knowledge. Finally, a third benefit of this study would be to avoid the proposition of pseudo-new concepts that had been already formulated, often with admirable depth, by an author or school of a much earlier period.

Justifying a claim of originality in philosophy involves, undoubtedly, an honest examination of the history of ideas. In *exact* sciences, knowledge is cumulative, and past knowledge always appears updated, somehow, in current theories. Human sciences have areas in which knowledge with difficulty is increasingly acquired, on a step-by-step basis, in a historical process. Philosophy is one of them and a terminological non-agreement would require constant remission to the history of ideas, and only then become aware that something *new* is being proposed.

Let us then pass on to the specific issue of terminology that gave rise to these initial considerations. It relates to the terms *realism* and *idealism,* as they appear in Peirce's vocabulary. Contemporaneously, as we know, these terms are considered as meaning opposing philosophical positions: realists would be those who admit the existence of an external world, independent of the mind that represents it; idealists, in turn, state that the world is constituted by mind and its perceptive capacity, in such a way that there would not be anything like a reality independent of its representation. This question, thus posed, one can say, does not belong to the theoretical context of Peircean works. Nevertheless, many uninformed scholars ask themselves how Peirce could be considered, simultaneously, a realist and a nominalist.

I previously touched on the necessary study of the history of philosophy because it would be the only resource capable of resolving this question, by becoming aware that realism, such as proclaimed by Peirce, is of a Scholastic extraction[4] and, so, it is not solely confined to the predicate of otherness in relation to its representation, but rather that this reality is also organized in general relations, which, in the Peircean vocabulary, are called *laws* or natural *habits*.

[4] Interested readers may consult (Ibri 1992, Chapter 2). Other perspectives can be found in (Boler 1963), (Dileo 1991), (Almeder 1975) and (Michael 1988).

In the case of *idealism,* it should be distinguished historically in its two nuances, viz., subjective and objective. Generally, the former is associated with the conception of a reality confined to subjectivity, while the latter refers to a substantial predication of reality, affirming it as of an ideal nature. In accordance with this conceptualization, Berkeley and Fichte can exemplarily be distinguished as subjective idealists, while both Plato's and Schelling's positions, as well as Peirce's, can be considered under an objective idealism.[5]

This is a clear case where unfamiliarity with the historical context of philosophical terms seriously jeopardizes the understanding of the conceptual position of some authors. Surprisingly, there are scholars focused on philosophical language analysis who get entangled in issues that, ultimately, are of a linguistic nature, notwithstanding being dependent on knowledge of the history of philosophy, often disdained by schools that preach that such a history is nothing more than a delirious parade of metaphysical doctrines.

These considerations certainly do not resolve satisfactorily the possible conceptual interlacing between realism and objective idealism, which we shall address in the course of this essay.

Why Realism and Idealism in Peirce? Genesis Conjectures

The study of the sciences of Nature and, chiefly, its practice in the investigation of phenomena in light of theories so as to confront them with experimental results, can teach a lot under a philosophical viewpoint. It is not by chance that Peirce mentions in his famous *What Pragmatism Is*[6] how his mind was trained in a laboratory, and how this distinguished him from other philosophical thinkers. The fact that he admits this distinction stimulates, somehow, our efforts at *guessing* what that text does not explicitly say. In this guessing activity, there is nothing that does not meet the principles that Peirce formulated in his logic of abduction, namely, that we must be stimulated to conjecture, if we are to advance in any research intended to explain facts.[7]

Indeed, scientific research places theoretical representations in contact with their objects through phenomena derived from experiments, which are nothing more than a direct contact with the otherness of such phenomena. Objects can, genuinely, *object* to theoretical predictions through their experimental replicas, or *indexes,* in the Semiotic vocabulary—that is to say, as symbols, represented by the general character of the theories, are confronted by them, namely, the indicative signs. To a mind trained in such practice, it is trivial to say that processes of theory validation occur through some level of *adherence* with experimental results, and when they

[5] Details of this may be found in (Ibri 1992, Chapter 4). For other approaches, we suggest consulting: (Guardiano 2011), (McCarthy 1984) and (Tiercelin 1998).

[6] CP 5.411-437, EP 2.331-359.

[7] Readers may wish to consult, as examples, the texts *The Nature of Meaning*, EP 2.208-225 and *Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction*, EP 2.226-241.

do not, they should be parametrically readjusted or, even, be radically changed. For this reason, it must also sound trivial to say to a man of science that the last *word* that justifies a theory belongs to the object.[8] So, in the final analysis, this practice is, one may say, a *lesson in otherness*, in its philosophical meaning.

From another angle, the obligation to intervene in the structure of theories, adjusting forms and parameters when predictions derived from them do not adhere to experimental data, leads to this question: what strange power does the contingency of the experiment have, in its particularity and finitude, to *disallow* a general theory? Would not these data *necessarily* be replicas of something equally general that would manifest itself through its indexing or, in other words, would not such manifestation reveal itself as a sequence of indexes that organize themselves according to some general rule? Without delving here into what would be a good induction, suffice it to say that some redundancy of the sequence of indexes—its continuance in similar sequential experiments—reinforces the idea that it is not some merely contingent order, present in phenomena.

This would be a second lesson, namely of the awakening of the belief that investigation is, indeed, of the nature of a *dialogue* with general objects endowed with logical rules, with syntactic structures that belong to them. This presupposition is, admittedly, that there is some corresponding form between an investigated object and its theoretical representation, and that this object is definitely not a particular, but something of the nature of a symbol[9], as much as the theories that seem to represent it. *Science is science of the universal*, as Plato and Aristotle affirmed—one seeks the symbols and not merely the indexes that existentialize them.

From these considerations, it seems inappropriate to support a theory of mirrors.[10]According to this theory, every investigation supposedly seeks a genuine picture of the phenomenon, a perfect image. Now, we know very well that this expectation belongs to a period in history when, justifiably, in face of the success of the scientific revolution in the Renaissance, the thinkers of that time formulated the idea of a universe similar to a clock, whose mechanism would be possible to discover and represent to its perfection. But here, one must revert to history, to again do justice to the ideas of each era, and not simply condemn them as metaphysical nonsense. Reasons of a theological nature, among others evident in the culture of that time, stimulated this deterministic world view that was continuously propagated through the first half of the nineteenth century[11]. But this determinism was abandoned in philosophy during the second half of the nineteenth century, and in science in the second decade of the twentieth century. Darwin set a milestone when he resorted to the principle of Chance for his theory of evolution. However, he was

[8] As Peirce himself said: "[…] If the facts won't agree with the Theory, so much the worse for them. They are bad facts. This sounds to me childish, I confess." (CP 5.116).

[9] To further explore the ontological conception that Peirce developed regarding the symbol, see his *New Elements*, EP 2.300-324, particularly the last pages. Different approaches and perspectives can be found in (Parker 1994) and (Nöth 2010).

[10] As Rorty (1979) does.

[11] Incidentally, this determinism remained as belief to some contemporary scientists, like Einstein.

not exactly a philosopher. At the end of the nineteenth century, this principle, pioneered by Peirce, was formulated in philosophy[12].

Renouncing the mirror-theory was never a problem to Peirce. World images in the plane of knowledge, if required to represent it, should, in his philosophy, always be considered somewhat faded, often out of focus, showing its object roughly, albeit under a predictive viewpoint—an essential purpose of knowledge—sufficiently clear to show what future conduct could reasonably be expected of such object. The mythological search for an absolutely certain knowledge was, fortunately, abandoned, and in this task Peirce was definitely a pioneer, as Popper explicitly acknowledged[13].

His theory of Chance, introducing indetermination in terms of the ontology of the object, was epistemologically accompanied by the doctrine of fallibilism[14], namely, that our knowledge is fallible, approximated, subject to a permanent correction process. The mirror and the mirrored object are indeterminate in various degrees. Uncertainty definitely shapes human rationality, and the entire task of knowledge is to reduce, to an ontologically feasible point, the fadedness of the *images*. They are the ones that substantiate thought in the form of signs and, through them, we try to adjust the *focus* of immediate objects in relation to dynamic ones[15]. Here we continue to use the Rortyan metaphor of the mirror only to show how, contrary to the use that Rorty makes of it, it would be feasible in relation to Peirce's philosophy.

Returning to the possibility of conjecturing on the *spirit* of a philosophical work, a hypothesis seems to suggest itself out of the long familiarity with Peirce's works: in what way did his education in science and its experimental practice possibly inspire Peirce to advocate a realism, not only of the existence of an external world of particulars, but also constituted of relations of order between them? Would he be so vividly interested in the work of Scotus as he was in his youth, if the seeds of realism had not been already instilled in his mind by the precocious practice of an experimental science?[16] It seems plausible to think that scientific practice, the

[12] As Popper (1972) acknowledges: "Thus Peirce conjectured that the world was not only ruled by the strict Newtonian laws, but that is was also at the same time ruled by laws of chance, or of randomness, or of disorder: by laws of statistical probability. This made the world an interlocking system of clouds and clocks, so that even the best clock would, in its molecular structure, show some degree of cloudiness. So far as I know, Peirce was the first post-Newtonian physicist and philosopher who thus dared to adopt the view that to some degree all clocks are clouds, or in other words, that only clouds exist, though clouds of very different degree of cloudiness."

[13] In the essay mentioned above, Popper (1972) describes deterministic hope as *nightmare*.

[14] See for example: CP 1.13-14; and particularly CP 1.141-175.

[15] In the conceptualization proposed by Peirce, the immediate object is that which appears in the representation, while the dynamic one is the real object, possessing otherness in relation to its representations. One of the best Peircean descriptions of the different types in interpretants can be found in a letter from Peirce dated March 14, 1909 (SS. 108–119). In its entirety, this letter also touches on points that we have addressed throughout these pages, such as Peirce's education in natural sciences and his determined realistic position, and we strongly recommend its reading. See also, CP 4.536 and CP 8.315.

[16] Provocative analyses on the relation between realism and experimental practice in science in Peirce can be found in (Forster 2011) and (Delaney 1993, particularly Chapter 1 and 2).

search for an adjustment of theories in terms of the otherness of phenomena and the relation of order they display, suggests, to those who make this practice an object of philosophical reflection, as it did to Peirce, a realism of a Scotist nature, that is, the acknowledgment that some universals are real.

Now as we continue this reflection, asking ourselves about the *nature* of these universals, which Peirce called *laws*[17]and, later, real *continuities*[18], we enter the domain of objective idealism.[19] I conjecture that Peirce's idea of idealism would not have originated from his practice in science—for from it, it would seem plausible to say, originated a realism constituted by the predicates of *otherness* and *generality.* The history of philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century had already paraded many idealist schools, whether of a subjective or objective nature. Peirce was a serious reader of the history of ideas, and his objective idealism, as he explicitly confessed, was drawn from Schelling, whence derives the complexity of speculating not only on the nature of the universals, but also on the substantial relations between matter and ideality, a topic which we will address further along. The nature of sense qualities, such as colors, sounds, odors etc., should be also added to his reflection on objective idealism, and not only on the fabric of the general relations recognized as part of the object.

The practice of a science that deals with phenomena and has a specific field of experimentation, by instilling in the mind of the investigator the notion of objective reality constituted by a generalized otherness, does not, I suppose, induce subjective attitudes toward philosophy. The act of constantly dealing with the object, with that which can always, potentially, object to its representation, must lead to the admission of an objective reality, indifferent to any constituting appropriation of a subjective nature. Under this hypothesis, realism, as a philosophical posture, appears to harmonize with objective predications. In this regard, although in the current state of our reflection in which the development of the possible relations between realism and idealism in Peirce's philosophy is still incipient, it should be noted that this idealism, if simultaneously viable with a realism, must be of an objective nature.[20] It would be strange indeed to accept a realism of the universals, *necessarily* of an objective nature, simultaneously with an idealism centered on a constituting subject. The acceptance of a universe of real symbols, that is, of natural laws that are formed by themselves, independently of the way in which they can be represented, means accepting concurrently that such laws have the same eidetic nature[21]—such universe of real symbols is potentially representable in a theoretical universe of symbols, which immediately suggests a connaturality between object

[17] EP 2.67-74.

[18] NEM 4.343-344.

[19] See (Ibri 1992, pp. 55–69) for details.

[20] On other occasion, I addressed this theme also on its interfaces with semiotics. See (Ibri 2006).

[21] We use the term *eidetic* in the Greek meaning of *eidos*, designating something of the nature of ideality.

and sign.[22] The acknowledgment of this connaturality, as suggested here, derives only from a philosophical conjecture on the consequences of scientific practice. In fact, the concept of connaturality is harmoniously present in what I call the *symmetry of categories*[23], notwithstanding its formulation from the conception of this symmetry.

I consider *connaturality* an important concept. It opens many doors for ontological reflection, which we can no longer avoid if we truly wish to understand what Peirce intended with his philosophy. But, as a scholar of Kant, Peirce would not propose a *bad* metaphysics, but rather one that, in the Kantian style, is strictly grounded on a Phenomenology, with the precaution of bearing in mind the broad concept of the phenomenon proposed by Peirce. Ultimately, both these authors agree on what would be a sound metaphysics, but would certainly differ on what, after all, can be considered *phenomenon.* To Peirce, dreams are phenomena, no less than the irregularity of a tree canopy.[24] Kant would hardly admit these examples, especially because it would not be of theoretical interest to his epistemology, in which the condition of semantic possibility of a phenomenon should be in its submission to a strict rule of understanding, i.e., that of *causality.* It is known, however, that phenomena that possess a high degree of spontaneity, and that repudiate being subjected to causal rules, are fundamental both to Peircean epistemology and to its always correlate ontology. These are, ultimately, consequences of two distinct philosophical presuppositions, namely, *determinism* and *indeterminism.*[25]

Questions gradually emerge in this heuristic process of possible reconstruction of Peirce's realism-idealism, that have no other purpose than to show that these doctrines do not necessarily emerge from metaphysical nonsense, but from a reflection on the ontological nature of the objects of scientific investigation. It will be seen that such an ontology will not ask an innocuous question about what is the *being* of things, but rather it will conjecture on what constitutes it, in view of its *practical consequences.*[26] Here, pragmatism is called upon not only as a rule for the meaning of theories, but also as a logical rule capable of entering the universe of meaning of an ontological nature, namely, the plane of real objects.

However, this aspect will be addressed further along, and I now return to a concept that is precious to Semiotics, that of the *dialogue,* to emphasize the importance of the notion of connaturality, deeply related to objective idealism.

[22] See, for example, CP 5.549-573, where Peirce explains the relationship between sign and object, within the context of the theory of truth provided by pragmatism.

[23] See (Ibri 1992, Chapter 1), (Ibri, 2009, 2010, 2011).

[24] See CP 1.284. For other approaches and perspectives, see, for example, (Anderson 1995), (Blachowicz 1972) and (De Tienne 1993).

[25] For further details, see (Ibri 1992, Chapter 3). For other approaches, see (Cosculluela 1992).

[26] I addressed the issue of practical consequences in pragmatism in (Ibri 1992, Chapter 6).

Connaturality, Semiotic Dialogy and Pragmatism

Earlier I said that scientific investigation may be understood as a dialogue derived from the adaptation of theories to phenomena, in which the objects reveal what they are by the way they *appear*. Here, *appear* and *being* are logical correlates, and not aspects that possibly contradict each other, as in ancient metaphysics.

A proposal to reflect on the notion of dialogue implies considering the possibility of modifying conduct through experience. This would mean some sort of interpretation of the phenomenal world in which one is inserted. In turn, *interpreting* requires an extraction of pragmatic meaning, namely, one that possibly determines future conduct. To be sure, the planning of future conduct is nothing more than to nourish the hope that a new form of action, guided by the reformulation of concepts, may perform the role of an efficient mediation in relation to the otherness of phenomena, i.e., to the *reality* of the objects. In a universe of existents, this circulation of meanings capable of modifying conduct, or even, of strengthening pre-established conducts in the form of *habits*[27], involves a signic, or semiotic, dialogue in which the notion of language[28] extends to a realistic signic context of philosophy. Meaning, here, transcends its mere consideration as a property of languages practiced by men, rather extending toward the entirety of the universe of phenomena, so as to acquire its *pragmatic legitimacy*. I refer to this latter expression for the purpose of establishing that *meaning,* to pragmatism, implies a necessary stage of existential interaction, an insertion into a *theater of reactions,* according to Peirce's vocabulary, of transformation of the indeterminate to a determination that involves a possible contradiction in a spatial-temporal context. I mention the word *stage* to stress that the meaning will be always consummated in a general instance, i.e., involving a reflexive return of experience to the plane of the concept. Under the perspective of the categories, secondness of experience is a necessary phase for general meaning on the plane of thirdness.

When admitting a realism of the universals, we must accept its objective ideality as a consequence. On this point, idealism is nothing more than an acknowledgment of the very nature of what constitutes real thirdness. Connaturality, on the plane of ideality, also derives from the acknowledgment that the object is of the same nature as its representations. Logical structures equally permeate sign and object.

An idealism of this kind is only a *backgrounding doctrine,* namely, a mere acknowledgment of a substantial connaturality between the cognoscible objects in their generality and the theories that represent them. In the language of Semiotics, sign and object are connatural, and this philosophical acknowledgment simply justifies how a dialogue of theories with experience can be possible. *Backgrounding doctrine,* an expression I propose here, thus represents a condition of epistemological possibility, and not an efficient instrument (either direct or explicit) for research, albeit it must be admitted that it establishes a world view whose consequences will transcend the mere effectiveness of the consolidation of knowledge. I will endeavor to enunciate some of these consequences at the end of this essay.

[27] On this notion of habit, important to the line of argument of this essay, I will return later.

[28] See (Ibri 2011).

Mind and Matter—Idealism in Light of Pragmatism

Peirce's reflection on the relations between mind and matter[29] already appears in some of his essays on this theme[30]. In them, he speculates on the possible relations between both, ruling out Cartesianism, first of all, as a dualism unsuitable for philosophies that seek to generally overcome them, by unifying concepts in light of the simplification recommended by Ockham's razor. On the other hand, a relationship between matter and mind in which the former is taken as genetically primordial and the latter its special case, would incur a *materialism.* A pragmatic analysis of the concept of materialism would, however, lead to mistakenly characterize it as ontological determinism[31], which would mean reducing phenomena of a psychic nature to a physicalism ascertainable by laws of matter.

Peirce emphatically rejects this alternative relationship between matter and mind, imagining, exemplarily, how absurd it would be to conceive a mechanism capable of *feeling.*[32] It would be, in other words, reducing feelings to the mechanical laws that created them, which, to Peirce, would be an inexplicable ultimate regularity. As a consequence, this would mean reducing firstness to thirdness, breaking the independence of the former in relation to the latter.[33]

There remains, therefore, as a possible relation between matter and mind, the subsumption of the former in relation to the latter, characterizing what he called *idealism.* But what kind of idealism would this be, derived from a logical analysis of the Cartesian substantial dualism? Without a doubt, given the ontological tenor of the issue, Peirce refers to an objective idealism that would affirm that physical laws are of an eidetic nature. However, we must remember that this consequence had already been extracted from his adoption of realism, in his conclusion that natural law must be understood as a system of logical relations of the nature of semiotic symbols, and, thus, eidetic.[34]

However, we must reflect more deeply on the ever disturbing, not to say unprecedented to many scholars, sentence enunciated by Peirce on *what is matter*. Summarizing his arguments in favor of an objective idealism, the passage quoted below concludes with such a sentence:

> The materialistic doctrine seems to me quite as repugnant to scientific logic as to common sense; since it requires us to suppose that a certain kind of mechanism will feel which would be a hypothesis absolutely irreducible to reason—an ultimate, inexplicable regularity; while the only possible justification of any theory is that it should make things clear and reasonable. Neutralism is sufficiently condemned by the logical maxim known as Ockham's razor, i.e., that not more independent elements are to be supposed than necessary.

[29] CP 6.24-25 (EP 1.292-293/W 8.105-106).

[30] See CP 2.272-277; W 8.135-157 (EP 1.312-333/CP 6.102-163) and W 8.165-183 (EP 1.334-351/CP 6.238-271).

[31] See (Ibri 1992, pp. 59–62).

[32] See (Ibri 1992, pp. 47–49, 104–105).

[33] This independence is phenomenologically and cosmologically justified. I have addressed this theme in Ibri (2010) and Ibri (1992).

[34] See also (Ibri 1992, chapter 4 and 5).

> By placing the inward and outward aspects of substance on a par, it seems to render both primordial. *The one intelligible theory of the universe is that of objective idealism, that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws*.[35]

It is a well-known fact that Peirce's idealism derives from Schelling[36], as he himself confesses, including the sentence that states that matter is *mind exhausted by inveterate habits*. The most significant passage of the Schellingean work that bears similarity to the section of Peirce's work quoted above is:

> Matter is, indeed, nothing else than mind viewed in an equilibrium of its activities. There is no need to demonstrate at length how, by means of this elimination of all dualism, or all real opposition between mind and matter, whereby the latter is regarded merely as mind under a condition of dullness, or the former, conversely, as matter merely in becoming […][37]

Under the light of pragmatism, to say what matter *is,* is to say how it *behaves* phenomenologically, or, in other words, what are the *practical consequences* of the concept of matter, considering such consequences as the experimentally verifiable predicates of matter, capable not only of affecting human conduct, but also the interactive conduct of the very universe of material events. I am here evidently proposing to use the expression *practical consequences* also in a radically realistic and ontological sense, extending the notion of conduct to all beings that cohabit a given real universe, albeit respecting the logical genesis of the doctrine that, in the most general way possible, is a necessary passage from indetermination to determination, from the general to the particular, implying the existence of some theater of reactions that can become the condition of possibility of such determination.[38] Keeping to this amplified line of understanding of the idea of pragmatism, the passage of the indeterminate general to the determinate particular and, as such, reactive to other particulars, is the necessary correlative passage of an internal[39] to an external world, in which the former comprises *continuity* and the latter *discontinuities*. A vocabulary of the theory of continuity[40] is shown here almost naturally, to provide support to a better understanding of the necessary relations between the general and the particular. I avail myself of it not only as an alternative for the general/ particular terms, but also in a context explained further on, relative to the ontological meaning of the Peircean categories.

---

[35] CP 6.24-5; my italics.

[36] I described the influence of Schelling on Peirce in (Ibri 2010). See also, (Dilworth 2011).

[37] Schelling (1978, p. 92).

[38] This condition arises from a logic of possibilities where something generically possible should cease to be so, in order for the term possibility assumes some significance. See, CP 6.219.

[39] I here use the word 'internal' in a general sense, in which interiority would be distinguished from subjectivity, thus acquiring a realistic logical meaning. Subjectivity would be a special case of interiority. In this sense, interior objects are those that can only be known or represented indirectly, by logical inference. Outside world, in turn, is the only one that can be directly observed—under the categorical point of view, it is under the secondness.

[40] See Chapter 4 of Ibri (1992). Other approaches regarding the concept of Continuity in Peirce can be consulted in (Havenel 2008), (Lane 2011 and 2011a), (Moore 2007), (Potter et al. 1977) and (Rosa 2003).

Although these considerations apparently extrapolate the boundaries of pragmatism[41] beyond its purpose of constituting a semantic rule associated with human conduct, in fact what is sought here is to interface the vocabularies of logic and ontology, endeavoring to create, in light of the background of realism, more powerful heuristic tools for an understanding of what we have defined as *symmetry of the categories*.[42] Indeed, these relations between the particular and the general, internal and external worlds, continuities and discontinuities, are consummated in the inter-relations between Peirce's three categories. While the first and third categories are of a continuous nature, or, in other words, harbor the mode of being of what is continuous, general and internal, secondness is the mode of being of the theater of reactions that harbor the discontinuous, the particular, the external side of the other two categories. These considerations on the three Peircean categories should apply—resorting again to the background of the author's realism-idealism—both phenomenologically and ontologically, and, for this reason, justify the use of the expression *symmetry of the categories,* meaning three modes of being that indifferentiate or symmetrize logical rights between subject and object, Man and Nature, radically breaking dualisms of genesis and proposing the abandonment of anthropocentric postures of philosophy.

Idealism Evolutionarily Grounded

One of the features of Peirce's objective idealism, according to my previous comments, is to break the mind-matter dualism in order to consider the material universe as a special form of mind, whose conduct would be driven by ingrained habits. An awareness of this proposition implies understanding natural laws as *habits* of conduct of matter, and the use of this terminology gains significance by enabling a reflection on *how* these habits were acquired, opening a conceptual door for an overlapping of idealism with some form of evolutionism. Peirce's hypothesis on the formation of habits of Nature, that is, on the origin of the natural laws, is, incidentally, one of his most brilliant ideas, according to William James.[43] On the one hand, Peirce proposed an evolutionism that would permeate his entire philosophy.[44] On the other, in the same line of argumentation, he conjectures on the formation of the laws of Nature. Here is a crucial passage of his work on this topic:

> What kind of explanation can there be then? I answer, we may still hope for an evolutionary explanation. We may suppose that the laws of nature are the result of an evolutionary process.[45] [Further:] But if the laws of nature are the result of evolution, this evolutionary process must be still in progress. For it cannot be complete as long as the constants of the

[41] See (Houser 2003), for a very interesting approach of Pragmatism. See also, (Ibri 2013 and 2013a).

[42] See note 23.

[43] NEM-III/2, pp. 872–874.

[44] See (Ibri 1992, Chapter 3).

[45] CP 7.512.

> laws have reached no ultimate possible limit. But if the laws of nature are still in process of evolution from a state of things in the indefinitely distant past in which there were no laws, it must be that events are not even now absolutely regulated by law.[46]

Continuing, Peirce speculates on an objective tendency for the acquisition of habits:

> But if the laws of nature are the result of evolution, this evolution must proceed according to some principle; and this principle will itself be of the nature of a law. But it must be such a law that it can evolve or develop itself.
> Evidently it must be a tendency toward generalization—a generalizing tendency […] Now the generalizing tendency is the great law of mind, the law of association, the law of habit-taking […] Hence I was led to the hypothesis that the laws of universe have been formed under a universal tendency of all things toward generalization and habit-taking.[47]

This always seemed to me the strongest argument for his objective idealism. Indeed, questions of genesis, such as the one that Peirce formulated on natural laws, can only be made if the theoretical system of philosophy bears a sound metaphysics, i.e., one grounded on phenomenology and logic, as it occurs in the Peircean philosophical system.

Natural laws, then, are habits acquired by a typical tendency of the mental universe. This argument evidently proposes an objective idealism, as it conjectures on Nature's capacity to generalize, viz., an inductive capacity. Indeed, the more radical evolution of Peirce's realism-idealism shows that two logical forms meet objectively in natural processes, namely, abduction and deduction. Although there is no space here for a deeper presentation of this point, briefly it can be said—just to satisfy the curiosity of those who had no contact with this part of Peirce's works—that natural abductions are evidenced by the insertion of diversity and growing complexity of the universe[48], while the laws of nature act deductively on its pertinent events, that is, enabling them to be conducted out, by necessity, from the rules that constitute them.

Thus, there is a substantial eidetic monism associated with realism, which is, indeed, its condition of possibility in light of the evolutionary argument on the origin of the natural laws. Laws emerge as acquired habits, which can only occur through a tendency of an eidetic nature. Idealism remains as a *backgrounding doctrine,* enabling the reality of the continuities which constitute the first and third categories. The universe of discontinuities of the second category should not, in turn, be substantially foreign to ideality, since, in the grounding of the categories, it is the *locus* for appearing as an exteriority of firstness and thirdness. Upon acknowledging this condition of substantial harmony between the categories as modes of being of reality, matter should be thus considered as possessing an eidetic nature, as it is that which constitutes the existence of the objects in their particularity.

It is interesting to recall, under this line of evolution in Peirce's ontology, how he states that "Pragmatism is a correct doctrine only insofar as it is recognized that material action is the mere husk of ideas […] *But the end of thought is action*

---

[46] CP 7.514.

[47] CP 7.515.

[48] See (Ibri 2006)

only insofar as the end of action is another thought."[49], evidencing how thought and action are connatural and interactive, as relations that establish themselves between the general and the particular, or between interiority and exteriority. Thus, deliberate *action* would be nothing more than thought endowed with purpose that enters a universe of existential reactivity.

Idealism and the Peircean Notion of Life

Matter, as explained, is then a form of mind ruled by inveterate habits, meaning that its predicates have a high degree of stability, and its conduct a high degree of redundancy. However, these habits are not fully crystallized and determinant of an exact behavior that would constitute a universe of strict laws, conducive to a deterministic concept of world. Peirce affirmed that the presence of firstness in the conduct of matter, acting in it through Chance, promotes a certain level of erraticity, making those laws or habits of a probabilistic nature. The regularities of the universe are, thus, merely approximate, and natural events reveal, on the one hand, the presence of the firstness that it always inserts through the principle of *Chance,* dispersion, irregularities and asymmetries, while, thirdness, in turn, acts on existence, making it redundant, habitual, albeit not in a strict way.

It is the presence of real thirdness, incidentally, that provides all and any cognitive operation, which, to be possible, always depends on the condition that its objects appear phenomenologically organized in a spatial-temporal form. A chaotic world would be absolutely incognoscible—such a need for a real order as a condition of epistemological possibility is, perhaps, the most vigorous proof of realism.[50] Resorting to the vocabulary of Synechism, cognition requires real *continuities* that can be represented in the *continuum* of thought. In Peirce's philosophy, we may say, epistemology and ontology interlace in such a way that one would hardly be able to consider one without the other.

In light of these considerations, we may define, between what is called mind and matter, a gradation of vivacity, or *life,* associating a greater degree to mind and a lesser one to matter, which would be the most important criterion for distinguishing both, after undoing the substantial dualism responsible for a split concerning their nature. But what would define that vivacity? What would be its most important predicates?

It seems reasonable to say that the ability to break inefficient habits that should act as mediations regarding the otherness, with which it cohabits, is an adequate way of measuring these degrees of vivacity. A certain capacity thus considered involves purposes and, therefore, if the achievement of such purposes are obstructed by an inadequate existential interaction or conduct, then will be justified the rupture of the correspondent habits that should work as guides of action.

[49] CP 8.272. my italics.

[50] See (Ibri 1992) for details.

Based on this, it would seem right to call upon the concept of *learning,* in the sense of deliberate change of habits, forsaking those that no longer serve as efficient mediations for the purpose of conduct. Inefficient habits for the intended purposes, if remaining as such, wind up interrupting the semiotic dialogue of the mind with its existentially interactive environment, a dialogue that is the very mainstay of what can be called learning. To learn, therefore, is to be potentially capable of changing conduct, and the capacity for doing so defines the main determining parameter of the degree of mental vivacity. A *living* mind must keep that dialogue and, in so doing, in light of fallibilism, may frequently incur in errors that will require it to be even more agile in marshaling resources to correct conduct until new habits can be acquired, always with the attribute of efficient mediations in the face of otherness.

The use of the word *mind* in a realistic sense, as we do here, is not exclusively confined to being human, but extends to all beings that cohabit some semiotic universe, i.e., in which there is circulation, commerce of signs and pragmatic meanings, capable of affecting conduct. Under such a broad meaning, then, not only the human universe is considered, but also the animal and vegetable, each one distinctly inserted into the gradation of vivacity defined by its respective competence of learning.

Continuity of Life—Final Considerations

The Peircean concept of the universe emerges as something essentially dynamic, an unfinished reality in which an eidetic nature is all-pervading, and as one which, under a background of substantial ideality, the actors who cohabit in it share the modes of being of the three categories.

Yet again, it must be repeated that idealism is not an operating doctrine in the sense of being essential to the successful course of scientific investigation: that is, once grounded and acknowledged, it no longer needs to be called upon to solve problems that imply choices of mediations and conduct. I suppose that for this reason, after formulating it, Peirce did not need to refer to it as a support to other doctrines.[51] It remained in the background, as the scenario of a vital theater of a semiotic and pragmatic nature. This nature emerges in Peirce's universe as the continuous production of signs, of interpretants that precede the adoption of a conduct, and in it are consummated as their external side, in the form of deliberate and purposeful action.

The special sciences, in Peirce's classification of sciences, depend on philosophy. In a more directly evident way, this dependency occurs with regard to phenomenology and logic or semiotic, but is even less evident as regards the other normative sciences, namely, aesthetics and ethics, and perhaps even less, concerning metaphysics as ontology. However, awareness and recognition of this *non-evident* dependency, eventually lead the investigations of a special science to a higher heuristic level, not only by the introduction of an enriching vocabulary which will enable the perception of new aspects of phenomena, but also by affording the philosophical acknowledgment of the equality of logical rights introduced by the symmetry of categories.

[51] For an opposite perspective, see (Short 2010a, b).

A science such as Biosemiotics will have its horizons expanded not only for the reasons mentioned, but also for the possibility of considering its primordial object, *life,* in light of an objective idealism determiner of a realism. Reality seen under the lens of these doctrines enables the justification of natural procedures that have a purpose, and are, therefore, necessarily interpretative, showing intelligence in the creation of mediations concerning the surrounding environment, and involving cognition processes that seek to represent the conduct of otherness in order to better suit its own conduct.

If we regard as *intelligent* every procedure that, in some way, involves deliberate purpose and conduct, we would see that Nature is full of them[52], and the beings that cohabit it share a general and common purpose, namely, the *continuity of life*. Knowing this enables us, together with the acknowledgment of the substantial ideality of Nature, to regard it with admiration, the ultimate finality of an esthetic nature that will determine a desirable ethics of investigation.

References

Almeder, R. (1975). The epistemological realism of Charles Peirce. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 11*(1), 3–17.

Anderson, D. R. (1995). *Strands of system: The philosophy of Charles Peirce*. Indiana: Purdue University Press.

Blachowicz, J. (1972). Realism and idealism in Peirce's Categories. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 8*(4), 199–213.

Boler, J. F. (1963). *Charles Peirce and scholastic realism: A study of Peirce's relation to John Duns Scotus*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Cosculluela, V. (1992). Peirce on Tychism and determinism. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 28*(4), 741–755.

De Tienne, A. (1993). Peirce's definition of the phaneron. In E. C. Moore (Ed.), *Charles Sanders Peirce and the philosophy of science: Papers from the Harvard sesquicentennial Congress*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.

Delaney, C. (1993). *Science knowledge, and mind: A study in the philosophy of C. S. Peirce.* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.

Dileo, J. (1991). Peirce's haecceitism. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 27*(1), 79–109.

Dilworth, D. (2011). Peirce's objective idealism: A Reply to T. L. Short 'What was Peirce's Objective Idealism.' *Cognitio, São Paulo, 12*(1), 53–74. (jan./jun. 2011).

Fisch, M. (1986). *Peirce, semeiotic and pragmatism: Essays by Max H. Fisch*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press (In K. Ketner & C. Kloesel (Eds.)).

Forster, P. (2011). *Peirce and the threat of nominalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Friedrich, W. J. (1978). *System of transcendental idealism.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia (translation by P. Heath).

Guardiano, N. (2011). The intelligibility of Peirce's metaphysics of objective idealism. *Cognitio, São Paulo, 12*(2), 187–204 (jul./dez).

Havenel, J. (2008). Peirce's clarifications of continuity. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 44*(1), 86–133.

Houser, N. (2003). Pragmatism and the loss of innocence. *Cognitio, São Paulo, 4*(2), 197–210.

[52] See CP 4.551; CP 6.17.

Ibri, I. A. (1992). *Kósmos Noetós: a arquitetura metafísica de Charles S. Peirce*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
Ibri, I. A. (2006). The heuristic exclusivity of abduction in Peirce's philosophy. In R. F. Leo & S. Marietti (Eds.), *Semiotics and philosophy in C. S. Peirce*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press.
Ibri, I. A. (2009). Reflections on a poetic ground in Peirce's philosophy. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 45,* 3.
Ibri, I. A. (2010). Peircean seeds for a philosophy of art. In K. Haworth, J. Hogue, & L. G. Sbrocchi (Eds.), *Semiotics 2010 "The Semiotics of Space"* (pp. 1–16). New York: Legas Publishers.
Ibri, I. A. (2011). Semiotics and epistemology: The pragmatic ground of communication. In R. M. Calcaterra (Ed.), *New perspectives on pragmatism and analytic philosophy* (pp. 71–82). Oed Amsterdam: Rodopi.
Ibri, I. A. (2013a). Neopragmatism viewed by pragmaticism. *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy, 1,* 181–192.
Ibri, I. A. (2013b). Choices, dogmatisms and bets: Justifying Peirce's realism. *Veritas, 57*(2), 51–61.
Lane, R. (2011). The final incapacity: Peirce on intuition and the continuity of mind and matter. (Part 1).*Cognitio, São Paulo, 12*(1), 105–119.
Lane, R. (2011a). The final incapacity: Peirce on intuition and the continuity of mind and matter. (Part2). *Cognitio, São Paulo, 12*(2), 237–256 (jul./dez).
Lenzen, V. F. (1964). Charles S. Peirce as astronomer. In E. Moore & R. Richard. *Studies in the philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce* (2nd Series). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
McCarthy, J. (1984). Semiotic idealism. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 20*(4), 395–434.
Michael, F. (1988). Two forms of scholastic realism in Peirce's philosophy. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, 24*(3), 317–348.
Moore, M. E. (2007). The genesis of the Peircean *Continuum*. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 43*(3), 425–469.
Nöth, W. (2010). The criterion of habit in Peirce's definitions of the symbol. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, 46*(1), 82–93.
Parker, K. (1994). Peirce's semiotic and ontology. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, 30*(1), 51–76.
Popper, K. (1972). Of clouds and clocks. In *Objective knowledge* (pp. 206–255). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Potter, V. G., et al. (1977). Peirce's definitions of continuity. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 13*(1), 20–34.
Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Rosa, A. M. (2003). *O Conceito de Continuidade em Charles S. Peirce*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
Schelling, Friedrich W.J. (1978). System of Transcendental Idealism. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia; translation by P. Heath.
Short, T. L. (2010a). What was Peirce's objective idealism? *Cognitio, 11*(2), 333–346.
Short, T. L. (2010b). Did Peirce have a cosmology? *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, 46*(4), 521–43.
Tiercelin, C. (1998). Peirce's objective idealism: A defense. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society, 34*(1), 1–28.