CHOICES, DOGMATISMS AND BETS – JUSTIFYING PEIRCE'S REALISM

Escolhas, Dogmatismos e Apostas – Justificando o Realismo de Peirce

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ABSTRACT – The conceptual axis of this paper is a reflection on Charles Peirce's realism, trying to show it as the ground from which many others of his philosophical doctrines are derived. In its first part, the paper analyses the problems posed by the classical Peircean paper Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man, proposing to extract from the consequences of this analysis the guidelines of a realism that gradually become more radical in Peirce's mature work. Such consequences will be consolidated in his Phenomenology, a science that will ground Semiotics and a conception of symmetry related to Peirce's categories. This symmetry regarding his epistemology and ontology will be, by the way, omnipresent in all Peircean philosophical system. The second part of the paper discusses the concepts of mediation and representation, also under a realistic background, concluding that these concepts cannot be coherently interlaced in nominalistic philosophies, in which is often found theoretical consequences somehow committed with dogmatic and no dialogic postures, in the sense of a meaning analysis proposed by the classical Peircean pragmatism.

KEYWORDS – Realism. Dogmatism. Semiotic dialogue. Mediation. Representation.

RESUMO – O eixo conceitual deste artigo constitui-se em uma reflexão sobre o realismo de Charles Peirce, buscando mostrá-lo como a base da qual se derivam muitas outras de suas doutrinas filosóficas. Na primeira parte do artigo, são analisados os problemas colocados pelo clássico ensaio peirciano Questões referentes a certas faculdades reivindicadas pelo homem, propondo extrair das consequências dessa análise as diretrizes de um realismo que gradualmente se torna mais radical na obra madura de Peirce. Tais consequências serão consolidadas em sua fenomenologia, uma ciência que fundamentará a semiótica e uma

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concepção de simetria relacionada às categorias do autor. Essa simetria associada à sua epistemologia e ontologia será, a propósito, onipresente em todo o sistema filosófico peirciano. Na segunda parte do artigo, são discutidos os conceitos de mediação e representação, também sob um viés realista, concluindo que esses conceitos não podem ser coerentemente relacionados nas filosofias nominalistas. Nessas filosofias, encontram-se frequentemente consequências de alguma forma comprometidas com posturas dogmáticas e não dialógicas, se confrontadas com uma análise do significado tal como proposto pelo pragmatismo clássico peirciano.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE – Realismo. Dogmatismo. Diálogo semiótico. Mediação. Representação.

1 The Path of Peirce's Thought on Realism

Still in his youth, when he was 29 years old in 1868, Peirce wrote two articles entitled *Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man*[1] and *Some Consequences of Four Incapacities*[2], both related and sequential, basically addressing epistemological guidelines that characterized his subsequent philosophy. To my mind, these two texts blend harmoniously with Peirce's realistic stance, which has always permeated his thought. Notwithstanding his self-criticism for nominalistic slips in the beginning of his philosophical career, when he made use of a language yielding to the psychology vocabulary, which he would later eschew, I hold that the roots and implications of realism were already present in his work, even in his most premature formulation. The subsequent development of his realism occurred through an enhancement of logical resources, same as the proposition of the theory of continuity (synechism) and logic caused the notion of *continuum* to replace that of the *universal*, resulting in his conception of the major scholastic question on the reality of the generals, in this shape: *Are any continua real?*[3]

Let's remember the following questions, very well known by Peircean scholars:

a) We have no power of introspection, save that all knowledge of the internal world derives from our knowledge of external facts;

b) We have no power of intuition, other than all cognition is logically determined by previous cognitions;

c) We have no power to think without signs;

d) We have no conception whatsoever of the absolutely incognizable.

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[1] CP-5.213-263.

[2] CP-5.264-317.

[3] NEM-IV, p. 343.

Peirce re-analyses these four propositions from their origin in the essay "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man", where he characterizes his strong anti-Cartesian position, outlined by the refusal of the beginning of a philosophy through a universal doubt, by the proposition of an intuition with cognitive power, and by the substantial separation of spirit and matter.

It must be borne in mind, yet again, that Peirce's mature work offers a theoretical framework enriched not only with logic, as, for example, his existential graphs with which he grounded an iconic logic, but also, and mainly, with regard to a solid ontology, based on his Phenomenology and his Semiotics. This allows for a rereading of the abovementioned 'four incapacities' in light of a new vocabulary, resulting from the definitive and vigorous introduction of an idea of world that, if never absent from his philosophy even in his youthful work, it definitely entered his final theoretical system, differentiating the author from lines of epistemological reflection grounded solely on an analysis of language or of the faculties of a cognizant subject.

There are grounds to say that Peirce's mature philosophy is definitely dialoguing, semiotically interacting between the worlds of the real object and the signs, which seek to represent it, and that of the evolutionary theory of the interpretations of those representations. The conceptual axis of this philosophy is outlined in the extensive consideration of his three categories that, arising from an inventory of the ways in which we experience phenomena, conclude that they are also ways of reality. This amplification of the scope of the categories, permeating both subject and world, conveys a relation of fundamental formal symmetry for the justification of the dialogue between language and experience.

One may ask whether the introduction of the theory of world that ultimately interacts with Peircean epistemology would not be an undue inflationary measure, when the contemporary philosophical trend has evolved in the opposite direction, i.e., toward deflation, particularly when some ontology would seem to emerge interactively with variables of a cognitive nature.

Indeed, Peirce's mature philosophy, by starting with a Phenomenology, already introduces the subject into the world, and this man-world *cohabitation* would never be undone throughout the entire development of the other theories. Such man-world cohabitation will imply – in an understanding that considers Peirce's realism – the establishment of a correlation between both, which will be guaranteed by the validity, likewise, of the categories to the ways of being of the consciousness that experiences and the ways of being of the reality experienced. This categorial symmetry between subject and world becomes the pivot of

the understanding of Semiotics as a dialoguing science between the universes of sign and object.

What enables us to say 'we learn from experience' in Peirce's philosophy' is not at all a concession to coarse empiricism, whose philosophical incompetence extends from an epistemological naivety to a nominalistic skepticism, namely, grounded on the possibility of a discontinuity of Nature without, however, reflecting on the resulting radical discontinuity of the possibility of any language prior to any cognition. *Learning from experience* will, first of all, require the logical justification of its possibility. Here, the symmetry of the categories will show its efficiency, by validating a substantial connaturality between the object of experience and the experiencing mind. This connaturality will ultimately be the stage where the semiotic dialogue becomes possible – not, it should be emphasized, merely intersubjective, but between subjectivity and objectivity, both represented as realms of signs and meaning in Peirce's mature philosophy. The semiotic dialogue between sign and object, between language and reality, will be provided, as mentioned, by a connaturality between both, consummated in Peirce's doctrine of Objective Idealism, namely, an acknowledgment that both, object and sign, are substantially ideality.

The adoption of a categorial symmetry will also provide a reading of the world in a non-anthropocentric way: correlates of human faculties will always be found in Nature, a theoretical aspect that, to those unfamiliar with Peirce's philosophy, would perhaps be most amazing, even disturbing. In the short space of this essay, however, I cannot explore a detailed justification of the consequences of Peirce's refusal of an anthropocentric philosophy.

From these introductory comments it seems interesting to analyze the aspects of the aforementioned 'four incapacities'. Let us begin by the first, that "we do not have any power of introspection, other than that all knowledge of internal world derives from our knowledge of external facts".

This explicitly marks the mature approach of the author to this theme. Peirce refuses to appeal to psychology to reflect on the phenomenon of introspection. Indeed, his view of the theme will here focus on the interaction of the categories and on pragmatism. To say that knowledge of the external world is what determines knowledge of the internal world, is to say that our interiority is merely of a potential nature or modally possible, and only concrete action can determine the internal indetermination as an effective choice. On the other hand, action, as part of an objective history, opens itself cognitively to public experience, reflexively providing its semiotic, dialogic, analysis. To lack the power

of introspection also means not 'knowing what we know' of us and of 'other minds,' other than by the way how such knowledge reflects in the external world, appearing in a defined fashion – and, if we were also to avail ourselves of Heidegger's vocabulary, notwithstanding its usual lack of clarity, we would say that the external world is that which, effectively, *reveals* itself as a phenomenon in its cognitive determination. In a categorial manner, the external world is characterized by *secondness*, the locus of the type of experience that offers itself to the visit of interpretative minds. The hypothesis of connaturality between fact and thought seems necessary to justify that the absorption of the former into the latter is done in a semiotic and dialogical manner.

It is in the external universe that that the possibility of knowledge over other minds is consummated: we have no access to internal worlds, unless they manifest themselves through some external side, in such a way that they are, thus, semiotically foreshadowed.

In turn, its second incapacity, according to which "we have no power of intuition other than all cognition is logically determined by previous cognitions," is clearly an anti-Cartesian statement, as commented before. Indeed, to Peirce, all cognition is built within a temporal continuum, in which there is a logical interlacing between the signs, and the mind that operates these relations has no power to act simultaneously in the universe of mediation and in intuitive immediacy , as if intending, contradictorily, *to be* in time and concomitantly *out* of it. However, a deeper analysis of Peircean epistemology will lead to the question of the synthesis proposed by Kant: what is the condition for the possibility of a unity of consciousness, that is, the unity under which signs are cognitively associated? While, in order to justify such unity, Kant reverts to the Cartesian *I think*, Peirce holds that the unity of consciousness is immediate feeling, defined by him as quale-consciousness. A kind of immediacy of a *non time* as foundation turns into the possibility of synthesis or apprenticeship that only develops in time. No doubt, this is a complex enough theme, allowing for a mere reference here, albeit very interesting for an investigation on epistemological heuristics.

Let us now turn to the third incapacity: 'We have no power to think without signs'. In a way, its consideration derives from the previous analysis of the second incapacity. All thought occurs in signs, namely, in logical representations, in a continuously temporal process in which past memory is always active for the recognition and insertion of phenomena in conceptual signs that analyze a state of things present for some future prediction. In this simple description, time is evidenced as fundamental for thought. In addition, to think an object is to think the predicates that

define its conduct, and conduct can only be apprehended through signs that represent relations between phenomenal states.

The fourth and last incapacity states that 'we have no conception whatsoever of the absolutely incognizable'. Being incognizable, according to Peirce, is being unable to possess known predicates, meaning that such an object does not appear from its external side, empowering itself as phenomenon. Up to this point, this analysis is no less than Kantian. However, in light of Peirce's categories, anything that does not manifest itself as external phenomenon, open to the general universe of experience, simply *does not exist*, not passing from a state of internal indetermination to a state of external determination, namely, from a potential state to an actual state. Incognizableness, then, occurs from the non-existence of the object, transferring the problem from the sphere of epistemology to that of ontology.

In this brief rereading of a text of the young Peirce, it can be said that there is a common trait between those incapacities, namely, they all relate to the presupposition that our cognition always occurs realistically. It develops from the need of a world that is a stage for the characterization of signs in an exteriorization that defines them, that takes them out of a state of concealment to one of exposure, enabling a community of investigation. This is the ground of Peirce's pragmatism seen in the light of a realistic ontology, providing the possibility of a semiotic dialogue between internal and external worlds, without a significant estrangement between them. This non-estrangement justifies a doctrine such as objective idealism, insofar as it claims there is no substantial dichotomy between external and internal worlds, making a semiotic dialogue between them feasible.

2 Representation and Mediation under a Realistic Approach[4]

Questions that might be interesting to the connections between Peirce's semiotics and the realistic approach of his philosophy are as follows: *"Are processes of mediation also processes of representation?"* Or under an alternative form: *"Is representation a specific form of mediation?"* Since I suppose this distinction between mediation and representation is considered pivotal to a philosophy of a realistic approach such as Peirce's, it seems interesting to reflect on what has been understood by both terms, in order to better understand such conceptual distinction. One important point to highlight is to bring into light some recent postures concerning

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[4] I owe the inspiration for the second part of this paper to Vincent Colapietro [see Colapietro (2010)], with whom I could discuss the subject 'mediation and representation' in Peirce.

what representation is and the criticism from some so-called anti-representationist schools. Consider, for instance, Richard Rorty's concept of representation[5] as an exact mirror of some object, an old-fashioned Enlightenment view that holds, according to him, an unjustifiable hope for catching up the essence of reality. Besides this way of conceptualizing *representation*, there are also other anti-representationist theories, which considered that representation is something that creates a sort of distance between man and phenomenon in itself, and then our apprehension of a true sensitive world would be impossible and blocked by it. Beginning with this last view of representation, it is clear to Peircean scholars that firstness is the proper mode of being to a straight experience of world, an experience of presentness where time always implied in conceptual signs are absent. However, to admit such an experience will not imply a rejection of an experience where men's mind looks to the world through any kind of mediation. Rationality cannot be developed without signs, as well stated by Peirce in his youth. Both experiences, mediated and immediate are considered as such in Peirce's philosophy, as we all well know.

On the other hand, Rorty's concept of representation is quite unsuitable not only to Peirce's philosophy, but also to the contemporary conception of positive theories in general. The latter are, at least among the most epistemologically updated fields of knowledge, straightly linked with an indeterminist view of the world. At this point, it's interesting to remember that Peirce's fallibilism, on one hand, and the distinction between immediate and dynamical object, on the other, are enough to refuse such view of representation as an exact mirror of any reality.

With these preliminaries, it seems worth asking if it would not be possible to conciliate representation and mediation within Peirce's philosophy, under a typical thirdness vocabulary? This conciliation, I suppose, would require the understanding of *representation as the way through which mediation acts or is somehow efficient*. Now, is it important to reflect on what it is to mediate? Is not mediation a kind of *processing media* between two opposites with the explicit function of conciliating one conduct to the other? Is not Thirdness, ultimately, this processing medium that incorporates secondness in it, breaking its character of brute force by reasonably *representing* the habitual way it acts? Here, incidentally, I used the word *representing* as the way through which the conduct of the otherness can be simulated; to simulate, here, would

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[5] Cf. RORTY, Richard. Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979.

mean to predict future conduct. If we take the relationship between man and reality, two interactive beings, we could say that our knowledge of any real object is the way we represent its future behavior. If this representation is true, namely, if we can efficiently simulate the way this object acts, in other words, its laws, then we are able to predict its conduct and so we also can plan our own conduct before it. According to this line of thought, a true representation will allow an efficient mediation where every sort of conflict potentially might be reduced to intelligibility and future reasonableness. *To act between* requires truly representing the opposite poles, breaking down their opposition by finding a common way in which both can act together.

Additionally, let me propose the following question: if mediation can dispense with representation, as an alternative to it, then we could imagine some situation where mediation is feasible but not necessarily by means of a true representation. Would not this case be a sort of mediation without the true knowledge of the otherness, i.e., without incorporating secondness in thirdness, which would violate the character of thirdness as thirdness? Let's remember that in the history of ideas we can find schools like the Sophists, to whom language was only an exercise of pure rhetoric, an instrument of seduction that worked as mediation among the Greeks for a long historical period. There wasn't any truth in their speeches, mainly because they were skeptics who didn't believe on the possibility of anything true.

To support this line of argument, I suppose it may be helpful to bring into reflection Peirce's well known essay *The Fixation of Belief*. Besides the dialogical scientific method for fixing beliefs, three others are there presented, namely, tenacity, authority and a priori. Are not the latter three mediations? Aren't they ways in which men's conduct can be ruled? Could we say that any of them involves inquiry in a Peircean sense and, therefore, knowledge? All scholars who are certainly very familiar with this Peircean paper would say *no*. The evident reason is that in all three cases, we could say that secondness brutality would be kept latent, being dominated by force or dogmatically. Regarding the dogmatic way to fix belief, we could call, for example, the historical period of the middle ages, where all mediation to understand Nature were constituted by 'saving appearances', a sort of allowed rationality which had no relation with truth because all natural processes were governed by God's will. *To save appearances* were mediation without any character of representation, in this case.

Aren't these three cases good examples of mediation without representation? Is it not the case of scientific method for fixing beliefs the only one where both representation and mediation would work together?

Maybe it would be useful, in order to support this line of reasoning, to cite Peirce's work passages where representation and mediation seem to be tightly connected. They could be exemplified by:

> Category the Third is the Idea of that which is such as it is a being a Third, or Medium, between a Second and its First. That is to say, it is Representation as an element of the phenomenon[6] [Further] Thirdness is nothing but the character of an object which embodies Betweeness or Mediation in its simplest and most rudimentary form; and I use it as the name of that element of the phenomenon which is predominant wherever Mediation is predominant, and which reaches its fullness in Representation[7]; [and] Thirdness, as I use the term, is only a synonym for Representation…[8].

It is not without reason that Peirce affirms, in the very definition of sign, its character of representation of the object, for which it is necessary that there is the possibility of a phenomenic experience capable, in a *continuum*, of feeding the also continuous flow of interpretants. It is also worth noting that this is the reason why Phenomenology is a science that is presupposed as the support of Semiotics.

Thus, scientific method must be semiotically dialogical with the object, with the goal of representing it truthfully. Only in this case it seems legitimate to say that *mediations are representations*. However, it is interesting to see that mediations without representations, namely, those that do not take into account a phenomenology of the object to be conceived, nor a semiotic process of construction of logical interpretants, can, nevertheless, affect conduct, as required by the main criterion of pragmatic meaning. In this case, once again, the realistic presupposition seems vital to distinguish actions governed by dogmatisms, whether tenacious, authoritarian or transcendent (a priori), from others that are in a permanent semiotic dialogue with experience. Realism presupposes systems of real thirdness, whose reference in factual secondness follows a semiotic path of particular replicas of general signs, namely sinsigns that point to legisigns. The representation of these legisigns is what enables the construction of scientific theories, insofar as they clearly hold a dialogue with experience. For no other reason, Peirce acknowledges that the search for truth through continuous investigation, that is, through the application of a method of inference phenomenologically sustained, was the only effectively genuine form of

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[6]   CP- 5.66.
[7]   CP-5.104.
[8]   CP-5.105.

scientificity[9]. The other constituting forms of mediation fail by moving in the direction of some particular interest, distant from a careful and impartial observation of phenomena. Thus, one may suppose that Peirce's reasons to sustain this position were that such mediations would not be representations with the power of predicting the conduct of objects, since they did not fulfill the requirements for a thirdness in the light of a realism, that is, a realism that ultimately sustains the undifferentiated substantiation of the categories, both for semiosis operations and for the reality of those objects.

3 Conclusion

In the title of this work I endeavored to reflect on the possibility of a pragmatism that advocates the meaning of a concept as the set of its practical consequences, considered as presuppositions of realistic and nominalistic philosophies. Realistic approaches can be authorized to make choices, insofar as their mediations are representations of the conduct of the object, implying that rationality may fulfill its role of simulating what could occur with phenomena, in an attempt to present them divested of brute force, an expression that Peirce reserved for a secondness as yet unrepresented, that is, still not reducible to thought. On the other hand, resorting to Peirce's classification in his essay *The Fixation of Belief*, dogmatic mediations would be those that sustain beliefs through tenacity, authority or a priori. All of these could not, truly, influence conducts that take into account the observation of objects, having, in some way, to obstruct or obscure the reality of phenomena, so as to assert a set of interests that would stipulate ways of action, whether individual or collective.

Finally, I would briefly mention philosophies similarly nominalist that presuppose a totally accidental reality of phenomena, namely, totally dependent on some order that would be imposed by a language that provides meaning to reality, since any arrangement of the facts that preceded such human constitution of possible meaning would be an inexplicable *essentialization* of the world and an intolerable occurrence of an undesirable metaphysics. Now, since the predicate of otherness is, supposedly, the major trait of what can be called *real*, given by Peirce through the category of secondness, then the course of facts would be independent of any mediation that purportedly wishes

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[9] On this theme, see Ivo A. Ibri, "Reflections on Practical Otherness: Peirce and Applied Sciences", Ideas in Action – Proceedings of the Applying Peirce Conference, Helsinki: Nordic Studies in Pragmatism, 2010, p. 74-85.

to provide meaning and, in fact, would ultimately fail in any mission of representation that it may intend to fulfill. Genuinely, in terms of pragmatism, a philosophy that does not acknowledge some form of real thirdness, even on an approximate, evolutionary and incomplete basis as in Peirce, could not make choices, even if recognizing in them some inevitable existential source of anguish. In the face of a world without real order the only thing to do is make bets on the future course of phenomena, where the brutality of facts would only be overcome by luck, however contingent this game could be. Evidently, such a philosophy has a lot in common with a tenacious, authoritarian or transcendent dogmatism for disregarding the conduct of phenomena as the true referential method of their representation.

In short, we could say that Peirce's realism is nothing more than an in-depth presupposition that makes logically consistent all claims for dealing with the otherness of the world through mediations that are genuine representations of an order, which is proper and intrinsic to phenomena.

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