

Peirce's Rhetorical Turn

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Introduction: The Question of Peirce *and* Rhetoric

In a letter written to Lady Victoria Welby late in his life, C. S. Peirce recalled an incident which occurred decades earlier. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the young Peirce was stung by a brief exchange with a person who, at the time, was a towering figure in American literature. In any event, he made a point of recounting this exchange years later:

I remember one day, when I was in my twenties, on the way to the post-office I fell in with the novelist Wm. D. Howells, who began criticizing one of my articles from the point of view of rhetorical elegance. I said to him, 'Mr. Howells, it is no part of the purpose of my writings to give readers pleasure.' Such an idea was quite out of his horizon; and I heard of him repeating it as very amusing. (*CP* 8.378)

The purpose of a piece of writing might have little or nothing to do with imparting the pleasures afforded by the finely crafted use of words. This is a point Peirce himself makes in this letter: "People do not consult a dictionary to be amused, but to receive definite instruction as condensed as clearness permits" (*CP* 8.378). Allow this incident to

frame this essay, one devoted to the *question*¹ of Peirce's relationship to rhetoric in various senses of that protean term. Does his concern with the *logic* of question and answer (cf. Collingwood; Ketner), especially with fruitfully posed questions and experientially revisable answers, include critical attention to such roles as those of questioner and respondent? More generally, does his formal doctrine of signs encompass at any point the communicative practices of deliberative agents or does it preserve its formal and general character by abstracting entirely from mindful actors caught up in heuristic dramas (e.g., debates about the meaning of a word or the truth of a proposition or the force of an argument)?

In a review devoted to *The Progress of Invention in the Nineteenth Century* (1900), C. S. Peirce wrote: "It is a primary rule of the *ethics of rhetoric* that every prose composition should begin by informing the reader what its aim is, with sufficient precision to enable him [the reader] to decide whether to read it or not" (CN 2, 276; emphasis added; cf. CP 2.79).² He added: "The man who puts pen to paper to produce anything like a treatise should, for his readers' sake, and for his own, begin by defining precisely what his book is intended to convey" (CN 2, 277). In accord with this rule, let me begin by announcing my own aim in this essay: to bring into sharper focus than

¹ The form of this essay is loosely based on that of the disputed question. This literary genre of philosophical discourse, characteristic of the medieval schoolmen, grew out of the oral practices of formal debate. But these medieval debates aimed at being genuine dialogues. What Josef Pieper writes of Thomas Aquinas might be said of medieval authors at their best: "the spirit of the *disputatio*, of disciplined opposition" is "the spirit of genuine discussion which remains a dialogue even when it is a dispute" (73). Pieper succinctly depicts the form of this discourse as well as the spirit of the *disputatio*: It "first formulates the question at issue. It then adduces, not the opinions of the author himself, but rather the voices of the opposition. Only after this does the author himself take the floor, first offering [in the body of the *articulus*] a systematically developed answer to the question and then replying to each of the opposing arguments" laid out immediately after the formulation of the question. A logic of question and answer governs this distinctive genre of philosophical discourse. Moreover, the question in effect serves as the title and, in turn, titles bear possibly complex relationships to the composition they identify. Finally, the voice of the opposition is granted heuristic priority: after the question, the task is to hear one's opponents out.

² It is almost certain that Peirce did not intend here works of fiction such as novels.

anyone has yet done³ the *rhetorical turn* taken by Charles S. Peirce, especially in the last phase of his intellectual life; and, in doing so, to reflect anew about the *meaning* of rhetoric. That is, my aim is twofold: to cast light on Peirce by considering his attention to rhetoric and, in turn, to cast light on rhetoric itself by beginning to trace out the trajectory of his thought on this topic.

Peirce suggests, “one of the first useful steps toward a science of *semeiotic* (σημειωτική), must be the accurate definition, or logical analysis, of the concepts of the science,” beginning with the definition of how *sign* is to be used by those devoted to studying signs in their most basic form and most important functions. Such a definition is derived by observing such signs as we actually know and, on the basis of such observations, articulating a truly general, formal, and abstract definition. Even after 1898, that is, after his philosophical reflections assume more deeply pragmaticist character, Peirce would write in a proposal for a grant from the Carnegie Institute: “Logic will here be defined as *formal semiotic*. A definition of the sign will be given [in the project for which he was requesting support] which no more refers to human thought than does the definition of a line as the place which a particle occupies, part by part, during a lapse of time.” The lines with which we are experientially acquainted are those involving movement and thus temporality, but those upon which the geometer deliberately abstract from certain concrete, experiential features of the path of a moving body. Such a definition of a sign is familiar to virtually every student of Peirce’s writings: it is “something, *A*, which brings something [else], *B*, its interpretant sign [or, more generally,

³ In identifying my goal in this manner, I have no intention to slight the contributions of those who have done much to illuminate both the centrality and details of Peirce’s preoccupation with rhetoric. My own work has benefited immensely from these scholars, above all, Max H. Fisch, James J. Liszka, Mats Bergman, and Lucia Santaella.

effect] determined of created by it, into the same sort of correspondence of something, *C*, its object, as that in which itself stands to *C*” (*NEM IV*, 20-21). This might be identified as the inaugural moment of Peircean semeiotic.

But, if the *inaugural moment* of Peirce’s theory of signs is a form of observation from which a highly generalized conception of semiosis (or sign-action) is derived (Ransdell; Bergman),⁴ then the *culminating moment* of this theory is an increasingly ramified understanding of the *efficacy* of signs (Liszka; Santaella-Braga). By such observation, Peirce derived (as we have just noted) a purely formal, abstract, and general conception of semiosis. But, by ultimately attending to the efficacy and fecundity of signs, as these features manifest themselves in a variety of fields, he returned his theory of signs to the contexts from which his reflections initially abstracted their formal (or “quasi-necessary”) definitions (*CP* 2.227) and classifications. For the purposes of speculative grammar, then, it is not only appropriate but also necessary to abstract from the features of the sign as an instrument of communication, at least from the agency of a conscious, deliberate utterer and also from that of such an interpreter (however, see,

⁴ After identifying logic, in its most inclusive sense, with “the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs,” Peirce explained: “By describing the doctrine as ‘quasi-necessary’ or formal, I mean that we observe the characters of such signs as we know, and from such an observation, by a process which I will not object to naming Abstraction, we are led to statements, eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense by no means necessary, as to what *must be* the characters of [at least] all signs used by a ‘scientific’ intelligence, that is to say, by an intelligence capable of learning from experience. As to that process of abstraction, it is itself a sort of observation” (*CP* 2.227). Our capacity for (or “faculty” of) abstractive observation is “one which ordinary people perfectly recognize [i.e., they exhibit in their comprehension of this process the first degree of clarity], but for which the theories of philosophers hardly leave room.” Elsewhere Peirce wrote: “Logic will be defined by formal semiotic. A definition of a sign will be given which no more refers to human thought than does the definition of a line as the place which a particle occupies, part by part, during a lapse of time [refer to time]. Namely, a sign is something, *A*, which brings something [else], *B*, its interpretant sign determined or created by it, into the same sort of correspondence with something, *C*, its *object*, as that in which it itself stands to *C*. It is from this definition, together with a definition of ‘formal,’ that I deduce mathematically the principles of logic. I also make a historical review of all the definitions and conceptions of logic, and show, not merely that my definition is no novelty, but that my non-psychological conception of logic has *virtually* been quite generally held, though not generally recognized” (*NEM IV*, 20-21).

Joswick; also Short). For the purposes of speculative rhetoric, however, it is equally necessary to put flesh back on the bones of the purely skeletal conception of semiosis conveyed by the purely formal definition.

Arguably, the move from speculative grammar to speculative rhetoric roughly corresponds to the move from the level of abstract definition to that of pragmatic clarification, such that the third branch of semeiotic is not only the most vital but also the most pragmaticist (the branch wherein Peirce's reflections on signs is most deeply and obviously pragmaticist, wherein references to the historical practices of situated agents are integral to a comprehension of semiosis). If this is correct, then the trajectory of Peirce's thought drives back toward the "rough ground" of human practices in their irreducible heterogeneity (cf. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* 107; Scheman 1996). On my view, at least, this amounts to nothing less than a rhetorical turn, for it concerns a critical⁵ assessment of the suasive power of various signs, in diverse contexts – the power of signs to move agents and to change the habits so integral to their agency. This power is indicative of the agency inherent in signs themselves (Ransdell; Bergman).⁶ The effect of signs is to dispose us in some way or other regarding a given topic, for example, to dispose us to hold more hesitantly or confidently a belief, or to

⁵ "The word *criticism* carries a meaning in philosophy which has so little resemblance to the criticism of literature, that the latter meaning throws no light on the former. Philosophical criticism is applied to an idea we have already adopted, but which we remark that we have not deliberately adopted. The mere fact that it has been adopted, as if hastily, that is, without deliberation though it does not necessarily create a doubt, suggests the idea that perhaps a doubt might arise. The critical attitude consists in reviewing the matter to see in what manner corrections shall be made. This is what one does when one reads over a letter one has written to see whether some unintended meaning is suggested. The criticism is always of a process, the process which led to the acceptance of an idea. It supposes that this process is subject to the control of the will; for its whole purpose is correction, and one cannot correct what one cannot control. Reasoning, in the proper sense of the word, is always deliberate and, therefore, is always subject to control" (*NEM IV*, 42; cf. Savan 1987-88, 63). Grammar and Logic (or Critic) in Peirce's trivium of the semeiotic are ordained to the task of criticism in just this sense (again, see Savan 1987-88, 63).

⁶ "... the agency of the Sign ..." (MS 634 [September 16, 1909], p. 22).

reject a belief altogether (CP 5.476).⁷ One of their most important effects is to signal an alarm *indicative* of the inadequacy of a belief – more briefly put, to engender doubt.

Another effect of signs is to corroborate our conjectures. Yet another important function of signs is to provide, in effect, the means for offering a second-order commentary on our first-order practices.

I. Objections to Portraying Peirce as a Rhetorician

On the surface, however, there are few authors whose name is less likely to suggest *a turn toward rhetoric* than that of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). He emphatically *identified*⁸ himself, in a polemical tone, as a scientist (in effect proclaiming: I am a scientist and scientifically trained philosopher, not a litterateur or theologian, humanist or even scholar).⁹ In one place, he wrote of scientists in general what certainly applied to himself: “the inquirer more or less vaguely *identifies himself in sentiment* with a Community of which he is a member, and which includes, for example, besides his momentary self, his self of ten years hence; and he speaks of the resultant cognitive compulsions of the course of life of that community of Our Experience” (CP 8.101; emphasis added).¹⁰ That is, scientists *qua* scientists establish their identities by

⁷ It is important to note that what Peirce means by a *habit-change* encompasses the strengthening or weakening of existing habits, not necessarily their eradication.

⁸ In *A Rhetoric of Motives* and elsewhere, the contemporary rhetorician Kenneth Burke attempts to make identification the focal consideration of rhetoric. At the outset of this work, he notes: “Traditionally, the key term for rhetoric is not ‘identification’ but ‘persuasion’” (1969, xiv). But, in my judgment, he offers weighty reasons for showing why processes of identification, rather than those of persuasion, define the focal concern of rhetorical inquiry. My own treatment of Peirce also shifts the focus away from persuasion and toward, in the first instance, communication and, following Burke’s suggestion, identification. No appeal can be effective or persuasive unless it involves concerns with which an individual identifies or, in the very process of addressing the individual, engenders or establishes aspects of an identity.

⁹ “I was brought up in an atmosphere of scientific inquiry, and have all my life chiefly lived among scientific men. For the last thirty years, the study which has constantly been before my mind has been upon the nature, strength, and history of methods of scientific thought. ... In its logical aspect ... and in its historical aspect I have long been engaged upon a treatise about it” (CP 6.604; cf. 5.411).

¹⁰ In a famous text, Peirce wrote: “we know that man is not whole as long as he is single, that he is essentially a possible member of society. Especially, one person’s experience is nothing, if it stands alone.

identification with not only an historically developing community but also what experience would disclose not to this or that isolated individual but to conjoined agents (persons committed by and animated by overlapping interests and shared objectives). In another place, he disclosed: “For my part, I beg to be excused from having any such dealings with such a philosophy [as that proposed by humanism]. I wish philosophy to be a strict science, passionless and severely fair” (CP 5.537).¹¹ He went so far as to claim: “some branches of science are not in a healthy state if they are *not* abstruse, arid, and abstract” (5.537).¹² But, when attaining such a state, such discourses are far from abhorrent or repulsive to those attuned to the nature of these discourses; rather they are (in words borrowed from John Milton’s *Comus*)

Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo’s lute ...¹³

If he sees what others cannot, we call it hallucination. It is not ‘my’ experience, but ‘our’ experience that has to be thought of; and this ‘us’ has indefinite possibilities” (CP 5.402, note 2)

¹¹ While the immediate target of his criticism here was F. C. S. Schiller, Peirce’s opposition to the “humanistic” form of philosophical discourse encompasses far more than this individual or even those forms of humanism gaining ascendancy in his own time.

¹² Peirce makes this point immediately after quoting F. C. S. Schiller’s claim in *Humanism* (1903) that philosophers “have rendered philosophy like unto themselves, abstruse, arid, abstract, and abhorrent” (CP 5.537).

¹³ Peirce mistakenly attributes these lines to William Shakespeare. The lines from Milton’s *Comus* deserves to be quoted more fully here:

How charming is divine Philosophy!
Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo’s lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectar’d sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns.

The reason for Peirce’s mistake is likely a confusion with a passage from Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (act iv, scene 3):

As sweet and musical
As bright Apollo’s lute, strung with his hair;
And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.

The concluding line of the passage quoted from Milton (“Where no crude surfeit reigns”) arguably points to one of the defining features of philosophical discourse, a rhetoric in which economy of expression and, thus, distaste for “rhetorical” excess.

The music of philosophical discourse is an effect of a sequence of signs in which typically complex harmonies are crafted, moreover, one in which resounding dissonance tends to play a dominant role.¹⁴ Perhaps the aesthetic considerations informing and guiding mathematicians in the construction of proofs are not altogether absent in the efforts of philosophers to formulate arguments, or draw distinctions, or in other ways to carry on their discourse. In addition, the apparent triumph of rhetoric over philosophy in the condemnation of Socrates by the majority of the citizens of Athens points to an *agon*, a struggle in which the advocacy of a philosophical rhetoric is artfully (though, in the end, ineffectively) pitted by Socrates against the rhetoric derived from the paradigms of acclaimed orators.¹⁵ Arguably, the quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric has historically been even more decisive than that between philosopher and poetry for determining the course and defining the character of philosophy (Liszka). If however we fail to appreciate the extent to which this is a *family* quarrel, we miss much about both what is at stake in this conflict *and* what is almost always occluded in the traditional forms of philosophical self-understanding. While philosophers are disposed to define their discipline in opposition to the figure of the sophist, while they tend to identify themselves with Socrates rather than Gorgias or Callicles, they in their arguments with one another at least imply sophistry abounds among philosophers. That is, part of the

¹⁴ John Dewey observed: “Although few philosophers have found a significant aesthetic form of expression for their ideas, when expression is judged by the criteria of literature, nevertheless philosophy performs for some exactly the same office that the fine arts perform for others. There is a kind of music of ideas that appeals, apart from any question of empirical verification, to the minds of thinkers, who derive an emotional satisfaction from an imaginative play synthesis of ideas obtainable by them in no other way” (LW 8: 38). In the ears of such minds, philosophical discourse is not ordinarily “harsh and crabbed.”

¹⁵ The *apologia* of Socrates is a defense of his manner of speaking, undertaken in a fashion commensurate with his characteristic style of discursive exchange. “The dispute between rhetoric and philosophy is,” as James J. Liszka notes, “as old as the one between poetry and philosophy (cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 266)” (2000, 239).

rhetoric of philosophers is to claim some of their opponents are sophists (not truly philosophers) (Smith, Bernstein; Blackburn).

In identifying himself as a scientist, however, Peirce was consciously distancing himself from preachers,¹⁶ teachers,¹⁷ and litterateurs, figures for whom rhetoric is of paramount or, least, central importance (Colapietro 1996, 75-80). He *seems* to be, in terms of style and conviction, the *least* rhetorical of philosophers. Indeed, it would be hard to find an author who more gladly or quickly sacrificed rhetoric for logic, the elegant turn of phrase for the precise formulation of his thought. Despite his writings containing more than an occasional sentence or phrase of truly memorable eloquence, Peirce is hardly ever read in the same manner and with the same pleasure as are Plato and Augustine, Friedrich Nietzsche and William James, George Santayana and José Ortega y Gasset, philosophical authors appreciated for their literary achievement.¹⁸ Moreover, it seems unlikely that an author whose writings are marred, by his own admission (see, e.g., Brent; also Liszka 1996, ix), by literary defects, also one whose thought is bound, by his insistent avowal, so tightly to the exacting demands of logical thought would have much, if anything, illuminating to say about rhetoric. On the surface, then, the characterization of Peirce as a philosopher whose thought took a rhetorical turn and, in doing so, an author

¹⁶ Laboratory vs. seminary trained philosophers. Even so, Peirce concerned himself with the practical aspects of religious oration (see Johnstone). A cynical interpretation of this would be that, in doing so, he sold his scientific soul for the possibility of monetary gain (apparently, less than thirty pieces of silver). A more charitable interpretation would be that the mature Peirce was genuinely animated by religious concerns and identified himself not only with the community of self-critical inquirers but also with the a community of self-proclaimed worshippers.

¹⁷ His ideal of the university makes it clear that such an institution ought to be, first and foremost, an assemblage of researchers, not one of teachers. The most basic practical difference here is that, like a preacher, a teacher presumes possession of a doctrine worthy to be propounded or professed, whereas an inquirer presumes the woeful inadequacy of all extant knowledge. While contrite fallibilism is the hallmark of the genuine inquirer, a more or less assured (even intimidating) command of a field is often the defining trait of master teachers.

¹⁸ Marjorie Perloff, a literary scholar, has written insightfully about the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein; and she has done so from a distinctively literary perspective.

whose writings consolidated crucial insights having direct relevance to the contemporary appreciation of the rhetorical dimensions of various discourses (Fish; Derrida), including the diverse genres of philosophical writing seems implausible.

Allow me to develop even more fully the case *against* characterizing Peirce as an author in whose writings we can discern a turn toward rhetoric.¹⁹ An important reason counting against this characterization is Peirce's antipathy toward litterateurs, those for whom eloquent expression is allegedly the loftiest concern.²⁰ His opposition to Renaissance humanism²¹ and, intimately connected to this, his respect for the medieval schoolmen whom these humanists were so disposed to ridicule are relevant here.²² He notes that these scholastics "have been above all things found fault with because they do not write a literary style and do not 'study in a literary spirit'" (CP 1.33). But the persons who voice such criticisms "cannot possibly comprehend the real merits of modern science." Scientific discourse cannot help but sound harsh and offensive to literary ears. Peirce's judgment here is unequivocal: So much the worse for literary ears!

Two points especially merit emphasis here. *First*, scientific inquiry requires in Peirce's judgment a technical vocabulary, one largely relying on terms of forbidding

¹⁹ As noted at the outset, I am in effect adopting the procedure of the medieval scholastics as embodied in the literary genre of the disputed question, much as Peirce himself effectively adopted this procedure in one of his most famous essays ("Questions concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man"). It should, however, be noted, first, (as Josef Pieper points out) that the *disputatio* is akin to a Platonic dialogue in which historically *identifiable* persons or positions (though ones often left unnamed and thus identified) are pitted against one another and, second, that Peirce confessed his own reflections tended to take the form of a dialogue.

²⁰ Questions concerning precision, clarity, and rigor are critical here. The characterization of litterateurs as individuals willing to sacrifice, say, clarity or precision for eloquence is, it should be noted, one made by those suspicious of certain styles or forms of expression.

²¹ James Liszka details Peirce's indebtedness to the rhetorical turn taken by Renaissance humanists.

²² The effectiveness of the rhetoric of ridicule is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the evolution of the term *dunce*. The name of an author who in the High Middle Ages was known as the "subtle doctor" – moreover, a thinker with whom Peirce explicitly allied himself and, without exaggeration, with whom Peirce identified his experiments in categorical reflection, also his conception of reality – was transformed by this ridicule into the name for a dullard.

complexity and, not infrequently, harsh sounds (Colapietro 1998). In what is itself an arresting rhetorical figure, Peirce argues that if any discipline “is ever to stand in the ranks of the sciences, literary elegance must be sacrificed – like the soldier’s old brilliant uniforms – to the stern requirements of efficiency ...” (CP 5.13). Such a sacrifice had already been made by the schoolmen: “If the words *quidditas*, *entitas*, and *haecceitas* are to excite our disgust, what shall we say of the Latin of the botanists, and the style of any technically scientific work?” (CP 1.33). In their conscientious efforts to craft an integrated set of technical terms, ones devised for their precision, the medieval schoolmen show themselves to be akin to scientific investigators (Oehler; Nöth; Deely).

Second, the schoolmen are hardly to be condemned for their unwillingness to undertake their investigations “in a literary spirit.” Peirce is indeed unsparing on this score, claiming “it is impossible to express how nauseating it [this expression – “study in a literary spirit”] is to any scientific man [or woman], yes even to the scientific linguist” (cf. Haack). Whereas Peirce tended to see Renaissance humanists as enemies of exact and rigorous thought, he viewed the scholastics as the champions and exemplars of such thought.

The turn from medieval scholasticism to Renaissance humanism might readily be interpreted as a regrettable turn *from logic to rhetoric* – and, in reference to Peirce, it would not be utterly inappropriate to interpret this transition in this manner.²³ But the need for a more nuanced account of the character of this complex transition is immediately felt when we realize that the *trivium* (the threefold way), encompassing the disciplines of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, constituted the *rudimentary* curriculum of the

²³ At one point, he suggests the transition from the rigorous discourse of the medieval scholastics to the literary writings of the Renaissance humanists was “a mere change of fashion” (CP 1.17).

medieval university *and* that this course of study served Peirce throughout his life as a model for how to divide the general study of signs into its principal parts (W 1; Savan).²⁴ Peirce's admiration for the scholastics extended to the trivium and, in turn, his adaptation of the trivium for his purposes retained rhetoric as the point (or level) of culmination of a logically (or *methodeutically*) ordered sequence. It is unquestionably significant that the culminating phase of semeiotic inquiry is a discipline variously named by Peirce (formal rhetoric, speculative rhetoric, general rhetoric, objective logic, and – in his later years – *methodeutic*),²⁵ but one invariably associated with rhetorical questions, when such questions are comprehensively (rather than narrowly) formulated (cf. Fisch; Savan; Santaella). But putting too much stress on this point is likely to obscure the fact that both Peirce's conceptions of grammar and logic (or Critic) are themselves rhetorical to a degree even he does not adequately appreciate. That is, we do not have to wait until the third branch of Peirce's semeiotic investigations to discern a rhetorical sensibility directing and informing his investigation of signs. For the deliberately adopted purposes of certain conscientious inquirers, we can abstract from flesh-and-blood agents caught up in communicative exchanges. But such agents are doing so; and, in the end, their exertions, aspirations, and habits of action are very much relevant to our understanding of

²⁴ In "Peirce's New Rhetoric," James Liszka presents a detailed, informed, and illuminating account of how to read Peirce's efforts as vitally connected to historical figures in both the classical and Renaissance traditions of rhetoric.

²⁵ My suggestion is to use *speculative rhetoric* as the most appropriate name for the third branch of Peircean semeiotic and, then, to use *methodeutic* as the name for one or more of the branches (or sub branches of such rhetoric). This accords with Peirce's own division of the third branch of his theory of signs, the division put forth in "Ideas, Stray or Stolen, About Scientific Writings" (*EP* 2, 325-330). This division is made in terms of "the special nature of the ideas to be conveyed" (*EP* 2, 329). Its main parts would be "a rhetoric of fine arts," "a rhetoric of practical communication," and "a rhetoric of scientific digests and surveys." Part of *methodeutic* in the strict sense would be identifiable with the rhetoric of scientific discourse, but the main part would be the third part of the third sub branch (that concerned with "the special nature of the class of signs into which the interpretation is to take place"). This is only a hypothesis, but in general the conception of the relationship between *speculative rhetoric* and *methodeutic* as one of whole and part is a hypothesis I put forth with some confidence.

signs. Indeed, at the outset, they define the field of inquiry (for the overarching purpose of Peircean semeiotic is to provide the indispensable resources for crafting a normative account of objective inquiry, i.e., to identify “what *must be* the characters of [at least] all signs used by a ‘scientific’ intelligence, that is to say, by an intelligence capable of learning from experience” [CP 2.227]).²⁶ Even so, the formalist and taxonomic character of so much of Peirce’s work on especially speculative grammar betrays the pragmaticist and historicist cast of his philosophical theories, including is semeiotic. The purely formal and abstract definition(s) of semiosis, also the elaborate classifications of *possible* types of semiosis, are derived by abstraction from actual, observable processes; and, of greater moment, they have their value in illuminating such processes (not least of all by allowing us to see as instances of semiosis processes we otherwise would not regard as such).

In any event, Peirce’s characteristic antipathy toward the predominantly literary culture of Renaissance humanism should not hide from us his interest in re-founding, as an integral and ultimately integrating part of his semeiotic, the study of rhetoric. That is, his turn toward logic, reconceived as semeiotic, is at the same time *a turn toward rhetoric*, itself reconceived in light of his efforts to craft a truly general or encompassing theory of signs. In the final analysis, my interest in Peirce’s mature turn toward rhetoric is ultimately subordinated to the contemporary turn in this direction. Understanding the development of Peirce’s thought is, in the end, valuable only insofar as it assists the development of our own thought. If taking note of Peirce’s rhetorical turn is crucial for

²⁶ According to Peirce, “the woof and warp of all thought and all research is symbols, and the life of thought and science is the life inherent in symbols” (CP 2.220). But symbols cannot function apart from other modes of signification, so a detailed, nuanced, and comprehensive account of the various modes of signification is required for doing justice to scientific investigation (or objective inquiry).

tracing the unfinished trajectory of his thought, thus critical for comprehending the distinctive character of his achievement,²⁷ then the task of tracing the trajectory of his thought beyond anything he appears to have accomplished is vital for us today, especially insofar as it contributes to our understanding of rhetoric.

But, to tarry here a bit longer, there is much in Peirce's writings apparently standing in the way of my interpretation, just as there is much in traditional philosophy blocking the path of a rapprochement between philosophy and rhetoric. In response receiving an Appendix to *A Pluralistic Universe* in which his friend William James compares Peirce to Henri Bergson, Peirce testily wrote: "a man who seeks to further science can hardly commit a greater sin than to use the terms of his science without anxious care to use them with strict accuracy, [so] it is not very [flattering to me] grateful to my feelings to be classed with a Bergson who seems to be doing his prettiest to muddle all distinctions" (Perry, II, 438). The willingness to sacrifice precision for eloquence – to do one's prettiest to muddle distinctions, because the demands of rigorously executed thought are (allegedly) subordinated to those of finely crafted expression – partly defines the *rhetorical* in the pejorative sense. But *rhetoric* in this sense is certainly not the only or most critical sense of this word.

For all of his opposition to Cartesianism, Peirce seems to have agreed with Descartes that eloquence was far more a natural gift than an acquired skill (*Discours*). In MS 632, C. S. Peirce confessed: "I am not *naturally* a writer ... but as far from being so as any man" (emphasis added). "One of the most extreme and lamentable of my incapacities is my incapacity for linguistic expression" (quoted in Liszka 1996, ix). To

²⁷ Paradoxically, an assessment of this achievement is best made when the most central details of Peirce's *unfinished agenda* are brought into sharp focus. That is, his achievement can only be assessed in reference to what he ultimately was driven to aspire to achieve but, ultimately, failed to carry through to completion.

repeat, this would, upon first consideration, hardly seem to be the kind of person from whom one would seek counsel regarding questions of style or rhetoric.

His friends, acquaintances, and even some of his most ardent advocates concur in this judgment (see, e.g., Brent). William James famously described Peirce's lectures on pragmatism as "flashes of brilliant light relieved against Cimmerian darkness." Josiah Royce went so far as to suggest Peirce was willfully obscure.

It is not always easy to understand Peirce. On occasion he could be brilliantly clear ... although this clearness was a capricious fact in his life and in his writings, and was frequently interrupted by a mode of expression which often seemed to me to be due to the fear, after all, that in case mediocre minds found themselves understanding too many of his ideas, they would be led to form too high an impression of their own powers. One finds this tendency towards what might be called 'impenetrability' in his manuscripts. Too often the reader meets with a thought of surpassing brilliancy, and follows it eagerly, only to have it disappear like the cuttlefish in the inky blackness of its own secretion. (1916, 707; quoted in Goudge, 2)

T. L. Short, one of Peirce's most sympathetic and informed expositors, has suggested something akin to Royce's judgment, referring to Peirce's baroque style. Short goes so far as to suggest the motive for adopting this style was hardly admirable.

II. Contrary to These Objections [*Sed Contra*]

Peirce however deserves to be defended against such charges.²⁸ Though acutely aware of his deficiencies as a stylist, he took great pains to express himself.

A student might infer that I have been given to expressing myself without due consideration; but in fact I have never, in any philosophical writing – barring anonymous contributions to newspapers – made any statement which was not based on at least half a dozen attempts, in writing, to subject the whole question to a very far more minute and critical examination than could be attempted in print, these attempts being made quite independently of one another, at intervals of many months, but subsequently compared together with the most careful criticism, and being themselves based upon at least two briefs of the state of the question, covering its whole literature, as far as known to me, and carrying the criticism in the strictest logical form to its extreme beginnings. ... My waverings, therefore, have never been due to haste. (*CP* 5.146)

Peirce's manuscripts reveal an author who is often – I am disposed to say, *characteristically* – at odds with himself. His own recollection of a critic who suggested Peirce did not appear certain of his conclusions should be recalled here. While the critic intended to point out a deficiency in Peirce's authorial stance, Peirce took the criticism as the highest praise imaginable. For such a "contrite fallibilist," there is nothing surprising in this. Uncertainty is however not necessarily the most salient feature of Peirce's philosophical texts, especially when sufficient attention is given to his unpublished

²⁸ This point in the discussion marks the *Sed contra* of this "disputed question" (Pieper). This is the moment where the discourse turns *from* the weightiest objections to the position to be defended *to* the first step in the defense of this position.

manuscripts. He reveals himself in especially these manuscripts to be undisciplined, and this trait is nowhere more evident than in his apparent inability to follow strictly a linear path. In a word, he is often maddeningly *digressive*. But, then, he shows himself in this very tendency to be willing to follow the scent of truth wherever it might take him. Accordingly, a manuscript begun as a piece intended for publication breaks often in a direction (at least apparently) far removed from the topic under consideration. Even in those pieces crafted as coherent essays, Peirce's manner of expression can tend to frustrate the comprehension of his position or appreciation of the force of his argument. But, contrary to an objection posed above, these deficiencies do not by themselves disqualify Peirce as a student of rhetoric. Indeed, they might even be the origin of his qualification. In any event, he supposed this to be the case. He suggested: "It would be needless, we trust, to interpose any warning against inferring a theory of rhetoric is false because a given advocate of it exhibits little grace, dexterity, or tact in the handling of language. For we all know how seldom an author treating a particular skill is found to be remarkably endowed with the skill he discourses about. Many a time, it has been precisely his consciousness of natural deficiency in that respect that has led him to study the art" (EP 2, 329). It seems reasonable to suppose Peirce's explicit awareness of his own linguistic deficiencies actually did prompt him to painstaking analyses of various features of our communicative practices, especially those bearing upon scientific research.

III. Speculative Rhetoric as the "Destiny" of Peircean Semeiotic

In 1904, C. S. Peirce's review in *The Nation* (79, 84-85) of T. Clifford Allbutt's *Notes on the Composition of Scientific Papers* (NY: Macmillan, 1904) appeared (CN 3:

179-81). Shortly afterwards, he wrote the first of two projected essays on scientific rhetoric (“Ideas, Stray or Stolen, about Scientific Writing, No. 1”). The second essay was either never written or (as happened to all too many of his other manuscripts) lost. Even so, the two short pieces available to us are invaluable for alerting us to both Peirce’s critical attention to scientific rhetoric and, more generally, his commitment to a discipline yet to be established (“speculative rhetoric” as an *ens in posse* [EP 2, 326]). On the one hand, we have unmistakable evidence of his painstaking engagement with the actual *practice* of scientific writing, not simply as the author of scientific memoirs but also as a student of this distinctive genre of literary production. On the other hand, we have equally compelling evidence of his aspiration to enlarge the scope of rhetoric in such a manner as to institute what amounts to a truly new discipline (albeit one able to draw upon the accomplishments of a variety of historically established fields of study). The somewhat narrow focus of his particular concern (scientific writing) is thus counterbalanced by the expansive scope of his philosophical imagination. Such writing concerns, first and foremost, “the communication of scientific discoveries” (CN 3, 180-81) *by* those who have devoted themselves to making such discoveries, *to* those who are committed to this same endeavor. The communication of such discoveries is concerned with one or more aspects of the work of discovery. Peirce’s ideal of a community of inquirers is realized, to the degree it ever is, in such communication or exchange. The principal aim of scientific writing is, hence, to goad and guide the activities of inquirers in the direction of truth. Put otherwise, it is to render efficacious whatever signs bear upon questions to which one or more communities of investigation have devoted themselves. [novel phenomena and provisionally tenable hypotheses] The reports of

observations (say, those of an eclipse) are, for example, signs bearing upon signs (the eclipse being a sign of the relative position of several astronomical bodies, the reports being signs of these signs). These reports ought to be composed in such a way as to insure the power of the most salient signs. The accidental contingencies of place and time (e.g., having been on a certain day, in a certain year, in Sicily when an eclipse was observable from that locale, on that date) are, in a dramatic manner, deprived of much of their privilege: the knowledge of that event is not limited to those contemporaneous with the event. If scientific discoveries are based on the testimony of experimental evidence, the testimony of other scientific observers is as central to one's scientific inquiry as is the testimony of one's direct observations.

There is, implicit in what I have already said, the defining concern of speculative rhetoric as conceived by Peirce. *The rhetorical question in the Peircean sense concerns, in any usage of signs over which self-control is in some measure possible, how to render signs efficacious or effective and also fruitful or fecund (EP 2, 326).* The particular genres of scientific writing make up a small part of a vast array of observable processes about which the question of the efficacy of signs merits focal, *critical* attention (Savan 1987-88, 63). Consider here a simple example, one worthy nonetheless of far closer scrutiny than I will today give to it. It is a paradigm of a matter meriting *criticism* in Peirce's sense.

The word *criticism* carries a meaning in philosophy which has so little resemblance to the criticism of literature, that the latter meaning throws no light on the former. Philosophical criticism is applied to an idea we have already adopted, but which we remark that we have not deliberately

adopted. The mere fact that it has been adopted, as if hastily, that is, without deliberation though it does not necessarily create a doubt, suggests the idea that perhaps a doubt might arise. The critical attitude consists in reviewing the matter to see in what manner corrections shall be made. This is what one does when one reads over a letter one has written to see whether some unintended meaning is suggested. The criticism is always of a process, the process which led to the acceptance of an idea. It supposes that this process is subject to the control of the will; for its whole purpose is correction, and one cannot correct what one cannot control. Reasoning, in the proper sense of the word, is always deliberate and, therefore, is always subject to control. (*NEM IV*, 42; cf. Savan 1987-88, 63).

Think here of E-mail. Deliberation should extend whether or not to reply to a message, not just how to respond. The task of writing a letter might be generalized in such a way as to serve as an indispensable model for authorial deliberation. At the very least, such a model suggests the need to re-read the discourse in light of the imaginable construals and responses of the intended recipient and, possibly, also others in whose hands such a missive might fall.

In his review of Allbutt's *Notes on the Composition of Scientific Papers*, Peirce offers an instructive characterization of rhetoric, one quite close to (if not identical with) that implied in the understanding of criticism just discussed. Let me briefly sketch the context in which this characterization of rhetoric is put forth and, then, attend to the characterization itself. In this review, Peirce notes that the only "scientific essays" on which the author focuses are those submitted by 'the candidates for the degree of M.B. or

of M.D. by the University of Cambridge,” but immediately adds that such papers owe their existence to “a motive entirely different from that of any genuine scientific writing” (CN 3, 180). Whereas the papers submitted by such candidates for such degrees are written to prove the worthiness of these individuals for the formal recognition of academic accomplishment, those submitted by scientists for the scrutiny of their peers are typically composed to win a hearing for the explanatory power of a testable hypothesis (i.e., to go some distance toward proving the worthiness of some conjecture or other).

Having drawn this distinction (that between essays written by students and those composed by scientists), Peirce suggests how the term *rhetoric* ought to be understood. Actually, he proposes what rhetoric ought *to be*, as though it either does not yet exist or else exists in forms often at odds with what it ought to be. And please note, at this point, he is writing about rhetoric in general, not scientific rhetoric: “Now, rhetoric ought to be the doctrine of the adaptation of the forms of expression of a [piece of] writing to the accomplishment of its purpose” (CN 3, 180). The adaptation of the forms of expression to the attainment of a purpose requires us to ascertain, in the first place, the appropriate or defining purpose of a particular piece of writing. Hence, consideration of the forms of expression in this light cannot be limited to consideration of the means of communication, but must extend to ends themselves. Let us return very briefly to the example of composing or drafting a letter. The identification of the animating purpose(s), embodied primarily not in the private consciousness of a historical agent but in the replicable, interwoven signs of a unique instance of human communication, is a more delicate and difficult task than we are often inclined to suppose. Whereas the purposes to which “the communication of scientific discoveries” ought to be adapted are,

arguably, uncontroversial, those for which the innovations of literary artists are made hardly ever avoid being disputable. Indeed, the purpose of much literary writing, especially since modernism, appears to be a relentless interrogation of the possible aims of various cultural practices, including literature itself. This is a point to which I will return near the conclusion of this paper, though only to touch upon..

Let me attend in greater detail than I have thus far, first, to Peirce's views regarding scientific rhetoric and, then, to his conception of speculative rhetoric. Peirce begins "Ideas, Stray or Stolen, about Scientific Writing" by noting:

Scientific journals are publishing, nowadays, many discussions concerning two matters which the late [or recent] enormous multiplication of true scientific workers has raised to vital importance; namely, the best vocabulary for one or another branch of knowledge, and the best types of titles for scientific papers. Both are plainly questions of rhetoric. (*EP* 2, 325)

But he immediately goes on to stress that the characterization of science in terms of rhetoric (more exactly, the very attribution of a rhetorical character to scientific writing) is certain to meet with resistance from diverse quarters, both within and without the scientific community. "To a good many *persons of literary culture*," Peirce suggests, "it has hitherto [or previously] seemed that there was little or no room in scientific writings for any other rule of rhetoric than that of expressing oneself in the simplest and directest manner ..." (emphasis added). From the perspective of such persons, "to talk of the style of a scientific communication was somewhat like talking of the moral character of a fish." But humanists or litterateurs are here not betraying "a particularly narrow [or idiosyncratic] view," since numerous scientists themselves would concur: In the

judgment of “a good many persons trained to the scientific life[,] a coupling of the ideas of rhetoric and of science would hitherto equally have been regarded as a typical example of incongruity” (*EP 2*, 325). But the *practice* of scientists is driving them toward considerations of rhetoric, beyond the two noted at the outset of this essay: “Yet now and here we come upon this phenomenon of two questions of rhetoric agitating the surface of the scientific deep; and looking a little beneath, we surprise the severest sciences doing homage to rules of expression as stringent and strange as any of those by which the excellence of compositions in Chinese or in Urdu is judged” (*EP 2*, 325-26). For example, a “proposition of geometry, a definition of a botanical species, a description of a crystal or of a telescopic nebula is subjected to a mandatory form of statement that is artificial in the extreme” (*EP 2*, 326). Some community mandates that statements be subjected to norms and ideals of expression congruent with its purposes. Self-conscious artifice or contrivance, often of a seemingly extreme or exaggerated form, is inevitably the result of *conscientiously* subjecting one’s discourse to such communally enforced norms and ideals. Think here of pieces of proposed legislation.

From a consideration of this development in the practice of science itself, Peirce is quickly led one far beyond *scientific* rhetoric. He asserts: “our conception of rhetoric has got to be generalized,” indeed enlarged beyond anything yet imagined. The first step is to “remove the restriction of rhetoric to speech” and, by implication, writing. The need to take this step is made clear when we consider the formal, artificial systems of expression devised by mathematicians, also when we take into account works of art. “What is,” Peirce asks, “the principal virtue ascribed to algebraical notation, if it is not the rhetorical virtue of perspicuity? Has not many a picture, many a sculpture, the very

same fault which in a poem we analyze as being ‘too rhetorical’?” (326). After taking the first step beyond limiting rhetoric to speech and writing, he acknowledges “at once” the *possibility* of “a universal art of rhetoric” (he identifies this art as an *ens in posse*). Such an art will disclose “the general secret of rendering signs effective.” If there is any doubt about the scope of its concern, Peirce dispels it by indicating what he intends to be encompassed by the term *sign* in this context:

every picture, diagram, natural cry, pointing finger, wink, knot in one’s handkerchief, memory, dream, fancy, concept, indication, token, symptom, letter, numeral, word, sentence, chapter, book, library, and in short whatever, be it in the physical universe, be it in the world of thought, that, whether embodying an idea of any kind (and permit us throughout to use this term to cover purposes and feelings), or being connected with some existing object, or referring to future events through a general rule, causes something else, its interpretant sign [or, more simply, its interpretant], to be determined to a corresponding relation to the same idea, existing thing, or law [possibility, actuality, or generality]

Peirce is not emphatically claiming that such a discipline is anywhere to be found among the achievements, efforts, or even aspirations of human beings. He is, *first*, simply asserting that “there *ought ... to be ...* a science to which should be referable the fundamental principles of everything like rhetoric, – a *speculative rhetoric*, the science of the essential conditions under which a sign may determine an interpretant sign of itself and of whatever it signifies ...” (*EP* 2, 326; emphasis added). But, *second*, he does suppose “indeed there is” such a rhetoric, “if students do not wonderfully deceive

themselves.” I take this to mean that, though only in a largely inchoate and unconscious form, such a universal art exists. Its realization as such however requires a disciplinary self-consciousness and self-cultivation (i.e., a community of individuals who in a conscious and deliberate manner cultivate an ever expansive, deepening interest in this field of inquiry).

Conclusion

Rhetoric primarily concerns *communication* and, more broadly, the efficacy of signs. Persuasion is only one of the functions of communication and, thus, a rhetoric having the scope of the discipline envisioned by Peirce considers far more than this single function. But, insofar as Peirce’s rhetorical turn is related to the increasingly deepening pragmatism of his mature thought, i.e., insofar as his turn toward rhetoric is of a piece with the deepening of his pragmatism, the norms and ideals bound up with rational self-criticism and self-control are constitutive of his reconceptualization of rhetoric. Borrowing an insight from the contemporary rhetorician Kenneth Burke, I would like to suggest here that rhetoric in the Peircean sense is concerned as much with *identity* as with communication. Identity itself must however be linked to those discursive and other processes of identification in and through which the self-understanding of self-critical agents is formed, solidified, and indeed transformed.

Peirce identified himself as a scientist and, more narrowly, as a logician. In doing so, he self-consciously identified himself with an historically evolved and evolving community of inquirers defined by their devotion to the discovery of truths not yet known. His identity as a scientist was forged by his practical identification with this historical community, though his more or less attenuated practical identification with

other historical communities (e.g., familial, political, and religious ones) is far from insignificant. While this identification *disposed* him to a certain understanding of rhetoric (a frequently disparaging conception of the rhetorical), his mature conception of speculative rhetoric, at least when carried toward its fuller articulation, provides resources for understanding the centrality and texture of the very processes of identification so manifest in his authorial self-understanding.

In effect, Peirce warns us that the word “merely” is one of the most powerful rhetorical instruments of disparagement or denigration we possess. In his original account of pragmatism, Peirce argued that “it would be *merely* a question of nomenclature whether that diamond should be said to have been hard or not” (*CP* 5.453; emphasis added). When in his maturity he turned to the reformulation of his pragmatism, however, Peirce insisted: “No doubt this is true, except for the abominable falsehood in the word MERELY, implying that symbols are unreal.” (Think here of how often expressions such as the “*merely* conventional” or the “*merely* somatic” operate to marginalize or discredit conventions or the body.) One can make an analogous point here. The disparagement of rhetoric typically involves those instances in which someone is being *merely* rhetorical, that is, those cases in which an individual is dissociating rhetoric from logic and arguably also from grammar, in the senses intended by Peirce.

The two most important features of Peirce’s actual rhetoric are, first, the role he accords his readers and, second, the complex motives animating his philosophical authorship. Let us consider each in turn. He accords his readers the status and role of judges. “I address the reader as ‘your Honour,’” Peirce explains in one place, “simply because I sincerely do honor anybody who is disposed to undertake a sustained endeavor

to train himself to reason in such ways as to miss as little as possible of such truth as concerns him, while at the same time, as far as circumstances permit, avoid risks of error; and I address him in the second person because I think of him as a real person, with all the instincts of which we human beings are so sublimely and so responsibly endowed” ...” (MS 682, pp. 2-3; cf. p. 1, p. 27; published in *EP 2*). Peirce’s readers are accordingly not being addressed as students but as co-inquirers who are, more than the author himself, entitled to judge the force of the evidence being marshaled, the perspicuity of the expressions being used, the fecundity of the ideas being broadcast, the salience of the distinctions being drawn, and similar considerations.

Let us now turn to the second most important feature of Peirce’s actual rhetoric. Of course, any author takes pen to paper, or fingers to a keyboard, for irreducibly complex, (in some measure) ultimately unfathomable reasons.²⁹ To make the point paradoxically, the author who accorded the reader such exalted status wrote principally for himself. To make this point in a less paradoxical way, Peirce wrote first and foremost not to formulate the consolidated results of completed research but to experiment with ideas. His writings are the sites of experimentation wherein paths of inquiry are continuously being opened in new and unanticipated directions. They are always ones wherein authorial resolve frequently gives way to irrepressible curiosity. How else are we to explain one of the most striking features of Peirce’s unpublished manuscripts – their frequent digressions? He was indefatigably trying out new ideas and old ones in novel ways. He suggests, “modern students of science have been successful because they

²⁹ Peirce is explicit about this, using a figure from one of the most literary or rhetorical authors with whom he was familiar. Borrowing a figure from Ralph Waldo Emerson, Peirce insists: “Each man has an identity which far transcends the mere animal; – an essence, a meaning subtle as it may be. He cannot know his own essential significance; of his eye it is eyebeam” (*CP 7.591*)

have spent their lives not in their libraries and museums but in their laboratories and in the field ...” (CP 1.34). But Peirce actually spent the bulk of his intellectual life in his private study, that is, surrounded by his books and immersed in his musings on paper (and that means in his personal library). He was concerned to adapt the means of expression to the exigencies of communication, especially when the purpose of communication involved advancing the work of discovering truths not yet known.

The interrogation of the diverse media of communication (e.g., sound, color, movement, gesture, and figure), including the uniquely *qualitative* features of them, solely for the sake of discovering the communicative possibilities and limitations in these various media, maniacally pursued for the purpose of disclosing the qualities of these media, is an integral part of much artistic innovation. “But it must be confessed,” Peirce wrote, “that there is very little of the artist in my make-up; and I detest my own style quite as much as the reader is likely to do” (MS 683, 00016).³⁰ The adaptation of the means of expression to the exigencies of expression is rhetorically critical, but no more so than the exploration of the possible forms and functions of expression or communication.

These points ultimately concern self-understanding, including the self-understanding of the participant in a discourse or representative of a discipline. And such

³⁰ William to Henry James” I envy ye the world of Art. Away from it, as we live, we sink into a flatter, blanker kind of consciousness, and indulge in an ostrich-like forgetfulness of all our rich potentialities – and they startle us now and then when by accident some rich human product, pictorial, literary or architectural, slaps us with its tail” (Perry, II, 254). Cf. John Dewey: “The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness. Common things, a flower, a gleam of moonlight, the song of a bird, not things rare and remote, are means with which the deeper levels of life are touched so that they spring up as desire and thought. This process is art. Poetry, the drama, the novel, are proofs that the problem of presentation is not insoluble. Artists have always been the purveyors of news [in any significant and substantial sense], for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation” (LW 2, 349-50). “We are, as it were, introduced [by art] into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried beyond ourselves to find ourselves” (LW 10, 199).

self-understanding is inseparable from self-identification (especially those discursive processes and practices in and through which an authorial identity is formed, maintained, and altered). Given the depth and reach of Peirce's fallibilism, however, it should not surprise us that possibilities of misunderstanding and misidentification are ineliminable. Consider here an analogy – one between the way Peirce interprets the self-interpretation of the psychologists of his time and the way we might interpret Peirce's philosophical self-interpretation. After indicating the impropriety or, at least, presumption of contesting the self-understanding of the participants in a historically established discourse such as psychology, Peirce does just that. “No doubt, it seems an extraordinary piece of presumption,” he notes, “for a man to tell a large body of scientific men for whom he professes high respect that they do not know what are the problems they are endeavoring to solve; that while they think they are trying to make clear the phenomena of consciousness, it is really something quite different that they are trying to do” (*CP* 7.367).³¹ Even so, Peirce presumes to inform psychologists that they have misidentified the object of their own inquiry. But, to some extent, the predicament of psychologists is that of every other human being, also that of the practitioners or representatives of a discipline such as philosophy no less than psychology.

This is as true of Peirce as it is of anyone else. So, to quote another part of a letter to James already cited, “philosophy is either science or is balderdash” (Perry, II, 438). The self-understanding of this philosopher is, arguably, as misguided or mistaken as was that of the psychologists whom he tried to correct. Philosophy might fail to become a

³¹ This seems to be especially the case given Peirce's acknowledgment of not knowing this discipline from the inside.

science, especially one such as physics, chemistry, or biology, without thereby being no better than balderdash.

Among other things, philosophy *is* rhetoric, in a sense Peirce only belatedly and fleetingly glimpsed, a sense precluding it from being a science in as univocal and uncontroversial sense as Peirce desired (Colapietro). We hardly ever know with adequate clarity or precision what we are talking about. Peirce is quite explicit about this point: “It would, certainly, in one sense be extravagant to say that we can never tell what we are talking about; yet, in another sense, it is quite true” (CP 3.419).³² Moreover, the very form of our discourse, especially the identity of the evolving disciplines in which lively controversies abound, are essentially contestable (Gallie). This makes our identification with these discourses and disciplines inescapable problematic. We do *not* in any incontrovertible or authoritative manner know what we are talking about or what we are doing, including what we are doing when we are engaged in philosophical discourse. As ironic as this might sound, the upshot of our own inquiry into the Peirce’s turn toward rhetoric – the realization that we do not adequately know what we are talking about or even what we are doing – should be a welcome conclusion to the philosophical inquirer. For narrowly bounded purposes, there is often little basis for genuine doubts. For humanly intertwined and alterable purposes, however, the first step toward wisdom is a candid confession of ignorance. Deliberative reflection on the various forms of human agency – and also on the ultimate setting in which such agency has emerged and continues to develop – is an alternative way of conceiving philosophical discourse (an

³² The reasons for this are various and complex. But they include the ones that Peirce is quick to offer after making this claim: “The meanings of words ordinarily depend upon our tendencies to weld together qualities and our aptitudes to see resemblances, or, to use the received phrase, upon associations by similarity; while experience is bound together, and only recognisable [sic.], by forces acting upon us, or, to use an even worse chosen technical term, by means of associations by *contiguity*” (CP 3.419).

alternative to Peirce's depiction of philosophy as a science).³³ My proposed characterization of philosophical reflection inescapably carries its own limitations and distortions as well as disclosures and insights. But, as a corrective to the too narrow view of philosophy as a science, it arguably escapes being balderdash. Moreover, it is rhetorical, without being *merely* rhetorical. Finally, it traces out one of the most important trajectories of Peirce's unfinished thought – and it does so in such a way as to land us in the thick of things, in the midst of the most lively controversies located at the intersection of various disciplines, also at the center of more than a few of these distinct discourses (Fish). The question of philosophy, especially at this juncture, cannot avoid being a question of rhetoric, where the identity of each discourse engenders ambivalent identifications and conflicting articulations.

Attending to the efficacy of signs is enforced by a number of factors, not least of all our realization of the inadequacy of our self-understanding. The intelligibility of the cosmos so far outstrips our intelligence that only an imagination progressively liberating itself from natural, cultural, and other limitations (in a word, only imagination *unbound*), moreover, only individuals conscientiously binding themselves to transcendent ideals, are ever in a position to penetrate or even simply to glimpse the secrets of nature. While the question of grammar concerns, at bottom, the conditions of meaning or intelligibility, the

³³ Peirce characterized speculative rhetoric (or *methodeutic*) as “the highest and most living branch of logic” (*CP* 2.333; see Fisch 1986, 338-41, 350-52, & 392-93). In 1901, he identified “the ultimate aim of the logical studies” to which he had devoted his life to be “the theory of the growing of all kinds of knowledge” (MS 637, 9; quoted in Santaella-Braga, 388). Elsewhere he defines “pure rhetoric” with the task of ascertaining “the laws by which in every scientific intelligence one sign gives birth to another, and especially one thought brings forth another” (*CP* 2.229). The principal object of its critical concern is itself living: “Let us look upon science – the science of today – as a living thing. What characterizes it generally, from this point of view, is that the thoroughly established truths are labelled and put upon the shelves of each scientist's mind, where they can be at hand when there is occasion to use things – arranged, therefore, to suit his special convenience – while science itself, the living process, is busied mainly with conjectures, which are either getting framed or getting tested” (*CP* 1.234). The cosmos itself is evolving and one of the most salient features of the observable universe is the growth of growth, the evolution of ever new forms of being, life, and knowledge. See Peirce on the idea of growth being fecund (*EP* 2, 373-74).

concern of rhetoric is with ingenuity and innovation. It concerns courting the possibility of nonsense for the sake of discovering truths not yet known. While grammar marks the limits of meaning (the conditions of intelligibility), rhetoric inevitably transgresses established boundaries and instituted patterns – for the sake of developing the intimations of intelligibility suggested to us from diverse directions and in often confusing ways. To *identify* ourselves with the task of coming to terms more fully than we have yet done with the intelligibility intimated in our experience but outstripping our intelligence – to identify ourselves with this task – is to identify ourselves at once with an ancient tradition and contemporary thinkers. Moreover, it is a task bearing a complex relationship to classical rhetoricians and their contemporary champions (see, e.g., Barthes; Fish; also Culler). Finally, it is arguably the human face of deliberative agency.

Such agency deliberately abstracts from the multitudinous contingencies of concrete situations but, in the end, it imposes upon itself the task of translating its loftiest abstractions into habits of practice. This makes Peirce's rhetorical turn one with his pragmaticist turn: the turn toward rhetoric evident in the culminating phase of his intellectual life not only coincides with his most self-consciously pragmaticist period but also embodies at its very center the impetus, value, and still unrealized potential of Peirce's thoroughgoing pragmatism. The greater realization of this potential will, in my judgment, explode the scientific pretensions of his avowed position,³⁴ thereby allowing philosophical reflection to assume more vividly and clearly its actual character – the ongoing *deliberation* of human agents regarding the historical practices and natural processes in which they are implicated and by which they are defined, also regarding the ultimate context in which human life has emerged. Our inheritances become, in some

³⁴ Joseph Ransdell, Thomas Short, and Mats Bergman defend Peirce against the charge of scientism.

measure, tasks, just as especially our definitive tasks can become more finely and fully deliberative undertakings. And for these tasks to become deliberative in this way, we cannot escape asking: Who is addressing whom³⁵ – and for what purpose, also to what effect? In its utmost generality, then, deliberation (that is, philosophy in the sense intended here) shows itself to be rhetorical – and, in this connection, rhetoric shows itself to be worthy of the most painstaking, systematic, and nuanced development. To devote oneself to this development would be to trace beyond anything Peirce achieved a trajectory discernible in the most creative phase of his intellectual life, the pragmatist phase of his later years.

Students of Peirce accordingly must be animated by the paradoxical realization that, on the one hand, they cannot go beyond Peirce without first catching up to him (Ketner) and, on the other, they cannot catch up to him without strenuously and imaginatively trying to go beyond him (Short). In this instance, this means tracing the unfinished arc of his most mature reflections on signs: it means taking him at his word that speculative rhetoric is the liveliest branch of semeiotic and, in doing so, developing more fully than he himself did the implications of his own words (thereby perhaps going beyond anything he actually or explicitly wrote). Words are destinies whose momentum and developments transcend the capacity of those who use them (Colapietro). Their histories in effect teach human utterers what they meant to mean.³⁶ These histories are

³⁵ Though not fashionable in many philosophical circles today, Peirce is open to considering that the sacred or divine is addressing human beings in ways such individuals can hardly, if at all, discern or decipher. But this is only part of what is meant by this question.

³⁶ In the Preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel wrote: “We learn by experience that we meant something other than we meant to mean; and this correction of our meaning compels our knowledge to go back to the proposition [the articulation in which we first tried to express our meaning], and understand it in some other way” (39). The compulsion to revise our meanings – to be forced by the more or less brutal rebukes of our actual experience to realize “we meant something other than we meant to mean” – is, ironically, one of the respects in which Peirce supposed he was different from Hegel.

almost always more complex and inclusive than we imagine them to be, also far more opportunities for innovation and ingenuity than inertia in the direction of unimaginative repetitions and unquestioning fidelity.

In its most evidently pragmatic sense, a sign is anything that establishes, maintains, or strengthens a relationship between forces, factors, or fields that might otherwise be disparate (*CP* 8.332). To take a simple example (one used earlier), the observer whose record allows me to become aware of an event I could never witness puts me in connection with that event. The observer fulfills here the office of a sign. The actuality of the event thereby exerts itself beyond the time and place of its occurrence. The significance of the event is therefore taken up into an ongoing process of, at the very least, redescription and recontextualization (Rorty). In the end, the most critical question is this: How can we amplify, extend, ramify, and in other respects enhance the efficacy of signs? The possible forms of significance (that to which speculative *grammar* attends) ultimately point to wider spheres of entanglement, involvement, and transaction (that on which speculative *rhetoric* focuses).³⁷ The purely formal, abstract definition and classifications of signs or semiosis are the achievements of a self-controlled inquirer, ones involving a kind of self-effacement. The reference to mind is deliberately erased *by* mindful actors *for* a specific purpose defining a heuristic context. The more concrete,

³⁷ In exploring the connections between his pragmatism and commonsensism, Peirce noted, “the indubitable beliefs [upon which philosophical defenders of common place so much weight] refer to a somewhat primitive mode of life.” Thus, “while they never become dubitable in so far as our mode of life remains that of a somewhat primitive man [or organism], yet as we develop *degrees of self-control* unknown to that man, occasions of action arise in relation to which our original beliefs, if stretched to cover them, have no sufficient authority” (*CP* 5.511). Scientific inquiry is an imaginative exercise of human agency inevitably thrusting human agents into bewildering settings where there instinctual beliefs and customary conceptions are almost certainly more misleading than not. For this and other reasons, then, Peirce does not hesitate to claim that science has thrust us (at least those of us who *identify* with its purposes and pursuits) into a quite different world than those who are removed from the expanded arena of human activity secured by the imaginative probings of experimental intelligence (see. e.g., *CP* 1.236). As noted above, Peirce crafted his general theory of signs for the specific purpose of offering a heuristically useful account of the role of signs in such probings.

contextual characterizations of semiosis encountered in speculative rhetoric however provide instances in which we are offered, if only in quick yet deft strokes, the suggestions for a vivid portrait of the human face of deliberative agency (Colapietro). This is not the humanism of Schiller, but that of Peirce. It concerns first and foremost the deliberately cultivated passion for what is not wrongly called dispassionate inquiry. The humanly trained ears and eyes of such a humanist are able to discern music and poetry where those who are untrained or trained otherwise than in the severe discipline of experiential philosophy are only able to hear harsh and crabbéd sounds.

For Peirce, “all reasoning, even solitary meditation, is essentially of *the nature of an appeal to a person* held in high respect” (MS 634). Thus, his dialogical conception of reasoning entails a rhetorical conception of semiosis (the appeal to a more informed, intelligent agent than one’s self at any actual moment is not ultimately eliminable). In the end (though not at the beginning), consideration of the power of symbols and other signs to appeal to mind (see, e.g., *CP* 8.342) is not so much a “sop to Cerberus” (SS, 81) as an inescapable acknowledgment of the deliberative and dialogical – thus, the dramatic³⁸ and rhetorical character – of human rationality (Colapietro). Such acknowledgment carries a rejection of any pretense to the apodictic certainty claimed by the monologic self. It enjoins an uncompromising embrace of the ingenious innovations of the dialogical (i.e., the rhetorical) self, for whom the appeal to others colors or qualifies virtually every conception (especially semeiotic conceptions), at least when the pragmatic clarification of these conceptions is conscientiously undertaken.

³⁸ In “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science” Alasdair MacIntyre compellingly argues for dramatic narrative being integral to the work of experimental intelligence. The history of science might indeed be characterized as that of variously intersecting dramas of self-correction and self-revision.

The very act of speaking or writing – indeed, that of thinking itself – is essentially an appeal to the other. Such an appeal is not incidental to Peirce’s understanding of semiosis. Nor is it tacked on to the theory of signs, as though it were an afterthought. Insofar as it directly pertains to questions of rhetoric, this appeal is integral to his semeiotic to a degree insufficiently appreciated by Peirce and also many of his most sympathetic, informed expositors. The trajectory of his investigation of signs drives beyond anything either he or we have yet been able to articulate. The third branch of Peircean semeiotic thus remains, to an unfortunate extent, what it was when he wrote “Ideas, Stray and Stolen, about Scientific Writing” (1904) – an *ens in posse*. But there ought to be at this juncture little question that Peirce’s philosophical project encompasses a rhetorical turn. There is even reasonable suspicion that his stray, stolen, and ingeniously improvised ideas regarding rhetoric are likely to be a valuable source for the ongoing work of intersecting disciplines, discourses, and traditions. Such an intersection is virtually the definition of the rhetorical situation, one in which others are encountered in such a way as disciplinary and other forms of identity are called into question. The incessant questioning characteristic of human rationality, as conceived by Peirce (see, e.g., *CP 7.77*), extends to the questioner and the forms of questioning themselves. Self-identifications and identifying signatures, including Peirce’s characteristic identification with the scientific community, have their decisive weight, but never unquestionable authority. They are open to unbounded interrogation, by means of which the power of Peirce’s own publications and manuscripts is realized. The power of these texts resides, above all else, in the capacity to appeal to readers in such a way that they are interpreted as signs allied to the promptings, pressures, and compulsions of experience itself. Thus

Peirce is not unduly self-deceptive or otherwise deceitful or misleading when he rhetorically identifies his philosophy with the work of the experimentalist. It is, however, almost certainly the case that not only the significance but also the character of his research and compositions transcends to some extent his self-understanding and self-identifications (see, e.g., 7.591-596 for Peirce's endorsement of such a viewpoint).³⁹

³⁹ I must confess here that I am unfavorably disposed to those genres of interpretation in which interpreters elevate themselves above the authors whom they are supposedly illuminating, especially to those in which expositors claim to know so much better than the authors themselves what these authors are about. This has not been my intention in this essay. Rather I take myself to be most faithful to Peirce when I am able, always with his help, to trace the trajectories of *his* thought beyond anything he was able to accomplish. I suppose his readers are unworthy of him if they are not actually co-inquirers, persons who truly take up the work of investigation being executed in one or another of Peirce's writings. And I suppose this because *he* says and implies so often that this is the only sort of reader he desires to have. In this and other crucial respects, then, I take him, almost without question, at his word.

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