Peirce’s Semiotics, Subdoxastic Aboutness, and the Paradox of Inquiry

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Abstract
The author suggests that educational philosophy should benefit from addressing questions traditionally asked within discourse in the philosophy of mind, namely: the relation between the mind and world and the problems of intentionality (or aboutness), meaning, and representation. Peirce’s semiotics and his category of creative abduction provide a novel conceptual framework for exploring these questions. A model of reasoning and learning, based on Peirce’s triadic logic of relations, is analysed. This model, it is argued, is fruitful for overcoming the paradox of new knowledge that was first debated by Socrates in his dialogue with Meno.

Keywords: semiotics, consciousness, habits, abduction, Meno, experience, embodiment

Introduction
There is a continuing debate, elucidated by Davies (1995), on the topic of intentionality and on the varieties of aboutness as it is called¹. Frantz Brentano initially defined intentionality as the mark of the mental, that is, the ability of the mind to be about something or to have some content. The aim of this paper is to address subdoxastic aboutness, or non-conceptual content, from the perspective of Charles Sanders Peirce’s evolutionary philosophy and his conception of a sign, linguistic or non-linguistic alike, as ternary. The paper will question the present assumption of a strict divide between different kinds of aboutness and will posit subdoxastic aboutness as an integral part of mental representations. This construct is not altogether novel: Searle (1990), for example, asserts the possibility of an unconscious mental phenomena being accessible to consciousness in principle. The stronger claim of this paper is that such perceptual subdoxastic states serve as a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for the production of meanings. Towards this end, a model of reasoning, based on Peirce’s logical categories, will be offered. According to this model, information processing must include subdoxastic states, and subdoxastic aboutness cannot be separated from experiential aboutness and thus from consciousness.
In general terms, Peirce’s triadic structure of a sign presupposes a sign-object-interpretant relation. According to Peirce, the triadic relation as pertaining to inferential process includes abduction, deduction, and induction. The suggested model indicates production of meanings as stable structures that—as habits established in repeated experiences—may be considered to be fulfilling proper functions (see Millikan, 1984) and, I suggest, may be respectively called proper structures. In turn, habits further inform subdoxastic aboutness, thereby performing a double role of circular causality in the overall dynamics. The triadic relation inscribed in the creation of meanings posits these structures as integrative, that is, founded on learning by means of integrating the unconscious representations into consciousness and forming belief. Moreover, the suggested structure itself will serve as an explanatory paradigm for the paradox of inquiry, also known as the learning paradox that haunted us since the time of Plato’s *Meno*. While strictly speaking the paradox *per se* cannot be overcome, the very existence of what common sense considers a paradox is an ineliminable feature of triadic semiotics: what seems to be a paradox is in fact the presence of abductive inference, as Peircean generic category of Firstness, within the Thirdness of the total cognitive process. As such, it is inherent in the semiotic thinking and is a precondition for the meaning production in the dynamics of learning and forming beliefs. Therefore subdoxastic aboutness inherent in the Peircean logic of abduction not only leads to experience and belief but it is itself informed by experience even if the informational input enters the process below the conscious level.

**Peirce’s Semiotics**

The triadic nature of relations between signs leads to Peirce’s classifying signs in terms of basic relational categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness: ‘First is the conception of being or existing independent of anything else. Second is the conception of being relative to, the conception of reaction with, something else. Third is the conception of mediation, whereby first and second are brought into relation. ... In psychology Feeling is First, Sense of reaction Second, General conception Third, or mediation. ... Chance is First, Law is Second, the tendency to take habits is Third. Mind is First, Matter is Second, Evolution is Third’ (Peirce, CP 6. 7). Firstness is quality, possibility, freedom. Secondness, as a relation of the First to the Second, is of opposites, physical reality, billiard-ball forces, rigid deterministic laws, direct cause and effect, action and reaction. Thirdness relates seconds to thirds; it is synthesis, communication, memory, mediation. A sign can be anything that stands for something else, its object, in such a relation so as to generate another sign called by Peirce an interpretant. Sheriff (1994, p. 35), elaborating on the notion of specifically Peircean sign, presents the process of how the *interpretant* of the sign in a triadic sign-object-interpretant relation becomes a *sign* in a subsequent triadic relation, and so forth, by means of the following graph (Figure 1).

For Peirce, logic is a science of the necessary laws of thought. Logic is not a pure invention of logicians but is a *ratio* that always already exists in human praxis.
Because thought always takes place by virtue of the action of signs, Peirce equated logic with semiotics therefore ‘treating not merely of truth, but also of the general conditions of signs being signs’ (Peirce, CP 1. 444). Peirce’s pragmatic maxim establishes the criterion for meaning as production of real effects: ‘Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object’ (Peirce, CP 5. 402). Peirce’s philosophy, as such, blends logic and psychology and allows for the presensory and preconscious—not limited to sense data—apprehension of reality upon which, despite it being necessarily vague, people are prepared to act. This level of perception is subdoxastic indeed and would be qualified by Peirce as Firstness, that is, a precognitive category that he called a quali-signification. For Peirce, a perceptual judgment is a rather involuntary operation of the mind based on quali-signification as a qualitative immediacy of experience. In psychological terms, such judgment would be based on insight, intuition or imagination, all the psychological categories traditionally left outside the boundaries of formal logic. Yet, the Firstness of abduction—as Peirce called it—is a mode of inference having the following logical form: a surprising fact is observed; but if our hypothesis of this fact were true, then this fact would be a matter of course; therefore there is reason to suspect that our hypothesis is true. The immediate Firstness—a sort of premodern natural attraction—was, together with the Thirdness of mediation, left out as insignificant by the pure reason of modernity and substituted by the dualistic sin-signification and instrumental rationality based on conventional logic of excluded middle. When Peirce conceived of signs in terms of images, that is as an extra-linguistic category, he described them in numbers which are cardinal and not simply ordinal, like sequential first, second or third. By definition, Secondness contains one and two, so there is Firstness in Secondness, and there are three in the Thirdness so that Thirdness must always already contain the Firstness in itself.

The fist fact is perplexing, that is, it involves doubt, tension and conflict, because of the encounter with the otherness as Secondness of ‘reaction against my will’ (Peirce, CP 8. 144) due to the intervention, often beyond one’s awareness of this action, of the brute facts of human experiences. Even when ‘the surprising fact ... is observed’ (Peirce, CP 5.185), the problematic situation includes something not fully present to the senses, otherwise the fact would not be surprising. An inquiring mind, rather than performing a direct stimulus-response function, makes a first step

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Figure 1: A triadic relation

\[ S \rightarrow I \rightarrow O \]

\( (\text{Sign}) \rightarrow \text{(Interpretant)} \rightarrow (\text{Object}) \)
toward apprehending the experience by abduction, a peculiar logic of discovery, bordering on as yet uneducated guess. Despite being initially pre-conscious and necessarily vague, the abductive inference, according to Peirce, belongs to objective logic understood broadly as the ‘laws of thought, ... thought always taking place by means of signs’ (Peirce, CP 1.144). All thought is inferential, and the basic semiotic relation must be inferential, or illative. The causal influence embedded in the semiotic process of cognition becomes indirect, or mediated by means of inclusion of the third category that completes the cycle by breaking down the direct dyadic cause-effect connection. Nonetheless the formal, albeit vague, rule of abduction enables mind to reason from the premise to the conclusion; such an inference being described by the following statement: if A is B, and C can be signified by B, then maybe A is a sign of C. The interpretation is triggered by the Firstness of abduction, which is tending towards the perceptual judgment and is a hypothesis-bearing statement that asserts its conclusion only conjecturally; yet, according to Peirce (CP 5. 189), there is a reason to believe that the resulting judgment, under the circumstances, is true. Peirce (CP 5. 184) was adamant that there is no sharp line of demarcation between abduction and perceptual judgment: one shades into the other along the inferential process. The continuity thesis, advanced by Peirce, points to the fact that the level at which a perceptual judgment is being formed is pre-conscious: ‘because it is subconscious ... [it] does not have to make separate acts of inference but performs its acts in one continuous process’ (Peirce, 1998, p. 227), defying the line of the strict divide between, as we would have said today, the subdoxastic and indicator aboutness. The given premise must entail some empirical consequences; the explication of the initial perception is achieved by analogical reasoning which unfolds into inferences to the would-be consequences of abductive conclusions eventually leading ‘to a result indefinitely approximating to the truth in the long run’ (Peirce, CP 2.781), asymptotically integrating into the synthetic inference in the process.

Peirce emphasized the role of diagrammatic reasoning saying that ‘passing from one diagram to the other, the [reasoner] ... will be supposed to see something ... that is of a general nature’ (Peirce, CP 5.148), hence contributing to making one’s ideas clear. The purpose of such a diagrammatic mode of expression was to depict the dynamical character of thought-process. Peirce viewed the epistemic process as a step away from the Cartesian theatre and one’s privileged access to propositions that mirror reality. The whole notion of a proposition, whose subject designates reality and whose predicate describes the essence of the said reality, is transformed by Peirce into interpretation of reality and living it out experientially: mimesis turns into semiosis. Semiosis, as the action of signs, comprises the relation between the object and the mind by virtue of a sign such that a sign is affected by the object and is affecting the mind thereby producing an effect, or meaning, called by Peirce the interpretant of the sign. The object of reference does not have to have a solely physical existence: it may be a preceding sign, a thought, or a dream. The abductive guess as a matter of the First borders on intuition, an intuitive knowledge traditionally being a synonym for immediate, or direct, knowledge. Intuition conventionally has been considered to be the initial perception of an object. For Peirce, however,
there is no immediate, that is, unmediated, knowledge: all cognition is sign-mediated. Perception differs not in kind but only in degree from other forms of human knowledge and is not limited to merely sense perception. Perception turns inwards and directs itself towards the objects of conception by means of the Firstness of insight or intuition that constitutes some as yet pre-conceptual content. The very etymology of the word confirms this: to in-tuit means to learn from within even though ‘the parish of percepts [is] … out in the open’ (Peirce, CP 8. 144) of the experiential world. While Davies’ (1995) starting point is attitude (to propositions) aboutness, and Dummett (1991) reverses the order by explaining intentionality in terms of linguistic aboutness, Peirce’s semiotic and retroductive approach makes the debate over the order a moot point.

Affirming the continuity of consciousness, Peirce stressed its temporal character. The cognitive, that is inferential, process of interpretation is a series of thought-signs, and the meaning of each thought becomes understood in each subsequent thought, creating a process of unlimited semiosis. Therefore subdoxastic, that is, pre-conceptual aboutness—which is posited as different in kind from experiential aboutness (Davies, 1995, p. 281)—cannot be asserted with certainty as being separated from consciousness. The dynamics of sign-process presupposes its ties to consciousness thereby fulfilling the condition of genuine intentionality (Searle, 1990). No thought is ever instantaneous because it needs an inferential stretch for its own interpretation. Yet the immediacy of Firstness is always presented in an instant and, as Firstness, it is had by the mind prior to the Thirdness of mediation, making inference seem to border on association and guessing. Peirce, as long ago as 1868, stated that cognition exists only ‘in the relation of my states of mind at different instants. ... In short, the Immediate (and therefore in itself unsusceptible of mediation—the Unanalyzeable, the Inexplicable, the Unintellectual) runs in a continuous stream through our lives; it is the sum total of consciousness, whose mediation, which is the continuity of it, is brought about by a real effective force behind consciousness’ (Peirce, 1955, pp. 236–237), the apparent physicality of this force enabling the recursive process of representation upon presentation.

Signs reiterate; they become signs of signs, or representations. As Peirce stated, ‘the mode of being of a representamen [that is, a sign-vehicle, psychical or physical, which is semiotically connected with the ground, the object and the interpretant] is such that it is capable of repetition’ (CP 5. 138, brackets mine) leading to the creation of definite patterns. But because every meaning may become a precursor to a new interpretant, the repetition is never the repetition of the same. Peirce distinguished between the immediate and the real object, and one’s intuition never proceeds from scratch but is based on some previous, and as though given interpretation, which is that what constitutes the immediate object of the sign. The immediate object may or may not represent the real one, however the latter does not have to be unknowable: ‘over against all cognition, there is an unknown but knowable reality’ (Peirce, CP 5. 257), which needs a series of interpretants to ultimately manifest in the understanding. The chain of interpretants constitutes a semiotic or communicative—dialogical—process where communication is taken broadly and not limited to linguistic signs or speech acts.

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For Peirce, the concepts literally take part in the reality of what is conceived, implying holism and a sense of auto-referentiality between the inner and outer realities. Every sign is subject to interpretation by the series of subsequent thought-signs, and the whole triad enveloping ‘the relation-of-the-sign-to-its-object becomes the object of the new sign’ (Sheriff, 1994, p. 37). As a result of multiple inter-relations, signs move from one to another, they grow and engender other signs because the triadic logic leads to signs always already becoming something else and something more, contributing—in the process of their growth—to learning and self-integration.

Because ‘consistency belongs to every sign, ... the man-sign acquires information and comes to mean more that he did before’ (Peirce, 1955, p. 249). The value of knowledge is in its practical import, that is, the way we, humans, will act, think, and feel—in short, assign meaning to our own experience—as the pragmatic effect of the said knowledge. The meaning and essence of every conception depends, in a pragmatic sense, on the way the latter is being used: it ‘lies in the application that is to be made of it’ (Peirce, CP 5. 532): pragmatic maxim presupposes the discovery of meanings. Everything is a sign: the whole universe, for Peirce, is perfused with signs; yet ‘nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign’ (Peirce, CP 2. 308) by means of triadic relations leading to each successive sign becoming an interpretant for the preceding one. What seems to be a paradoxical statement is derived from the nature of the pragmatic method itself. Abduction does seem to function instantaneously not because there is no temporal interval of inference, but because the mind is unaware of when it begins or ends. Yes, it is amenable to a clear insight, therefore becoming conscious. Any talk ‘of unconscious mental phenomena that are in principle inaccessible to consciousness is incoherent’ (Searle, 1884, p. 550). The abductive suggestion ‘comes to us as a flash. It is an act of insight’ (Peirce, CP 5. 181) which is fallible but still has a mysterious power ‘of guessing right’ (Peirce, CP 6. 530) even while being pre-conscious and not rationally controllable.

At the psychological level, this unconscious inference functioning abductively is intuition, which blends into an intellectual knowledge, the nous of the ancients. Intuition for Peirce does mean cognition, which is determined by the object outside one’s personal cogito. Intuition presents the content, which is about something, although this something constitutes knowledge that at the level of Firstness is as yet tacit and implicit. Peirce considered consciousness to be not a thought but just a fleeting feeling that simply presents itself and is not by itself capable of representation but needs thought as Thirdness, which ‘is ... a synonym for representation’ (Peirce, CP 5. 105). In the absence of Thirdness, though, it is indeed the ‘first, present, immediate, fresh, new, initiative, original, spontaneous, free ... Only, remember that every description of it must be false to it’ (Peirce, CP 1. 357). Describing the structure of perceptual abduction, Peirce noticed that ‘the first premise is not actually thought, though it is in the mind habitually. This, of itself would not make the inference unconscious. But it is so because it is not recognized as an inference; the conclusion is accepted without our knowing how’ (Peirce, CP 8. 64–65).
Habits of the Mind

Peirce defined habit as a disposition to act in a certain manner under specific circumstances. Sign-function is what determines the meaning of the sign based on the habits that it generates, sustains, or modifies. The mind itself is part of nature by virtue of the Thirdness of the evolutionary process: the continuity, or what Peirce called synechism, is irreducible to materialism or idealism alike. The presence of what Peirce called a quasi-interpreter is necessary for the semiotic communication between the mind and the nature, for there exists a quasi-utterer in nature like the one that, for example, utters the signs of the weather. The mind-body relation is thoroughly semiotic: because matter (Second) is effete mind (First), mind (First) has to be entrenched in habits (Thirds) so as to congeal, as Peirce says, into matter (Second)\(^3\). Noth presents a synopsis of a triadic sign tracing its definitions and different terminology from Plato, to Stoics, to Peirce, to Ogden and Richards (Noth, 1995, pp. 90–91), and notices that in order to construct a semiotic triangle (Figure 2) connecting, in the most general terms, sign-vehicle, sense, and referent, the path of mediation, represented by a dotted line between a sign-vehicle and a referent, must be present. The order of the relata varies: from the viewpoint of sign-production, the semiosis proceeds from sense-to sign vehicle-to object. From the perspective of the interpreter, the order is the following: sign vehicle-sense-referent, that is, sense is a mediator for the referent. For Peirce, a sign vehicle is a representamen that can be described as ‘an Object perceptible, or only imaginable, or even unimaginable’ (Peirce, CP 2. 230).

If there is no connection, as mediation, there is no meaning as any mental representation is meaningful or significant only if there is an interpretant as an effect produced by the said representation; and such an interpretant effectively performs a mediating role for the subject in terms of the referent. Importantly, the role of interpretant is efficacious only if the content of representation ‘can make a difference to either the internal states or [external] behavior ... in ways that depend on the content or referent’ (Von Eckardt, 1996, p. 281) of representation\(^4\). The obvious problem of the infinite regress in the supposedly endless chain of interpretants can be avoided precisely because of the possibility of further habit-change that Peirce expresses in terms of ‘modification of a person’s tendencies toward action’ (Peirce, CP 5. 476). The habit alone (Peirce, CP 5.491), as a logical interpretant, is capable of abruptly interrupting the semiotic regress, effecting its own transformation. The final interpretant of a certain mental representation would be a physical change at the metalevel of action, which thereby halts the regress\(^5\).

The triadic model of inference enables one becoming consciously aware of the yet unconscious habits even if the first stimulus is barely liminal: semiosis is what makes the unconscious conscious. The continuity of inference, even if only in a probabilistic sense, defies the idea of some unknowable thing-in-itself, the latter being only hypothetical like any other First and is to be ultimately known as a sign, or Thirdness of Firstness, after being ‘present to me’ (Peirce, CP 5. 289). Percepts enter into the triadic relationship with concepts via mediation, and in the presence of affective Firstness.

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The Thirdness of cognition governs Secondness causing the formation of beliefs and concepts: it determines the objects of knowledge as seconds because Thirdness, in its capacity of performing mediating function, creates or ‘brings information … [it] determines the idea and gives it body’ (Peirce, CP 1. 537). For a cognitive structure to be proper (that is, so as to fulfil Millikan’s proper function) it must be self-referential: a semiotic triangle (Figure 2) has to close on itself. The evolutionary process (Thirdness, or mediation) is however characterized not by a reduction to the biological principle of natural selection (cf. Millikan, 1984, 1986) but by a general law ultimately defined as the generalizing ‘tendency of all things to take habits’ (Peirce, CP 6. 101) in ‘a continuous flow’ (CP 1. 412) of semiosis. This tendency is ‘self-generative’ (Peirce, CP 1. 409), and a genuine sign is ultimately self-referential indeed. A sign as interpretant is what makes a percept a concept because it at once represents the paradoxical ‘future memory’ (Peirce, CP 7. 591) of one’s cognition.

According to Peirce’s speculative grammar, the triadic relation is what establishes speculum, that is, an eventual correspondence between the signs and their objects, the latter also signs if and when interpreted. The self-referential closure establishes identity, but with a difference, such as the difference existing, as posited by Peirce, between a sign’s immediate object and the real one. It not only can create ‘in the mind of a person an equivalent sign [but] … a more developed sign’ (Peirce, CP 2. 228) because of a new meaning or a newly created conceptual content: signs grow and become other signs. The dyadic relation alone would not lead to the creation of meanings: a sign, ‘in order to fulfil its office, to actualize its potency, must be compelled by its object’ (Peirce, CP 5. 554) therefore it strives to abductively leap from the unconscious into being integrated into consciousness. Peirce asserted such an inward action as capable of potentially influencing the formation of habits (CP 6. 286). The unconscious ideas constitute what Peirce called a psychological ground for habits: Peirce’s ‘general idea … is already determinative of acts in the future to an extent to which it is not now conscious’ (CP 6. 156). He used the terms ampliative and explicative to differentiate between the modes of reasoning that aim not only at plainly increasing the background knowledge but, by contrast, at making hidden or implicit knowledge explicit, at making manifest what is latent.
and unconscious, that is, its subdoxastic and pre-conceptual, that is, pre-symbolic, content. Peirce recognized the mixed nature of mental signs, only part of them being symbolic. While at the level of Secondness all physical forces act and react, so that each material particle may be an index of the other one, the level of the mind demands a triadic, symbolic, relation, and the symbol-parts of mental signs are concepts. The meanings created by semiotic process are first and foremost ‘virtual … [because located] not in what is actually thought but in what this thought may be connected with in representation’ (Peirce, CP 5: 289) through mediation; they are capable nevertheless of producing real effects in terms of consequences or practical bearings. The new concepts are never completely determined: they are born from the qualitative Firsts of intuition and insight and always contain such a subtle ‘feeling’ of Firstness in themselves. The practical bearings, as Peirce called them, of some possible precognitive reasoning, are not to be ignored. They, fair enough, constitute ‘sensations so faint’ (Peirce & Jastrow, 1884, quoted in Hacking, 1990, p. 205) so as to bypass the level of common awareness. Peirce emphasized the feeling-tone of abduction saying that every abductive inference involves a particular emotion: ‘the various sounds made by the instruments in the orchestra strike upon the ear, and the result is a peculiar musical emotion … This emotion is essentially the same thing as a hypothetic inference’ (Peirce, CP 2. 643). It is quite difficult to account for rational conclusions based on such vague sensations, emotions, faint first impressions, or subtle affects. In a characteristic language, Peirce and Jastrow commented that the ‘insight of females as well as certain ‘telepathic’ phenomena may be explained in this way. Such faint sensations ought to be fully studied by the psychologist and assiduously cultivated by every man’ (in Hacking, 1999, p. 206). Any object of experience contains potentialities as virtual meanings, which are not yet actualised or explicit. Due to the infinite stream of interpretants, a quantity of possible meanings is never fully exhaustive. Furthermore, it is not required for the interpretant to actually exist: for Peirce, it being in futuro is sufficient. Signs grow and become other signs, contributing via their interpretants to learning and the evolution of human consciousness: a thought that has passed from doubt to belief is a sign of signs, or representation.

Back to Meno: Resolving the Paradox of Inquiry

Let us recall Plato’s Meno dialogue and the famous ens primum cognitum later formulated by Aquinas, or the problem of being as first known. Meno is puzzled by what Socrates means when he provocatively says that we do not learn, and that what is called learning is pretty much a process of recollection. Plato states the famous paradox in the following way:

Meno. And how will you inquire, Socrates, into that which you know not? What will you put forth as the subject of inquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is what you did not know?

Socrates. I know, Meno, what you mean; but just see what a tiresome dispute you are introducing. You argue that a man can not inquire either about
that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for he knows, and therefore has no need to inquire about that—nor about that which he does not know; for he does not know that about which he is to inquire.9

Are we facing an absurdity because either one knows a priori what is it that s/he is looking for, or one does not know what s/he is looking for and therefore cannot have prior expectations of finding anything? According to Plato, the theory of recollection demands that we always already possess all the knowledge unconsciously and simply recognize the given truths. Recognize? Not so, even if the slave boy in the Meno dialogue indeed has some kind of 'tacit precognition' (Magnani, 2001, p. 13). If any new knowledge is incompatible with prior learning—the latter is fact being a precondition for the understanding of what is new—then there is no foundation on which to build such a new knowledge. An encounter with the experiential world breaks in. According to Peirce, the new knowledge is acquired because of the logic of discovery exemplified in the Firstness of abduction. One has it in a form of subtle feeling prior to the full (re)cognition, which enables one to form opinions. Therefore it is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for forming beliefs.

If there were no abductive inference—at the level of subdoxastic states—no new knowledge would ever come into being because there would not be any pre-conceptual Firstness, therefore no Thirdness either: the category of Thirdness by definition must include Firstness in itself. And because Thirdness does govern Secondness by bringing information, it sure enough determines an idea and 'gives it body' (Peirce, CP 1. 537), that is, it embodies immaterial ideas in the physical world therefore contributing to the objects of knowledge, as seconds, appearing to consciousness. Otherwise no concepts, beliefs, or the full-bodied doxa would be formed. To Peirce, all the regularities in both the nature and the mind are regarded as products of growth (CP 6. 268) or learning from experience, so that the mind expands because of the new meanings being communicated. Peirce considered consciousness a vague term and noted that 'if it is to mean Thought it is more without us than within. It is we that are in it, rather than it in any of us' (CP 8. 256). The Thirdness is ultimately a mode of being of intelligence or reason. In this respect a semiotic triangle also closes the Platonic gap between the sensible and the intelligible; the Latin informare literally means giving material form. Because the growth of reason consists ‘in embodiment, that is, in manifestation’ (Peirce, CP 1. 615), in this informative or semiotic process the sensible world becomes intelligible while in the meantime affording sensibility to the intelligible world.

Albeit being a necessary condition for the production of meanings and yielding new information, abduction by itself is insufficient and cannot be the sole means to the new knowledge: all three forms of inference are necessary. If abduction were the only ‘cause’ no new knowledge or any conceptual change would occur because a leap of imagination, a First fleeting feeling, or a glimpse of intuition—if such indeed were to take place—would sink back into the dyadic existence. This First will return back to the point of its own departure without becoming a sign of immediate Firstness and without having been able of becoming conscious via mediation as the
Thirdness of Firstness. It wouldn’t make any difference to the representational content because nothing would have been ‘presented’ in the first place.

Firstness, by definition, does not refer to anything else. We remember Peirce having said that abduction bypasses our awareness and the mind remains unaware of when and where abduction begins and ends. Something ‘fresh and new’ (Peirce, CP 1. 357) has to be perceived—not only seen, heard, or touched, as seconds, but also felt or intuited, as firsts—in order to make a difference so as to create its integration into reflective thinking. The latter is possible only at the level of Secondness. But without Firstness, Secondness is impossible, as both are cardinals—and this Peircean finesse is being generally ignored. So is Thirdness that by virtue of itself governing Secondness does create ‘synthetic consciousness … sense of learning’ (Peirce, CP 1. 377) and the necessary mediation of immediacy. Therefore it completes the triadic structure, which properly provides the signs with their meanings. And the triangle has to close on itself, because a complete act of integrative thought demands the elaboration of the initial guess to its logical conclusions with respect to the original surprising fact, such a fact as an instance of real, even if barely perceived, subdoxastic and non-conscious, experience—in the format of the first ‘immediate element of experience, generalized to its utmost’ (Peirce, CP 7. 365)—having initiated this guess in the first place.

Notes

1. It is my contention that the educational philosophy should benefit from exploring the problems, which are usually considered to be the prerogative of the philosophy of mind, namely: the relation between the mind and world and the questions of intentionality, meaning, and representation. The present paper is an expanded and developed version of an original thesis, which has been presented at the Towards a Science of Consciousness 2004 Conference, The University of Arizona, Tucson, April 2004, in a format of a poster titled ‘Subdoxastic aboutness and proper structures’. See: https://bandura.sbs.arizona.edu/login/consciousness/report_web_detail.aspx?abs=488

2. Peirce sometimes used abduction as interchangeable with retroduction. In this paper the adjective ‘retroductive’ is used deliberately for the purpose to emphasize the backward movement necessary for the intuitive learning from within albeit performing an abductive leap forward to the unknown, completing in a way a causal circuit, rather than moving along a straight cause-effect line. In The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God, written in 1908, Peirce presents musement as an element of the abductive-like process.

3. Although this paper agrees with Searle’s approach to the logic of the unconscious and his ‘Connection Principle’ (Searle, 1994, pp. 544–550), Searle’s ontology of the unconscious as well as his solution to the mind-body problem based on biological naturalism are different from the position adopted in this paper and based on Peirce’s refusal to ‘conceive of the psychical and the physical aspect of matter as two aspects absolutely distinct’ (Peirce, CP 6. 268). Peircean holism implies the coordination between the two different aspects of one total process (see Rescher, 1996). Matter is mind, whose habits became so fixed and rigid that there is no way for the ‘mind’ in question either to take a new habit or break an old one. Habit taking as evolutionary process (the cardinal Thirdness) exists only providing it includes Firstness in itself (in a form of chance, feeling, creativity, novelty, or freedom) as a condition of its own dynamics.

4. See Fetzer (1991) who proposed a semiotic theory of mind as early as 1988. Fetzer asserts that ‘the most striking feature of Peirce’s theory of signs is that it suggests a
corresponding theory of mind, according to which minds are sign-using (or ‘semiotic’) systems’ (1991, p. 65).

5. See Chapter 8 in Von Eckardt (1996) for the detailed analysis of Peirce’s views with regard to contemporary cognitive science and the significance problem.

6. Peirce’s trichotomy of signs includes an icon, an index, and a symbol.


References


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