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*Murray G. Murphey (1967)*

## PEIRCE, CHARLES SANDERS [ADDENDUM]

Charles Sanders Peirce, one of America's most original philosophers, produced a body of work remarkable for its scope and enduring relevance. For many years Peirce's principal contributions to mainstream philosophy were in logic and philosophy of science, but changes in the philosophic terrain since 1967 have brought new areas of his thought to prominence. The resurgence of interest in pragmatism, due in large measure to its promotion by Richard Rorty, and the adoption of Peirce by the Frankfurt School as the philosopher who may hold the key to the problem of modernity, have brought attention to Peirce's unique brand of pragmatism and to his philosophy of signs. Outside of philosophy, the active interdisciplinary field of semiotics that began in Chicago with Charles Morris acknowledges Peirce as the founder of modern sign theory.

Peirce was a late child of the enlightenment, a staunch believer in the universal applicability of mathematics and in the continuous growth of knowledge through sustained inquiry. He was a diligent student of the history of science and understood that the advancement of knowledge is crucially linked to nondeductive

(inductive and abductive) reasoning and shared experimental methods. He was convinced that a prerequisite for successful experimentation is an external world resistant to actions arising from misconceptions of it. These views led Peirce to an anti-Cartesian epistemology rooted in perceptual experience and committed to fallibilism and the repudiation of deductive foundationalism. Peirce generalized his view of the advancement of science to all forms of learning from experience, and he concluded that all meaningful conceptions are necessarily related to experiential expectations (conceived consequences). This is the epistemological motivation for his meaning-focused pragmatism (pragmaticism).

Sometimes Peirce is said to have equated truth with settled belief, but that applies only when belief is settled as the result of a steadfast application of scientific method. Other methods for overcoming doubt and settling belief, such as the a priori method or the methods of tenacity and authority, while not without some advantages, do not provide grounds for confidence that truth will be reached. Even the sustained application of scientific method can never issue in a guarantee that inquiry has "stormed the citadel of truth." Truth is always relative to propositions and is, therefore, grounded in the conventionality of symbolism (for propositions can only be expressed symbolically). The true represents the real precisely insofar as inquiry forces beliefs to yield to the dictates of an independent reality, but the "correspondence" of truth and reality that is hoped for at the end of inquiry is at best an ideal limit; we can never be certain that we have reached the truth. This is Peirce's fallibilism. It is typical of Peirce's philosophy that truth and reality are correlates in a triadic relation, where the mediating relate involves a community of inquirers (interpreters).

Peirce believed that the key to intelligence of any kind is sign action (which is always goal directed), and he formulated an elaborate semiotic theory to facilitate the analysis and classification of signs. Peirce's division of signs into icons, indexes, and symbols is his best-known semiotic bequest—although his distinction between tones, tokens, and types is also widely used—but these are only two of many triads that permeate his philosophy. Peirce held that minds are sign systems and thoughts are sign actions, and it is not too far-fetched to say that the mission of his semiotic is similar to that of modern-day cognitive science. Peirce's epistemological shift from a focus on ideas to signs marks him as a forerunner, if not a founder, of philosophy's so-called linguistic turn and, also, of the modern—and postmodern—emphasis on textualism. Peirce's triadic theory of signs distinguishes

semiotics from semiology, a generally dyadic theory of signs stemming from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. Recently there have been attempts to reconcile these two approaches.

Current interest in Peirce's thought extends over most of philosophy. Peirce's graphical logic (his existential graphs) is used as a basis for computational linguistics. The recent move away from logicism has led to renewed interest in Peirce's philosophy of logic, according to which logic is not the epistemic foundation for mathematics. The rehabilitation of systematic and speculative thought has attracted attention to Peirce's evolutionary cosmology, which holds that the principal constituents of the universe are chance, law, and habit formation. Peirce insisted that change is really operative in nature (his tychism), that continuity, in general, prevails (his synechism), and that love or sympathy has a real influence on the course of events (his agapism). He contributed America's most original and thoroughgoing phenomenology (his phaneroscopy), and he advanced unique views on religion and on the significance of sentiment and instinct. He stressed the importance of the existent and the individual while, at the same time, admiring the ideal and insisting that rationality is rooted in the social. Peirce's intellectual legacy is a rich system of thought that helps organize and unify a broad array of issues in modern philosophy.

**See also** Chance; Classical Foundationalism; Cognitive Science; Enlightenment; Logic, History of; Philosophy of Science, History of; Pragmatism; Rorty, Richard; Truth.

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**Nathan Houser (1996)**

## PELAGIUS AND PELAGIANISM

Pelagius was a spiritual adviser to Christian aristocrats in Rome around the turn of the fifth century CE. In a commentary on the Pauline epistles, a treatise *On Nature*, and other writings, he sought to bolster Christian asceticism by opposing Manichaean determinism and affirming human capacity to progress toward moral perfection. His moral character and theological insights attracted followers who defended and developed his teachings.