

## Peirce and the Founding of American Sociology

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**ABSTRACT** This paper argues that Charles Sanders Peirce contributed significantly to the founding of American sociology, doing so at the level of philosophical presuppositions or meta-sociology. I emphasize two of his ideas. One is semiotics, which is virtually the same as the anthropologists' concept of culture. This latter concept in turn was essential to clarifying the sociologists' idea of the social or society. Peirce also created the modern theory of the dialogical self, which explained the symbolic character of human beings and proved foundational for social psychology. Politically Peirce was a right-wing conservative, but his ideas eventually contributed to the egalitarian views of cultures and sub-cultures. In addition his ideas contributed, by way of unanticipated consequences, to the 20th-century human rights revolutions in the American legal system. Thus he was both a founder of sociology and a founder of American political liberalism.

**KEYWORDS** early American sociology, inner speech, Peirce, semiotics

### Introduction

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) originated several ideas that contributed to social theory, particularly to its philosophical underpinnings. Some of these are in unfamiliar contexts and in need of a slight re-framing or re-conceptualization. They also need to be related to each other. But, assuming these finishing touches, Peirce had a cluster of powerful insights that trade heavily on the notions of the symbolic, the semiotic, the dialogical, the cultural and the self – ideas central to social theory.

The bulk of this paper will be a presentation and reorganization of these ideas. The parallels and affinities with the concepts that actually took root in the social sciences are quite strong. Peirce himself was so unconventional, isolated and irascible that he had few direct connections to the founding fathers of the

American social sciences, or, for that matter, to anyone else. What connections he had to sociologists were indirect, largely through William James, James Mark Baldwin, Josiah Royce and the later John Dewey. Still, his ideas are so powerful and so similar to the ones sociology adopted that he probably did have a significant influence on the social sciences.

## Early Sociology

To look for Peirce's possible influence on early sociology, it will be helpful to review the history of that field, particularly the period of self-definition. In an earlier paper (Wiley, 1979a) I described the self-defining or identity-seeking period of American sociology as having occurred from about 1892 to 1918. Before this there had been several decades of sociological stirring; a kind of gestation period. But it was in 1892 that Albion Small founded the first sociology department in the United States at the University of Chicago, marking the formal inauguration of the discipline. And in about 1918 the first dominant theory or paradigm was formed. This was the 'Chicago School', again at the University of Chicago.

Against this background I distinguished five stages: (1) that of identity-formation, from 1892 to 1918; (2) the first dominating theory, the Chicago School, from about 1918 to 1936; (3) the first interregnum, from about 1936 to 1950; (4) the second dominating theory, Parsons-Merton, Harvard-Columbia functionalism, from about 1950 to 1970; and (5) the second open period or interregnum, from about 1970 to the present.

The identity-seeking period was an attempt to define, create and control the intellectual space of the discipline. I summarized this complex process through four trends, which I called the cutting of the umbilical cords. One was the distancing from dog-eat-dog evolutionism by tempering it with a reformist, cultural evolution. A second was the attenuation of German idealism's influence by merging it with American pragmatism. Another was the separation from university economics departments and from narrowly economic ideas. And a fourth was a retreat from ethical commitment, religious sponsorship, social movements and political pressure groups into a centrist, more-or-less value-free academic discipline.

Running through these four trends and the clarification of sociology's paradigm space were the founding concepts, those of the social and the cultural, or 'society' and 'culture'. Here is where Peirce's influence can be found – at the meta-theoretical or pre-suppositional core of the field.

Sometimes when a new academic field is being created there must first be the discovery of a new kind of reality, almost like the finding of a new chemical element. This reality is what the field will investigate, and the definition of this new reality will be the field's paradigm space. This new reality is the practitioners' justification for claiming they have a new field, suitable for inclusion in the

educational system, worthy of credibility and deserving of public support. Later, the first effective attempt to explain how things work inside the paradigm space may become the first dominant theory or paradigm, the paradigm differing from the space much as real definition differs from nominal.

There may also be disputes over the nature and definition of the new reality. In the case of sociology, its practitioners claimed to have identified socio-cultural phenomena as a new entity. But it was not entirely clear what the social and cultural were, and this uncertainty lent itself to conceptual disputes. Peirce's contribution, indirect but important, concerned the presuppositional or meta-theoretical assumptions that resolved the disputes. In particular his work concerned the emergent, that is, the extra-biological, character of culture and therefore of the social.

In their formative years both American sociology and American anthropology were split over the biology vs culture issue. One side favored biological explanations of society and culture, emphasizing instincts and genes and looking for natural selection. The other claimed that the symbol and culture were emergent from the biological, that they existed at their own ontological level, and that they required a corresponding method.

Both disputes went on for many years and were quite complicated (Stocking, 1968). My purpose here, however, is merely to get to the point where I can introduce Peirce, so I will give only a sketchy picture of the two fights. The dispute was clearest in anthropology, where the biological faction was primarily employed in museums, and the cultural faction in universities. Intellectually the fight was over culture and whether cultural formations could be explained as biologically driven or had to be explained by extra-biological, symbolic concepts. Materially, however, the fight was over control of the American Anthropological Association and its influence over the educational institutions of anthropology. More specifically, the fight was over votes in the Association – and over the numbers of voters in the two factions as these numbers changed from year to year. In a sense Franz Boas resolved the fight in both respects. His concept of culture came to reign as the accepted definition of the paradigm space, which settled the intellectual fight. And his ability at Columbia University to produce high-quality Ph.D.s gradually tipped the voting balance toward the culturological faction, thus settling the material fight. But still there were about 10 active and 30 preparatory years to the fight.

There was a similar, if less clearly articulated, dispute in sociology during its formative years, and it is this one that may have been the more influenced by Peirce. The University of Chicago was the American center of sociology from the beginning, even before Chicago launched the first successful paradigm. The other center of influence was the department at Columbia University, which had gotten a slightly later start but had established its own distinctive style and sphere of influence.

The Columbia department, called a 'social science' department until 1941, was established in 1904 and its founder was F.H. Giddings. Whereas the Chicago department was kindred to pragmatism and the closely related German historicism, Columbia was closer to positivism and British empiricism. Much as Chicago centered its methods on cultural interpretation and the case study, Columbia centered its style on the causal model of physical science and the statistical study. In addition the Columbia approach was more sympathetic to biogenic explanations of human behavior, which Giddings managed to combine with the statistical method.

I should add that after 1927, when Giddings retired, the Columbia department, now under Robert McIver, reduced its emphasis on statistics, became even more qualitative than Chicago, and also dropped the sympathy for biogenic explanations. And after 1950, under Merton, it became a bastion of another qualitative theory, that of functionalism. So the Columbia I am talking about came to an abrupt end in 1927. Subsequent incarnations of that department became much more culture-oriented in theory, liberal in politics and diversified in method.

The possible impact of Peirce, then, came in the formative period of sociology, from about 1892 to 1918, during which there was a Chicago-Columbia rivalry. The two departments presented well-defined alternatives for pursuing sociology, and they were competing to establish the first paradigm in the field. After the First World War the Chicago department emerged with a strong faculty, a well-articulated theoretical orientation, a solid financial base, the major journal in the field, control of the American Sociological Society and a steady stream of talented graduate students. Their paradigm is what I would loosely call symbolic interaction or interpretive sociology. It differed from the Giddings approach in its semiotic concept of culture and its corresponding concept of the social.

The Chicago School had several theoretical thinkers, among whom were W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, Robert Park, Ernest W. Burgess and Ellsworth Faris. Their umbrella idea was that of the sign or symbol, itself the unit of the social and the cultural. And behind this semiotic idea stood the pragmatists, especially Peirce.

## **Back to Peirce**

I have now described the historical situation and niche that had a distinct elective affinity for Peirce's epistemological ideas, and I now return to the Peirce narrative. His actual philosophy is complicated, technical and subject to considerable dispute. In the words of one commentator, 'Every interpretation of Peirce must be to some degree controversial' (Goudge, 1950: vii). Peirce's writings, much of which are unpublished, seem to some to have a fair amount of contradictions or seeming contradictions in them. His lack of students or disciples deprived him

of the reality checks that associates can provide, and this probably contributed to the untidy organization of his thoughts. As Paul Weiss said of him.

It is somewhat of a misfortune . . . for a great philosopher to win no disciples during his lifetime. With no one to expand and apply his main doctrines sympathetically and conscientiously he is likely to lose a grasp of the full meaning of his own views. . . . The living philosopher needs disciples to give him ballast and balance.

(1940: 253)

Still, Peirce was probably the most gifted and accomplished of American philosophers. And I think the meta-sociology I draw from his writings will show his importance for the development of sociology and anthropology.

I will discuss two major themes in Peirce: semiotics vs intuition and the dialogical self, although several other ideas will appear as sub-themes. These ideas overlap and have implications for each other. Nevertheless, they are distinct arguments about meaning. But first I will make several preliminary points. These will concern Peirce's personality and unusual life situation, the position of Peirce in sociology today, and the intellectual style I will follow in this paper.

Peirce came from a distinguished Cambridge, Massachusetts family, and he thought quite highly of himself, both as a social aristocrat and as an intellectual genius (Brent, 1998; Corrington, 1993). His father, Benjamin Peirce, was a renowned Harvard mathematician and he constantly nudged his son toward intellectual greatness. Benjamin was also a political conservative, notably pro-slavery in a time and place that favored abolitionism. His son's politics seem to have been somewhat mixed or maybe confused, but they were still predominantly conservative like his father's. Perhaps Peirce's greatest intellectual gift was creativity, Weiss calling him 'the most original and versatile of America's philosophers' (1937: 403). His best ideas are strikingly new, and not a mere modification of someone else's. But his worst scholarly trait was disorder and disunity, particularly a lack of balance and coherence among his ideas.

Peirce was like Max Weber in the way in which he would get over-enthusiastic about an insight and stretch it quite far. Weber would, for example, emphasize 'class' almost as much as Marx did. But then he would show how 'status' limits the force of class in crucial ways, such that class now seemed severely diminished. Then power and politics would entrance him and he would argue that this factor overshadowed both class and status. In the end he would have a scheme that could prove almost anything, and one would have to find the real Weber inside the bloated one.

Since the 1940s Peirce commentators have been debating the problem of his seemingly uncontrolled diversity. To find some unity, one has to follow options such as ignoring some of his claims and working with those that fit best together, stacking his diverse ideas into stages of development, or simply accepting the

divergency at face value and referring to it as 'sides', alternate systems or flat-out contradictions. This is why Goudge said all interpretations of Peirce are controversial.

Like Weber then, Peirce goes in too many directions at once, including some that are almost diametrically opposed. Still, this seems, by and large, a good thing for Peirce and Weber both. We get a lot of sparkle, illumination and excitement, far more than we would from a more controlled intellect. But one also has to do some judicious interpreting with both of these geniuses.

Despite my argument that Peirce may have had a crucial influence during sociology's formative years, he was not explicitly and openly used until well into the 20th century. Perhaps the first extended treatment of him was in C. Wright Mills's Ph.D. dissertation on pragmatism (Mills, 1942, 1964). A more recent show of interest has again come from sociologists who, like Mills, are investigating pragmatism, including its social psychological implications. These sociologists include Archer (2003), Durig (1994), Halton (1994; Rochberg-Halton, 1986), Levine (1995), Lewis and Smith (1980), Perinbanayagam (1991, 2000), Shalin (1986), Sobrinho (2001) and Wiley (1994).

There is also a Peircean group in anthropology, including Daniel (1984), Lee and Urban (1989), Mertz and Parmentier (1985), Parmentier (1994, 1997) and Singer (1984, 1991). In addition there are a growing number of scholars in neighboring disciplines, such as literary criticism, linguistics, law, philosophy, history and semiotics, who are looking at social themes in Peirce. The sociological interest in Peirce, then, is part of a widespread adoption of his ideas. Peirce has two postmodern overtones which may help explain the contemporary interest. His logic is strongly anti-foundational, and his epistemology is thoroughly social.

My method in this essay will have to be doubly interpretive. First, all accounts of Peirce must be highly interpretive if not downright constructive because of the diversity problem I mentioned earlier. But I am also taking some of his ideas and moving them into a different context, namely the philosophy or meta-theory of the social sciences, which requires a second interpretation. This will entail showing how these ideas easily lead to more expressly sociological ideas, which Peirce himself did not hold. They also lead to ideas which are more socially egalitarian than any that Peirce seems to have maintained. This teasing out of implications from Peirce, even if he would not have approved of them, is what I mean by re-framing.

To my knowledge, Peirce has not been looked at as a theorist of the social sciences before, so there is not much by way of precedent to follow. I may have to break some of the traditions of Peircian scholarship to make the sociological argument, and possibly make some debatable interpretations. I will also be primarily reporting rather than endorsing everything that Peirce said. I want to show his relation to the social sciences without necessarily agreeing with every point he made. Still, if this paper can join the issue of whether and how Peirce was

one of the founding fathers of the American social sciences, it will be a worthwhile enterprise.

## Semiotics vs Intuition

The two themes of semiotics and intuition interpenetrate, and it is somewhat arbitrary to begin with semiotics. Yet I think it is the semiotic argument against intuition that pushes Peirce most decisively into the realm of social theory. Therefore I will begin with this point, though much of what I say will be relevant to the other theme as well.

In two of his 1868 papers (1984a [1868], 1984b [1868b]) Peirce had several arguments against Descartes, including whether everything can be doubted at once and whether anything can be doubted at all in a purely methodological manner (for good secondary treatments of these papers, see Davis, 1972; Friedman, 1999; Hanson, 1988; Hoopes, 1989: 190–233; Michaels, 1977; Rochberg-Halton, 1986: 71–94). He also asserted that we discover our selves not directly, in a '*cogito ergo sum*', but indirectly, in the childhood encounter with our ignorance and error.

Peirce's main argument, however, concerned whether humans have what he called an 'intuitive' form of knowledge. He argued instead that all knowledge is indirect, fragmentary and semiotically mediated, which, as I will point out, is the epistemological counterpart of culture. For Peirce, intuition is claimed to be a kind of knowledge, including both physical sensations and concepts, that is self-evident and independent of any earlier knowledge. It is adequate in itself, and it thereby resembles the notion of an axiom or first principle. In Peirce's words:

Throughout this paper the term intuition will be taken as signifying a cognition not determined by a previous cognition of the same object, and therefore so determined by something out of the consciousness. . . . Intuition here will be nearly the same as 'premise not itself a conclusion;' the only difference being that premises and conclusions are judgments, whereas an intuition may, as far as its definition states, be any kind of cognition whatever.

(1984a [1868]: 193)

Peirce's definition of intuition applies both to concepts and to judgments, the latter being relations among concepts. He argued that we never have concepts that allow us to see directly into their objects, disclosing the complete nature or essence of these objects. As opposed to Descartes's direct, clear and distinct ideas, Peirce's concepts are always indirect, incomplete, indistinct and dependent on previous concepts. Peirce also held, against the British empiricists, that sense



impressions are never intuitive either. They are always worked on and 'inferred' in the perception process, even though they seem direct and intuitive.

Descartes was naïvely realistic in the sense that he thought we saw directly into things as they are. Peirce regarded this kind of exaggerated realism as quite widespread in modern philosophy, including even John Locke and British empiricism along with George Berkeley and idealism. As Peirce saw it, Descartes was the progenitor of an epistemological orientation which had spread throughout philosophy (Hoopes, 1991: Introduction).

Peirce, in contrast, cut the epistemological pie in a new way. Instead of the long-standing distinctions among materialism, idealism, monism and the various forms of dualism, he distinguished positions that assert different degrees of directness or indirectness in knowledge – or, as we will see, non-semiotic (dyadic) from semiotic (triadic) positions.

Peirce did not conclusively disprove the validity of Cartesian intuitions, and he admitted this, but he was nevertheless quite persuasive. Perhaps his major argument was that we do not seem to know intuitively whether a particular idea is an intuition, although we may think we do. When people view a particular concept as intuitively adequate, it often turns out that time washes away this confidence and people of a later date no longer regard the concept as such. In addition some people may think a concept is intuitive, but others may not. Moreover, relying on the intuitive certainty that a particular concept is itself intuitive leads to the problem of an infinite regress, for one could continue to ask whether the intuition of the intuition is itself intuitively certain. Peirce also gave several examples from perceptive experience, including the frequent unreliability of eyewitness testimony in courts of law, and other problems with seeing, hearing and touching.

I think the power of Peirce's argument, however, is in its appeal to common sense and everyday experience. In ordinary life, knowledge is fragmentary, indirect, mediated and processual. And the cognitive process frequently takes the form of dialogue, either inside one's own mind or in conversation with others. It almost never seems intuitive and direct, and when it does, it is vulnerable to Peirce's arguments against intuition.

Peirce's counter-argument, that knowledge is always semiotically mediated, not only has a true-to-life quality; in addition, to make a major point of this paper, it helps explain how culture is constructed. For culture is not an intuitive mirror but an interpretation of experience. As a result, cultures differ from each other, depending on the specific details of how the community's dialogical and semiotic processes have proceeded. The semiotics that Peirce provides as a substitution for Cartesian intuition is not usually thought of in connection with the anthropological concept of culture, but the idea of semiotics as Peirce construed it is very close to that concept. In fact Leslie White (1949) argued that the symbol is the basis of culture, and Clifford Geertz (1973: 5) defined culture in terms of semiotics.



In his anti-intuition arguments Peirce did not intend to construct the concept of culture or to explain the underlying epistemology of culture. I am putting words in his mouth. But these words are merely the implications and near implications of words he did say. So I will proceed with my interpretation or re-framing of Peirce to show how he spoke to meta-sociology.

If human cognition were based on intuitions, then all societies would be alike in how they cognize the world, for there would be no principle of variation within the intuitive process. The closest to an explanation of variation would be some notion of stages or degrees of accuracy, with intuition being viewed as a skill. This would be accompanied by the closely related notion of cognitive distortions and errors. On that view people's cognitions would differ as invalid or valid, as well as in degrees of validity. Cognitive variation would be linear on a hierarchical scale going from error to partial intuitive accuracy to complete intuitive accuracy. As a theory for explaining variation among societies and civilizations, the intuitive approach would produce a hierarchy of civilizations, and this hierarchy would probably be based on a stage theory of cognitive variation. In fact this is exactly what was going on in anthropology during its late 19th-century evolutionary period (Harris, 1968: 180–216), itself displaced when the Franz Boas group clarified the modern concept of culture.

What Peirce's epistemology provided was an explanation of how societies can differ from each other without any of them necessarily being better or more valid than the others. The semiotic explanation of cognition leads to the idea that societies can be different but equal, the inegalitarian hierarchical ladder becoming an egalitarian horizontal field. This is because there are an indefinite number of ways of viewing the world, and, given the mediation and indirectness of the semiotic process, it usually makes little sense to say that some are more valuable than others. Or, speaking with cultural relativity, the idea of an absolute and hierarchical value yardstick may not make any sense in explaining cultural variation.

This does not imply complete relativity or the absence of an actual world 'out there'. Peirce's position is constructivistic in the sense that it allows for some selection, construction or interpretation in the semiotic way in which we cognize the world. But it still assumes a real world, along with actual, if vague, standards of truth, beauty and goodness.

The argument for cultural equalitarianism, to continue this line of reasoning, also holds for sub-groups or sub-cultures within a population, such as those based on race, ethnicity and gender. A good example from American history concerns the difference between the way the founding fathers viewed these sub-populations, as implied in the Constitution, and the way they could be viewed after the cultural insights of pragmatism and anthropology. The founding fathers were relying on a blend of mostly British philosophy, referred to by the intellectual historians as 'faculty psychology' (Howe, 1987). This perspective relied on a Lockian version of Cartesian intuitionism and, lacking any non-hierarchical way of

explaining cultural or sub-cultural variation, the founding fathers and the Constitution ranked women below men, Indians below whites, and blacks below everyone else.

However, once Peirce's epistemological discovery of culture, along with Boas's more institutional discovery of culture, had spread throughout the social sciences, and from that base into the public philosophy, Americans had the intellectual resources to re-define cultural variation as non-hierarchical and to treat their minorities with democratic fairness. The fact that this has not yet been anywhere near fully achieved does not deny the role of Peirce and pragmatism in contributing to the philosophical resources for its achievement.

Peirce's theory of the semiotic vs the intuitive character of human cognition, then, provided the epistemological underpinnings for the idea of culture. Variation had to be found within the knowledge process and at the micro level before the macro or structural concept of culture, along with its democratic political implications, could be fully formed.

## Peirce's 'Culture' and that of the Anthropologists

To clarify the sense in which Peirce's semiotic sphere is the same as culture in the anthropologists' sense of the word, it will be helpful to compare Peirce and Franz Boas in some detail. Boas created the concept of culture at the macro or overall societal level, and he did it mainly by refuting racism. Biological racism was the binary opposite of the concept he was groping for. In addition to being a pioneering anthropologist, Boas was a concerned Jew, opposing anti-semitism when he encountered it. And he probably had a vague idea of the culture concept, which would trump anti-semitism, even before he had much by way of evidence or arguments.

Nevertheless, he built a complex set of arguments against racism and the racist version of evolutionary anthropology. These included physical measurements of the bodies of various ethnic groups, studies of the diffusion of cultural traits, studies of primitive languages, and comparisons of intelligence in primitives and moderns. In all these studies Boas showed, with increasing momentum, that racism is incorrect. Primitives do not differ significantly from moderns, and one ethnic group does not differ significantly from another. In particular there are not relations of inferiority and superiority among these groups (Cole, 1999: 261-75; Elliott, 2002; Stocking, 1992). Boas, of course, advocated the alternative hypothesis, which is that of the uniformity of human nature and the symbolically constructed quality of culture. But it took him quite a while to clarify the cultural theory itself or even settle on the word 'culture', his students eventually doing much of this for him.

In contrast, Peirce's binary opposite was intuition and the excessively rational picture it painted of human cultures. Peirce had created the term 'sign', which was a generic or umbrella term for natural and conventional signs viewed

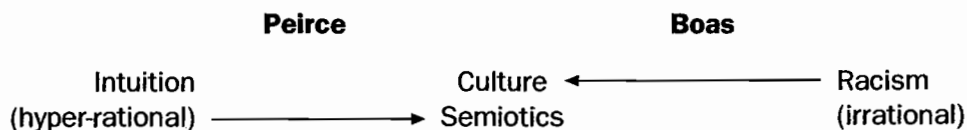
together. No one before had ever looked at all the varieties of signs with a single schema, and the construction of this genus allowed Peirce to see both the dynamics of signs in general and the widespread presence of these sign systems in the human world. Once he realized that signs constitute the bulk of our environment it was easy to see that human concepts are signs, and usually vague ones at that. In particular the idea that concepts and judgments could be clear and distinct and therefore self-evident was in his eyes an obvious fallacy. Semiotics was a substitute for the excessive rationality of the allegedly intuitive world. Semiotics replaced intuition much as Boas's vaguely understood concept of culture replaced racism.

Both Peirce and Boas were opposing what they saw as a fallacious view of human rationality, but these views were at opposite poles. Picture a continuum, with intuitive rationality at one end (the left) and irrational racism at the other (the right). Boas opposed racism, which had placed a biological dynamic where culture should have been. This necessitated that he find a position to the left of racism and toward the middle of the continuum.

At the other pole is the excessively rational view of human knowledge. This pictured it as anchored in clear and distinct, intuitive starting points with similarly persuasive implications and derivations. Not everyone or every society had these intuitive resources, but they were, so went the argument, there to be had. Peirce knew differently, however. He understood how approximate and indirect human knowledge was, and he could see that an epistemology of intuitions was misguided. So he distanced himself from the binary pole that he was refuting and moved to the right of the line, placing him in the same middle ground that Boas had placed himself upon. They were reacting against insufficiently and overly rational positions, each favoring a position which might be called middling rational. These were the cultural and semiotic positions.

Of course, I am not saying they both occupied the exact same middle position. Peirce's semiotic and Boas's culture are different in several ways. But in the broad-brush history of ideas, they constitute a striking convergence. They reacted against the extremes, met in the middle and found a conceptual region that gradually came to define human nature and the modern world. I supply an illustration of this convergence in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. HOW BOAS AND PEIRCE MET IN THE MIDDLE



One of the differences between the Peircean and Boasian positions was in the ideologies of the two thinkers. Boas was clearly a political liberal, drawing his

politics largely from his concern over anti-semitism (Frank, 1997; Glick, 1982). He sensed the political appropriateness of a concept like the one that would eventually be called 'culture', and he slowly proved that this idea was actually true. When Hitler came to power in Germany and instituted a militant racism as German policy, Boas had the intellectual trump card. When his face appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine (May 11, 1936), glaring at Hitler so to speak, and his disproof of racism was the lead article, his eyes seem to be saying 'See, I was right all along!' Boas's politics fit his theory, although the theory is no less true for being politically useful in the eyes of its originator.

Peirce is an opposite story. He did not say much about his politics in the writings that we have, so the picture of his political beliefs and attitudes is a thin one. And like so much about Peirce it is somewhat contradictory, containing both conservative and liberal elements. We have two extremely conservative statements from the years 1908 and 1910, when Peirce was 70 and 72 years old. The first is in a letter to Lady Welby, saying in some detail that he was, among other things, in favor of slavery.

Being a convinced Pragmaticist in Semeiotic, naturally and necessarily nothing can appear to me sillier than rationalism; and folly in politics cannot go further than English liberalism. The people ought to be enslaved; only the slaveholders ought to practice the virtues that alone can maintain their rule. England will find out too late that it has sapped the foundations of culture. The most perfect language that ever was spoken was classical Greek; and it is obvious that no people could have spoken it who were not provided with plenty of intelligent slaves. As to us Americans who had, at first, so much political sense, we always showed a disposition to support what aristocracy we had; and we have constantly experienced, and felt but too keenly, the ruinous effects of universal suffrage and weakly exercised government. Here are the labor-organizations, into whose hands we are delivering the government, clamouring today for the 'right' to persecute and kill people as they please. We are making them a ruling class; and England is going to do the same thing.

(Hardwick, 1977: 78-9)

It is possible that this statement should not be taken at face value. Lady Welby had traveled to the United States with her mother in the 1850s, when she was a teenager. Later she wrote about this experience and spoke extremely favorably of American slavery (Hardwick, 1977: xvii-xviii). So it is possible that Peirce exaggerated to please her. But it is also possible that, knowing her views, he spoke even more truthfully than usual.

The second statement is a comment among his unpublished papers:

If they were to come to know me better they might learn to think me ultra-conservative. I am, for example, an old-fashioned christian, a believer in the efficacy of prayer, an opponent of female suffrage and of universal male suffrage, in favor of letting business-methods develop without the interference of law, a disbeliever in democracy, etc. etc.

(Unpublished manuscript 645, 1910)<sup>1</sup>

Although the earlier statement has a conversational tone, this one has an extreme, in-your-face flavor, and it too may be an exaggeration of Peirce's actual beliefs. But we do not know for sure. As an old man he was infirm, very poor and thoroughly friendless. His politics may have become embittered because of these bitter circumstances. There is not enough from his earlier life to know with certainty. And maybe he had these beliefs at about this level of intensity all his life.

On the liberal side there is an 1893 essay on evolutionary love which has a Christian socialist flavor. Joseph Brent, Peirce's major biographer, characterizes this essay as follows:

'Evolutionary Love' was, as the title suggests, Peirce's adaptation of Christian theology. . . . It begins with a thoroughgoing and millennial condemnation of the Gilded Age, with its massive greed, social Darwinism, and inhuman social values expressed by its nineteenth-century political economy.

(1998: 214)

The two sets of attitudes seem completely opposed, particularly with respect to government control over business and the philosophy of social Darwinism. Peirce's actual politics, then, seem to be ambiguous. I have found nothing in writing that attempts to give a balanced view of them or confronts their contradictory elements. Despite this uncertainty, Peirce's main political orientation seems to have been quite conservative. I gather this from the probable influence of his arch-conservative father, the two late-life utterances, the opinions of the commentators and the possibility that 'Evolutionary Love' (Peirce, 1893) was itself an emotionally driven denunciation. I also submitted the question to Joseph Ransdell's Peirce list on the internet (April 2004) and there was general agreement that Peirce was indeed a political conservative.

What this political discussion adds up to is another way of comparing Peirce and Boas on the concept of culture. In contrast to the largely liberal anthropologists who constructed the concept of culture, Peirce was, if anything, opposed to the tolerant implications of his thought. His epistemology had objectively liberal implications but his own personal views probably did not.

The fact, then, that the highly egalitarian concept of culture was initially discovered in the guise of semiotics by an inegalitarian scholar gives the concept

more validity than if it were espoused only by liberal anthropologists. In a manner of speaking it makes this concept not only good but also true. The fact that the discovery of culture was a convergence of two scholars, one left-wing and the other right-wing, also suggests that it was an idea whose time had come. It was an increasingly common-sense concept, fitting the post-Civil War stirrings over the equality question, and if it had not been founded by those two thinkers, others would have done so.

Another difference between Peirce and Boas was in the logic of their arguments. Peirce probed deeply into the underlying epistemology of culture while Boas's strong point was a simple process of elimination at the macro level. If racism didn't explain cultural variation, then the idea that culture was 'learned, shared and transmitted' would have to do the job. There was no other candidate. In a sense Boas proved culture by showing its consequences, while Peirce explained it by showing its cause. Boas showed that the physical traits of sub-populations could not explain their ways of life or sub-cultures. Only a concept that stressed psychological and social learning could do this.

A closely related difference was that Peirce approached culture from a micro level and Boas from a macro level, making the two approaches complementary. Peirce's micro concept was that of the sign, although nowadays the term 'symbol' is more often used as the generic semiotic concept. Peirce's sign was, as I am arguing, the elementary unit of culture. Leslie White (1949) gave a thorough explanation of how signs (but White said 'symbol') are the building blocks or constituents of culture; and when I asked Clifford Geertz if he had Peirce in mind in saying he had a semiotic approach to culture, he said, 'though I have been acquainted with and appreciative of Peirce's work since my undergraduate days, my reference to "semiotics" was meant to be more general, indicating all sorts of work from Langer, Percy, and Peirce to Saussure, Barthes and Eco' (personal communication, February 2004). The usual micro-macro view is that the macro is emergent from the micro. This would mean Peirce's discovery of culture was at a level below that of Boas, but still in close logical relation.

I have now compared Peirce and Boas on several dimensions: rationality, ideology, egalitarianism, cause vs consequences and micro vs macro. Each thinker came at the concept of culture in his own way, using different binary opposites and distinct explanatory tools. Nevertheless they ended up in pretty much the same place. The concept of culture was the overall paradigm for the social sciences in general, and for anthropology in particular. The concept of society could not be clearly articulated or 'filled in' until the concept of culture was available, so sociology too found this concept indispensable. I am not saying that Peirce influenced Boas, or Boas influenced Peirce, although neither is an impossibility. Boas's intellectual sources were almost exclusively from early German anthropological thinkers (Bunzl, 1996) and Peirce's were from Western philosophy. But Peirce's creation of the idea of semiotics was very close to, if not identical with,

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the concept of culture, and he therefore influenced one of the main ideas that would clarify or fill in the paradigm space of American sociology and anthropology.

Another implication of this Peirce–Boas comparison is that the concept of culture is more powerful if it can be reached in two ways. Not only were the two thinkers rather opposite in their values and politics, in addition the two logical routes to this concept are quite distinct and opposite, giving this case the quality of an independent discovery. Moreover, the method of discovery entailed different premises. I mention this because in recent decades the anthropological concept of culture has been criticized as being elitist, i.e. white, male, colonial, heterosexual, and so on. But this, insofar as it is true, is confusing the use with the abuse. The concept of culture has been the main and certainly the most effective argument against racism and the other forms of discrimination against minorities. In other words it has been used as highly supportive to non-whites, non-males, the colonized and non-heterosexuals. In fact the 20th-century revolution in American legal rights depended heavily on this concept. It may be that these legal resources can now be protected with concepts other than that of culture, but this concept is what spearheaded the breakthroughs. Furthermore, it is now implicit in and part of the conventional wisdom, so that if it is abandoned in a manifest way it is still doing highly liberating work in a latent manner.

## The Dialogical Self

The notion that the self is an internal conversation is now a major way of viewing consciousness and the activity of the self. The overall stream of consciousness is not just inner speech, but this is a central and often controlling feature of the stream. Nor does the internal conversation appear to be characterized solely by verbal language. Imagery and other non-verbal elements are also involved, both as context and as constituents. They can even function as parts of speech. So, while this phenomenon is very much under debate in academia and increasingly subject to research (see Archer, 2003; Collins, 2004; *Culture & Psychology*, 2001; Wiley, 2004), it is nevertheless a major theme in contemporary sociology and social psychology. Peirce is the person who began this discussion, and several of the social sciences owe their insights into the dialogical self to him. There is no good bibliography on inner speech, but the topic now reaches into several disciplines, including, philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, linguistics, education, sports studies, speech communication, literary criticism and film studies.

The idea that in thinking we talk to ourselves began in Western philosophy with Plato (*Theaetetus* 189e–190a and *Sophist* 263e). Subsequently, from Augustine through Ockham and a bit beyond, there was extensive discussion of ‘mental language’, which is inner speech viewed as an abstract, universal language. But the inner speech we all experience, which is in a variant of our own ordinary language, was not looked at much in this period. The concentration on abstract

language, which calls to mind Fodor and Chomsky's contemporary idea of 'mentalese' (Fodor, 1975), had a special theological significance for the medievals. In particular, given that the third person of the trinity was thought to be the inner speech of the first person, this feature of human beings was thought to be a strong trace of God in humanity. Thus the interest in inner speech as we empirically experience it pretty much dropped out in Western thought from Plato to Peirce (Archer, 2003: 65, but see Collins, 1998: 200–8 on Indian Buddhism).

Peirce may have gotten the idea from any number of the sources in which he was reading. In an unpublished document, which gives a good overall picture of his theory of inner speech, he refers to his historical sources:

I say every concept is a mental sign. There is no novelty in this position. The Greeks seem to have been unable to think of a concept otherwise, and some of the greatest medieval and modern thinkers have urged its truth. A little self-observation, outweighing the sum total of authority, even if authority were of one voice in condemning this view, suffices however to show that deliberations that really and sincerely agitate our breasts always assume a dialogical form. The ego of any one moment (at such times) is incessantly appealing to the ego of a subsequent moment, welded into the former one, to yield his assent and give his endorsement to the earlier instant's argumentation. The untutored mind, often, as we all know, close to elemental truths, testifies to this in its phrase 'I says to myself says I.' Not seldom that sort of mind even reasons aloud with itself. I shall assume it then to be granted to the force of these three combined reasons, with others too trite to mention, that a concept is a mental sign.

(Unpublished manuscript 318: 12–13)

This statement touches on several inner speech issues, but I want to single out Peirce's sources. When he mentions Greeks, medievals and moderns he covers the entire history of Western philosophy. And the idea that thought is a sign was common. But in the 'mental language' era from Augustine (Matthews, 2002: Introduction) to late scholasticism, philosophers did not envision thought in conventional signs. Mental language was in an abstract and inexpressible sign system, not in Latin, Greek or the vernaculars. So it was Peirce's innovation to construe the mental signs in ordinary language and pursue this idea.

In addition, previous philosophers had said that when we think, we talk to ourselves (including Plato, and Kant, 1978 [1800]: 85). But the idea of this self-talk being dialogical, with two or more aspects of the self in communication, had almost never been specified. Thought talk could have been, and probably was, construed as monological, as in the Homeric and Shakespearean soliloquies. I think Peirce was skilled at self observation, and the dialogical insight came from listening to, and gradually steering, his own dialogue. Inner speech, as with the parallel case of dreams, was in everyone's ordinary experience. But, again like

dreams, it was vague and difficult to observe – perhaps the opposite of Descartes's 'clear and distinct'. It took a highly original mind to isolate inner speech, observe it and make it into a problematic for philosophy. It was a major insight on how thought works, and it was Peirce's insight.

Peirce began exploring inner speech when, as a teenager, he was captivated by Frederick Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Schiller, 1967 [1795]). This is an intense and breathy volume about self formation. Goudge called it a 'turgid product of German romanticism' (1950: 334). Schiller recognized two basic impulses, the emotional one of the body and the more intellectualized one of the mind. These two drives are unintegrated and can clash unless a person finds a way of synthesizing them. Schiller proposed a third drive, that of aesthetics, which he envisioned as integrating body and mind. In this way you could make peace between your physical and mental impulses by constructing an aesthetic bridge.

The word 'aesthetic' was relatively new when Schiller's book was written, and it had a more diffuse definition than the one today, which centers on beauty and the arts. In particular it had overtones of self-control and mastery over one's impulses, although this idea was loose and unseparated from the core idea of beauty. As Peirce put it

If conduct is to be thoroughly deliberate, the ideal must be a habit of feeling which has grown up under the influence of a course of self-criticisms and or hetero-criticisms; and the theory of the deliberate formation of such habits of feeling is what ought to be meant by *esthetics*.

(1931: 313)

In this text Peirce is saying he uses the term 'esthetics' to mean the formation of habits of self control, not matters of art and beauty. Sometimes he refers to esthetics as the science of ends, ethics being the study of the kind of conduct necessary to reach those ends (Holmes, 1966: 114). And the word 'feeling' does not mean emotion but qualitative immediacy, which is how Peirce usually used this term.

Perhaps one made oneself more of a work of art by self-control, which would help explain Peirce's use of 'esthetics'. There are also overtones of sublimating one's sexual impulses into aesthetic channels. In any case Peirce seems to have treated the *Aesthetic Letters* both as a philosophical monograph and as a self-help manual, giving him a life philosophy during the youthful years (1856–61 when Peirce was 16 to 21). He treated the three drives as pronouns, the mind drive being 'I', the body drive being 'it', and the calming, aesthetic drive being 'thou'. The interplay of the three drives, then, was seen as an interaction among the three pronouns. Peirce only wrote a few pages on the I-it-thou triad, although this included exploring them as the elemental categories of thought and

reality. He also began a book on the 'I, IT and THOU' in spring 1861 (Fisch, 1982: xxix). But we have so little of Peirce's thinking on this issue that it appears something of a jumble, with lots of missing parts.

I think Peirce got a vague notion of the dialogical self during the Schiller years. The pronouns suggest this, for the 'thou' is equivalent to what he would eventually call the 'you'. As Max Fisch pointed out, 'In 1891 Peirce defines *tuism* for the *Century Dictionary* as "The doctrine that all thought is addressed to a second person, or to one's future self as to a second person"' (1982: xxix). As I interpret Peirce, his dialogical self proceeds between the present self, which he calls the 'I', and the near future self, which he calls the 'you', these two being in dialogical conversation. The 'it', which was originally a name for Schiller's body urges, seems to shift in meaning for Peirce to the third person, that is, he, she or it. This means that his early categories construed 'it' as comprising the world of things or external objects. But when he began using the pronouns for the analysis of inner speech, this term started referring to the third person. Later, Boas would make the related observation that 'the three personal pronouns – I, thou and he – occur in all human language. . . . The underlying idea of these pronouns is the clear distinction between the self as speaker, the person or object spoken to and that spoken of' (cited in Singer, 1984: 70).

There is also some scholarship that supports my view of where Peirce's dialogical self got its start. Jeffrey Barnouw (1988, 2005) thinks Peirce interpreted Schiller's aesthetic stage or drive as one in which we form new habits and ideals. We do this by envisioning or modeling the new habits in our mind, interspersed with attempts to engage in the new behavior. Barnouw thinks Peirce interpreted Schiller's aesthetic state as one in which we make new habits *through inner speech*. We imagine and talk about the new habit to ourselves. Then we test the waters to see if we can begin performing the new behavior. How this might go on is sketched in a late-life statement by Peirce:

What most influences men to self-government is intense disgust with one kind of life and warm admiration for another. Careful observation of men will show this; and those who desire to further the practice of self-government ought to shape their teachings accordingly.

Meantime, instead of a silly science of esthetics, that tries to bring our enjoyment of sensuous beauty . . . that which ought to be fostered is meditation, ponderings, day-dreams (under control) concerning ideals – oh, no, no, no! 'Ideals' is far too cold a word. I mean rather passionate admiring aspirations. . . .

(Unpublished manuscript 675: 15–16, *circa* 1911,  
cited in Colapietro, 1989: 111)

What Barnouw thinks Peirce did with the *Aesthetic Letters* was to use 'meditation, ponderings, day-dreams (under control)', that is, inner speech, to

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engage in an 'esthetic' upon himself: in other words, to use inner speech to promote favored habits of behavior (see also Karkama, 1994, for a similar conclusion, although he thinks Schiller himself is advocating this strategy).

There is no absolute certainty where Peirce got the idea of the dialogical self, since he did not explicitly tell us, but there is a high probability he got it from reading Frederick Schiller. He also seems to have gotten it at the same time as, and in conjunction with, his early theory of the ontological categories. These are the I-it-thou triad, which, I am suggesting, may also have been the first terms by which he visualized the workings of inner speech. Later Peirce changed the names, and presumably the meanings, of the categories to firstness, secondness and thirdness. But as I read the *Aesthetic Letters*, this more mature set of Peirce's categories is also suggested by Schiller's language. In particular I find strong traces of 'firstness' (qualitative immediacy) in Schiller's text.

I am arguing then (in agreement with Archer, 2003: 65) that Peirce was the first person to discover and clarify the dialogical self in Western philosophy. There were earlier observations that thought was in signs and there were some that these signs were linguistic. But Peirce was the first to integrate the idea of semiotic thought with a dialogical process and a steering function. In other words he postulated an inner social process, conducted in the form of linguistic communication, by which we negotiate our environment. He tended to overestimate how easy it would be to change habits through this process. And this seems peculiar, since he was at the mercy of his bad habits all his life. But nevertheless it does appear that humans can control their inner dialogue and stream of consciousness more easily than they can their outer habits and behavior. Inner agency is more available to us than outer. And this, as Peirce suggested, makes it a good starting point for controlling the self.

Another implication of the dialogical self is the plasticity of human nature, a trait which Peirce sensed. He said of human instinct that 'its theater is the plastic inner world' (unpublished manuscript 318, 44, 1907, cited in Colapietro, 1989: 114), and he was clearly referring to the plasticity of semiotics or meaning. The power of self-control also suggests a variety of behavioral options within a highly plastic or stretchable set of horizons. This feature of the self brings to mind the equally flexible feature of culture – that the same functions can be performed by a wide range of cultures or sub-cultures, with none being necessarily better or worse.

The plastic self has obvious implications against racism and ethnic discrimination, both of which were certainly widespread during Peirce's years. To confront this, I should first distinguish between the politics of Peirce's ideas and those of Peirce himself, these two being decidedly different. Peirce does not seem to have ever become particularly tolerant on racial and ethnic issues. The fact that he was still speaking in favor of slavery in 1908, even if he might have been posing somewhat, suggests otherwise. And if he meant it, he was being spectacularly intolerant. But one of the main points in this paper is that ideas, once birthed, will

sometimes go their own way, regardless of the intent of their originator. This is the Max Weber story of how Calvinist predestination was transformed into the Protestant Ethic, instituting rules, initially unintended, around the elite. The ideology shifted in what Weber called an 'elective affinity', as the intellectual caretakers steered the boat in new directions.

In a similar way Peirce's ideas went through the hands of the other pragmatists, James, Dewey and perhaps Mead, among others. Through these thinkers they went into the social sciences. And they radiated out from the social sciences into the public institutions, such as the press, schools and universities, books and magazines, religion, law and politics. In other words, pragmatist egalitarianism, itself derived largely from Peirce's cultural semiotics and semiotic self, has now spread throughout American customs and morality. The 20th-century granting of equality to minority groups, previously treated as inferior in American law, drew heavily on the notion of environmentalism. What had been attributed to heredity, that is, ethnic and racial cultures or the lifestyles of women, was now seen as an accident of learning, so to speak. And the lifestyles of gays were also appearing to be significantly cultural.

It may well be that Boas and the anthropological concept of culture were even more important than Peirce's ideas. The former spread through the same institutions as pragmatism did, eventually coalescing with it in a public philosophy of egalitarianism. And the legal reforms also were a response to many other cultural and religious forces, not the least the protests of the groups themselves. But to an immeasurable but significant extent, pragmatist ideas of environmentalism and minority group equality trace back to Peirce's theories of semiotics. This line of discussion is part of the 're-framing' I promised at the start of this paper. If Peirce is to be looked at within the context of social theory and the early American social sciences, his ideas need to be detached from the media in which he placed them. It is their sociological or meta-sociological implications I am after; not their status in philosophy as such. And the same diffuse and indirect influences that put Peirce into the early social sciences also placed his pragmatist ideas within the public consciousness at large. His ideas shifted from conservative intent to liberal consequences. And if, as Peirce claimed, we should define things by their consequences, he – conservative snob that he was – was a father of American liberalism (Hoopes, 1998) as well as of the social sciences.

Returning now to the dialogical self, let me recapitulate how I first encountered and grappled with this idea. In the late 1970s, when I got interested in Mead, I was fascinated by his somewhat evanescent sketch of the dialogical self, my first impressions appearing in 'Notes on Self Genesis: From Me to We to I' (1979b). I was reading things that compared Mead with someone else, including Peirce. In one of the references to Peirce, probably the definition of 'tuism', I first realized that Peirce too had a dialogical self.

This side of Peirce had been mentioned by various commentators but few had taken a close look at it or compared it to Mead (but see Colapietro, 1989:



99–118; Rochberg-Halton, 1986: 3–40; Singer, 1984). So I began to compare Mead and Peirce in their versions of the dialogical self. Mead's 'me' is complex, perhaps overly complex, comprising the past, our memory of the past, our fixed habits or traits, ourselves as a grammatical object, our knowledge, our rules and moral standards, the cognitive rules the violation of which define the mentally ill, and a sort of social mind he referred to as the 'generalized other'. Mead had overloaded his me and made it difficult to use as a concept.

In contrast, Peirce had pushed everything into the future, as indicated in his definition of 'tuism' earlier. This included the near-future self as it approaches the present, the larger 'person' to which that self was attached, and the various standards, moral and otherwise, of the community. In other words, a lot of what Mead had put into the past and the me Peirce had put into the future and the 'you'. In effect Peirce's 'you' is Mead's me, transformed into the future and substantially trimmed with Ockham's razor.

I realized that both Mead and Peirce had distinct dialogical models: Mead the I and the me, and Peirce the I and the you. Their dialogical selves had different emphases and could perform different tasks. I dissected these differences in a book chapter (1994: 40–73), and I decided to try to integrate the two. This led to the I–you–me triad, a formulation that would combine the strengths of the two dialogical selves.

But, given this triad and the various pronouncements Peirce had made about humans as signs, the question arose: can this pronomial triad be mapped onto Peirce's semiotic triad of representamen, object and interpretant? I studied this issue and talked it over with several Peirce scholars. Eventually the best solution seems to be that the I is the representamen (or 'sign' in the narrow sense), the me is the object and the you is the interpretant. The semiotic self is the present self ('I') interpreting the past self ('me') to the future self ('you'). This was a way of understanding Peirce's statement that humans are signs, namely that we are 'bi-level' signs.

In other words Peirce seemed to be using 'sign' in two different senses (Colapietro, 1989: 66). The semiotic stream that passes through the mind or self was one set of signs. And the mind or self that they passed through was another kind of 'sign'. Once we mapped the pronomial onto the semiotic triad, it was clear which was which. The significant stream was a set of signs in the ordinary sense, and the I–you–me overall self was a sign in another sense. That other sense was that of a second-order or meta sign, a field, a medium or a network. In other words it was a structural sign within which there was a constant flow of first-order signs or signification.

Peirce's main use or application of his own dialogical self model was to explain self-control, as discussed above. He may have been naïve about how easy it is to break bad habits, but his idea of using inner speech to model future behavior is now widely used in several fields, from psychotherapy to kinesthetics.

In particular Peirce had an excellent hunch concerning how human agency works, moving from inner to outer control.

## Conclusion

I have now analyzed two of Peirce's major ideas, that of semiotics and the dialogical self. These are both semiotic, but the former concerns general semiotics as another way of looking at culture, and the latter concerns the semiotic self. Since these ideas are located at two different ontological levels, each has its own distinct implications. But they agree in check-mating racism and biological determinism, even though Peirce himself never drew out these implications. And in that way they are kindred to the cultural ideas of Franz Boas and anthropology. Between discovering semiotics and the dialogical self, Peirce made a huge contribution to modern social theory.

The semiotic approach obviously implies that we do not know with exactitude what the world of objects is like. If we did, it could only have been arrived at by intuition, which is an idea Peirce rejected. He felt that thought would be self-corrective over time, and that in the long run the general opinion, particularly that of the scientists, would be a true one. This means he was, to some extent, a social constructionist. In contrast to William James, though, his constructionism was a long, slow process, and it was thoroughly social. In his 'will to believe' James had suggested we could construct a reality non-socially, that is, by ourselves, and in the short run. James thought, for example, that he had constructed the truth of the idea of God and that of free will. But Peirce thought this version of constructionism was wrong. The community might create these ideas over a long period of time, but not the individual and not at a moment's notice. If anything, Peirce was somewhat closer to the social constructionism of Thomas and Znaniecki's *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–20), the underlying theme of which was later stated as 'if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (Thomas and Thomas, 1928: 572).

Peirce's ideas are very close to those of the 1920s Chicago School generally, which was the first paradigm in the history, at least the American history, of sociology. If the Chicago School spokespersons had said we got these ideas from Peirce (which they did not), it would have been quite plausible. But they got them from a variety of sources, American and European, and in large part from George Herbert Mead. If we refer to the Chicago School's position as 'symbolic interactionism', even though the term was invented later by Herbert Blumer, this expression could also be used to refer to Peirce's sociological ideas.

But Mead never acknowledged any debt to, or even much of an acquaintance with, Peirce. Yet Peirce invented the modern theory of the dialogical self, and Mead produced a variation of the same theory slightly later. Moreover, Mead was closely acquainted with William James and John Dewey, both in their writings and in personal, face-to-face relations. Both of these scholars were familiar

with Peirce – James throughout his life and Dewey by the early 20th century. It seems implausible that Mead would not have heard about Peirce's ideas from these two.

Still, Mead did originate several important ideas that were his alone. Peirce had created an overall, umbrella idea of the sign, and this became the core of his semiotics. Mead, in contrast, wanted to understand the abstract or general symbol as such, which was only one of the kind in which Peirce was interested. Mead contrasted the non-significant symbol of the animals with the significant one of humans. He made this contrast both in a phylogenetic context, to explain the evolutionary birth of meaning, and in an ontogenetic context, to explain the birth of meaning in each infant. He thought that reflexivity was the key to meaning for humans. When communicating with others, these humans could reflect on their utterance and respond to it internally as others would respond to it externally. This theory, here perhaps stated over-terse, is not without problems, and Mead stated it somewhat differently on different occasions, but still it is one of the most powerful theories of meaning in existence:

So Mead did not copy Peirce's ideas; he had his own. Nevertheless, there are so many parallels and affinities between Peirce and Mead that I think there must have been an influence, even if it was indirect and diffuse. Mead had subscribed to the *Nation* magazine, which had regular book reviews by Peirce. And he also subscribed to the *Journal of Philosophy*, which had a 1916 memorial issue on Peirce, including a paper by Dewey, two years after Peirce had died.

In addition to social construction, Peirce had other interesting ideas about meaning. For him the interpretive process, which was a continuing ingredient of meaning, eventually coalesced to some extent into a bundle of habits. In other words the meaning of an object was how we responded to the object. The meaning of God, for example, would be our habits of reverence, prayer, ethical commitment, and so on. This fits his famous pragmatic definition of meaning as consequences, or rather our conception of consequences. This definition sounded to some like a logical positivist definition of meaning in terms of observable and measurable sensory consequences. But Peirce has several variants of this maxim, and it is clear that, by 'our conception', he was referring to all possible consequences. In addition our conception could entail socially constructionist elements. An empiricist or logical positivistic interpretation of the pragmatic maxim would be guilty of the intuitionist fallacy.

Moreover, the interpretive aspect of meaning has a similarity with Max Weber's idea of *verstehen*. For Weber, cultural, as opposed to physical, facts required a special methodology. Since these cultural facts were constructed and given meaning by humans, they could be understood only by capturing the intended meaning. These facts were primarily about meanings, just as physical facts were primarily about physical stuff. And this meaning could only be understood by a process of insight or *verstehen*, during which we discover and reproduce the meaning in our consciousness. I do not think Peirce would disagree

with Weber on this point. In addition, Peirce's distinction between the triadic semiotic and the dyadic non-semiotic is close to the Weberian, neo-Kantian distinction between the cultural and the physical sciences.

Still another comparison comes to mind with Durkheim's notion of the social fact. For Durkheim these facts were characterized by being external and constraining. The same facts that Weber would call cultural – for example law, language, monetary systems, literature, government, kinship, and so on – Durkheim would call social. These are all constructed by human beings, but once constructed they seem to have the externality and constraint that Durkheim referred to. Yet Peirce's semiotic realm has much the same status as Durkheim's social. In addition both theorists showed how one can analyze or deconstruct these imposing socio-cultural-semiotic structures into their humble human origins.

It seems, then, that Peirce's ideas are very much in the flavor of social theory. He himself did not bring these ideas directly into social theory, since he had different interests, but I think I have shown that it can be done. And it may be that some of Peirce's ideas did enter into social theory, although in an indirect and diffuse way. There is certainly a close resemblance between his ideas and those that were actually adopted. In a cautious sense, then, one can say Peirce was something of a founding father of American social science. Evidently he was so disreputable, given the moral conservatism of the times, and personally obnoxious that he may not have been given the credit due to him. We may never know for sure. But it seems reasonable to at least call him a 'near founder' of social theory, if not an actual founder whose role has remained unnoticed.

## Notes

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1. The references to Peirce's unpublished manuscripts are identified in terms of the numbers used by Houghton Library at Harvard University.

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