A Critical Examination of the Philosophy of Charles S. Peirce: A Defence of the Claim that his Pragmatism is Founded on his Theory of Categories

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A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHARLES S. PEIRCE

A Defence of the Claim that his Pragmatism is Founded on his Theory of Categories

Siosifa Ika

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Notre Dame Australia

College of Theology
October, 2002.
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Abstract

This thesis explores the relation in Peirce’s philosophy between his theory of categories and his pragmatism. My most central claim is that the possibility and validity of metaphysics as a philosophical science depend on the appropriateness of its method. I argue that an appropriate method for metaphysics is possible, and that in Peirce’s pragmatism as founded on his theory of categories we find such a method.

In developing this thesis I seek to demonstrate four key propositions:

1. Peirce’s ‘pragmatism’ is fundamentally a form of metaphysical and epistemological realism and in this respect differs from logical positivism and other types of pragmatism that are overtly anti-metaphysical and skeptical about the possibility of our knowledge of real generals.

2. Peirce’s ‘theory of categories’ is the key to understanding his philosophy and demonstrates the extent to which he embraces a form of dialectical realism that bears striking resemblance to certain forms of scholastic metaphysics.

3. Peirce’s ‘semiotic’ or theory of signs can only be properly understood if we take full account of his theory of categories and the form of metaphysical and epistemological realism it implies.

4. Peirce’s account of semiotic is based on an irreducible trichotomy that he holds to exist between the categories, and which is reflected in the triadic relationship between Sign, Sign User and Thing Signified.

The apparent inconsistencies and indecisiveness in Peirce’s account of his ‘pragmatism’ can be explained if we recognise that he takes the four propositions outlined above for granted. Because he takes these propositions for granted as virtually self-evident, he fails to make fully explicit the internal logical connections between them and the different parts of his system. Despite appearances to the contrary, I maintain Peirce is a coherent and systematic thinker.

Based on the evidence drawn from reviewing the literature, and arguing the case in defence of these propositions, I propose to set out my argument in the following chapters, and the summary of the contents of each should make explicit the structure and content of my overall argument and conclusions.
Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or institution; and to the best of my knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Siosifa Ika
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This thesis could not have been completed without the assistance of various persons and organisations to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude. First of all I must thank my supervisor, Professor Ian E. Thompson, for his tireless advice and encouragement both in academic and personal matters. His suggested revisions and comments he made on the various drafts of the thesis have been most helpful. His love, sympathy, and kindness during the family bereavements I suffered during my PhD candidacy, helped me to carry on despite such difficult times. His consistent dedication as a supervisor proved to be vital when he continued to supervise my research, and to critique my work, after returning to Scotland two years ago.

I would also like to thank Professor Donald Watts, the Dean of Research and Postgraduate Studies of the University of Notre Dame Australia, for his friendly and encouraging advice both when I first made inquiries to enrol at Notre Dame, and during my candidacy at the University. My thanks are also due to my fellow postgraduate student, Phillip Matthews for the many fruitful discussions we had; to Dr Shasta Dawson, who co-supervised my research with Dr Thompson during the first semester of 1999; to Dr Catherine Legg for bringing to my attention the Peirce-l forum on the internet, and giving me a copy of her PhD thesis, both of which I found useful; and to Alison Thompson and Teresa Ika for their help with correcting my grammatical and typographic errors.

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Abbreviations

CP - *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, and A. W. Burks. (References stand for volume and paragraph number. Eg. CP 1.5 refers to volume 1, paragraph 5.)

SS - *Semiotic and Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby*, ed. C. S. Hardwick. (References stand for page number.)


All references to the above editions are inserted in brackets at the end of the quote.
In memory

of

my late grandparents and adoptive parents,

Siosifa (Snr.) and 'Ana Ika,

whose love has sustained my life

and

whose faith in me has inspired my studies
INTRODUCTION

(i) Overall Aim of the Thesis

The primary aim of this thesis is to clarify the relationship between Peirce’s theory of categories and his pragmatism. The claim defended in this thesis is that Peirce’s theory of categories is the ultimate foundation of his pragmatism and that the realist metaphysics this implies, enables him to avoid the anti-metaphysical conclusions of logical positivism and logical empiricism. The practical objectives of the thesis are to explain why and how Peirce’s pragmatism avoids the pitfalls of these rival theories.

Logical positivism, especially in its early form, as represented in the work of the philosophers\(^1\) of the Vienna Circle, is characterised by a strong proposal for a rejection of metaphysics on the ground that metaphysical statements are basically sense-less or meaningless non-sense because they are neither analytic statements nor empirically verifiable propositions. By contrast, Peirce’s pragmatism rests on metaphysical pre-suppositions in that he claims that his Categories are grounded in reality. For Peirce, as scientist and mathematician, the ontological question, the reality status of our fundamental concepts, is a question that logical positivists and logical empiricists would simply reject as a meaningless pseudo-question.

The metaphysical position of Peirce’s pragmatism stems from his commitment to both a metaphysical realism and epistemological realism, both being in his view logical requirements of any adequate theory of categories. Generally, metaphysical realism is the view that things exist independently of our knowledge of them; and epistemological realism maintains that we can know things as they really are.

Peirce’s theory of categories, with its unique treatment of the basic elements of reality, or ‘modes of being’, determines the distinctive characteristic of his pragmatism. It requires our approach to the meaning of concepts to be a matter of irreducible triadic relations, rooted in the structure of given reality, and that in every meaningful situation all three of his fundamental categories are involved. His metaphysically and epistemologically grounded ‘pragmatism’ requires that determining meaning involves the ability to predict the “would-be” situation of events.

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There are indications in Peirce’s writings that the connections between his theory of categories and his pragmatism are fundamental to understanding his philosophy. His statements on the nature of pragmatism as a philosophical method or maxim appear to reflect different viewpoints.

On the one hand, he attributes his discovery of this approach to his study of signs. In a draft of a book review written about 1904, Peirce claims that the “maxim [of pragmatism] is put forth … as a far-reaching theorem solidly grounded upon an elaborate study of the nature of signs” (CP 8.191). He reiterates this claim in a letter to Christine Ladd-Franklin written c.1904: “Pragmatism is one of the results of my study of the formal laws of signs, a study guided by mathematics and the familiar facts of everyday experience and by no other science whatsoever.” These two statements suggest that Peirce claims a logical basis for his pragmatism — given the fact that the study of signs is, for Peirce, a logical study, and his insistence that pragmatism is a ‘logical maxim’.

On the other hand, other statements of Peirce indicate that he grounded, or at least wanted to ground, pragmatism upon a theory of categories rooted in reality (as Aristotle’s claimed to be). He said of the construction of pragmatism, c.1905:

Pragmatism … had been designed and constructed … architectonically. Just as a civil engineer, before erecting a bridge, a ship, or a house, will think of the different properties of all materials, and will use no iron, stone, or cement, that has not been subjected to tests; and will put them together in ways minutely considered, so, in constructing the doctrine of pragmatism the properties of all indecomposable concepts were examined and the ways in which they could be compounded. Then the purpose of the proposed doctrine having been analyzed, it was constructed out of the appropriate concepts so as to fulfill that purpose. In this way, the truth of it was proved (CP 5.5).

The way he envisages a theory of categories to be involved in constructing pragmatism is indicated in this passage by the ideas ‘architectonically’ and ‘indecomposable concepts’. The word ‘architectonically’ designates the idea of system, that is, a system of pragmatism, whose design and construction requires ‘indecomposable concepts’. The term ‘indecomposable concepts’ is another label Peirce sometimes uses in place of ‘categories’. In a letter to William James written in 1902, Peirce emphasised:

---

I have advanced my understanding of these categories much since Cambridge
days; and can now put them in a much clearer light and more convincingly.
The true nature of pragmatism cannot be understood without them (CP 8.256).

I do not believe these two seemingly different views on the foundation of
pragmatism are fundamentally incompatible. Instead, they are inter-related just as
Peirce considered his theory of categories and theory of signs to be connected. The
problem is that Peirce did not offer any clear account of how his statements of ‘signs-
based’ pragmatism are related to those of his ‘categories-based’ pragmatism. This is
evident when he often speaks of the categories and signs interchangeably, defining
the categories in terms of signs, and signs in terms of the categories (eg. CP 2.274).

(iii) The Foundation of Peirce’s Pragmatism and the Uniqueness of the Thesis

Some work has already been done on the foundation of his pragmatism. There
are studies that have already pointed out the relation between Peirce’s theory of
categories and pragmatism, some of which have offered some indications in one way
or another of a foundational role of the theory of categories in pragmatism. However,
as far as I can ascertain, these studies, in their indications of the foundational role of
the categories in his pragmatism, are either too brief and halting, though suggestive, or only partial in their treatment of the foundational role of the theory of categories,

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3 From now on I will use the expression ‘signs-based’ pragmatism wherever I mean to say the
theory of signs is the foundation of pragmatism, and ‘categories-based’ pragmatism wherever I mean
to say the theory of categories is the foundation of pragmatism.

Kloesel, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), especially ch. 5. I share Fisch’s view on this
matter, but his discussion omits a whole range of related issues that I intend to consider in this thesis
viz. the uniqueness of Peirce’s system of categories, and the realist philosophical basis of his
pragmatism.

5 Eg. Eugene Freeman, *The Categories of Charles Peirce* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing,
1934). Freeman puts the emphasis in his analysis on the relation between the theory of categories and
pragmatism on the category of Thirdness. It is understandable, given that Freeman is concerned with
pragmatism as a theory of meaning, that he stresses the category of Thirdness and pays little attention
to Firstness and Secondness because meaning, is an element of the category of Thirdness, according to
Peirce. (Pragmatism itself being among other things a theory of meaning.) However, unfolding the
foundational role of the theory of categories in pragmatism by emphasising the category of Thirdness
is too narrow to appreciate the extent of the foundational role of the theory of categories in
pragmatism. That is, it is not the category of Thirdness alone that serves as the foundation of
pragmatism, but all three categories taken together.
or take the theory of categories as secondary to the theory of signs in their foundational role in pragmatism.⁶

Some other studies⁷ take Peirce’s doubt-belief theory of inquiry (presented in his papers ‘The Fixation of Belief’ and ‘How To Make Our Ideas Clear’) as the foundation of his pragmatism. As I will argue, despite no mention of the categories in these papers, there are reasons and evidence that the categories are the framework within which Peirce formulates his belief-doubt theory of inquiry.

However, despite much scholarly work on the foundation of Peirce’s pragmatism, no one, as far as I am aware, has considered why pragmatism is bound to presuppose metaphysics as a means to determining its foundation. The significance of this approach is that: firstly, it will clarify how the foundation of pragmatism can be attributed to both the theory of categories and the theory of signs; secondly, it will show that to attribute the foundation of pragmatism to the theory of signs alone fails to account for the fact that Peirce speaks of the signs not only from a logical point of view, but also from a metaphysical point of view (though the latter, generally speaking, is less explicit than the former).

In this thesis, I argue that Peirce’s attribution of the foundation of his pragmatism to his theory of signs is conducted within the context of his development of his theory of categories. Once this is realised, it will become clear that for Peirce the theory of signs and the theory of categories are virtually inseparable. This is not to say that no distinction can be drawn between what a category is and what a sign is. The point is that to take Peirce’s claim of a signs-based pragmatism too literally without giving serious attention to his theory of categories would fail to account for two central points of his pragmatism, namely, that it involves commitment to his scholastic realism and that it has a metaphysical task.

⁶ Eg. John J. Fitzgerald, *Peirce’s Theory of Signs as Foundation for Pragmatism*, (The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton, 1966). The upshot of Fitzgerald’s book is that pragmatism is related indirectly via the theory of signs. Thus in Fitzgerald’s view, whereas pragmatism is directly related to the theory of signs, its relation with the theory of categories is of secondary importance. The problem with Fitzgerald’s view is that it fails to recognise that Peirce’s pragmatism has a direct, primary connection with his theory of categories. For it is within the context of his theory of categories that Peirce demands a realist basis for his pragmatism.

Part I: Peirce’s Theory of Categories

Part 1 is divided into chapters 1 and 2. Its main purpose is to give a critical exposition of Peirce’s theory of categories and the role of phenomenological method in his pragmatism.

In chapter 1 I seek both to give an introduction to the main features of his thought and to identify the unique characteristic features of his theory of categories. I will begin by analysing Peirce’s paper ‘On a New List of Categories’ comparing and contrasting his position with Aristotle’s and Kant’s theories of categories, so as to bring out the distinctive features of Peirce’s own theory.

When Peirce first derived his categories in his paper ‘On a New List of Categories’ (1867), he was already familiar with the categorical systems of Aristotle and Kant. At this stage in the development of his thought Peirce regarded these systems, especially those of Aristotle and Kant, as having a great significance in recognising “that the commonest and most indispensable conceptions are nothing but objectifications of logical forms.”

While there are some similarities between Peirce’s theory of categories and those of Aristotle and Kant, what is important for my purpose is to characterize and to clarify the unique features of Peirce’s theory of categories and how it differs from the theories of categories of philosophers before him. In this way I seek to explore and assess the significance of his contribution to philosophy.

Peirce’s system of categories is a “uniform chain of conceptions,” that are interdependent to the extent that the manifold of sense experience could not be unified and made intelligible by applying the categories singly or separately. For Peirce an achieved unity in our attempt to render the manifold of experience

8 These names are not mentioned in ‘On a New List of Categories’, Peirce’s first published paper on his theory of categories. The preliminary drafts of the paper, however, bear references to these names. These drafts are reproduced in Murray G. Murphey, *The Development of Peirce’s Philosophy* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 411-422.


10 Ibid., p. 413.
intelligible presupposes a *joint* application of *all* the categories. The mutual interconnection and interdependence between the categories is shown in Peirce’s treatment of “signs” and “categories”. In his analysis of signs and their functions, he treats these terms as virtually inter-changeable and as capable of being defined in terms of one another:

A *Sign*, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its *Object*, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant*, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object (CP 2.274).

Chapter 1 concludes with a general discussion of Peirce’s classification of the sciences and how he employs his theory of categories in that classification. The aim is not only to emphasise the obvious, that Peirce was a systematic thinker, concerned to build up a coherent philosophical system, but also to argue that a serious consideration of the question of the foundation of his pragmatism must take account of his classification of the sciences.

Chapter 2 deals with Peirce’s phenomenology, aiming to show that Peirce’s categories were meant not only as abstract theoretical tools, but also they represent structural and essential elements of experience with empirical manifestations. Thus chapter 2 will develop an analysis of Peirce’s categories in order to demonstrate that pragmatism becomes a theory of meaning which he conceived to be workable not only in the domain of theoretical discourse but also in concrete experience.

A subsidiary purpose of chapter 2 is to explain how Peirce’s phenomenology plays a role in his view that philosophy is both an “observational” science and a “science of discovery”. For Peirce what phenomenological method requires is that one merely observes the ‘phenomenon’ (i.e. what appears to the mind in pure imagination or as a result of real experience) and studies the most universal elements (or the categories) manifest in it. Phenomenology thus plays a somewhat paradoxical function in Peirce’s thought. On the one hand, it aims at undertaking an experiential derivation of the categories, thus showing their empirical manifestations. On the other hand, phenomenology does not restrict what it counts as observational to things that are experienceable by or through the senses alone. Rather, it takes as observational whatever appears to the mind regardless of what kind of source it has. Despite this seemingly paradoxical aspect of phenomenology, it is important to stress
here that phenomenology opens up the scope of what is to be regarded as observational — including entities that would normally be taken as metaphysical (or fictitious) by the logical positivist.

Here it is important to note that there is a similarity between Peirce’s phenomenology and his theory of signs (which is the focus of Part 3). According to his theory of signs, Peirce claims: “every thought is a sign” and every “thought is in signs” (W2: 207). With these ideas in place Peirce goes on to argue that every science is observational, since every science involves thought and since “every thought is a sign.” The subject-matter of study in any science is a sign in the sense that it stands in a triadic semiotic relation to the scientist and his/her understanding of it. So, what is subject to observation in any science are the signs it deals with in its field of inquiry.

Part II: Pragmatism and the Third Grade of Clarity

Part 2 is divided into chapters 3, 4, and 5.

The aim of chapter 3 is primarily to show how Peirce’s pragmatism is founded upon his theory of categories. It will be argued that the attribution of the foundation of pragmatism to the theory of signs is only one half of the story; the other half, which is the focus of this study, is the foundational role of the categories in pragmatism. It will become evident in chapter 3 how the categories serve as the framework for his doubt-belief theory of inquiry. Chapter 3 will introduce the two versions or formulations of his pragmatism (which we refer to in this thesis as the ‘original’ or ‘early’ and the ‘later’ versions) and how they are shaped by his theory of categories.

Chapter 4 argues that Peirce’s demand for a realist basis for pragmatism has more to do with his theory of categories than with his theory of signs. This is especially manifest in Peirce’s exposition of his scholastic realism where his main target is to argue for the reality of the categories, that all his three categories are real generals. Thus pragmatism is a commitment to the reality of the categories. Chapter 4 goes on to compare and contrast the early and later versions of Peirce’s pragmatism (introduced in chapter 3), showing how the phenomenological extension of the categories allows for an extension of pragmatism from a “restricted” to a “wider”
form, or, to use Fisch’s words, from “a simple take-it-or-leave-it maxim” to a doctrine.\textsuperscript{11}

Chapter 5 develops the specific relationship between pragmatism and metaphysics by showing that the extension of pragmatism from being merely a logical maxim for meaning clarification to a form of philosophical doctrine with metaphysical assertions is a further consequence of its commitment to the reality of the categories. It will emerge in chapter 5 that Peirce, with his unique brand of pragmatism, belonged to a group of philosophers who were associated with a revolution in philosophy in which the emphasis of inquiry is put on the centrality of the question of meaning.\textsuperscript{12} Peirce differs from these philosophers, however, by exploring the ontological basis of meaning and by endorsing the need for metaphysics. I will also discuss Peirce’s critique of positivism and its limited view of metaphysics. This is followed by a brief evaluation of Peirce’s own account of metaphysics. In this exposition it will become evident how the unique way in which pragmatism formulates the metaphysical question of his scholastic realism implies a certain metaphysical position.

\textit{Part III: Peirce’s Theory of Signs (or Semiotic)}

Part 3 consists of chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 6 presents a general exposition and critical appraisal of Peirce’s theory of signs or semiotic, aiming to determine its role in his account of inquiry. It will be shown that on the basis of the representative nature of signs semiotic requires observation and objectivity as essential elements of inquiry. A comparison of the ideas the ‘object of sign’ and the ‘object of thought’ will be conducted, and it is shown how the former ensure objectivity to a greater extent than the latter.

The so-called metaphysical neutrality of semiotic will be clarified, arguing that it is more to do with ‘division of labour’ in the classification of the sciences than with whether or not semiotic has any metaphysical implication or presupposition.

Chapter 7 will discuss the relationship between Peirce’s categories, his theory of signs, and his pragmatism within the context of his theory of inquiry. It will become evident that the categories are pertinent to logic. An attempt will be made to

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identify the senses in which there is a distinction between the categories and signs. The scholastic distinction between ‘real beings’ and ‘beings of reason’ will be used both to help clarify any distinction between the categories and signs, and to mark how Peirce’s semiotic goes beyond that of the scholastics. It will emerge that Peirce came to see an ontological dimension to signs, making it reasonable to ascertain that the sign is not a category.
PART I: PEIRCE’S THEORY OF CATEGORIES
Chapter 1:

PEIRCE’S THEORY OF CATEGORIES AND ITS UNIQUENESS
1.1 Some Preliminary Remarks

1.1.1 Reasons for beginning with Peirce’s Theory of Categories

There are three main reasons for beginning my inquiry into Peirce’s pragmatism with his theory of categories.

First, Peirce attached a central importance to his theory of categories. This is because Peirce, (like Aristotle and Kant before him) takes it for granted that to build a philosophical system requires that its foundations should be put in place before you start. In his draft of a proposed work entitled ‘A Guess at the Riddle,’ written in 1887-1888, Peirce says:

The undertaking which this volume inaugurates is to make a philosophy like that of Aristotle, that is to say, to outline a theory so comprehensive that, for a long time to come, the entire work of human reason, in philosophy of every school and kind, in mathematics, in psychology, in physical science, in history, in sociology, and in whatever other department there may be, shall appear as the filling up of its details. The first step toward this is to find simple concepts applicable to every subject (CP 1.1).

The foundation that Peirce looks for is a set of categories — the most basic “concepts applicable to every subject.” Peirce takes the view that the strength and value of a philosophy lies in the strength of its foundation, or the adequacy of the fundamental categories it employs.

The second reason is that I believe, and intend to demonstrate that Peirce’s theory of categories is the key to understanding his pragmatism. In a letter to William James in 1902, Peirce says:

[M]y three categories, … in their psychological aspect, appear as Feeling, Reaction, Thought. I have advanced my understanding of these categories much since Cambridge days; and can now put them in a much clearer light and more convincingly. The true nature of pragmatism cannot be understood without them (CP 8.256).

I also intend to show that because Peirce adopts a fundamental set of categories as the foundation for his system, on pain of inconsistency he must inevitably endorse the need for metaphysics in his philosophy of pragmatism. This is despite Peirce’s strong insistence on pragmatism as merely a logical principle for meaning clarification.

Thirdly, Peirce claims with great confidence that his theory of categories is “my one contribution to philosophy” (CP 8.213). Since Peirce maintains that adoption of a set of categories is necessary for building a philosophical system, and
since he was thoroughly familiar with the sets of categories used by other philosophers, his claim that his theory of categories is “my one contribution to philosophy” must be taken seriously. This indicates not only that Peirce questioned the adequacy of the categories employed by other philosophers, but also that he claimed that there was something unique in his own list of categories.

Peirce’s dissatisfaction with the categories identified by other philosophers led him to explore the grounds for a new set of categories to serve as the foundation for his philosophy. In 1867, Peirce took “the first step toward” the development of his philosophical system by producing his paper ‘On a New List of Categories,’ the first published exposition of his theory of categories.

For all the above reasons it can be said that Peirce’s general philosophical project was most fundamentally concerned with some kind of methodological quest; a quest that seeks to establish the most fundamental categories that are both logically and metaphysically presupposed in any inquiry. The categories are logical presuppositions in the sense that they are principles or norms to be necessarily followed in the process of inquiry. They are also metaphysical presuppositions in the sense that Peirce rightly regarded them as reflections or representations of reality. Peirce’s unique brand of pragmatism, with its blend of logical rigour, practical orientation and realist metaphysical foundations was the end result of his methodological quest.

1.1.2 What is meant by a ‘Theory of Categories’?

A theory of categories is an inquiry into the most fundamental conceptions required in order to render our experience intelligible and meaningful. The underlying assumption made by those who advance a theory of categories is that without categories, we cannot make sense of our experience — whether real or imaginary experience. Moreover, it is argued that the set of categories identified must be universal; that is, they must be applicable to every object or phenomenon that human beings can experience or think about.

Because categories are our concepts of widest application and most encompassing generality, Peirce regards the theory of categories to be directly relevant to phenomenology, logic, and metaphysics, and he proceeds to treat them as such in his exploration of these fields. The importance of these fundamental categories to these three divisions of philosophy demonstrates for Peirce that a
relation of irreducible trichotomy holds between experience, thought, and being. According to Peirce, the development of a theory of categories requires the methods of phenomenological inquiry for phenomenology aims to discover the most universal and essential elements of phenomena as they appear to us in our experience. The theory of categories is fundamental to logic in so far as it seeks to define and analyse the relationships between the most universal conceptions of thought, which are presupposed in and required for every kind of thought process. Metaphysics, in so far as it is concerned with the nature of the real, requires an adequate theory of categories to establish the most universal elements of reality. Peirce thus claims that his list of categories is “a table of conceptions drawn from a logical analysis of thought and regarded as applicable to being” (CP 1.300).

1.2  ‘On a New List of Categories’: An Introduction to Peirce’s Theory of Categories

In ‘On a New List of Categories’ 13 Peirce sets out to formulate a theory of categories that can specify and demonstrate what the universal conceptions of thought and reality are. The paper introduces ideas that I shall argue are fundamental to the whole of his philosophical system and shows that his theory of categories is basic to his understanding of phenomenological method, his form of pragmatism, and his theory of signs and their functions.

1.2.1 The Aim of the ‘New List’

Peirce begins the ‘New List’ by remarking:

This paper is based upon the theory already established, that the function of conceptions is to reduce the manifold of sensuous impressions to unity, and that the validity of a conception consists in the impossibility of reducing the content of consciousness to unity without the introduction of it (W 2: 49).

By “the theory already established” Peirce refers to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason. 14 In about 1894 Peirce wrote more specifically of the indebtedness his theory of categories owed to Kant. “My list [of categories] grew originally out of the study of the table of Kant” (CP 1.300).

Christopher Hookway remarks that “The argument of ‘On a New List of Categories’ … is self-consciously Kantian.” 15 Peirce follows Kant in holding the

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13 Henceforth ‘New List’.
14 Especially book 1 of Transcendental Analytic.
view that an understanding of sensuous impressions given in experience requires universal conceptions to render them intelligible. The categories that Peirce seeks to establish are not universal classes of things, but universal conceptions, or elementary conceptions. In a later commentary on the ‘New List’ made in c.1905, Peirce indicates that he is concerned with “the fundamental categories of thought” (CP 1.561; my emphasis). It should be remembered that Peirce’s categorical project aims not at a psychological but a logical account of the categories. He says, “throughout this process, introspection is not resorted to. Nothing is assumed respecting the subjective elements of consciousness which cannot be securely inferred from the objective elements” (W 2: 51-52).

1.2.2 The Method Employed in the ‘New List’

Peirce employed a method he called prescision in deriving the categories of the ‘New List’. Peirce explains that prescision (which he also identifies as abstraction) is a form of mental separation that:

arises from attention to one element and neglect of the other. Exclusive attention consists in a definite conception or supposition of one part of an object, without any supposition of the other (W 2: 50).

There are two other kinds of mental separation, according to Peirce. They are “discrimination” and “dissociation.” But Peirce cautions that “Abstraction or prescision ought to be carefully distinguished from … discrimination and dissociation” (W 2: 50). The latter, Peirce believes, are not adequate for his purpose. For “Discrimination has to do merely with the essences of terms, and only draws a distinction in meaning” (W 2: 50). As such it does not help identify the interrelationship between the categories as required in the order of “gradation.” For the establishment of the meaning of a concept does not necessarily make that concept a category. In other words, the categories are principles used in determining the meaning of concepts, but they are not arrived at merely by determining the meaning of concepts.

Dissociation “is the consciousness of one thing, without the necessary simultaneous consciousness of the other” (W 2: 50). The mental separation of dissociation lacks the ability to indicate how a category is truly necessary; because for Peirce the categories are both necessary and sufficient conditions of interrelations holding between them. This ‘lack of ability’ in dissociation is due to its openness to psychological flexibility, in which the logical distinction between the categories
could not be made. As Carl R. Hausmann puts it, separation by dissociation “involves psychological considerations of what consciousness can be about.”\textsuperscript{16} But this is contrary to Peirce’s purpose, namely, a non-psychological description of the categories. In c.1880, Peirce wrote confirming the inadequacy of dissociation when employed to search for the categories: “the categories cannot be dissociated in imagination from each other, nor from other ideas” (CP 1.353).

Instead, Peirce holds that prescision is the only form of separation that can serve his purpose. The method of prescision requires two general principles. First, that the universal conceptions must be necessary in order to explain the category immediately succeeding it. Every conception found to be involved in the process of bringing unity to the manifold of sense impressions is a necessary element of the process, for it “consists in the impossibility of reducing the content of consciousness to unity without the introduction of it.” By this principle of necessity the universal conceptions are justified as members of the unifying process.

Second, as members of the unifying process, the universal conceptions are in an order of “gradation” — i.e. strictly hierarchical — as far as their function is concerned. Peirce explains what he means by “gradation” as follows: “For one such conception may unite the manifold of sense and yet another may be required to unite the conception and the manifold to which it is applied; and so on” (W 2. 49). Thus the necessary universal conceptions are viewed as members of a system in which, as Hausmann says, they “cannot function independently of one another.”\textsuperscript{17} Within this hierarchically categorical system the categories are related to one another in a distinctly asymmetrical manner. Each category performs a function that cannot be replaced by another category.

“Prescision,” Peirce says, “is not a reciprocal process” (W 2: 51). He continues, giving an account of what he means by this statement:

Elementary conceptions only arise upon the occasion of experience; that is, they are produced for the first time according to a general law, the condition of which is the existence of certain impressions. Now if a conception does not reduce the impressions upon which it follows to unity, it is a mere arbitrary addition to these latter; and elementary conceptions do not arise thus arbitrarily. But if the impressions could be definitely comprehended without the conception, this latter would not reduce them to unity. Hence, the


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 97.
impressions (or more immediate conceptions) cannot be definitely conceived or attended to, to the neglect of an elementary conception which reduces them to unity. On the other hand, when such a conception has once been obtained, there is, in general, no reason why the premises which have occasioned it should not be neglected, and therefore the explaining conception may frequently be prescinded from the more immediate ones and from the impressions (W 2: 51).

This passage summarises the key ideas Peirce considers when specifying the categories by means of prescision. It shows that the necessity of a universal conception is determined by the necessity of the function it delivers. If a comprehension of the impressions is possible without a conception, that conception is proved unnecessary for comprehending the impressions, and, therefore, it cannot be a category. And, furthermore, each category has a function that is distinct to itself, and thus irreplaceable by the function of another category. Now it is clear what Peirce is trying to emphasise in the last sentence of the passage above. He is saying that in the whole process of unifying the impressions a category can be disregarded once its function is completed. For the next category in order of gradation takes over the unifying process, which is not complete yet, from the category preceding it and delivers its function in the process. And this goes on until the unity of the impressions is achieved.

It is important to notice that when Peirce speaks of the neglect of a category at the completion of its function, he means the cessation of that category in its functioning, (which is a kind of process), whereas the unifying process carries the outcome of the function of that category to the next category. And upon this outcome lies the possibility for the next category to perform its function distinctively. The word “neglect” in this sense implies a stage of inactivity that a category comes to when its function is completed.

1.2.3 The Categories of the ‘New List’

By means of prescision Peirce distinguished five categories. They are:

- BEING,
- Quality (Reference to a Ground),
- Relation (Reference to a Correlate),
- Representation (Reference to an Interpretant),
- SUBSTANCE (W 2: 54).
1.2.3.1 Substance and Being: The Beginning and End of Conception

Substance and being, according to Peirce, "are the beginning and end of all conception" (W 2: 50) respectively. The category of substance ("the present, in general" or "IT" as Peirce also calls it) is a universal conception that is the "nearest to sense" (W 2: 49). It is simply "the general recognition of what is contained in attention, [it] has no connotation, and therefore no proper unity" (W 2: 49). Further, it is "neither predicated of a subject, nor in a subject" (W 2: 49). At the level of the conception of substance no predicate has been distinguished in a subject; it amounts to nothing more or less than recognition of the IT as such.

The validity of the conception of substance lies in being the essential first stage of concept formation. "Before any comparison or discrimination can be made between what is present, what is present must have been recognized as such, as it" (W 2: 49). Peirce considers substance the most immediate of all the five universal conceptions. It is the first thing that enters the consciousness when the mind attends to an object. Yet in itself it has no connotation. In terms of function, Peirce explains the conception of substance "is the pure denotative power of the mind, that is to say, the power which directs the mind to an object, in contradistinction to the power of thinking any predicate of that object" (W 2: 49). For this reason Peirce calls substance the beginning of conception, since it is the very first thing taking place in any conception.

At the opposite limit there is the conception of being. Peirce explains that "The conception of being arises upon the formation of a proposition" (W 2: 52), and the "unity to which the understanding reduces impressions is the unity of a proposition" (W 2: 49). The conception of being is simply expressed by the copula, whose function is to connect the predicate to the subject of the proposition. Because the conception of being is a formal entity with no content, it is able to unify the manifold of sense impressions in terms of a predicate united to a subject.

Peirce emphasises that no unity could be achieved without the conception of being, for it "is that which completes the work of conceptions of reducing the manifold to unity" (W 2: 49-50). Thus he describes being as the end (or terminus) of conception. There is a degree of vagueness in Peirce’s explanation of the conception of being. Sometimes he appears, as in the quotation just given, to place the conception of being above all the rest of the categories. At other times he seems to attribute the function of completing the unification of the manifold to the conception.
of representation instead. This vagueness, however, is prompted mainly by Peirce’s style of presenting his analysis. He fails to clearly explain some of the moves he makes in his analysis. For example, he offers no account as to why he talks about “passing from being to substance” (W 2: 52, 54), after all he contends that substance is the beginning of conception and being the end of it. Since I do not believe that there is a real contradiction between the accounts just referred to, I will attempt to address his conception of being in a way that will both do justice to Peirce and at the same time make sense of what he appears to have said.

I suggest that the conception of being may better be understood as logically prior to the three intermediate categories — Quality, Relation and Representation. (I will show in section 1.2.3.2 below, that the conception of being is also ontologically prior to the intermediate categories.) That is, any attempt to unify the manifold of sense experience presupposes some idea of what the ‘unity’ in question is like. Peirce identifies (in the ‘New List’) this unity with (the function of) the copula ‘is’ in any given proposition. The intermediate categories express different aspects of the manifold which is brought to unity within the framework of a particular proposition. That is to say an object can be made intelligible only within the formal framework of a specific proposition, but until the intermediate categories have completed their function, no particular object is made intelligible.

Therefore, any particular attempt to unify the impressions of experience without the aid of the conception of being could never be completed, because the conception of being provides the necessary formal basis for the unity, or within which the manifold is “sorted out.” Likewise, without substance, no unifying process for the manifold of impressions would ever be needed. Peirce expresses this point as follows.

If we had but one impression, it would not require to be reduced to unity … But since there is a manifold of impressions, we have a feeling of complication or confusion, which leads us to differentiate this impression from that, and then, having been differentiated, they require to be brought to unity (W 2: 54).

The conceptions of substance and being are depicted in the ‘New List’ as two necessary conditions for the unity and coherence of the overall categorical system. When they are said to be the beginning and end of conception, Peirce is quite clear that the conception cannot occur without the use of both the categories of substance and being. The description of substance and being as the beginning and end of
conception leaves us with a pattern (or intentional structure) which may be represented as follows. (See figure 1, below).

**Figure 1:**

**Substance** [Beginning] → **{Quality/Relation/Representation}** → **Being** [End]

### 1.2.3.2 Quality, Relation, Representation: The Intermediate Conceptions

Between substance and being are three intermediate conceptions of quality, relation, and representation, which Peirce termed “accidents.” In the ‘New List,’ Peirce does not explain what he means by calling the three intermediate conceptions “accidents.” Yet, his intention is clear, as Hausmann remarks:

> [It] is obviously not intended as a retraction of the point that they are categories and thus universal and necessary. It is rather a way of indicating their status in relation to the framing foundations of categories [substance and being], that is, to their serving as a means to the end of making intelligible what otherwise would be chaos, which is to serve the purpose of unifying the diversity of what is encountered in experience.\(^\text{18}\)

Hausmann rightly points out that Peirce’s use of the word “accidents” in referring to the intermediate categories is simply to indicate “their status in relation” to the conceptions of substance and being. This shows two different levels at which the categories of the ‘New List’ are necessary. At one level, or what we may call loosely the ‘foundational level’ of conception, only the conceptions of substance and being are necessary, since there cannot be a conception without a beginning and an end. At this level the intermediate conceptions are sufficient conditions, or accidents, of the particular event required to bring unity to the manifold of impressions, for they determine the circumstances in whose presence the event will occur.

At the level of “passing from being to substance,” each intermediate category is both a necessary and sufficient condition, depending on its relation to other categories. The category of quality is a sufficient condition of the category of being, but also a necessary condition for the category of relation. The category of relation is a necessary condition for the category of representation, while it is a sufficient condition of the category of quality. Regarding the category of representation, it is a necessary condition for the category of substance, and at the same time it is a sufficient condition of the category of relation. The designation “accidents” thus

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 108.
applies correctly to the intermediate categories only at the ‘foundational level,’ but not at the level of “passing from being to substance.”

When Peirce distinguishes the three intermediate conceptions he consistently refers to “passing from being to substance;” and we may represent it thus. (See figure 2, below).

Figure 2:

\[
\text{Being} \rightarrow \{\text{Quality/Relation/Representation}\} \rightarrow \text{Substance}
\]

By the conception of being, represented by the copula of a proposition, a quality (predicate) is united to the substance (subject) in a particular relation and in a particular mode of representation. “Quality, therefore, in its very widest sense, is the first conception in order in passing from being to substance” (W 2: 52). Quality is not given in the impression. It is on the contrary “a pure species or abstraction” (W 2: 52). Consider Peirce’s example “the stove is black.” The quality black, or blackness, is predicated of the subject “the stove.” But before predication, a quality, in order to be applicable to a subject, “must first be considered without regard to this circumstance, and taken immediately” (W 2: 52). Peirce argues further:

the conception of a pure abstraction is indispensable, because we cannot comprehend an agreement of two things, except as an agreement in some respect, and this respect is such a pure abstraction as blackness. Such a pure abstraction, reference to which constitutes a quality or general attribute, may be termed a ground (W 2: 52-53).

This passage explains what Peirce means by quality as a relation of “reference to a ground.” The ground, or respect, is the very basis of attributing or unifying a quality to a subject. So when attribution, or ‘unifying’ a quality to a subject, takes place there is a relation involved in which we refer to a ground of that quality. In unifying the quality “black” to the subject “the stove”, we do so because we know what “black” looks like.

Peirce may be understood to have demonstrated by the principle of prescision both the logical and ontological priority of being to quality, quality to relations and relations to representations. He says, “Reference to a ground [quality] cannot be prescinded from being, but being can be prescinded from it” (W 2: 53). This is because quality presupposes being, but not vice versa. About the validity of its introduction, Peirce tells us, “The occasion of the introduction of the conception of
reference to a ground is the reference to a correlate, and this is, therefore, the next
collection in order [of passing from being to substance]” (W 2: 53).

Just as reference to a correlate is the occasion of reference to a ground,
reference to an interpretant is the occasion of the introduction of the correlate. Thus
representation, reference to an interpretant, is the third and last intermediate
conception in the order of “passing from being to substance.” Reference to an
interpretant operates by means of comparison, thus Peirce claims:

[E]very comparison requires, besides the related thing, the ground, and the
correlate, also a mediating representation which represents the relate to be a
representation of the same correlate which this mediating representation itself
represents (W 2: 53).

Peirce goes on,

Such a mediating representation may be termed an interpretant, because it
fulfils the office of an interpreter, who says that a foreigner says the same thing
which he himself says (W 2: 53-54).

For example, suppose we think of teaching — a relation between a teacher and a
student. In the conception of teaching it is represented that there is a teacher being in
relation to a student with whom the teacher himself is in relation. This conception of
teaching is an interpretant which not only represents a teacher as a representation of
the relation of teaching a student, but also the relation of the student (being taught) as
well.

Peirce is aware of the ambiguity of the word ‘representation’, but he considers
it harmless to his purpose. He explains the scope of his usage of the word
‘representation’ as follows.

The term “representation” is here to be understood in a very extended sense,
which can be explained by instances better than definition. In this sense, a
word represents a thing to the conception in the mind of the hearer, a portrait
represents the person for whom it is intended to the conception of recognition,
a weathercock represents the direction of the wind to the conception of him
who understands it, a barrister represents his client to the judge and jury whom
he influences (W 2: 54).

The universal conception of representation presupposes the universal conception of
relation, but not vice versa. Thus “Reference to an interpretant cannot be prescinded
from reference to a correlate; but the latter can be prescinded from the former” (W 2:
54). Here, again, the non-reciprocal nature of prescision is maintained. Peirce
continues his explanation of representation:

the reference to an interpretant arises upon the holding together of diverse
impressions, and therefore it does not join a conception to the substance, as the
other two references do, but unites directly the manifold of the substance itself. It is, therefore, the last conception in order in passing from being to substance (W 2: 54).

Perhaps it is not surprising that Peirce spent only the first few paragraphs of the ‘New List’ on discussing the conceptions of substance and being as the beginning and end of conception respectively, and then focussed the rest of the paper on “passing from being to substance” and the intermediate conceptions. This shows that the analysis conducted to identify the universal conceptions in the ‘New List’ is primarily concerned with the necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of propositions, and the functions of components of propositions. Although substance and being are two of the five universal conceptions of the ‘New List’ there is a reason to believe that the three intermediate conceptions are the primary focus of Peirce’s attention in the paper under consideration.

1.2.4 Numerical Description of the Categories

Peirce assigns numerical titles to the three intermediate conceptions, saying:

This passage from the many to the one is numerical. The conception of a third is that of an object which is so related to two others, that one of these must be related to the other in the same way in which the third is related to that other. Now this coincides with the conception of an interpretant (W 2: 55).

In this, the only passage on numerical description of the categories in the ‘New List’, Peirce continues, “An other is plainly equivalent to a correlate. The conception of second differs from that other, in implying the possibility of a third” (W 2: 55). There is no mention of the conception of quality in numerical terms, but it is clear that a conception of first would be equivalent to the conception of quality, considering Peirce’s statement on the order of implication between the conceptions of second and third. In the last two sentences of the same passage Peirce states, “In the same way [the conception of second implies the possibility of a third], the conception of self implies the possibility of an other. The Ground is the self abstracted from the concreteness which implies the possibility of an other” (W 2: 55). Here “Ground is the self abstracted from the concreteness” is no different from the description of the conception of quality (see section 1.2.3.2 above).

However, Peirce’s numerical description of the three intermediate categories by no means indicates that substance and being could be given a similar description, nor does it contain any sign of an attempt by Peirce to so describe them. Peirce appears to suggest that their usefulness as two separate categories is coming to an
end. However, there is still an indirect reference to substance and being in the next paragraph after his numerical description of the intermediate categories, when Peirce makes a list of “supposable objects” of the categories. In the list there are:

What is.
Quale — that which refers to a ground,
Relate— that which refers to a ground and correlate,
Representamen— that which refers to a ground, correlate, and interpretant.
It. (W 2: 55)

“What is” and “It” are listed as the “supposable objects” of being and substance respectively. But there is nothing else said about them and how they might be related to the “supposable objects” of the intermediate categories.

1.2.5 Types of Representations and Logic

In the ‘New List’ Peirce had already started to work on some application of the categories. One part of Peirce’s concern is an attempt “to show how the three conceptions of reference to a ground, reference to an object, and reference to an interpretant are fundamental ones of at least one universal science, that of logic” (W 2: 56). Peirce does not include the categories of being and substance in this attempt, nor does he explain why. The most reasonable conjecture that can be made to explain this is that Peirce no longer thinks of the categories of being and substance as fundamental to logic or that logic qua logic is not directly concerned with either. This is consistent with the suggestion made in section 1.2.4 concerning why substance and being are not included in his numerical description of the categories. This suggestion is further supported by the features of the basis of Peirce’s claim that the three intermediate conceptions are fundamental to logic.

By using the principle of precision Peirce distinguishes three kinds of “representations” which differ from one another in terms of how they are related to their objects. This indicates Peirce’s certain understanding of the intermediate categories. He treats them as (different forms of) relations of reference. Recall his lists of the intermediate categories and their “supposable objects”:
List of intermediate categories:—
Quality (Reference to a Ground),
Relation (Reference to a Correlate),
Representation (Reference to an Interpretant).

List of “supposable objects” of intermediate categories:—
Quale — that which refers to a ground,
Relate — that which refers to a ground and correlate,
Representamen — that which refers to a ground, correlate, and interpretant.

Judging these two lists by themselves reveals the latter to have the merit of
being more complete, and thus more descriptive than the former, in that it shows the
number of item(s) involved in the relation of reference of each category and why a
category is prescindable and/or unprescindable from another category. Quality is
prescindable from both the categories of relation and representation, because quality
refers neither to a correlate nor to an interpretant. Relation cannot be prescinded from
quality for relation necessarily involves quality, reference to a ground. But relation
can be prescinded from representation since the former does not involve reference to
an interpretant. The category of representation involves reference “to a ground,
correlate, and interpretant,” and thus it cannot be prescinded from both quality and
relation, for they are both necessary conditions for its occurrence.

The term ‘reference’ (or ‘refer’) plays a significant role in Peirce’s analysis of
the categories. It designates a kind of representative power within the categories,
which Peirce purports to express by the term ‘reference’. This is evident in Peirce’s
defining of the three intermediate categories consistently using the word ‘refer.’ Note
that the third intermediate category is the only one called ‘representation’. But this
simply means that the third intermediate category is the representation proper, or
representation in total. For it includes the first two intermediate categories. The
categories of quality and relation are representations but with a lesser number of
terms involved in their whole process of representation.

Peirce analyses the relations of reference of the three intermediate categories,
and concludes that these relations hold between its terms in three different ways,
which he calls: (1) “concurrence or community in some quality,” (2)
“correspondence in fact,” and (3) “imputed quality.” By “concurrence or community
in some quality” Peirce means that which refers to something is in possession of
some character by virtue of which it renders itself representative. The relation of reference of a relatum (or what Peirce calls “relate”))\textsuperscript{19} to its ‘correlate’ is due to “correspondence in fact,” by which he means not only that the relate possesses a certain character that makes it representative, but it factually corresponds to its correlate. ‘Imputed character’ being the basis of the third mode of representation is a general law by which the ground and the correlate are brought together. Representation based on an imputed character involves the first two intermediate categories, but it differs from them in having an interpretant. Distinguishing these three different modes of representation enables Peirce to develop and explain the representative power of the categories. He says, “It follows that there are three kinds of representations” (W 2: 56).

1st. Those whose relation to their objects is a mere community in some quality, and these representations may be termed Likenesses.

2nd. Those whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact, and these may be termed Indices or Signs.

3rd. Those the ground of whose relation to their objects is an imputed character, which are the same as general signs, and these may be termed Symbols (W 2: 56).

The identification of these three kinds of representations makes it possible for Peirce to distinguish three different classes of signs: likenesses (which Peirce later called icons), indices or signs, and symbols. Peirce, by showing the methodological value of the three intermediate categories thus demonstrates that they are fundamental to logic insofar as they enable us to distinguish between these three classes of signs and their functions. Without the specific understanding of the categories as modes of representations, Peirce could not have demonstrated their application to logic. This is important and necessary for him that logic is the study or science “of second intentions as applied to first. … second intentions are the objects of the understanding considered as representations, and the first intentions to which they apply are the objects of those representations” (W 2: 56). If logic were not considered a study of second intentions (or representations), as he maintains along with scholastic logicians, but is concerned with first intentions, then the category of representation could not be part of the subject matter of logic.

At the time of publication of the ‘New List,’ however, Peirce held a more nominalistic view of logic, namely, that it operates by means of symbols alone and

\textsuperscript{19} Note Peirce uses the term ‘relate’ here as a noun, not as a verb as we normally understand it.
does not require likenesses and indices. This is because Peirce’s interest in logic then was very much focussed on classification of arguments, and for him “no arguments can be constructed of these [likenesses and indices] alone” (W 2: 56). Also, Peirce took the view that “The objects of the understanding, considered as representations, are symbols, that is, signs which are at least potentially general” (W 2: 56). Logical rules apply to likenesses and indices not in their own right and independently of the category of representation, but as members of it.

This leads Peirce to distinguish three branches of logic, three divisions of symbols, and three modes of arguments, focussed merely on symbols. The three branches of logic being: formal grammar, logic (proper), and formal rhetoric. Each is concerned with the formal conditions of symbols but in different respects. Formal grammar is concerned with the formal conditions necessary for combinations of symbols to yield a meaning. Logic proper (or ‘critical logic’ as Peirce also calls it) studies “the formal conditions of the truth of symbols” (W 2: 57). The third branch of logic, formal rhetoric, deals with how symbols appeal to, or refer to, an interpretant, thus showing “the force of symbols” (W 2: 57). The three divisions of symbols are:

1: Symbols which directly determine only their _grounds_ or imputed qualities, and are thus but sums of marks or _terms_;
2: Symbols which also independently determine their _objects_ by means of other term or terms, and thus, expressing their own objective validity, become capable of truth or falsehood, that is, are _propositions_; and,
3: Symbols which also independently determine their _interpretants_, and thus the minds to which they appeal, by premising a proposition or propositions which such a mind is to admit. These are _arguments_ (W 2: 57).

Peirce’s triadic divisions of symbols shows that ‘terms’, ‘propositions’ and ‘arguments’ are each recognised as part of the subject matter of logic, as symbols can be treated as general signs, or principles. What Peirce is saying is that particular terms, propositions and arguments can only be regarded as logically significant if they are considered in relation to some general rules.

Just as particular terms, propositions and arguments have logical significance due to the generality of symbols, likenesses and indices also play a part in logical consideration, as components of an argument.

Peirce divides arguments into three kinds: deduction, hypothesis (or “abduction” as he later called it), and induction. In each of these forms of argument

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the premises represent the conclusion in a certain way, depending on how they are related to one another. Thus the premises of a particular form of argument are a certain class of signs. “In deductive argument,” Peirce says, “the conclusion is represented by the premises as by a general sign under which it is contained” (W 2: 58; emphasis added). The premises of a hypothesis represent a likeness of the conclusion. With induction “the premises are an index of the conclusion” (W 2: 58, emphasis added).

1.3 Aristotle, Kant, and Peirce on Categories: A Brief Comparison and Contrast

The influence of both Aristotle and Kant on Peirce is undeniable, and it has become a commonplace in Peirce scholarship. Peirce had a great admiration for both these philosophers, remarking that they are two of the greatest philosophers of all time. As indicated in section 1.1.1, Peirce’s philosophical project was quite similar in aim to those of both Aristotle and Kant. When Peirce first derived his categories, he had both Aristotle and Kant in mind, among others. In attempting to demonstrate the uniqueness of Peirce’s theory of categories, I need to compare his theory with both Aristotle’s and Kant’s.

I have already mentioned one similarity between Peirce’s, Aristotle’s, and Kant’s lists of categories: that they were all regarded as foundational to their respective philosophical systems. Another similarity is that they all held the view that logic plays an important role in discovering the categories they wanted. Interestingly, however, it is the extent of their employment of logic in deriving their categories where the difference between them is most remarkable.

1.3.1 Aristotle’s Categories

Aristotle’s theory of categories is an attempt to identify the types of things that can be said of something else or an object. Thus his categories, ten in number, are called ‘predicates.’ Each category is predicable of the subject of any given proposition; and the proposition resulting from each predication is an answer to a question asked of that thing or object.

Aristotle’s Categories, in which he derived his ten categories, opens with a brief discussion of three different kinds of words: equivocal, univocal, and derivative words. Two things are equivocal if the same word can apply to them but in different senses. For example, both a man in reality, and a man in a portrait may be called...
‘animals’, but what the word ‘animal’ means in the case of man is different from what it means when applied to the case of the portrait. A word is univocal if it applies to different things in the same sense. Thus when the word ‘animal’ is applied to both a man and an ox it is used univocally since the word ‘animal’ applies to them in the same sense. Thirdly, there are derivative words, which get their name from similar words but of different form (or function). The word ‘grammatical’, for example, is a derivative of ‘grammar’.

Aristotle then states that all words or expressions are either compound or simple expressions. “We may or we may not combine what we call words, expressions and phrases. Combine them; you have propositions.” As to simple words, Aristotle explains, “Each uncombined word or expression means one of the following things,” which are his categories.

- what (Substance), how large (that is, Quantity), what sort of thing (that is, Quality), related to what (or Relation), where (that is, Place), when (or Time),
- in what attitude (Posture, Position), how circumstanced (State or Condition), how active, what doing (or Action), how passive, what suffering (Affection).

Aristotle treated these categories as both logical and ontological representations. They are logical, in that they represent the ways in which we think about things. For example, we think of an object either as a substance (as in ‘Socrates is a man’) or as a determination of it (as in ‘Socrates is five-foot tall’). Used in an ontological sense, the categories represent different modes of being, or ways how things exist. To say that a person, Peter, for example, exists implies that Peter is somewhere, i.e. in a place; he must have a certain height; and so on.

Aristotle’s method of deriving his categories is a mixture of logic and appeal to the form of language itself. As William and Martha Kneale put it, “Aristotle is classifying types of being … but he uses the differences between rules for different linguistic expressions as a clue to the differences between types of being.”

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22 Ibid., 2, 1a16-18.
23 Ibid., 4, 1b25.
24 Ibid., 4, 1b25-28.
holds a similar view when he says that Aristotle’s categories “are derived from a half-logical, half-grammatical analysis of propositions.”

The main important difference, however, between Aristotle’s and Peirce’s theories of categories is that in case of the former theory each category can be applied to form a meaningful proposition without necessarily requiring the involvement of the other categories. For example, we can say, “Stove is black” with the category of quality, which is ‘black’ in this example, being the only category employed, and yet we appear to still have quite a meaningful proposition. However, for Peirce, as I have discussed earlier, all his categories must be involved in the proposition “Stove is black.” He would argue that we cannot make sense of any proposition or concept without the involvement of all the categories.

There is an exception to what I have just said about the difference between Aristotle’s and Peirce’s categories; namely, Aristotle’s category of substance, which is significantly different from the rest of his categories. The category of substance, according to Aristotle, can neither be predicated of a subject, nor is it in a subject. This is because for Aristotle substance is both logically and ontologically prior to the rest of the categories. For in every predication there is always a substance, which is signified by the subject of a proposition, of which we predicate any of the rest of the categories. Aristotle explains:

Everything else but first substance is either affirmed of first substance or present in such as its subject. This is evident from particular instances taken by way of examples. We predicate ‘animal’ of ‘man.’ So we predicate ‘animal also of any particular man. Were there no individuals existing of whom it could thus be affirmed, it could not be affirmed of the species. Colour, again, is in body; so also in this or that body. For were there no bodies existing wherein it could also exist, it could not be in body at all. In fine, then, all things whatsoever, save what we call primary substances, are predicates of primary substances or present in such as their subjects. And were there no primary substance, nought else could so much as exist.

Aristotle draws an important distinction between what he calls primary and secondary substances. By ‘primary substance’ Aristotle means the individual things or existents such as man, horse, and so on; and secondary substances are things, or more properly called ‘concepts’, like ‘man’, ‘horse’, etc. An example will suffice to

27 This is from a draft of his ‘New List.’ This draft does not appear in the Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce. It is reprinted in Murray G. Murphey, The Development of Peirce’s Philosophy (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), p. 412.

demonstrate Aristotle’s idea of the distinction. Consider the proposition “Socrates is a man.” The term ‘man’ is a secondary substance, or species in Aristotle’s alternative terminology; and ‘Socrates,’ which is the subject of the proposition considered, is a primary substance. According to Aristotle, the primary substance ‘Socrates’ cannot be predicated of, nor does it exist in, any subject. On the other hand, a secondary substance can be predicated of a subject but it is not in a subject. Thus ‘man’ can be predicated of Socrates, but it is not in Socrates or any other individual man.

1.3.2 Kant’s Categories

Kant, unlike Aristotle, derived his categories directly from an analysis of the logical forms of judgements. This is because for Kant the categories are a priori or “pure concepts of the understanding,” meaning that they are neither given in perception nor experience, nor can be abstracted from it. Rather, they are presupposed by the logical forms of judgement. Kant held the view that all knowledge rests on three main factors. Firstly, there is a given “manifold of pure intuition” by which he means the impressions received by intuition (i.e. in direct experience). Secondly, this “manifold of intuition” is synthesised by our imagination, which Kant takes as a “blind but indispensable function of the soul.” The third factor involved in knowledge is the concepts (of the understanding) which bring unity to the synthesis of the manifold of intuition by imagination. These concepts, according to Kant, “rest on the understanding.”

All acts of the understanding are reducible to judgements, according to Kant. This is because, Kant claims, “the only use which the understanding can make of … concepts is to judge by means of them.” Thus for Kant to identify the categories, requires an identification of all different possible forms of judgements. Kant came up with twelve logical forms of judgements (given below in figure 3), which he classified according to their quantity, quality, relation, and modality.

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30 Ibid., A78.
31 Ibid., A79.
32 Ibid., B94.
33 Ibid., B93. Emphasis added.
Since the logical forms of judgement are distinct from one another, corresponding to each one of them is a distinct category. Kant thus derived twelve categories (given in figure 4 below) from his table of judgements.

Kant argues that the categories are necessary for all knowledge and experience. For the categories, according to Kant, provide “the objective ground of the possibility of experience.” He says:

Concepts of objects in general thus underlie all empirical knowledge as its *a priori* conditions. The objective validity of the categories as *a priori* concepts rests, therefore, on the fact that, so far as the form of thought is concerned, through them alone does experience become possible. They relate of necessity and *a priori* to objects of experience, for the reason that only by means of them can any object whatsoever of experience be thought.

Like Aristotle’s categories, as explained above, Kant’s categories do not have the characteristic of inter-dependence inherent in Peirce’s list of categories, namely that *all* the categories are involved in every meaningful proposition. Peirce, in

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**Kant’s Table of Judgements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Modality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universal</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particular</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Hypothetical</td>
<td>Assertoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Infinite</td>
<td>Disjunctive</td>
<td>Apodeictic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Kant’s Table of Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of Quantity</th>
<th>Of Quality</th>
<th>Of Relation</th>
<th>Of Modality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>Of Inherence and Subsistence</td>
<td>Possibility — Impossibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plurality</td>
<td>Negation</td>
<td>(substantia et accidens)</td>
<td>Existence — Non-existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totality</td>
<td>Limitation</td>
<td>Of Causality and Dependence</td>
<td>Necessity — Contingency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(cause and effect)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Of Community (reciprocity between agent and patient)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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34 Ibid., A70, B95.
35 Ibid., B106.
36 Ibid., A94.
37 Ibid., B126.
realising the difference between his list of categories and that of Kant, draws a
distinction between what he calls “particular categories” and “universal categories.”
He identifies Kant’s categories as particular categories, and his own as universal.

The particular categories form a series, or set of series, only one of each being
present, or at least predominant, in any one phenomenon. The universal
categories, on the other hand, belong to every phenomenon, one being perhaps
more prominent in one aspect of that phenomenon than another but all
belonging to every phenomenon (CP 5.43).

Then, two sentences later, Peirce continues, saying the following of Kant’s
categories.

But in Kant we have Unity, Plurality, and Totality not all present at once;
Reality, Negation, and Limitation not all present at once; Inherence, Causation,
and Reaction not all present at once; Possibility, Necessity, and Actuality not
all present at once. On the other hand Kant’s four greater categories, Quantity,
Quality, Relation, and Modality, form what I should recognize as Kant’s
Universal Categories (CP 5.43).

Despite Peirce’s identification of “Kant’s four greater categories” as universal
categories, it should be pointed out that he does not mean to say that they are the
same as his own categories. For not only are they different in number, but, more
importantly, Kant’s “universal categories” do not have the inter-dependence and
irreducible triadic relation (or triadicity) of Peirce’s categories. Kant would classify
Peirce’s example “The stove is black” (discussed in section 1.2.3.2 above) as a
categorical judgment, and one that embodies his category of ‘inherence and
subsistence’ (or substance and accident). Whereas for Kant this judgment is formed
by applying the category of ‘inherence and subsistence’ only, Peirce maintains all his
categories are involved in the formation of the judgment.

1.4 Some Changes to the Categories of the ‘New List’

Peirce later, in 1885,\(^{38}\) revised his theory of categories formulated in the ‘New
List’ in the light of the developments he made to his theories of cognition, reality,
and logic of relations.

1.4.1 From Five to Three Categories

In his writings after publication of the ‘New List’ in 1867 to the end of his
philosophical career, Peirce maintained only three categories. He dropped being and

\(^{38}\) According to Murray G. Murphey, 1993, p. 296, “although some tentative attempts at a revision
of the categories were made in the late 1870’s — e.g. the correlation of Thirdness with continuity —
no thoroughgoing revision was made until 1885.”
substance from his list of categories and retained only the three intermediate categories of the ‘New List,’ as explained above in section 1.2.3.

Between 1868 and 1877 Peirce wrote a series of papers, published in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Three of these papers constitute what is known as the ‘cognition series’: ‘Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man’ (1868), ‘Some Consequences of Four Incapacities’ (1868), and ‘Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic’ (1869). The ‘cognition series’ contains developments of some of the ideas of the ‘New List;’ for example, the theory of signs and its application to cognition. All these developments culminate in an attack on what Peirce calls “the spirit of Cartesianism,” which he understands to be a doctrine of introspection emphasising methodological doubt and the certainty of individual self-consciousness as principles of knowledge. His opposition to the spirit of Cartesianism contains four denials.

1. We have no power of Introspection, but all knowledge of the internal worlds is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.
2. We have no power of Intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions.
3. We have no power of thinking without signs.
4. We have no conception of the absolutely incognizable (W 2: 213).

A radical consequence of his denial of these four principal assumptions of Cartesian metaphysics is that Peirce has to reformulate his five categories given in the ‘New List.’ I argue that despite the fact that the actual reformulation of his list of categories did not take place until 1885, the fundamental ideas of the ‘cognition series’ suggest that there would be some changes to be made to the categories of the ‘New List.’ This is evident, as I shall explain, in Peirce’s view of substance and being presented in the ‘cognition series.’ (As far as I know, Peirce does not offer any explanation as to why he dropped ‘being’ and ‘substance’ from his list of categories.)

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40 It is true, as Hausmann (1993, p. 137) points out, that Peirce “has not abandoned these conceptions [being and substance] completely [after the ‘New List’], because he does refer to them in other contexts.” The point is despite Peirce’s reference to being and substance in other contexts after the ‘New List,’ he never regarded them in those contexts as distinct categories as he did in the ‘New List.’
Fundamental to ‘cognition series’ is the idea that the products of cognition are relations (W 2: 209), meaning that “every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions” (W 2:213). What Peirce opposes here is the idea that there is an absolutely first principle, which he identifies as an element of the “spirit of Cartesianism.” Since being and substance are not forms of relations, nor forms of representations, nor signs, nor forms of cognition, it follows that they have to be excluded from the list of primitive categories. This leaves only the three (intermediate) categories, namely: Quality (Reference to a Ground), Relation (Reference to a Correlate), Representation (Reference to an Interpretant).

The arguments of the ‘cognition series’ (which lead to the exclusion of being and substance from his list of categories) indicate what Peirce thinks about the nature of categories. Namely, that categories must themselves be *universal conceptions*, and that they must result from some conceptual activity, or cognition. Although being and substance are identified in the ‘New List’ as universal conceptions, in the light of the arguments he puts forward in the ‘cognition series,’ he concludes that they cannot be conceptions. Peirce’s proof of this is that they are not relations. For Peirce conceptions involve representation of some sort, whether a conception is based on concurrence, or correspondence in fact, or imputed quality. Terms such as being and substance are normally called absolute terms; they involve no relation, and thus they are not able to involve representation. But, according to Peirce’s argument, absolute terms, if there are really any, are “absolutely inconceivable” (W 2: 238).

Peirce becomes clearer in the ‘cognition series’ about his view of what the relation of substance and being to cognition really is. He explains substance more explicitly, saying “that the first impression of sense is not cognition but only the *limit* of cognition. … At the very first instant of this process [of experience of any object], there is no consciousness but only the beginning of becoming conscious” (W 2: 191; my emphasis). Although Peirce has already indicated this in the ‘New List,’ that substance is the beginning of conception and it has no connotation, it is in the ‘cognition series’ instead that he makes a clear distinction between the *limit* of cognition and *cognition* per se. To put it in the language of the ‘New List,’ the distinction is now clearly made between the *beginning* of conception and *conception* itself. In the light of this distinction Peirce argues, “Thus the first impression is out of the mind in the sense that the degree of consciousness in it is zero” (W 2: 191). It follows that the categories Peirce has in mind are supposed to be products of some
degree of consciousness, in which some representation of them is possible and their representative power is realised. An object or substance that involves no degree of consciousness cannot afford any representation of it. In other words, Peirce is saying that we cannot make representations of the “incognizables or inconceivables,” if there are any.

Peirce’s sign theory of cognition allows the term ‘being’ to be treated, for all practical purposes, as synonymous with ‘thought.’ This means that ‘being’ is no longer considered a category but ‘a conception about a category’. Peirce says, because “all thought is in signs” (W 2: 208), and being is synonymous with thought, the conception of being is “a conception about a sign - a thought, or word” (W 2: 231). Peirce arrives at this conclusion by arguing that:

A conception … which was quite universal in every respect would be unrecognizable and impossible. We do not obtain the conception of Being, in the sense implied in the copula, by observing that all the things which we can think of have something in common, for there is no such thing to be observed. We get it by reflecting upon signs - words or thoughts; - we observe that different predicates may be attached to the same subject, and that each makes some conception applicable to the subject; then we imagine that a subject has something true of it merely because a predicate (no matter what) is attached to it, - and that we call Being. … and since it is not applicable to every sign, it is not primarily universal, although it is so in its mediate application to things (W 2: 231).

Here Peirce brings in his sign theory of cognition to explain both how we arrive at a conception of being and the logical function of the term ‘being’ in logical discourse. He denies any existence to being as such (considered as “something” conceivable in itself), arguing that the only concept of being that is meaningful and intelligible to us is that which is conveyed to us through signs, or representations. This is how Peirce comes to view thought, which for him is a sign (W 2: 173), as synonymous with being.

It should be emphasised that this notion of being stems ultimately from his denial of the view that there is an absolutely first premise or cognition. Peirce takes the idea of an absolutely ultimate cognition or conception as untenable for such an idea would be inconceivable. He emphasises that “The only thought … which can possibly be cognized is thought in signs. But thought which cannot be cognized does not exist. All thought, therefore, must necessarily be in signs” (W 2: 207). It follows from this that being which is cognisable is only that which results from cognition conducted in signs.
In denying “the spirit of Cartesianism,” and its resort to psychological introspection, Peirce comes up with a theory of cognition that requires him to exclude being and substance from his list of categories. He argues that the concept of substance does not involve cognition and as such it cannot function as a category. Being is considered not a category but a conception about a category. This reinforces Peirce’s insistence on categories as kinds of relations with representative power, and having established the categories as kinds of relations with representative power, Peirce realises that he has to give a phenomenological account of the categories, showing how they link to experience.

1.4.2 The Impact of the Logic of Relations and Quantification Theory on Peirce’s Approach to Categories

After the publication of the ‘New List,’ Peirce made some logical discoveries which also required changes to be made to his categories. These discoveries relate to his logic of relations (which Peirce also calls ‘logic of relatives’) and the theory of quantification. He set out his account of the logic of relations in his 1870 paper ‘Description of a Notation for the Logic of Relatives, resulting from an Amplification of the Conceptions of Boole’s Calculus of Logic.’\(^{41}\) His quantification theory was first presented in 1883, in his paper ‘The Logic of Relatives,’ and was published together with papers on logic by his students\(^{42}\) (most notably O. H. Mitchell) at The Johns Hopkins University. Peirce refined his quantification theory and presented it in his paper ‘On the Algebra of Logic: A Contribution to the Philosophy of Notation,’ 1885.\(^{43}\) (It should be noted that there is some similarity between elements of the description of the intermediate categories in the ‘New List’ and some of the conclusions of Peirce’s logic of relations, however there is no evidence that Peirce used logic of relations\(^{44}\) in his analysis in the ‘New List’.)

In the ‘New List’ Peirce treats the three intermediate categories as forms of relations. There Peirce was concerned primarily with these forms of relations as

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\(^{44}\) Peirce had a copy of De Morgan’s paper on the logic of relations (‘On the Syllogism IV, and the Logic of Relations’) in 1866, a year before his ‘New List.’ CP 1.562.
conditions of the proposition. A quality is predicated of the subject, thus forming a relation between the subject and the quality, and finally the process of predication is conducted by an interpretant. Although Peirce understood the three intermediate categories as kinds of relations, his understanding of them was still restricted to traditional ‘Aristotelian’ subject-predicate logic, according to which a proposition is constituted of a subject and a predicate united by a copula.

1.4.2.1 Logic of Relations

Peirce’s logic of relations allows certain logical operations which traditional logic is unable to handle. Unlike traditional logic, the logic of relations both demonstrates for Peirce that there are propositions (such as “A gives B to C”) that are not reducible to subject-predicate logical form, and makes it possible to analyse three-term propositions. Peirce distinguishes three classes of logical terms, which he calls “absolute terms,” “simple relative terms,” and “conjugative terms.” These classes of terms, according to Peirce, represent things in three different logical forms.

**Absolute terms** like “man,” “tree,” etc. have the logical form “a _____”, using the indefinite article ‘a’ or ‘an’ and leaving the blank space to be filled in with whatever term is under discussion. One characteristic of absolute terms is that there is no discrimination involved. The logical form of absolute terms “involves only the conception of quality” (W 2: 365), according to Peirce.

**Simple relative terms** are terms like “lover of,” “father of,” and so on, and they have the logical form “_____ is a lover of _____”. The characteristic feature of simple relative terms is that they discriminate between objects themselves or their relatives. For example, “John is the father of Peter”. In this sentence, the simple relative term “father of” is a relation holding between John and Peter, in which John is discriminated from Peter.

The fundamental idea of the third class of logical terms, **conjugative terms**, is that it “involves the conception of bringing things into relation,” thus requiring “the addition of more than one term to complete the denotation” (W 2: 365). Examples of conjugative terms include terms like “giver,” “buyer,” and they stand in the logical form such as “giver of _____ to _____”, or “buyer of _____ for _____ from _____” (W 2: 365). The difference between simple relative terms and conjugative terms is that the latter involve both ability to distinguish between different relations and their relata, and consciousness of their origin. For example, the proposition “A gives B to
C” has three subjects (A, B, and C) brought together by the notion “giver.” To put this example in the form “giver of _____ to _____,” we will have “A is the giver of B to C,” in which the giver is specified as A and the two blanks filled in with B and C.

Peirce, in realising that he has to explain his limiting of classes of logical terms to only three, given that there are propositions containing more than three terms (e.g. ‘x pays y to z for w’\(^\text{45}\)), says the following: “The conjugative term involves the conception of THIRD, the relative that of second or OTHER, the absolute term simply considers AN object” (W 2: 365). He then continues:

> No fourth class of terms exists involving the conception of fourth, because when that of third is introduced, since it involves the conception of bringing objects into relation, all higher numbers are given at once, inasmuch as the conception of bringing objects into relation is independent of the number of members of the relationship (W 2: 365; emphasis added).

The idea of “bringing objects into relation” is apparently the basis of Peirce’s argument in limiting the number of his categories to three. From this passage it appears that for Peirce any relation with a number of terms higher than three would perform the same function as that by the conception of third, namely, “bringing objects into relation.” He does not seem to be concerned with whether or not a relation with more than three terms would render its objects more intelligible than the objects of a triadic relation. But he seems to think that this could not be the case, since a polyadic relation could not necessarily make its objects more intelligible than if they are reduced to and rendered in a triadic relation. Peirce argues that because polyadic relations are compounds of triadic relations (CP 1.347), they are reducible to the latter relations.

Absolute terms, simple relative terms, and conjugative terms are three kinds of predicates.\(^\text{46}\) An absolute term is a one-place predicate, simple relative term a two-place predicate, and conjugative term a three-place predicate.\(^\text{47}\) Further, these three kinds of predicates are three different kinds of relations: they are monadic, dyadic, and triadic relations, and correspond to absolute, simple relative, and conjugative


terms respectively. These (relational) predicates become Peirce’s three categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness.

These categories correspond to the intermediate categories of the ‘New List.’ There is an important difference between the two, however. Whereas the intermediate categories of the ‘New List’ are conceptions involved in connecting being to substance in the subject-predicate form, Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness (or the conceptions of first, second, and third as Peirce also calls them) now revised under the discovery of the logic of relations are “kinds of predicates.”

The category of third (or Thirdness) constitutes the climax of Peirce’s categorical system. The methodological capacity of this system rests ultimately on the conception of third and much of what Peirce’s categories are capable of depends on it. For example, although the conceptions of first and second are necessary steps in seeking for the meaning or intelligibility of objects, together they cannot fulfil that goal without the conception of third. Monadic and dyadic relations have to develop into a triadic relation in order to make their objects intelligible. And relations of terms higher than three are reducible to a triadic relation in which the meaning of their objects could be made available for understanding.

1.4.2.2 Theory of Quantification

Peirce’s discovery of the theory of quantification in 1883, and its refinement in his 1885 paper referred to above, made him revise his category of relation or Secondness. This is because the theory of quantification demonstrates for Peirce that all the three kinds of signs, which he calls “token” (or “symbol” as he also calls it), “icon,” and “index” are necessary for logical thought. He says, “in a perfect system of logical notations signs of these several kinds must all be employed” (CP 3.363).

A token is a sign “related to its object only in consequence of a mental association, and depends upon a habit” (CP 3.360). Tokens “are always abstract and general, because habits are general rules to which the organism has become

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48 Murphey, 1993, pp. 152-3.
49 Peirce describes the significance of the conception of third in different places in his writings. See, for example, CP 4.332.
50 Peirce discovered quantification theory independently of Gottlob Frege who made the same discovery four years earlier in his Begriffsschrift, 1879.
subjected” (CP 3.360). Since “generality is essential to reasoning,” and since tokens “are the only general signs,” tokens are thus necessary for logical thought (CP 3.363). An icon is “a sign which stands for something merely because it resembles it” (CP 3.362), such as a painting. The necessity of icon for logical thought is that it provides the ‘object’ (which may either be physically or mentally present) which reasoning ‘observes’ and ‘experiments’ with in order to draw out conclusion. Thus “in contemplating a painting,” for example, “there is a moment when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears” (CP 3.362).

Quantifiers belong to the third class of signs, “indices.” According to Peirce, “The index asserts nothing; it only says “There!” It takes hold of our eyes, as it were, and forcibly directs them to a particular object, and there it stops” (CP 3.361). Logical thought requires indices (examples of which include a pointing finger, pronouns, etc.) for denoting “the subject of discourse” (CP 3.363).

[T]okens alone do not state what is the subject of discourse; and this can, in fact, not be described in general terms; it can only be indicated. The actual world cannot be distinguished from a world of imagination by any description. Hence the need of pronoun and indices, and the more complicated the subject the greater the need of them (CP 3.363).

Peirce attributes the credit of introducing indices into logic to his student O. H. Mitchell.

The introduction of the indices into the algebra of logic is the greatest merit of Mr. Mitchell’s system. He writes $F_1$ to mean that the proposition $F$ is true of every object in the universe, and $F_u$ to mean that the same is true of some object. This distinction can only be made in some such way as this (CP 3.363).

Mitchell’s notations $F_1$ and $F_u$ correspond to universal and existential (or particular) quantifiers respectively. Peirce provided his own notations for quantifiers by adopting the mathematical signs for sum and product, namely sigma, $\Sigma$, and pi, $\Pi$, respectively. Peirce uses $\Sigma$ for ‘some’ (existential quantifier) and $\Pi$ for ‘all’ (universal quantifier) (CP 3.393). Combined with variables and indices, Peirce writes $\Sigma_i x_i$ to mean “that $x$ is true of some one of the individuals denoted by $i$,” and $\Pi_i x_i$ to mean “that $x$ is true of all these individuals [denoted by $i$]” (CP 3.393). Here variables refer directly not to numbers, but to individual objects; and the signs $\Sigma$ and

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52 The symbolization of universal and particular quantification in modern logic follows Russell rather than Peirce, but they are essentially making the same kind of distinctions.
Π designate not mathematical sums and products of numbers, or logical sums and products of classes, “but direct quantification over” individual objects. 53

Thus quantification theory demonstrates for Peirce that his category of Secondness could be associated with individual objects. Whereas Peirce identifies the category of Secondness or relation in the ‘New List’ as a concept, with the discovery of quantification theory, he now identifies the category of Secondness with individual objects instead. 54

1.5 Theory of Categories and the Classification of the Sciences

Peirce was convinced that the sciences have to be organised systematically, and in the later years of his career he endeavoured to translate this conviction into effect. There are various factors responsible for Peirce’s conviction of the importance of system (e.g. his diverse knowledge and experience of many fields of inquiry — physical sciences, history of science, mathematics, philosophy, history of philosophy, etc. and the need for science to integrate these). However, it is the influence of Aristotle and Kant that is more important and should be identified.

In his article ‘The Architecture of Theories,’ 55 Peirce refers to Kant thus: “That systems ought to be constructed architectonically has been preached since Kant, but I do not think the full import of the maxim has by any means been apprehended” (CP 6.9). Peirce continues:

What I would recommend is that every person who wishes to form an opinion concerning fundamental problems should first of all make a complete survey of human knowledge, should take note of all the valuable ideas in each branch of science, should observe in just what respect each has been successful and where it has failed, in order that, in the light of the thorough acquaintance so attained of the available materials for a philosophical theory and of the nature and strength of each, he may proceed to the study of what the problem of philosophy consists in, and the proper way of solving it. … namely, to make a systematic study of the conceptions out of which a philosophical theory may be built, in order to ascertain what place each conception may fitly occupy in such a theory, and to what uses it is adapted (CP 6.9).

In about 1898, in a proposed work entitled ‘A Guess at the Riddle,’ Peirce set out to construct his system. “To erect a philosophical edifice,” Peirce says, “that shall outlast the vicissitudes of time, my care must be, not so much to set each brick with

53 W. V. Quine, ‘Peirce’s Logic,’ 1995, p.27.
54 Murphey, 1993, p. 299.
55 First published in The Monist, 1891.
The undertaking which this volume inaugurates is to make a philosophy like that of Aristotle, that is to say, to outline a theory so comprehensive that, for a long time to come, the entire work of human reason, in philosophy of every school and kind, in mathematics, in psychology, in physical science, in history, in sociology, and in whatever other department there may be, shall appear as the filling up of its details (CP 1.1).

These two passages taken together indicate the difficult and far-reaching project that Peirce set for himself, that is, to combine detailed, thorough-going investigation and general inquiry into the foundations or essence of things, to develop a coherent system of thought. Because Peirce was both a scientist and philosopher he was committed to bringing science and philosophy together (neither to override the other). More specifically, Peirce’s attempt was to build a system of philosophy upon ‘deep and massive’ foundations that would be the product of detailed investigation. As Peirce himself says of his philosophy (in a fragment of his dated c. 1897), “in brief, my philosophy may be described as the attempt of a physicist to make such conjecture as to the constitution of the universe as the methods of science may permit, with the aid of all that has been done by previous philosophers” (CP 1.7).

1.5.1 Peirce’s Classification of the Sciences

It was clear to Peirce that achievement of his goal required a classification of the sciences that would exhibit the relations between the sciences. He specified his classification as concerned “not with all possible sciences, nor with so many branches of knowledge, but with sciences in their present condition” (CP 1.180). He acknowledged that his classification “borrows its idea from Comte’s classification; namely, the idea that one science depends upon another for fundamental principles, but does not furnish such principles to that other” (CP 1.180). Peirce closely follows this idea throughout his classification, which results in a strictly hierarchical system.

In Peirce’s classification of the sciences he considers philosophy a science. It should be noted, too, that Peirce understood his system of the sciences as a system of systems, as he often spoke of a science as a system, or, to use the word ‘classification’, a classification of classifications.

In his conception of science Peirce rejects the view that science is simply a body of systematised knowledge. He defines science as “a living historic entity,” (CP 1.44) or “living process” (CP 1.234). The essence of Peirce’s conception of science
emphasises the dynamic, actual practice and pursuit of science, not the static, established body of facts that science provides for us. “Let us remember,” Peirce writes, “that science is a pursuit of living men, and that its most marked characteristic is that when it is genuine, it is in an incessant state of metabolism and growth” (CP 1.232). This conception of science is more compatible with what Peirce requires of his classification of the sciences, namely, a dynamic system that establishes the relations between the actual sciences rather than treating them as abstract or isolated units.

Peirce classified the sciences into three general divisions: Science of Discovery (or Theoretical Science), Science of Review, and Practical Science. He admitted that his classification was incomplete, leaving some parts of it underdeveloped (e.g., practical sciences), and some were merely identified without any attempt to elaborate on detail (e.g., science of review). But two things are very clear in his classification. First, that he had a definite purpose in his conducting a classification (already indicated earlier), and second, that the focus of his classification was on theoretical sciences.

1.5.2 Sciences of Discovery (or Theoretical Sciences)

Peirce divided theoretical sciences into three main groups, starting from the most general and abstract of the sciences to the least general and abstract. Each of his divisions of the theoretical sciences is subdivided, then each subdivision is further subdivided, and this is then further subdivided, making four layers altogether. The outline of these layers will become clear in the course of our discussion.

Peirce considered what principles to employ in his classification of the sciences, for example: the purpose of a science, the problem a science addresses, the kinds of questions they are concerned with, the method of reasoning used in a science, the subject matter or object of inquiry, and the mode of observation employed by a science. The role played by these factors in the whole classification is not equally apparent. It largely depends on which part of the system is in question, and from what standpoint one conducts the observation, that some are more or less obvious than others.

Peirce calls the first division of science a branch — with the purpose of the science as its distinguishing factor. He “recognize[s] two branches of science: Theoretical, whose purpose is simply and solely knowledge of God’s truth; and
Practical, for the uses of life” (CP 1.239). Next to the first division is what Peirce calls class, and under class is what he calls order. Peirce distinguishes three classes of science: mathematics, philosophy (also called coenoscopic science), and the special sciences (which he also calls idioscopic sciences, or idioscopy). All these sciences, Peirce argues, are observational “but … in very different senses” (CP 1.239).

Mathematics is the most abstract of all the sciences. It “meddles with every other science without exception. There is no science whatever to which is not attached an application of mathematics” (CP 1.245). The observation of mathematics is peculiar to itself, for it is conducted in the imagination.

[Mathematics] is observational, in so far as it makes constructions in the imagination according to abstract precepts, and then observes these imaginary objects, finding in them relations of parts not specified in the precept of construction. This is truly observation, yet certainly in a very peculiar sense (CP 1.240).

Peirce’s view of ‘observation’ is a kind of metaphorical extension of observation as usually understood within the empirical sciences where the emphasis is placed on sense observation.

The purpose of mathematics is not to establish positive truths but to determine what is and is not logically possible. By that Peirce means the whole business of mathematics is concerned merely with tracing what consequences or conclusions necessarily follow from its hypotheses. The truth or falsity of the inferred conclusions is not a concern of mathematics. Hence Peirce also calls mathematics the science of necessary reasoning, or “science of the consequences of hypotheses” (CP 1.247).

The relation between mathematics and philosophy is a one-directional dependence. Because mathematics is more abstract and therefore ranked higher than philosophy, it is independent of it. “[M]athematics,” Peirce insists, “is the only science which can be said to stand in no need of philosophy” (CP 1.249). On the other hand, philosophy is dependent on mathematics for its fundamental concepts such as space, numbers, continuity, possible relations, and so on. (See CP 6.26-31).

The task or purpose of the second class of science, philosophy, is to establish universal truths and phenomena in experience. Unlike mathematics, philosophy’s ‘observation’ is restricted to normal, common experience. In arguing for the observational character of philosophy Peirce rejects the view that metaphysics has no
meaning and is “beyond the reach of human cognition” (CP 6.2). The fact is, according to Peirce:

the only reason that this [the observation of metaphysics] is not universally recognized is that it rests upon kinds of phenomena with which every man’s experience is so saturated that he usually pays no particular attention to them. The data of metaphysics are not less open to observation, but immeasurably more so, than the data, say, of the very highly developed science of astronomy (CP 6.2).

Thus the observations of philosophy “escape the untrained eye precisely because they permeate our whole lives, just as a man who never takes off his blue spectacles soon ceases to see the blue tinge” (CP 1.241).

Third of the classes of science is the special sciences, such as physics, biology, chemistry, etc. The special sciences are concerned with finding out new facts from the same experience upon which philosophy operates in seeking universal phenomena. But unlike philosophy, the special sciences are more interested in minute details relating to the particulars of experience. They also differ from philosophy in terms of observation. Scientists have their own special kind of observation in which the senses are either subject to a special training, assisted with technological aids or apparatus like a microscope, or both.

In relation to dependency the special sciences appeal to philosophy for principles, but not vice versa. While special sciences each have a primary concern of their own, they often encounter certain problems in the pursuit of their specific subject matter which make them appeal to philosophy. (Eg. whether force is a product of unperceivable constraints, or to distinguish the validity of different types of explanation, etc.)

1.5.2.1 Semiotic and Observation in Science of Discovery

There are two main things that stand out from the foregoing discussion. The first is Peirce’s claim that all mathematics, philosophy, and the special sciences are observational, and second, that they are all sciences of discovery. (Note that he uses both terms in a way that differs from common usage in the empirical sciences.) Both these claims represent a certain line of thought that is persistent in Peirce’s philosophy of science, namely, his interest in and concern for the concept of method. In making all sciences of discovery observational, Peirce appears to have taken the view that it is the method employed in science, and not the object a science studies that matters most. As I said earlier, Peirce was well aware of the differences between
the objects studied in various theoretical sciences, and yet he still considered them all sciences of discovery. That is to say, for Peirce, sciences of discovery depend fundamentally on method rather than the object of their study.

This point can be illustrated using the table below (figure 5). The overall purpose of this table is simply to show how Peirce is here understood in the way just explained, that is, the nature of object of study does not disqualify theoretical sciences from being a science of discovery, and the consistency in their being observational constitutes the very basis of my claim that the issue of method is a key element reflected in Peirce’s classification of the sciences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science of Discovery</th>
<th>Is it observational?</th>
<th>Is its object of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>abstract?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Sciences</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peirce’s insistence on observation as an essential element of all sciences of discovery is a direct result of assumptions underlying his semiotic. (The relation between semiotic and observation is discussed in detail in chapter 6.) In shifting the focus of his logical inquiry from classification of types of reasoning to treating them as stages of inquiry, Peirce encountered a problem with regard to mathematics. The problem was about how to make mathematics both a deductive science (purely analytic) and a science of discovery (synthetic in Kant’s sense). Peirce believed that he had resolved this problem by means of his semiotic. He wrote in his article ‘On the Algebra of Logic: A Contribution to the Philosophy of Notation’ in 1885:

It has long been a puzzle how it could be that, on the one hand, mathematics is purely deductive in its nature, and draws its conclusion apodictically, while on the other hand, it presents as rich and apparently unending a series of surprising discoveries as any observational science. Various have been the attempts to solve the paradox by breaking down one or other of these assertions, but without success. The truth, however, appears to be that all deductive reasoning, even simple syllogism, involves an element of observation; namely, deduction consists in constructing an icon or diagram the relations of whose parts shall present a complete analogy with those of the parts of the object of reasoning, of experimenting upon this image in the imagination, and of observing the result so as to discover unnoticed and hidden relations among the parts (CP 3.363).
1.5.3 Divisions of Philosophy

Because Peirce’s division of philosophy plays an important role in my discussion in the remaining chapters, where I will give a great deal of attention to it, I will only briefly outline it here.

The third division in Peirce’s classification of the sciences is the subdivision of a class which he calls order. Peirce divides philosophy into three orders: phenomenology, normative science, and metaphysics. Peirce states the tasks of the divisions of philosophy as follows.

Phenomenology ascertains and studies the kinds of elements universally present in the phenomena; meaning by the phenomenon, whatever is present at any time to the mind in any way. Normative science distinguishes what ought to be from what ought not to be … Metaphysics seeks to give an account of the universe of mind and matter. Normative science rests largely on phenomenology and mathematics; metaphysics on phenomenology and on normative science (CP 1.186).

The same principle operative in the divisions of class is also at work here. The more abstract order of philosophy supplies principles to the less abstract ones. Normative science is dependent on phenomenology only, whereas metaphysics is dependent on both normative science and phenomenology.
Chapter 2:

PEIRCE’S PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO
THE NATURE OF THE CATEGORIES
2.1 Peirce’s Conception of Phenomenology

2.1.1 Why does he call his approach ‘Phenomenology’?

As mentioned in chapter 1, Peirce takes inquiry into the categories as an affair of phenomenology as well, and not a business just of logic and metaphysics. My discussion of Peirce’s phenomenology requires that I give attention to two things. First, Peirce introduced his science of phenomenology, or “the Doctrine of Categories” (CP 1.280), into his philosophy in 1902, about thirty-five years after his first published exposition of his theory of categories in the ‘New List’. Secondly, his account of his phenomenology is remarkably straightforward, and perhaps simple in some ways. These two things have led to differences in understanding and interpretation among Peirce scholars as to the value and place of Peirce’s phenomenology in his philosophical system. Some of the questions that arise are: What difference does the introduction of phenomenology make to his theory of categories? Are the categories of phenomenology different from the ones he had previously discovered? and What prompted Peirce to introduce ‘phenomenology’ into his philosophy?

It is argued here that Peirce’s phenomenology is a consequence of his commitment to his theory of categories, which can be shown by considering the following issues. First, phenomenology is a part of a system of the sciences; second, as a science of the phenomenon, phenomenology not only reflects a denial of the idea of the “thing-in-itself”, but it also provides the platform for philosophy as an “observational” science and a “science of discovery”. This second issue relates to pragmatism. In its relation to pragmatism, phenomenology involves a methodological attitude that does not presuppose any preconceived theory, but rather attempts to observe and describe phenomena as they appear to us.

It is worth mentioning here that it was not until 1885 that Peirce began to draw a distinction between the formal and material aspects of his categories; a distinction

56 From 1905 onward Peirce began to use the terms “phaneroscopy” and “phaneron” in place of “phenomenology” and “phenomenon” respectively.
57 For example, Freeman (1934, pp. 28-29) argues that phenomenology is not really a derivation of the categories, as Peirce thought, but it is just an illustration of the relevance of the categories to experience; whereas for Rosenthal (1994, pp. 77-95), Peirce’s phenomenology is really at work in deriving his categories. See also Fisch (1986, p. 437) for some interesting ideas on Freeman’s view of Peirce’s phenomenology.
that was lacking in his earlier accounts of the categories. But since Peirce claims that the content of knowledge derives ultimately from experience, it remains for him to explain this connection. This requires Peirce to show that there must be an experiential or material aspect of the categories (see CP 1.452, c.1896). This concern for the material or experiential aspect of the categories gives rise to his phenomenological inquiry into the nature of the categories. In other words, if Peirce’s categories were merely a business of logic, he would have no need for the science of phenomenology.

2.1.2 The Aim and Scope of ‘Phenomenology’

Peirce conceives of his phenomenology as a science that treats the phenomenon as it is. “Phenomenology ascertains and studies the kinds of elements universally present in the phenomenon” (CP 1.186; 1903), and its aim is,

to unravel the tangled skein [of] all that in any sense appears and wind it into distinct forms; or in other words, to make the ultimate analysis of all experiences the first task to which philosophy has to apply itself. (CP 1.280; 1902)

The business of phenomenology is to draw up a catalogue of categories and prove its sufficiency and freedom from redundancies, to make out the characteristics of each category, and to show the relations of each to the other. (CP 5.43; 1903)

In seeking to identify and study the most universal elements of experience, namely, the categories, phenomenology is not concerned with the reality or truth of phenomena. The concern of the phenomenologist is entirely with phenomena as such, regardless of whether they correspond to any real object in the universe or not (CP 5.122; 1903). Peirce considers that phenomenology is able to prove “beyond question … that a certain very short list comprises all of these broadest categories of phanerons there are” (CP 1.286).

What Peirce means by ‘the phenomenon’, the subject matter of phenomenology, leaves the science of phenomenology as a study of extremely broad scope. He defines ‘the phenomenon’ as “whatever is present at any time to the mind in any way” (CP 1.186; 1903), or “the collective total of all that is in any way or in any sense present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real

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thing or not” (CP 1.284; 1905). The question of truth or reality of phenomena is not raised at any time during the phenomenological inquiry.

Having understood his own phenomenology in the extended manner just explained, Peirce contrasts his phenomenology to that of Hegel’s, saying that:

I will not restrict it [phenomenology] to the observation and analysis of experience but extend it to describing all the features that are common to whatever is experienced or might conceivably be experienced or become an object of study in any way direct or indirect.59

What Peirce wants to do in this passage is to draw our attention to the distinction between “experience” itself and the “elements of experience”, and points out that his phenomenology is not only about experience itself, but about the elements of experience as well. It seems to Peirce that to restrict his phenomenology as a study merely of experience, understood as a mere encounter between a subject and an object, or the experienced, would render it subjective and psychological, in the sense that each individual subject would encounter an object differently. But this is far from what Peirce considered his phenomenology to be. His conception of phenomenology is concerned with an objective description of the elements of experience, which could be revealed through the process of experience. That is, the phenomenologist is studying experience that has both a structure, or form, and a content.

To emphasise the difference between his understanding of what a phenomenon is and what some philosophers take the word “idea” to mean, Peirce writes:

English philosophers have quite commonly used the word idea in a sense approaching to that which I give to phaneron. But in various ways they have restricted the meaning of it too much to cover my conception (if conception it can be called), besides giving a psychological connotation to their word which I am careful to exclude. The fact that they have the habit of saying that “there is no such idea” as this or that, in the very same breath in which they definitely describe the phaneron in question, renders their term fatally inapt for my purpose (CP 1.285; c. 1904).

Peirce does not identify the “various ways” in which the English philosophers have restricted their meaning of ‘idea’. However, the most striking and important aspect of his criticisms of Hegel’s conception of phenomenology and the English

philosophers’ meaning of ‘idea’ is that Peirce thinks of both of them as too limited to cover what he means by phenomenology.

The limitation of Hegel’s phenomenology, in Peirce’s view, is due to Hegel’s failure to consider seriously the category of Secondness. He says of Hegel,

The capital error of Hegel which permeates his whole system in every part of it is that he almost altogether ignores the Outward Clash. Besides the lower consciousness of feeling and the higher consciousness of nutrition, this direct consciousness of hitting and getting hit enters into all cognition and serves to make it mean something real. (CP 8.41; 1885).

The “Outward Clash” to which Peirce refers in the above passage means the category of Secondness. In his ‘A Guess at the Riddle,’ Peirce speaks of Hegel in the same critical vein, saying that: “He [Hegel] has usually overlooked external Secondness, altogether. In other words, he has committed the trifling oversight of forgetting that there is a real world with real actions and reactions” (CP 1.368; c. 1890).

As to the limitation of the English philosophers’ notion of idea, Peirce has the view that “There is nothing quite so directly open to observation as phanerons” (CP 1.286; c. 1904). Thus ‘phenomena’ cannot be identified with the ‘ideas’ of the English empiricist philosophers. Whereas one can say “there is no such idea’ as this or that” in which a truth claim is meant to be made, the phenomenologist is not supposed to make any truth claims at all. For phenomenology, according to Peirce, does not presuppose any theory; it is a pre-logical, pre-scientific inquiry into the phenomenon as such, hence it is not a part of the task of phenomenology to ascertain the truth or reality of phenomena. Thus Peirce argues,

This science of Phenomenology is in my view the most primal of all the positive sciences. That is, it is not based, as to its principles, upon any other positive science. By a positive science I mean an inquiry which seeks for positive knowledge; that is, for such knowledge as may conveniently be expressed in a categorical proposition (CP 5.39).

The reason why Peirce considers phenomenology as “the most primal of all the positive sciences” is obvious from this passage: namely, the principles of phenomenology are derived not from any positive science. Notice that Peirce does

60 Being aware that what he defines and classifies as the normative sciences (logic, ethics, and aesthetics) may be argued against as not positive sciences, Peirce makes the following reply. “Logic and the other normative sciences, although they ask, not what is but what ought to be, nevertheless are positive sciences since it is by asserting positive, categorical truth that they are able to show that what they call good really is so; and the right reason, right effort, and right being, of which they treat, derive that character from positive categorical fact” (CP 5.39).
not mean that phenomenology has no principles. The principles of phenomenology, Peirce claims, are derived from mathematics, which for him is a science whose concern has nothing to do with acquiring positive knowledge about the actual world. “Mathematics is the study of what is true of hypothetical states of things.” (CP 4.233; 1902).

Furthermore, since mathematics, from which phenomenology derives its principles, does not make any truth claims about the world, and since phenomenology is a “primal” kind of study, in that it does not impose any logical or scientific theory on the phenomenon it studies, then it follows that phenomenology cannot make any truth claims concerning the world or reality.

The particular account Peirce gives of phenomenology and its subject matter is consistent with some of the moves he made in modifying the categories of the ‘New List,’ and enables us to understand why he excludes the conceptions of substance and being from his list of categories. Substance and being, as they appear in the ‘New List,’ are seen to have an ontological status that places them outside the realm of phenomena. Peirce considers that to bring the question of the ontological status of phenomena into phenomenology would be harmful to phenomenology itself, since (1) the question of the ontological status of phenomena belongs to metaphysics, and (2) to allow phenomenology to make ontological claims would result in confusing metaphysics with phenomenology. It follows, then, that even if substance and being were not excluded from the list of the categories his phenomenology would definitely demand that exclusion. This is not to say that Peirce denies the reality of his categories. In fact, he considers his categories as real universals. However, he does not want to restrict the task of phenomenology to confirming the reality of phenomena.

2.1.3 The Methods of Phenomenology

In order to carry out its pure or “honest, single-minded observation of the appearances” (CP 1.287; c. 1904), phenomenology requires three faculties or capabilities, according to Peirce.

He identifies the first faculty as “the artist’s observational power” (CP 5.42; emphasis added). The characteristic feature of this faculty or power, according to Peirce, is that it observes the phenomenon as such without making any judgment in relation to some idea or theory. Peirce draws his idea of identifying this first faculty
with “the artist’s observational power,” as the phrase itself indicates, from his observation of what an artist (a painter in this case) is like.

This is the faculty of the artist who sees for example the apparent colors of nature as they appear. When the ground is covered by snow on which the sun shines brightly except where shadows fall, if you ask any ordinary man what its color appears to be, he will tell you white, pure white, whiter in the sunlight, a little greyish in the shadow. But that is not what is before his eyes that he is describing; it is his theory of what ought to be seen. The artist will tell him that the shadows are not grey but a dull blue and that the snow in the sunshine is of a rich yellow (CP 5.42).

Having acquired the observational power of the artist, the phenomenologist is able to get to the ‘purity’ of the phenomenon as it appears to us unaffected by any theory or idea.

Peirce calls the second required faculty in phenomenology a “resolute discrimination” (CP 5.42; my emphasis). What characterises this faculty is that it enables the phenomenologist to focus his attention determinedly on the particular phenomenon (whatever it may be) that is under observation. Peirce says, “resolute discrimination which fastens itself like a bulldog upon the particular feature that we are studying, follows it wherever it may lurk, and detects it beneath all its disguises” (CP 5.42). Because of the focus and attentive observation the phenomenology would be able to detect the appearance or phenomenon in question in all its various manifestations.

The third faculty essential for phenomenological inquiry, according to Peirce, is “the generalizing power of the mathematician” (CP 5.42; my emphasis), which is required to make generalisation out of the information gathered by means of “resolute discrimination.” Such generalisation is “the abstract formula that comprehends the very essence of the feature under examination” (CP 5.42). In all the stages of the application of the three faculties to the phenomenological inquiry, no question is raised as to the truth or reality of its findings. For phenomenological inquiry, Peirce says, “simply scrutinizes the direct appearances, and endeavours to combine minute accuracy with the broadest possible generalization” (CP 1.287).

2.2 The Categories as Phenomenologically Described

Through the three faculties discussed above, Peirce identified his three categories (or modes of being) of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. These categories are indecomposable elements of phenomena, meaning that they are irreducible to one another.
One major task of phenomenology, for Peirce, is to describe the characteristic features of each category that make them distinct from one another.

2.2.1 The Category of ‘Firstness’

Peirce describes the category of Firstness as “presentness” or “quality of feeling.” By that he means the very first “thing” or “feeling” that is noted by the mind when some thing or phenomenon appears to it. This event occurs before we have time to think about it. In a draft of his second lecture on pragmatism delivered at Harvard in 1903, Peirce says:

The present is just what it is regardless of the absent, regardless of past and future. It is such as it is, utterly ignoring anything else. … The present, being such as it is while utterly ignoring everything else, is positively such as it is (CP 5.44).

He then goes on inviting his listeners:

Imagine, if you please, a consciousness in which there is no comparison, no relation, no recognized multiplicity (since parts would be other than the whole), no change, no imagination of any modification of what is positively there, no reflexion — nothing but a simple positive character. Such a consciousness might be just an odour, say a smell of attar; or it might be one infinite dead ache … (CP 5.44).

The category of Firstness also involves some element of ‘newness’, which further involves ‘growth’ in one’s experience. Consider, for example, a person who tastes pineapple for the first time. Firstness, in this case, is the quality of taste or feeling of pineapple that first occurs to this person in tasting the pineapple, but also this ‘feeling’, which is new to this person, is an addition to this person’s experience.61

The category of Firstness, as Hookway observes, “is the hardest of the three [categories] to focus on clearly.”62 Peirce himself was aware of the complexity of the matter. He says, “It [the category of Firstness] cannot be articulately thought; assert it, and it has already lost its characteristic innocence; for assertion always implies a denial of something else. Stop to think of it, and it has flown!” (CP 1.357). What Peirce is saying is that we can still give a description of the category of Firstness, but

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61 Catherine Wendy Legg, “Modes of Being: A Comparison of the Realism Question in Charles Peirce and Contemporary Analytic Philosophy, (Ph.D thesis, Australian National University, 1999), pp. 17-18. Note because there is a slight error in pagination in the electronic copy of Legg’s thesis on which my reference relies, the page numbers cited here may not be identical with page numbers in the original she submitted to ANU.

“remember that every description of it must be false to it” (CP 1.357). This seems a self-contradictory view of the category of Firstness, since the word “description” normally carries with it the assumption that something true is said of the object described. But it should be remembered that phenomenology does not purport to be concerned with the subject-independent truth or falsity of its descriptions, but merely to describe phenomena as they appear to consciousness.

The essence of what Peirce wants to say about the category of Firstness is summed up most satisfactorily in the following passage.

The idea of absolutely first must be entirely separated from all conception of or reference to anything else; for what involves a second is itself a second to that second. The first must therefore be present and immediate, so as not to be second to a representation. It must be fresh and new, for if old it is second to its former state. It must be initiative, original, spontaneous, and free; otherwise it is second to a determining cause. It is also something vivid and conscious; so only it avoids being the object of some sensation. It precedes all synthesis and all differentiation; it has no unity and no parts (CP 1.357).

The significance of this passage lies not only in describing the characteristic features of the category of Firstness, but also explaining why it is called “Firstness.” All the characters of Firstness are justified to the extent that it is a real first, in that it is not a consequent of some antecedent, nor does it depend on something else for its occurrence.

Peirce is careful enough not to reduce his category of Firstness to a completely subjective level where it might be understood to mean that whatever an individual feels is a Firstness. He explains the category of Firstness as most appropriately exemplified by “second” qualities “such as the color of magenta, the odor of attar, the sound of a railway whistle” (CP 1.304), and so on. But Peirce saves his view from collapsing into subjectivism when he continues the same passage to specify his position thus:

I do not mean the sense of actually experiencing these feelings, whether primarily or in any memory or imagination. That is something that involves these qualities as an element of it. But I mean the qualities themselves which, in themselves, are mere may-bes, not necessarily realized (CP 1.304).

Peirce maintains that the category of Firstness “is predominant in feeling” (CP 1.302). This understanding of the category of Firstness broadens Peirce’s categorical system to the extent that the domain of feeling, which is normally regarded as a subjective state of affairs, is given some kind of objectivity.
2.2.2 The Category of ‘Secondness’

The category of Secondness Peirce refers to as “struggle.” He says, “The second category that I find, the next simplest feature common to all that comes before the mind, is the element of struggle” (CP 1.322). Secondness is characterised as being purely dyadic in nature. Peirce defines what he means by “struggle” as follows.

By struggle I must explain that I mean mutual action between two things regardless of any sort of third or medium, and in particular regardless of any law of action (CP 1.322).

Action or struggle of Secondness, as Peirce clearly explains, does not involve any third term. It simply consists of two things or subjects without any law or reason involved. Any force or effort involved in the dyadic relation of action or struggle of Secondness is “blind” or “brute”, according to Peirce, meaning that there is no involvement of reason or law (CP 1.328, 427). Rather, what is involved in such action or struggle is reaction or resistance.

Imagine yourself making a strong muscular effort, say that of pressing with all your might against a half-open door. Obviously, there is a sense of resistance. There could not be effort without equal resistance any more than there could be a resistance without an equal effort that it resists (CP 5.45).

Associated with struggle or action, in the sense above, is “surprise”, which is another characteristic of Secondness. Surprise normally occurs as a result of experiencing something unexpectedly. Further, this element of unexpectedness of surprise always goes together with some sense of shock. As often happens in our daily experience (at work or in other forms of experience), when we are surprised by something, it is hard to avoid the sense of shock that comes with it. Admittedly, we often do not realise it immediately, for it happens so instantaneously before we have a chance to think about it.

These (phenomenological) features of Secondness demonstrate for Peirce the actual process of how we learn from experience, which he claims “is our only teacher.”

Experience is our only teacher. … But precisely how does this action of experience take place? It takes place by a series of surprises. There is no need of going into details. At one time a ship is sailing along in the trades over a smooth sea, the navigator having no more positive expectation than that of the usual monotony of such a voyage, when suddenly she strikes upon a rock (CP 5. 50-51).
What Peirce demonstrates by means of this scenario is that struggle, together with its elements of surprise and shock (which are hardly separable, if they are at all, in the category of Secondness) are definitive in the event of *discovery*. He explains:

The majority of discoveries … have been the result of experimentation. Now no man makes an experiment without being more or less inclined to think that an interesting result will ensue; for experiments are much too costly of physical and psychical energy to be undertaken at random and aimlessly. And naturally can possibly be learned from an experiment that turns out just as was anticipated. It is by surprises that experience teaches all she designs to teach us (CP 5. 51).

Thus the importance of phenomenology is not confined to identifying and describing the categories. It also provides an experiential ground for the view that philosophy is a “science of discovery,” in the sense discussed above.

2.2.3 *The Category of ‘Thirdness’*

The category of Thirdness is most prominently illustrated by terms like law, thought, prediction, representation, meaning, generality, continuity, mediation, and so on. Just as the categories of Firstness and Secondness are found in the domains of qualities of phenomena and actual facts respectively, the category of Thirdness is found in any province of phenomena that is intelligible and meaningful to an interpretant. For Peirce “every genuine triadic relation involves thought or meaning” (CP 1.345). Consider one of Peirce’s favourite examples, “the relation of giving,” which he gives to illustrate this statement.

A gives B to C. This does not consist in A’s throwing B away and its accidentally hitting C … If that were all, it would not be a genuine triadic relation, but merely one dyadic relation followed by another. There need be no motion of the thing given. Giving is a transfer of the right of property. Now right is a matter of law, and law is a matter of thought and meaning (CP 1.345).

The meaning of the triadic relation “A gives B to C” lies in the fact that “giving” has a meaning recognised by both parties, that is, it is defined by the law of right of property, which is ultimately a product of thought. If “giving” is simply a fact without any definition attached to it by a law, the whole triadic relation “A gives B to C” could not have any meaning, let alone the impossibility to form a triadic relation out of a meaningless or lawless idea. It is in this sense, however, that Peirce speaks of Thirdness as the category of laws (CP 1.420).

Another example Peirce uses to illustrate Thirdness is prediction. He distinguishes between two kinds of regularity or uniformity in the course of events.
On the one hand, there is regularity based on “some active general principle” (CP 5.100). It is this kind of regularity that makes our prediction possible and reasonable.

Now for Thirdness. Five minutes of our waking life will hardly pass without our making some kind of prediction; and in the majority of cases these predictions are fulfilled in the event. Yet a prediction is essentially of a general nature, and cannot ever be completely fulfilled. To say that a prediction has a decided tendency to be fulfilled, is to say that the future events are in a measure really governed by a law. … [That is] it must be that future events have a tendency to conform to a general rule. … A rule to which future events have a tendency to conform is ipso facto an important thing, an important element in the happening of those events. This mode of being which consists … in the fact that future facts of Secondness will take on a determinate general character, I call a Thirdness (CP 1.26).

Prediction, moreover, is not possible in the other kind of regularity, which is due to pure chance only. Peirce illustrates:

If a pair of dice turns up sixes five times running, that is a mere uniformity. The dice might happen fortuitously to turn up sixes a thousand times running. But that would not afford the slightest security for a prediction that they would turn up sixes the next time (CP 1.26).

Thus Thirdness is an important mode of being. It shows that both prediction and its basis, namely, “some active general principle,” rule, or law (which itself is an instance of Thirdness) are essential elements of life. That is, we generally cannot help making prediction. As Peirce noted, “Five minutes of our waking life will hardly pass without our making some kind of prediction” (CP 1.26; my emphasis).

2.3 Phenomenology as Part of a System of the Sciences

Peirce incorporated phenomenology into his philosophical system while working on his project of the classification of the sciences. As noted in chapter 1, Peirce places phenomenology as the first science in the order of the branches of philosophy, and second to mathematics within the order of the sciences as a whole. His classification of the sciences is strictly hierarchical, in that each science derives its principles from the science above it, whereas each science gets its data from the science below it, and not vice versa.

Two things should be pointed out here. First, phenomenology is not identical with or equal to philosophy, and, second, philosophy is not reducible to phenomenology. Phenomenology for Peirce is just one division of philosophy, yet it is an indispensable part of philosophy.
2.3.1 An Argument for Peirce’s Phenomenology as Part of Philosophy

I argue that Peirce’s phenomenology is more than just an approach to his categories; that is, more than just a science that simply observes the phenomenon as such in order to identify its most universal elements (the categories).

Peirce claims that phenomenology is “the first task to which philosophy has to apply itself” (CP 1.280; 1902). But what does this mean, and what consequences follow from making phenomenology the first task of philosophy?

Joseph Ransdell rightly observes in ‘Is Peirce a Phenomenologist?’ that without any “assumptions, presuppositions, or assertions” phenomenology is able to allow for a development of a semiotic (or logic in the broad sense) that makes no metaphysical claims.

What “phenomenology” primarily meant to [Peirce] was the idea that the objects of phenomenological study as such are not studied with any implicit or explicit assumptions, presuppositions, or assertions as to their reality status, which made it possible to develop semiotic or logic (in the broad sense) in a way that presupposes no metaphysical framework, and therefore involves no a priori assumptions about, say, the mental or physical status of the phenomenal entities.63

However, Ransdell does not explain how this is possible. His assertion in the passage just quoted is not sufficient to show that it is the case that phenomenology can yield a semiotic without metaphysical presuppositions. For Peirce claims that philosophy is not only an observational science, but its inquiry starts with making observations about the nature of phenomena themselves.

What Ransdell is saying applies to Peirce’s phenomenology as a single discipline, noting what significance phenomenology has to semiotic. Although Ransdell’s remark is illuminating with regard to Peirce’s phenomenology, it could be problematic if it is accepted without sufficient caution. It could lead us to assume that phenomenology is nothing else but semiotic (if not reducible to it).

If we examine what Ransdell says in the following passage, the difficulties and limitations of his view of Peirce’s phenomenology begin to emerge.

Now let us turn to Peirce’s phenomenology proper. As I remarked earlier, the essence of it is found in the 1867 paper on the categories [‘On a New List of Categories’], and I should perhaps remark before proceeding that if Peirce is to be regarded as a phenomenologist it should be understood that most of Peirce’s

analyses should be looked for under the heading of semiotic. For his phenomenology proper is really quite simple: the paper in question is quite short, and there is not a whole lot more to be done in phenomenology proper than what he does therein, though the line of argument certainly could be - and I believe should be - developed at much greater length and in much greater detail. Let me hasten to say that I do not mean to trivialize the matter by stressing the relative simplicity of it. The point is simply that the way Peirce conceives phenomenology [it] leaves most of the work to be done under other headings, and most of what Peirce himself did along these lines would properly be regarded as a part of semiotic.\(^{64}\)

Ransdell’s account clearly and correctly traces the link between Peirce’s phenomenology and the ‘New List’.\(^{65}\) However, what is lacking in Ransdell’s account is that it does not include in its consideration the fact that Peirce never thinks that one can do philosophy by means of phenomenology alone. For Peirce philosophy is more than phenomenology, and that phenomenology is only one essential stage of the process of philosophical inquiry.

Had Ransdell examined the relation between phenomenology and philosophy within Peirce’s system as a whole, this could have led him to a different conclusion, and by focusing simply on the relationship of Peirce’s phenomenology to semiotic his approach runs the risk of being too limited and thus does not do justice to Peirce. I do not dispute that Peirce’s phenomenology can be studied in its own right as an independent part of his philosophy. However it is incorrect and unjust to draw final conclusions about Peirce’s phenomenology from this perspective alone.

Another difficulty with drawing a conclusion about Peirce’s phenomenology from the sort of limited perspective embodied in Ransdell’s account is that we tend to think of it as a “simple” approach to the study of the most universal elements of experience. On the contrary, Peirce does not consider phenomenology an easy inquiry. In c. 1894, Peirce wrote the following about the observational aspect of philosophy (the aspect that he came to call ‘phenomenology’ about eight years later):

To assume, however, that the observational part of philosophy, because it is not particularly laborious, is therefore easy, is a dreadful mistake, into which the student is very apt to fall, and which gives the death-blow to any possibility of this success in this study. It is, on the contrary, extremely difficult to bring our attention to elements of experience which are continually present. For we have nothing in experience with which to contrast them; and without contrast,
they cannot excite our attention. We can only contrast them with imaginary states of things; but even what we imagine is but a crazy-quilt of bits snipped off from actual experiences. The result is that round-about devices have to be resorted to, in order to enable us to perceive what stares us in the face with a glare that, once noticed, becomes almost oppressive with its insistency. This circumstance alone would be sufficient to render philosophical observation difficult (CP 1.134).

Furthermore, Peirce considers the division of philosophy into phenomenology, normative science, and metaphysics an important aspect of his philosophical system. It is not my concern here to defend Peirce’s division of philosophy, but rather to emphasise that to restrict our inquiry to Peirce’s phenomenology in isolation fails to do justice to Peirce’s division of philosophy and his commitment to his theory of categories. It is important to recognise that for Peirce phenomenology is just one aspect of philosophy, and is not synonymous with philosophy as a whole. Being clear about this distinction is an important step towards the realisation that the relationship of phenomenology to semiotic, and the general significance of phenomenology to philosophy are different questions.

Distinguishing these two questions enables us to have a clearer understanding of the distinction between the “categories” and “signs”, and hence the distinction between the theory of categories and the theory of signs, or semiotic. This in turn enables us to focus on the broader contribution of phenomenology (and phenomenological method) to Peirce’s overall system of philosophy rather than its contribution to his semiotic alone. In adopting this approach one also can avoid the risk of treating phenomenology as a “simple” approach to the fundamental categories of experience. (The nature and scope of semiotic will be discussed in chapter 6, and the relations between the categories and signs in chapter 7.)

While Ransdell argues that phenomenology “made it possible to develop semiotic or logic (in the broad sense) in a way that presupposes no metaphysical framework, and therefore involves no a priori assumptions about, say, the mental or physical status of the phenomenal entities,” he does not explain what would have happened if Peirce had not employed phenomenological method in developing his semiotic. It is hard to see why Ransdell does not see that phenomenology for Peirce is more than just a means for developing a semiotic that presupposes no metaphysical

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66 Given the central claim of this thesis, that Peirce’s theory of categories is the ultimate basis of his pragmatism, it is important to my argument to maintain the distinction between the theory of categories and the theory of signs, or semiotic.
principles. The only possible reason I can make out is that because Ransdell’s discussion focussed mainly on the ‘New List’ (in which Peirce’s derivation of the categories is a mixture of logical and phenomenological analysis) his account of phenomenology is bound to be largely based on the similarity between phenomenology and semiotic. (Note in my discussion in chapter 1 I explained how Peirce’s semiotic originated in the ‘New List’. ) But as indicated above, the problem with the account given there is that it leaves out of the picture the wider significance of Peirce’s phenomenology to his philosophy in general.

From the wider perspective of this chapter, it should be clear that Peirce’s phenomenology functions to ground not only a semiotic that presupposes no metaphysical principles, but also serves to provide a basis for philosophy that is observational and experiential without endorsing either logicism or psychologism. Peirce’s move to provide an observational, experiential basis for his philosophy emerges in his application of phenomenological method to his description of the categories. The categories Peirce derived in his ‘New List’ are the result of an analysis of the material conditions for propositions to be propositions about something or other. (See discussion of the ‘New List’ in chapter 1.) When Peirce introduced his phenomenology, his aim was to give an experiential description of the categories; a description that is not confined merely to the structure of the proposition (such as he employed in the ‘New List’). Here he seeks to demonstrate that his conclusions are based on what the phenomenologist discovers from his careful, attentive observation of the phenomenon.

Now, given the architectonic nature of Peirce’s philosophy, in building a philosophical system, in which his categories are to be the foundation, his phenomenology seeks to provide not only an experiential description of the categories themselves, but also an experiential basis for his philosophy as well. Given his earlier quoted criticism of Hegel: “[H]e has committed the trifling oversight of forgetting that there is a real world with real actions and reactions” (CP 1.368; c. 1890), one can say that Peirce introduced phenomenology into his system to show that there is a real world and that he did not forget that there is one. From his phenomenology a methodical message emerges, about how to identify the categories: That to conduct this process of categorical identification, one needs first of all to allow for the broadest scope of the object to be identified.
2.3.2 Phenomenology as Considered from the Point of View of Categories

Peirce bases his divisions of philosophy on his theory of categories. In his 1903 Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism, Peirce states:

So then the division of Philosophy into these three grand departments [Phenomenology, Normative Science, and Metaphysics] … turns out to be a division according to Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, and is thus one of the very numerous phenomena I have met with which confirm this list of categories. …

Phenomenology treats of the universal Qualities of Phenomena in their immediate phenomenal character, in themselves as phenomena. It, thus, treats of Phenomena in their Firstness. …

Normative Science treats of the laws of the relation of phenomena to ends; that is, it treats of Phenomena in their Secondness. …

Metaphysics … treats of Phenomena in their Thirdness (CP 5.121-124).

The irreducibility of philosophy to phenomenology is demanded by the irreducibility of the categories themselves. Thus Ransdell’s approach (discussed above) fails to recognise the irreducibility of the categories upon which Peirce’s division of philosophy is based. Of course, there is a phenomenological aspect in both the normative science (of which semiotic is a part) and metaphysics, since they derive their principles from phenomenology. But that is not to say that phenomenology could be a part of either semiotic or metaphysics.

2.3.3 The Importance of Peirce’s Phenomenology to his Philosophy

The introduction of phenomenology prevents Peirce’s philosophy from collapsing into psychologism. Before Peirce introduced his phenomenology, he had attempted a psychological explanation of the categories. In 1885, in a manuscript entitled ‘One, Two, Three: Fundamental Categories of Thought and of Nature,’ Peirce claims that

the whole organism of logic may be mentally evolved from the three conceptions of first, second, and third, or more precisely, An, Other, Medium.

But if these three conceptions enter as we find they do as elements of all conceptions connected with reasoning, they must be virtually in the mind when reasoning first commences. In that sense, at least, they must be innate ideas; and consequently they must be capable of explanation, psychologically (W 5:245).

At the time, Peirce further claims that the categories are capable of psychological explanation by saying that the categories have some origin in psychology. In ‘A Guess at the Riddle,’ c. 1890, Peirce attempts to figure out, among other things, why the conceptions of first, second, and third are so “forced upon us in
logic, and really cannot be dispensed with” (CP 1.374) showing that the question of the origin of these conceptions becomes an important one for him. He attempts to answer the question by offering the following line of argument.

We find the ideas of first, second, third, constant ingredients of our knowledge. It must then either be that they are continually given to us in the presentations of the sense, or that it is the peculiar nature of the mind to mix them with our thoughts. Now we certainly cannot think that these ideas are given in sense. First, second, and third are not sensations. They can only be given in sense by things appearing labelled as first, second, and third, and such labels things do not usually bear. They ought therefore to have a psychological origin (CP 1.374; my emphasis).

After claiming the psychological origin of the ideas of first, second, and third, Peirce then proceeds to clarify his position by saying,

The noticeable thing is that I do not rest here, but seek to put the conclusion to the test by an independent examination of the facts of psychology, to see whether we can find any traces of the existence of three parts or faculties of the soul or modes of consciousness, which might confirm the result just reached (CP 1.374).

It seems that Peirce’s attempt at a psychological explanation of the categories is intended to provide an experiential justification of the categories derived by logic. However, when he came to follow his architectonic plan in classification of the sciences, it occurred to him that his whole philosophical system would then have to conform to psychology, thus committing him to a psychology-based philosophy. When he became aware that his philosophy might fall into psychologism, Peirce moved to clarify the distinction between psychology and phenomenology. In a letter written to William James on October 3, 1904, Peirce wrote: “[phenomenology] is a branch of philosophy I am most deeply interested in and which I have worked upon almost as much as I have upon logic. It has nothing to do with psychology” (CP 8.295; my emphasis). Peirce continues in the same letter:

… phenomenology is one science and psychology a very different one. …. The standards of certainty must be different in different sciences, the principles to which one science appeals altogether different from those of the other. From the point of view of logic and methodical development the distinctions are of the greatest concern. Phenomenology has no right to appeal to logic, except to deductive logic. On the contrary, logic must be founded on phenomenology. Psychology, you may say, observes the same facts as phenomenology does. No. It does not observe the same facts. It looks upon the same world; - the same world that the astronomer looks at. But what it observes in that world is different. Psychology of all sciences stands most in need of the discoveries of the logician, which he makes by the aid of the phenomenologist (CP 8.297).
2.3.3.1 Philosophy as an “Observational” Science and a “Science of Discovery”

One of the most distinctive features of Peirce’s conception of philosophy is that he sees it as a “science of discovery”. To describe philosophy as a “science of discovery” may seem an odd idea, given the current trend in analytic philosophy where it is held to be simply the activity of meaning-clarification and not concerned in any way with discovering the truth.

But what does Peirce mean by ‘philosophy’? In his 1903 Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism, Peirce expresses his understanding of philosophy as follows:

[B]y Philosophy I mean that department of Positive Science, or Science of Fact, which does not busy itself with gathering facts, but merely with learning what can be learned from that experience which presses in upon every one of us daily and hourly. It does not gather new facts, because it does not need them, and also because new general facts cannot be firmly established without the assumption of a metaphysical doctrine; and this, in turn, requires the cooperation of every department of philosophy; so that such new facts, however striking they may be, afford weaker support to philosophy by far than that common experience which nobody doubts or can doubt, and which nobody ever even pretended to doubt except as a consequence of belief in that experience so entire and perfect that it failed to be conscious of itself (CP 5.120).

For Peirce the subject matter of philosophy is “common experience,” by that he means the common structure of all experience, and not the particular, individual experience. From this it is obvious how important his categories are for Peirce’s view of philosophy, for not only are his categories universal conceptions or elements, but they are also experiential.

Peirce’s view of philosophy then, as a science of discovery, owes many of its fundamental ideas to his conception of phenomenology. Phenomenology, for Peirce, provides an experiential description of the categories, and thus enables philosophy to claim common experience as its subject matter. Without his phenomenology and its experiential description of the categories, Peirce would have found it difficult to claim that common experience is the subject matter of philosophy, since the categories would have remained too abstract to be part of common experience. This in turn connects with Peirce’s claim that in the last resort pragmatism has to appeal to phenomenology to provide it with an adequate foundation in the form of our common experience. These issues lead us on to the next section.
2.3.3.2 The Object of Discovery

The term ‘discovery’ is not a univocal term in philosophy, and it could cause unwanted confusion if not handled with sufficient caution. In one sense, ‘discovery’ stands for the finding of some new facts or things by some investigator/s. A botanist’s discovery of a new species of plant, for example, would be listed under this type of discovery. This is normally the appropriate meaning of the word when used to describe findings of the special sciences. Discovery in this sense does not apply to philosophy, since philosophy is not concerned with collecting new facts.

Another sense of discovery relates not so much to the finding of new facts as to finding or developing new ways of explaining “old” facts (or facts already known to us that can now be explained in a more detailed or effective fashion). For example, the discovery in physics that ‘light travels in straight lines’ is a new way of explaining the same familiar phenomena relating to the behaviour of light, which (before the discovery) used to be explained differently.\(^{67}\) This sense of discovery also does not usually apply to philosophy.

In what sense then is philosophy a “science of discovery”? The kind of discovery Peirce attached to philosophy is based on his phenomenology and its description of the categories. I discussed in section 2.2.2 that ‘discovery’ comes about in the context of our experience, our actual living our life; and it is marked by the ‘newness’ of a phenomenon to our individual experience and the surprise that results from the unexpectedness of facts to us. The kind of discovery Peirce associated with philosophy has more to do with the growth in understanding of, or development of one’s experience and knowledge. It may be said then that philosophy for Peirce is concerned not only with meaning clarification, but also with the growth of understanding by human beings of the nature and structure common to our experience and knowledge.

PART II: PRAGMATISM AND THE THIRD GRADE OF CLARITY
Chapter 3:

THE ORIGIN, PURPOSE, AND PRESUPPOSITIONS OF PEIRCE’S PRAGMATISM
3.1 ‘Pragmatism’ as a Theory of Inquiry for Meaning Clarification

What came to be called ‘pragmatism’ refers to Peirce’s fundamental concern to discover the basic elements or principles essential in the process of inquiry, rather than to formulate a criterion of truth by means of which the results of inquiry are to be judged for their truth value.

Peirce first publicly formulated the basic principles of his pragmatism in two earlier articles: ‘The Fixation of Belief’ (1877) and ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear’ (1878), both of which were published in a series of papers entitled: ‘Illustrations of the Logic of Science.’ While attention has been focused on the second paper: ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear,’ some of the arguments leading on to Peirce’s expression of the principle of pragmatism were already developed in ‘The Fixation of Belief’ (1877), the first paper of the ‘Illustrations’ series. Thus a more complete understanding of Peirce’s original account of pragmatism requires some acquaintance with his paper: ‘The Fixation of Belief.’

3.1.1 The Object of Reasoning and Guiding Principle

‘The Fixation of Belief’ is an essay on the logic of scientific inquiry. It focuses on two major issues: (1) what inquiry is, and (2) what the appropriate method of settling belief is.

Peirce begins ‘The Fixation of Belief’ with some brief remarks on logic, or the “art of reasoning,” stating that “The object of reasoning is to find out, from the consideration of what we already know, something else which we do not know. Consequently, reasoning is good if it be such as to give a true conclusion from true premises, and not otherwise” (W 3: 244). What determines us, in the process of reasoning, to draw a certain conclusion from given premises, Peirce argues, is a kind

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68 In 1905 Peirce coined the term ‘pragmaticism’ in order to distinguish his position from those of other pragmatists (e.g. William James and F. C. S. Schiller). “… while to observe the precise purpose of expressing the original definition, he begs to announce the birth of the word “pragmaticism,” which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers” (CP 5. 414). However, since Peirce himself is not consistent with his use of ‘pragmaticism’, the term ‘pragmatism’ is used consistently throughout this thesis, except where Peirce chooses to use its variant ‘pragmaticism’. As to the inconsistency of Peirce’s use of ‘pragmaticism’, see Fisch, 1986, p. 374n1.

69 Henceforth ‘Illustrations.’

70 Peirce did not use the term “pragmatism” in this paper, but the principle which came to be referred to as “pragmatism” first appeared in its published form in this 1878 paper, which was first published in the journal Popular Science Monthly, vol. 12, pp. 286-302 (1878).

71 Peirce later referred to ‘The Fixation of Belief’ and ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear’ as two parts of the same essay.
of “habit of mind”: “The particular habit of mind which governs this or that inference may be formulated in a proposition whose truth depends on the validity of the inferences which the habit determines; and such a formula is called a guiding principle of inference” (W 3: 245).

Peirce gives an example of what he means by the “guiding principle” involved in the process of reasoning.

Suppose, for example, that we observe that a rotating disk of copper quickly comes to rest when placed between the poles of a magnet, and we infer that this will happen with every disk of copper. The guiding principle is, that what is true of one piece of copper is true of another. Such a guiding principle with regard to copper would be much safer than with regard to many other substances - brass, for example (W 3: 245).

Since any fact could be a guiding principle, Peirce specifies what kind of guiding principle he is concerned with by making the observation that there are two classes of facts. One class of facts is those implied when one asks the “logical question”: “whether a certain conclusion follows from certain premises” (W 3: 246). The other class consists of facts which are not implied in asking the logical question but are those given in experience. The class of facts implied in asking the logical question, according to Peirce, “are absolutely essential as guiding principles” (W 3: 246); and it is these facts that occupy Peirce’s interest.

3.1.2 Doubt, Belief, and Inquiry

Since Peirce strongly opposed the psychologistic notion of logic — the view that logic is a study of mental processes — it is natural that we should be curious to know how psychological facts such as doubt and belief enter into Peirce’s theory of inquiry, and thereby into the formation of his pragmatic maxim. For pragmatism is a logical maxim, according to Peirce. Doubt and belief as psychological facts are well known to Peirce and he always speaks of them as such.

The way Peirce sees doubt and belief as the essential parts of inquiry is based on logical considerations. He claims that in the process of asking the logical question, “It is implied … that there are such states of mind as doubt and belief — that a passage from one to the other is possible, the object of thought remaining the same, and that this transition is subject to some rules which all minds are alike bound by” (W 3: 246). After having established doubt and belief as states of mind implied in the logical question, Peirce proceeds to explain the differences between them.
He enumerates three differences between doubt and belief. The first difference lies in doubt being expressed in the *logical* form of a question, whereas belief is expressed in the *logical* form of a judgment. The second difference is a *practical* one: “Our beliefs,” says Peirce, “guide our desires and shape our actions” (W 3: 247), while doubt does not have that effect. The third difference between doubt and belief is most obviously *psychological* in nature. Peirce writes, “Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state [of mind] from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else” (W 3: 247).

With these characteristic differences between doubt and belief, Peirce proceeds to explain his notion of inquiry. He argues that the immediate cause of inquiry is doubt, and its sole purpose is to settle doubt by bringing about the state of belief. “The irritation of doubt,” argues Peirce, “causes a struggle to attain a belief. I shall term this struggle *inquiry*” (W 3: 247). Because doubt is a state of mind that is uneasy, dissatisfied, and indecisive, it commits our mind to struggle to settle itself in to a state of belief, which is calm, satisfactory, and decisive. Peirce’s notion of inquiry, then, is about a structure professed to be common to all types of inquiry.

What Peirce calls ‘inquiry’ in ‘The Fixation of Belief’ does not refer to any particular sort of inquiry, as the word usually refers to a formal process such as ‘scientific inquiry’, ‘police inquiry’, etc. His notion of inquiry is rather a universal or generalised one that covers all sorts of inquiry.

Doubt and belief enter into Peirce’s notion of inquiry via the “gate” of logic, and only after they are logically approved of as *essential parts of inquiry*, does Peirce reflect on their nature and characteristic features or seek to locate them logically within the process of inquiry. So, any concern as to whether or not Peirce’s theory of inquiry just presented is tenable, because of its psychological aspect, has to take into account the *logical* perspective from which Peirce admits doubt and belief into “inquiry”. My position is that it is tenable, and it will become evident as I continue my discussion in sections 3.2 to 3.2.3.

For now I will discuss the particular way in which doubt and belief come to feature in Peirce’s theory of inquiry, and to consider two consequences of his approach — one may be said as positive, and the other negative.
3.1.2.1 “Belief”: Its Impacts on Pragmatism

Leading up to his formulation of the ‘pragmatic maxim’, Peirce, in Section II of ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear,’ refers to ‘The Fixation of Belief’ thus:

The principles set forth in the first of these papers [namely, ‘The Fixation of Belief’] lead, at once, to a method of reaching a clearness of thought of a far higher grade than the “distinctness” of the logicians. We have there found that the action of thought is excited by the irritation of doubt, and ceases when belief is attained; so that the production of belief is the sole function of thought (W3: 261).

It is clear from this passage that the doubt-belief theory of inquiry provides the basis of Peirce’s pragmatic maxim. Specifically, it is his analysis of belief and its characteristic features that leads Peirce to the maxim. Consider this critical passage on the doctrine of transubstantiation where Peirce derives deductively the pragmatic maxim from his analysis of belief.

But we can have no conception of wine except what may enter into a belief, either -

1. That this, that, or the other, is wine; or
2. That wine possesses certain properties.

Such beliefs are nothing but self-notifications that we should, upon occasion, act in regard to such things as we believe to be wine according to the qualities which we believe wine to possess. The occasion of such action would be some sensible perception, the motive of it to produce some sensible result. Thus our action has exclusive reference to what affects the senses, our habit has the same bearing as our action, our belief the same as our habit, our conception the same as our belief; and we can consequently mean nothing by wine but what has certain effects, direct or indirect, upon our senses (W 3: 265-6).

The deductive process involved in Peirce’s analysis can be more explicit if one adopts some symbols to stand for the key ideas in this passage, and then take each proposition (in the symbolic form to be used here) and put it in to a syllogistic form of argument. I use these symbols: A = action, E = practical/sensible effects, H = habit, B = belief, and C = conception (of whatever object under discussion). Note that the symbol “=” is used here less strictly than in the mathematical sense of equality to which the symbol is usually applied. Following the procedure just suggested I then have three syllogistic arguments.

\[
\begin{align*}
(1). & \quad A = E \\
(2). & \quad B = H \\
(3). & \quad H = E
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
H = A & \quad C = B \\
H = E & \quad C = H \\
& \quad C = E
\end{align*}
\]
The conclusions of arguments (1) and (2) become the premises of argument (3) from which follows the pragmatic maxim, \( C = E \). In the next paragraph after the passage just quoted above Peirce draws the conclusion, stating the pragmatic maxim. He says, “It appears, then, that the rule for attaining the third grade of clearness of apprehension is as follows” (W 3: 266):

Consider what effects, which 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 (W 3: 266).\(^{72}\)

The distinguishing feature of Peirce’s analysis of belief, in his pragmatism, is his inclusion of human action and habit as inseparable elements in the meaning of belief. According to Peirce, the meaning of a concept involves action that follows from accepting that concept. “The essence of belief,” says Peirce, “is the establishment of a habit, and different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise” (W 3: 263-4). So, action, in Peirce’s view, is a defining property of belief. To eliminate action from the meaning of a concept is like having that concept “stripped” of its meaning. Peirce emphasises “It is absurd to say thought has any meaning unrelated to its only function” (W 3: 266), which is to settle belief, or establish a rule of action.

3.1.2.2 The “Misfortune” of “Sensible Effects”

By means of his analysis of belief Peirce is led to formulate his pragmatic maxim in a way that is similar to the verification principle of Logical Positivism.\(^{73}\)

The main thesis of the verification principle is that the meaning of a statement is determined by the method of its verification in sense experience. When Peirce contends that the whole of our conception of the practical effects of an object is the meaning of that object, he makes sense experience, in effect, the “method” or criterion for determining the meaning of an object. By “practical bearings” or effects Peirce means “sensible effects”. A further resemblance of the pragmatic maxim to the Verification Principle appears when Peirce restricts the meaning of an object (or concept) to sensible effects, maintaining that there is no room for something other

\(^{72}\) This is the very principle that was first publicly baptised with the name ‘pragmatism’ by William James in a public address at The University of California in Berkeley, 1898. Fisch, 1986, p. 283.

\(^{73}\) My attention was first drawn to the resemblance of the pragmatic maxim to the Verification Principle by H. O. Mounce, 1997, ch 3. However the point made about its implications for Peirce’s account of belief is mine.
than sensible effects. The restriction of meaning to sensible effects is clearly illustrated when Peirce says, “It is foolish for Catholics and Protestants to fancy themselves in disagreement about the elements of the sacrament, if they agree in regard to all their sensible effects, here or after” (W 3: 266).

Just as the classic formulation of the Verification Principle commits logical positivism to a rejection of metaphysics, the original version of Peirce’s pragmatic maxim imposes a restriction on his theory of meaning, leading him to reject any supposed meaning with no sensible effects as absurd. In later years, however, Peirce realised the restriction the pragmatic maxim placed on his theory of meaning and found it problematic.

In ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear,’ after formulating the pragmatic maxim, Peirce proceeds to illustrate the maxim by examples. He applies it to various concepts. The first of these is the idea “hard”.

Let us ask what we mean by calling a thing hard. Evidently that it will not be scratched by many other substances. The whole conception of this quality, as of every other, lies in its conceived effects. There is absolutely no difference between a hard thing and a soft thing so long as they are not brought to the test. Suppose, then, that a diamond could be crystallized in the midst of a cushion of soft cotton, and should remain there until it was finally burned up. Would it be false to say that that diamond was soft? … We may, in the present case, modify our question, and ask what prevents us from saying that all hard bodies remain perfectly soft until they are touched, when their hardness increases with the pressure until they are scratched. Reflection will show that the reply is this: there would be no falsity in such modes of speech. They would involve a modification of our present usage of speech with regard to the words hard and soft, but not of their meanings. For they represent no fact to be different from what it is; only they involve arrangements of facts which would be exceedingly maladroit. This leads us to remark that the question of what would occur under circumstances which do not actually arise is not a question of fact, but only of the most perspicuous arrangement of them (W 3: 266-7).

Here Peirce is committed to some form of nominalism when he emphasises that until an object we consider to be hard is put to test, that is, in this case, until we press or scratch it, we can say it is soft. In general, nominalism is the doctrine that the only real things are the individual particulars; it claims that universals or generals are not real but are ‘creations’ of the mind. However, the nominalistic aspect of this (original) version of pragmatism is that it restricts the meaning of the idea “hard” to the particular diamond under consideration. If the particular diamond is not tested yet, hence no sensible effect(s) is identified, it is just a difference in “modes of speech” to claim that the diamond is hard or that it is soft.
In his ‘Issues of Pragmatism,’ the second article of the series published in *The Monist* (1905), Peirce redefined pragmatism as follows:

The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally upon all the possible different circumstances and desires, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol (CP 5.438).

This is not just a redefinition of the pragmatic maxim. More importantly, it marks a change in Peirce’s point of view from a partly nominalistic doctrine to a more realist one. By 1905 Peirce’s realism, the doctrine that there are real generals, had developed to accept that there are real possibilities. (The relation between pragmatism and realism is discussed further in chapter 4.) Peirce thus specifies that “it is the reality of some possibilities that pragmatism is most concerned to insist upon” (CP 5.453). Because he now incorporates the reality of possibilities into his pragmatism and understands that there is a difference between this version of pragmatism and the original account Peirce revisits the example of “hardness” of a diamond.

Let us now take up the case of that diamond which, having been crystallized upon a cushion of jeweler’s cotton, was accidentally consumed by fire before the crystal of corundum that had been sent for had had time to arrive, and indeed without being subjected to any other pressure than that of the atmosphere and its own weight. The question is, was that diamond really hard? It is certain that no discernible actual fact determined it to be so. But is its hardness not, nevertheless, a real fact? To say, as the article of January 1878 ['How to Make Our Ideas Clear'] seems to intend, that it is just as an arbitrary “usage of speech” chooses to arrange its thoughts, is as much as to decide against the reality of the property, since the real is that which is such as it is regardless of how it is, at any time, thought to be (CP 5. 457).

What Peirce seeks to address here is the nominalistic consequences that follow from his original formulation of the ‘pragmatic maxim’ and his account of the actual “sensible effects” of concepts. According to the original account, differences in linguistic expressions, or symbols, which have no corresponding differences in sensible effects are simply unreal. In ‘Issues of Pragmatism’ Peirce remarks on the original account of the pragmatic maxim as committing “the abominable falsehood in … implying that symbols are unreal” (CP 5.453). This nominalism, however, is shaken when Peirce considers it a real issue when there is a possibility of difference in linguistic expressions, or signs, used to express differences in sensible effects, thus admitting that symbols correspond with something real.
A shift in his pragmatism from a nominalistic to a more realist approach is most especially evident in a letter Peirce wrote in c. 1905 to the Italian pragmatist Signor Calderoni. He writes:

I myself went too far in the direction of nominalism when I said that it was a mere question of the convenience of speech whether we say that a diamond is hard when it is not pressed upon, or whether we say that it is soft until it is pressed upon. I now say that experiment will prove that the diamond is hard, as a positive fact. That is, it is a real fact that it would resist pressure, which amounts to extreme scholastic realism (CP 8.208).

The shift towards a more realistic description of the relation of antecedent to consequent, results in a shift in emphasis in his formulation of the pragmatic maxim from examples of indicative to contrafactual conditionals. The indicative conditional of the original form of pragmatic maxim reads the meaning of “hardness” of a diamond as follows. “If you press a diamond, then it is not scratched.” Now as the pragmatic maxim is reformulated in terms of contrafactual conditionals, the meaning of “hardness” of a diamond then reads thus: “If you were to press a diamond, then it would resist the pressure.” So, the meaning consists not in what follows from “the actual employment of the experiential method,” to use Almeder’s phrase, but what would happen if the experiential method were to be employed.

Thus, Peirce gives his pragmatism a broader base on which it is able to free itself from the restriction of “sensible effects” and its nominalistic and verificationist consequences. Because “sensible effects” occupy the centre of attention in the original account of the pragmatic maxim, this means that what the individual person (or inquirer) actually experiences is what counts the most. The problem that arises is how to explain the communal dimension of meaning and our participation in a common universe of discourse. In the original account the communal aspect of language has to be based on the claim that every inquirer will come to the same conclusion in the end if inquirers pursue their inquiry far enough. Thus pragmatism in its original form makes communal meaning secondary and dependent on the

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74 The editor of CP vol. 8, Arthur W. Burks, claims that “The intended recipient [of the letter] was probably Mario Calderoni, an Italian pragmatist.” See CP, vol. 8, footnote 1, p. 165.
authority of “sensible effects”. With the reformulation of his pragmatic maxim Peirce takes on a ‘full-blown’ communal, or public, view of meaning in contrast to the semi-communal position of the original account of pragmatism. The later version of pragmatism makes the communal basis of meaning a primary platform or principle independently of the authority of the particular “sensible effects” that the inquirers may experience.

### 3.2 Psychological Doubt and Its Limitation in Inquiry

In the first period\(^ {77}\) (1851-1870) of Peirce’s philosophical inquiry he was heavily involved in a critique of Cartesian philosophy. His attack on the Cartesian method of doubt is based on his rejection of subjective states as a sufficient basis for, or criterion of meaning for, a sound method of inquiry. He rejects the universal doubt of Descartes saying that it is “a mere self-deception, and not real doubt … Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts” (CP 5.265). To deliberately force ourselves into a state of doubt in order to conduct an inquiry does not make it operative. As Peirce puts it, “the mere putting of a proposition into the interrogative form does not stimulate the mind to any struggle after belief. There must be a real and living doubt, and without this all discussion is idle” (W 3: 248).

Susan Haack criticises Peirce’s attack on Descartes’ method of doubt, arguing that Peirce misrepresents Descartes. Haack defends Descartes’ method of doubt along the following lines:

Descartes’ project is this: The aim is to discover which, if any, of the things he believes is certain … . The method [of Descartes] is to begin with beliefs one actually holds and submit them to a severe test, retaining only those which pass the test … . Beliefs which fail the test, which are not certain, are to be suspended … . The place at which doubt enters the procedure is in the test to which Descartes proposes that beliefs be submitted: he will suspend belief in anything which is dubitable, anything it is possible to doubt.\(^ {78}\)

Haack further analyses that when a proposition is said to be dubitable we:

might mean either of two things: that it is psychologically possible that someone should actually doubt it; or that it is possible that there should be a reason for doubting it. (I’ll call these, respectively, the descriptive and


normative interpretations of ‘dubitable’.) I think it is clear that Descartes is concerned with dubitability in the normative sense.\textsuperscript{79}

Haack’s criticism seems to miss the essence of Peirce’s doubt-belief theory of inquiry and his rejection of the Cartesian method of doubt. What Peirce tries to do in his doubt-belief theory of inquiry is to locate the proper place of doubt in inquiry, and then proceed to identify the most reliable method (as far as the truth of our belief is concerned) for fixing our belief, i.e. settling our doubts into belief. The main point of his rejection of the Cartesian doubt is twofold. First, doubt is a psychological state of mind, and therefore it cannot be employed as a method for conducting scientific inquiry. Secondly, doubt by nature is not something we can force ourselves into, as Descartes thought; rather, it is a state of mind that happens to us as a result of our belief being contradicted by our surrounding environment — whether physical or otherwise.

3.2.1 Two Purposes of Inquiry

There are two kinds of purpose traced in Peirce’s notion of inquiry. One might be called ‘psychological purpose’, and the other ‘differential purpose’. The psychological footing of Peirce’s notion of inquiry makes belief in general the sole purpose of inquiry, whatever sort of inquiry; and hence its ‘psychological purpose’.

‘Differential purpose’ is whatever particular purpose Peirce recognises in each type of inquiry. For example, truth is the differential purpose of science, and power is the differential purpose of politics. Note that truth can be said to be the differential purpose of other types of inquiry such as legal inquiry, police inquiry, etc. Also, note it is arguable that the purpose of science is power, to master the world; and of politics to arrive at the truth about human nature so as to build a just and happy society. While these arguments could be justifiable, I should emphasise that they are beside the point of what Peirce is concerned with in his ‘The Fixation of Belief.’ Peirce is denying not that truth and true belief can be used for maintaining power; what he is denying is that power is a reliable method for obtaining true beliefs.

The idea of purpose in Peirce’s notion of inquiry determines to a certain extent his view on method. Consideration of the proper method to be used in any given inquiry must begin with recognition of the differential purpose of that inquiry. As a scientist, Peirce has no objection to use of methods other than those of science in

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 245.
other domains, relative to their differential purposes. Yet, these methods are not suitable if our purpose is to arrive at truth, settled belief. That is, the method appropriate to any inquiry must be compatible with its differential purpose, whatever it is. It must have characteristics by virtue of which its goals could be reached.

3.2.2 Methods of Fixing Belief

Peirce’s preference for scientific method is based on the fundamental assumptions about the nature of inquiry articulated in ‘The Fixation of Belief.’ Thus, Peirce’s concept of method has to be understood within the context of his notion of inquiry. While various methods attracted Peirce’s attention in one way or the other, he singled out the method of science. His preference for the method of science over other methods is based upon his general classification of methods into two divisions: (1) those which are employed in activities and inquiries other than science, and (2) the method employed in science itself.

Because of the common nature of inquiry, as struggle initiated by doubt and aiming at belief, Peirce assumes that every person has engaged in inquiry, no matter to what degree each person has experienced it; hence, every person may be regarded as an “inquirer”. But although every person is brought into inquiry by the psychological motivation of doubt, there are two points of difference between ‘inquirers’. First, they may differ in purpose, and second, in the methods they use in inquiry.

Peirce identifies four different methods of fixing belief; they are the method of tenacity, method of authority, the *a priori* method, and the method of science. The first three methods, Peirce enunciates, each have certain merits of their own.

The *method of tenacity* has the advantage of simplicity. A person using this method simply resorts to his or her own fancy in resolving a particular doubt, without making much effort in deciding what to believe. On another level, *appeal to authority* constitutes a common method of fixing belief; and this is, in Peirce’s account, the method mostly practised in religious and political institutions. Whatever the authority dictates determines what its subjects have to believe, or, at least, are expected to believe. Peirce explains this method of authority is mostly distinguished in its success in preserving and controlling religious and political dogmas. The *a priori method*, which Peirce claims has a central position in philosophies of metaphysicians, operates under the guidance of instinct. Philosophers of this method
build up their doctrines on what they are inclined to accept as true, or, differently put, on what they think the most agreeable to reason. The advantage of *a priori* method, for Peirce, lies in the fact that it allows philosophers to draw out conclusions which their instinct finds comfortable.

Peirce argues that beliefs attained through the use of these methods — method of tenacity, method of authority, a priori method — are not sufficiently well secured. That in finding other people’s beliefs to be as good as one’s own belief, though very different from theirs, will cause some feeling of uneasiness and dissatisfaction in that person about his or her belief. So, the method of tenacity fails to withstand the challenges of what Peirce terms “The social impulse …” (W 3: 250). As to the method of authority its failure to secure belief from becoming doubtful is as inevitable as that of the method of tenacity. Once the subjects of an authority find out that beliefs followed in other countries and centuries are different from theirs, they start to question whether their beliefs are more or less reliable than those of the others’. Thus, beliefs become doubtful. In the *a priori* method, its practice is unable to bring inquirers to a common agreement. Because it bases inquiry on what the philosopher’s instinct finds ‘agreeable to reason’, which is for Peirce “similar to the development of taste” (W 3: 253), it makes only certain beliefs fashionable at certain times. At other times, beliefs of another instinct become more fashionable, leaving the former ones out of fashion. This allows beliefs as conclusions of one instinct to remain in disharmony with those of other instincts.

Having disclosed difficulties with these methods, Peirce proposes that “To satisfy our doubts ... it is necessary that a method should be found by which our beliefs may be caused by nothing human, but by some external permanency — by something upon which our thinking has no effect” (W 3: 253). He takes scientific method to be the only successful method whereby opinions can be settled permanently. Since scientific method works with objective facts and principles, there is no room (in science) for beliefs derived from tenacity, authority, or instinct, to make any claim against its conclusions. For that reason scientific method affords the inquirers with certainty and hope that they will all come, at the end, to the same conclusion. But the inquirers, Peirce adds, have to conduct their inquiry far enough so that they can attain the ultimate opinion, which is not a result of any particular individual or authority but of “something which affects, or might affect, every man” (W 3: 253).
3.2.3 *The Ideas of “Purpose” and “Method” Connected*

Peirce’s central point is that differences and disagreement in beliefs, or opinions, on any particular subject are fundamentally to be settled by attention to the question of method. It is a matter of *how* one settles his or her belief. Only on the basis of scientific method can we meet both the purposes of inquiry (psychological and differential). To put the same point in form of a table, one may set out Peirce’s argument in summary form as follows (with letters F = failed, and S = Successful):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Psychological Purpose</th>
<th>Differential Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Method of Tenacity</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method of Authority</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A priori Method</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method of Science</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows the extent to which Peirce’s notion of inquiry is psychological, and how his preference for the method of science stems from a psychological standpoint. The method of science is the only method that passes the “psychological test”, that is capable of achieving the psychological purpose as well as the differential purpose of inquiry.

It should be emphasised, however, that it is incorrect to say that Peirce’s preference for the method of science is based entirely on a psychological principle. For his trust in the method of science is due to his conviction that this is the only method with an objective standard, i.e. standard pertaining to objects, that can be appealed to settle a subjective, psychological uncertainty.

But why does Peirce prefer objectivity (the method of science) to subjectivity (as in the method of tenacity, the method of authority, a priori method)? Peirce takes the view that objectivity, as in the method of science, has the potential of providing security for a belief not to be overturned by doubt. Subjectivity, as implied to various degrees in the other three methods, does not have this potential, according to Peirce. He holds that in the employment of subjective criteria for fixing belief the inquirer is locked in an “unsecured cell” so far as his or her belief is concerned. For once a belief so acquired is confronted with the external reality, it is very likely that it would readily be overturned by experience and become doubtful. So only by means of appealing to objects themselves can the inquirer be provided with security for his or
her belief against the possible contradictions of belief arising from recognition of surrounding conditions.

3.3 Pragmatism and the Categories

After his first formulation of pragmatism in ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear,’ 1878, Peirce never wrote anything further on the subject until the 1900s. In 1902 Peirce wrote an article entitled ‘Pragmatic and Pragmatism’ for the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*. He was provoked into clarifying and defending his own form of pragmatism in order to distinguish it from the popularised version of William James (CP 5.3). He accused James of taking pragmatism too far in assuming “that the end of man is action” (CP 5.3). In 1903 Peirce was invited to deliver a series of lectures on pragmatism at Harvard University in 1903. These lectures contained Peirce’s first thoroughly systematic presentation of his pragmatism, and the development of it I refer to in this thesis as ‘the later version’ of his pragmatism.

It should be pointed out, however, that between 1878 and the 1900s, Peirce had not ignored the subject altogether in the sense that the results of his research during this period formed the basis of the 1903 Harvard lectures. The differences between the earlier (or original) and later versions of his pragmatism indicate that Peirce’s philosophy underwent significant development over the period.

There is a whole range of differences between the two versions of pragmatism, but one difference is specially significant and is worth noting here. In the early version, as expressed in ‘The Fixation of Belief’ and ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear,’ there is neither mention of the categories nor of his theory of signs. In the later version both the categories and his theory of signs take on a central position. This does not imply that Peirce thought out his pragmatism in its early form without the framework of his theories of categories and signs. On the contrary, there are reasons to believe that Peirce’s theories of categories and signs play a part in the original account he gives of pragmatism and in his formulation of the pragmatic maxim, especially those aspects related to “sensible effects” and psychological doubt.

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80 Fisch (1986, p. 293) reports that Peirce first used the term ‘pragmatism’ in 1900.
His writings (related to and) on pragmatism produced during the period from the 1890s to the end of his philosophical career address issues that Peirce wanted to settle in favour of his pragmatism. Firstly, Peirce re-formulated the 1878 statement of the pragmatic principle so as to avoid the psychologistic interpretation of it that had been taken up by other ‘pragmatists’. Secondly, he sought to demonstrate pragmatism as a coherent principle applicable to other branches of his philosophy. And, thirdly, he sought to provide a (philosophical) justification of pragmatism.

In the first lecture of the 1903 lecture series Peirce argues that although pragmatism is an efficient method for solving various problems, “it does not at all follow from that that it is true.”82 He understands that the sufficiency of pragmatism as a method and its truth are two distinct questions, and he recognises that he is required to provide a proof of pragmatism. In this lecture Peirce acknowledges the need for a proof of pragmatism and explains how it was dealt with in the original account of pragmatism. He says:

What is the proof that the possible practical consequences of a concept constitute the sum total of the concept? The argument upon which I rested the maxim in my original paper was that belief consists mainly in being deliberately prepared to adopt the formula believed in as the guide to action. If this be in truth the nature of belief, then undoubtedly the proposition believed in can itself be nothing but a maxim of conduct. That I believe is quite evident.

But how do we know that belief is nothing but the deliberate preparedness to act according to the formula believed?

My original article carried this back to a psychological principle. The conception of truth according to me was developed out of an original impulse to act consistently, to have a definite intention. But in the first place, this was not very clearly made out, and in the second place, I do not think it satisfactory to reduce such fundamental things to facts of psychology.83

3.3.1 The Categories as Constitutive Principles for Pragmatism

Because Peirce conceives pragmatism to be a theory of meaning, it follows that pragmatism, in one way or the other, should have connections with both the theory of categories and the theory of signs. Basically, the categorical and semiotic presuppositions of Peirce’s philosophical system have two implications for his theory of meaning. First, the meaning of an object or concept is constituted by the category

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83 Ibid., p. 116.
of Thirdness, which involves both the categories of Firstness and Secondness; and, secondly, every thought is itself a sign, and thinking is conducted in signs. Because of these two fundamental contentions, pragmatism is bound to result in categorical-semiotic thinking, where not only all the three categories are involved, but also a three-way representation is implied: (1) it (a sign) represents something to us, (2) it represents us to something or someone, and (3) it is, or can be, represented by us to someone else. The question remains, however, whether or not Peirce follows these principles in formulating his pragmatism.

Because there is no direct reference to the theory of categories in the original account of pragmatism the issue of the connection between pragmatism and his theory of categories cannot easily be settled by any direct evidence. Nevertheless, there is room for tracing the connection. There are two reasons for this: One factor is that there are remarkably striking resemblances to the categories in both ‘The Fixation of Belief’ and ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear.’ As Fisch remarks, “The categories are the key to the analysis of belief, doubt, and inquiry in the first paper [‘The Fixation of Belief’], and to the distinction of the three grades of clarity in the second paper [‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear’].”

Doubt, inquiry, and belief correspond to the categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness respectively. The various names Peirce uses to call his three categories show the correspondence between the two sets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doubt (Firstness)</th>
<th>Inquiry (Secondness)</th>
<th>Belief (Thirdness)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td>Thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
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The other factor is that in the later version of pragmatism, as expressed in the 1903 lectures, Peirce attempted an explanation of the link between pragmatism and his phenomenology and the doctrine of categories. In these lectures there is no suggestion that the “link” Peirce explains here is being introduced for the first time. What is new in the explanation of the 1903 Harvard lectures is that the link between pragmatism and the categories is now addressed in a manner that is predominantly phenomenological, both in content and expression. In other words, the explanation about the link between pragmatism and the categories offered in the later years is

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simply another version of an already existing link that can be traced back to the 1877-78 papers.

It is characteristic of the later version of pragmatism that Peirce is clear about his views on the relation between pragmatism and his theory of signs. In c.1904 he confirmed the relation between pragmatism and his theory of signs as follows. “This maxim [of pragmatism] is put forth neither as a handy tool to serve so far as it may be found serviceable, nor as a self-evident truth, but as a far-reaching theorem solidly grounded upon an elaborate study of the nature of signs” (CP 8.191).

What is clear in Peirce’s arguments about the relation between pragmatism and the categories is that he takes the categories as necessary for understanding pragmatism. In a letter to William James in 1902 Peirce wrote:

[M]y three categories, which in their psychological aspect, appear as Feeling, Reaction, Thought. … I have advanced my understanding of these categories … and can now put them in a much clearer light and more convincingly. The true nature of pragmatism cannot be understood without them (CP 8.256).

Peirce continues in the letter to James:

It does not, as I seem to have thought at first, take Reaction as the be-all, but it takes the end-all as the be-all, and the End is something that gives it sanction to action. It is of the third category. Only one must not take a nominalistic view of Thought as if it were something that a man had in his consciousness. Consciousness may mean any one of the three categories. But 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).

What Peirce says in this passage makes it reasonable to argue that his pragmatism was built upon his theory of categories. He wants to emphasise the category of Thirdness, i.e. thought, as playing a central role in pragmatism. This reinforces the position that pragmatism is a theory of meaning, for it is only in the domain of the category of Thirdness that meaning is possible. Moreover, the category of Thirdness insures the generality that pragmatism requires in order to escape the psychologism Peirce wants to erase from the original formulation of the principle of pragmatism. In other words, Peirce comes to realise that pragmatism, as a logical and not a psychological principle, has to be grounded within his theory of categories with a full recognition of the category of Thirdness.

The 1902 letter to James indicates that the advance in Peirce’s understanding of his categories took place after 1890. It is his article ‘The Architecture of Theories,’ 1891, that Peirce set out to explain the relation between the categories and psychology. There he calls the psychological manifestations of the categories as
“feeling”, “reaction”, and “general conception, or mediation” (CP 6.32) corresponding to Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness respectively.\(^{85}\) This means that the later version of pragmatism would differ from the early version since the categories were not so fully developed in the early version.

The content of Peirce’s 1902 letter to James is consistent with Fisch’s observation about the categories as “the key to the analysis of belief, doubt, and inquiry … and to the distinction of the three grades of clarity.” It is important to note that although Peirce formulated pragmatism in its original form within the framework of the categories, he does not appear to have applied the categories vigorously enough. As a result, the original version of pragmatism fails to avoid the psychologism which Peirce later wanted to remove.

Moreover, when Peirce redefined pragmatism in the 1903 lectures a great deal of space in this series of seven lectures was devoted to the subject of phenomenology, or “the doctrine of categories”. What is important here is that wherever Peirce thoroughly explicates and defends his pragmatism the categories are seen to be applied vigorously. This suggests not only that Peirce founded his pragmatism on his categorical system, but, more importantly, he considered the earlier version to be inadequate because he had not made the connection with the categories explicit.

3.3.2 Categories and the Scientific Method

There are two principal ideas of Peirce’s pragmatism on which he is particularly insistent. He claims first, that pragmatism is a maxim of logic, and, second, that it is closely connected with scientific method and experimentation. These two claims are so related for Peirce that considering one would necessarily involve consideration of the other. This is partly shown by the phrase “the logic of science” which is the subject of the ‘Illustrations’ series. The phrase signifies the basic principle, or particular mode of thinking, practised in doing science, namely induction in particular. The logic, however, points to certain characteristic features of the method of science: it relies very much on observation of instances of experience, it is determined by an “external permanency”, the conclusion at which it aims is an ideal that is general in character. Note that these three features correspond to Peirce’s

\(^{85}\) Max H. Fisch (1986, p. 265) reports that this is when Peirce “began calling his three categories Quality, Reaction and Mediation.”
three universal categories. “External permanency” corresponds to the category of quality of feeling, observation of phenomena of experience to the category of relation, and the general ideal state or law to the category of representation.

3.3.3 The Question of the Proof of Pragmatism

Peirce considers providing a proof of pragmatism an important task and he committed himself to investigating the subject. Peirce attempts a “proof” of pragmatism not only as an essential requirement of scientific and philosophical inquiry, but also because he feels that it is required in order to draw the distinction between his pragmatism and that of other philosophers who in the eyes of Peirce have used the term too loosely. The subject became an increasingly important issue for Peirce in his writings on pragmatism after 1900.

Nevertheless, Peirce had already attempted a proof of pragmatism in his early papers: ‘The Fixation of Belief” and ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear.’ There, his proof rests on the theory of inquiry developed in these two articles. As I have indicated, for Peirce inquiry is a process initiated by the feeling of doubt and it comes to an end when the process of inquiry achieves a state of belief, that is, when the initiating doubt is settled. By 1903, however, Peirce considered it unsatisfactory because of its psychological aspect (CP 5.28).

Peirce argues that to construct a philosophical theory one has to follow a certain route of investigation. On the one hand, he rejects the mere speculation of some philosophers, and on the other hand he maintains a constant belief that philosophy should adopt a detailed, scientific form of inquiry. In his ‘The Architecture of Theories’ (1891) Peirce recommends that to construct a philosophical theory, one has:

- to make a systematic study of the conceptions out of which a philosophical theory may be built, in order to ascertain what place each conception may fitly occupy in such a theory, and to what uses it is adapted (CP 6.9).

There is uncertainty among scholars whether or not Peirce was successful in providing a proof of pragmatism. Part of the problem lies with Peirce himself. As with some of his views on other subjects Peirce almost never pursued a definite line of thinking without changing his mind. As a result his readers are left with views which in some respects are in conflict, and in other respects are not fully developed.

86 Ibid., p. 373-374.
In this thesis I argue that a significant part of the problem could have been resolved if Peirce had resorted earlier to his theory of categories for a proof of pragmatism. Some of his writings indicate that Peirce realised the categories should form part of the proof, but he never pursued that point far enough so that he could see the deeper significance or value of the theory to his system as a whole.

In c. 1905, Peirce wrote:

Pragmatism … had been designed and constructed … architectonically. … in constructing the doctrine of pragmatism the properties of all indecomposable concepts were examined and the ways in which they could be compounded. Then the purpose of the proposed doctrine having been analyzed, it was constructed out of the appropriate concepts so as to fulfil that purpose. In this way, the proof of it was proved. There are other subsidiary confirmations of its truth; but it is believed that there is no other independent way of strictly proving it (CP 5.5).

3.3.4 Pragmatism and the Principle of Abduction

Peirce’s pragmatism went through a process of change and development since its first formulation in 1878. However, it is noteworthy that in 1903 Peirce identified pragmatism with abduction.

the question of pragmatism … is nothing else than the question of the logic of abduction. That is, pragmatism proposes a certain maxim which, if sound, must render needless any further rule as to the admissibility of hypotheses to rank as hypotheses, that is to say, as explanations of phenomena held as hopeful suggestions; and … this is all that the maxim of pragmatism really pretends to do …. For the maxim of pragmatism is that a conception can have no logical effect or import differing from that of a second conception except so far as … it might conceivably modify our practical conduct differently from that second conception. Now it is indisputable that no rule of abduction would be admitted by any philosopher which should prohibit on any formalistic grounds any inquiry as to how we ought in consistency to shape our practical conduct. Therefore, a maxim which looks only to possibly practical considerations will not need any supplement in order to exclude any hypotheses as inadmissible. … Thus, the maxim of pragmatism … fully covers the entire logic of abduction (CP 5.196).

In finally identifying pragmatism with abduction Peirce is then involved in seeking to establish a common method for inquiry. Pragmatism as formulated in 1878 still retains its purpose as a principle or method for clarifying meaning, but as evident in the passage above it is now incorporated into a wider method with a broader application, in which it recognises the ‘future’ mode of being. Peirce says,
“Deduction proves that something *must* be, Induction shows that something *actually is* operative, Abduction merely suggests that something *may be.*\(^{87}\)

Chapter 4:

THE PLACE OF REALISM IN PEIRCE’S PRAGMATISM
4.1 Peirce on Nominalism-Realism Controversy

4.1.1 Introduction

Peirce considered realism an essential component of his pragmatism, and he consistently argued for it throughout his career.\(^{88}\) It will become clear in the following discussion that Peirce’s realism was not defined once and for all, but it went through stages of development, with associated developments in his pragmatism. The two major formulations (which I referred to in chapter 3 as the “early” and “later” formulations or versions) of his pragmatism were conducted (as I have shown) within the framework of his realist theory of categories. As a result, Peirce was forced to extend the scope of his pragmatism from being merely a logical maxim for clarifying the meaning of concepts to one which includes a metaphysical aspect, which Peirce describes thus.

Now whoever cares to know what pragmaticism is should understand that on its metaphysical side it is an attempt to solve the problem: In what way can a general be unaffected by any thought about it? (CP 5.503).

It becomes apparent that his pragmatism is founded upon a form of metaphysical realism, insofar as it must answer the question how a general be unaffected by any thought about it. In a word, pragmatism becomes an argument for a metaphysical position.

4.1.2 What does Realism mean for Peirce?

By ‘realism’ Peirce understands the doctrine that there are real universals (or ‘generals,’ or ‘laws’ as he later more often called them), and realism is to be distinguished from ‘nominalism’, the doctrine which maintains that only individual particulars have reality, whereas universals are only figments of the mind. There are numerous references to the nominalism-realism controversy scattered throughout his writings, and it is clear that for Peirce the fundamental issue between nominalism and realism is about the reality of universals: “Are universals real?” (W 2: 467), rather than simply the meaning of universals.

\(^{88}\) In noticing the force of Peirce’s demand for a realist basis for his pragmatism, Thomas S. Knight remarks that “No aspect of Peirce’s philosophy depends more upon realism than Pragmatism.” Thomas S. Knight, Charles Peirce (New York: Washington Square Press, 1965), p. 65.
Peirce became seriously engaged with the controversy early in his career\(^\text{89}\) as a result of his study of the scholastic philosophers. He believed the importance of nominalism-realism controversy was not limited to theoretical, intellectual discourse; but “its branches reach about our life.” He continues,

But although the question of nominalism and realism has its roots in the technicalities of logic, its branches reach about our life. The question whether genus homo has any existence except as individuals, is the question whether there is anything of any more dignity, worth, and importance than individual happiness, individual aspirations, and individual life. Whether men really have anything in common, so that the community is to be considered as an end in itself, and if so, what the relative value of the two factors is, is the most fundamental practical question in regard to every public institution the constitution of which we have it in our power to influence (W 2: 487).

It is noteworthy that this was written in 1871 — before he formulated his pragmatism. What is important here is that the view he expresses in this passage about the nominalism-realism controversy — as having some application to practical questions of life — is potentially pragmatic, given that his pragmatism emphasises the practical effects of belief. Further, he shows that he is committed to realism as an essential foundation for his pragmatism because he rejects the wider consequences of nominalism for our communal life as human beings.

Although Peirce recognises some important ideas in the works of other scholastic philosophers, he had special interest in the philosophy of Duns Scotus. And this is because Peirce believes that:

If his [Scotus’] logic and metaphysics, [is] not slavishly worshipped, but torn away from its medievalism, … it will go far toward supplying the philosophy which is best to harmonize with physical science (CP 1.6).

Peirce does not elaborate what he means by this statement. Fortunately, however, one can easily gather the meaning of his statement from what he says about Scotus in other parts of his writings. Consider, for example, what he says in the following passage:

The logical upshot of the doctrine of Scotus is that real problems cannot be solved by metaphysics, but must be decided according to the evidence. As he was a theologian, that evidence was, for him, the dicta of the church. But the same system in the hands of a scientific man will lead to his insisting upon submitting everything to the test of observation (CP 4.28).

\(^{89}\) According to Max H. Fisch, 1986, p. 188, “The years 1868 and 1869 were those of Peirce’s most intensive study of the schoolmen.”
In the light of this passage the “medievalism” from which Scotus’ philosophy must be liberated is its dependence on “the dicta of the church.” The particular aspect of Scotus’ philosophy which, for Peirce, could “harmonize with physical science” is his insistence “that real problems … must be decided according to the evidence.”

4.1.3 From Nominalism to Realism: Accepting that External Reality Exists

Early in his career Peirce first held a nominalist view of the reality of universals before he declared for realism. The nominalistic stand of his theory of universals admits of the reality of universals only within the domain of thought. He claims that there is nothing universal, or general, that is outside the sign processes of thought. Peirce made this claim upon the basis of his theory of cognition, the fundamental thesis of which was that our reasoning is inferential in character, and it operates by means of signs. In a draft of his first article of the cognition series, ‘Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man,’ 1868, Peirce makes the following remarks:

For the real is an object of an absolutely true proposition. Thus, we obtain a theory of reality which, while it is nominalistic, inasmuch as it bases universals upon signs, is yet quite opposed to that individualism which is often supposed to be coextensive with nominalism. … it is not merely the case … that universals have reality on this theory, but also that there are nothing but universals which have an immediate reality. … Now the nominalistic element of my theory is certainly an admission that nothing out of cognition and signification generally, has any generality; and therefore this seems to imply that we are not affected by a real external world. … Our principle, indeed, is simply that realities, all realities, are nominal, significative, cognitive. This is simply the pure doctrine of idealism (W 2: 175, 180, 181).

The nominalism for which Peirce declared in this passage is an idealistic nominalism, in that it restricts reality to thought. “In short,” Peirce continues in the same draft, “thought and being appear to be in their widest sense synonymous terms” (W 2: 175). Peirce’s identification of being with thought is a result of his denial of any ultimate premise, or first principle, that is claimed to exist but is unknowable. Moreover, it is important to note that at this time such identification seemed to Peirce to be the most appropriate theory on which to base his signs theory of cognition. Peirce seemed to think that allowing the existence of particulars in the external world would require an external starting point for thought, in which case thought would

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90 Peirce calls this kind of reasoning where the evidence is “the dicta of the church” or power of any political organisation “the method of authority.”
appear then to have a first premise or principle that is non-inferential in character. To claim that there is non-inferential basis to thought is contrary to what Peirce wants to argue for he insists that thought is inferential. As a result Peirce makes the reality of universals to consist entirely in thought, thus committing himself to a form of idealism.

Despite his claim that “universals have reality on this theory,” the reality of universals is confined to a realm of thought where nothing is universal but the signs. This leads Peirce to the conclusion that the real is that which is significative and cognitive, thus identifying thought with being. However, it did not take long before Peirce declared for realism by arguing for the external and independent reality of universals.

4.2 Pragmatism within the Framework of Realism

The development of Peirce’s realism was determined by his changing views on the ontological status or reality of his categories. In his survey of the development of Peirce’s realism Max H. Fisch argues that Peirce’s realism developed progressively as he accepted the reality of each of his categories and moved from “one-category” to “two-category,” and finally to “three-category” realism. He argues that this points directly to the fact that the universals, or generals, with whose reality Peirce is concerned, are nothing more or less than the categories themselves. For Peirce there are only three kinds of universals, namely, Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. Hence, his realism as a doctrine of the reality of universals is a doctrine of the reality of his categories.

4.2.1 One-Category Realism

Later in the same year, 1868, in which he formulated his nominalistic view of universals, Peirce first declared for realism in his paper ‘Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,’ the second article of the cognition series. Here Peirce argues that “We have no conception of the absolutely incognizable” (W 2: 213):

At any moment we are in possession of certain information, that is, of cognitions which have been logically derived by induction and hypothesis from previous cognitions which are less general, less distinct, and of which we have

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a less lively consciousness. These in their turn have been derived from others still less general, less distinct, and less vivid; and so on back to the ideal first, which is quite singular, and quite out of consciousness. This ideal first is the particular thing-in-itself. It does not exist as such. That is, there is no thing which is in-itself in the sense of not being relative to the mind, though things which are relative to the mind doubtless are, apart from that relation (W 2: 238-9).

He argues that our cognition is always at any moment the product of an inference from some previous cognitions, which themselves are derived from some further previous cognitions; and so on infinitely. To trace a cognition, according to Peirce, would lead back to what he calls an “ideal first.” “This ideal first,” says Peirce, “is the particular thing-in-itself” (W 2: 238). Peirce’s usage of the word “ideal” (in his calling “the particular thing-in-itself” an “ideal first”) serves to distinguish between what he affirms and what he denies in relation to particulars. It is a distinction, moreover, which leaves Peirce with no option but a “one-category” realism in which the only reality he recognises is that of representation, or the category of Thirdness.

What Peirce denies in the idea of a “particular thing-in-itself” is the claim that it is a thing in itself bearing no relation whatsoever to the mind — a position he associates with nominalism. If there is such a thing, Peirce argues, it is something of which we have no knowledge; and to claim the existence of something which we know nothing about is a self-contradiction. Does that mean, then, that there is for Peirce a “particular thing-in-itself,” but one that exists relative to the mind? Though this question may seem perplexing, it is a question worth considering since it helps clarify what is implicit in Peirce’s argument.

In ‘Some Consequences of Four In capacities,’ the categories of being and substance of the ‘New List’ have been excluded and Peirce works only with the three intermediate categories of quality, relation and representation. As I discussed in chapter 1 Peirce does not explain why he excludes the categories of substance and being from his list of categories. The most plausible guess one can make of this is that these two categories, substance and being, seem to Peirce to be an obstacle to the theory of cognition that he was developing in ‘Some Consequences of Four Incapacities.’ For if our cognition is always an inference with no absolute beginning and end, it follows that the categories of substance and being, which he defined

92 In the footnote, W 2:238, Peirce says, “By an ideal, I mean the limit which the possible cannot attain.”
initially as the beginning and end of conception respectively, have to be dropped from his list of categories.

Now working with only the categories of quality, relation, and representation means that Peirce, instead of searching for an absolutely first principle by which reality is to be defined, is led to look at the process of cognition itself. He concludes that the cognitions we arrive at by means of inference (induction and hypothesis) “are of two kinds, true and the untrue, or cognitions whose objects are real and those whose objects are unreal” (W 2: 239). Peirce then asks, “what do we mean by the real?” to which he answers,

It is a conception which we must first have had when we discovered that there was an unreal, an illusion; that is, when we first corrected ourselves (W 2: 239).

But since it is from our experience as individuals that our cognition makes its inference, Peirce thinks it necessary to distinguish “between an ens relative to private inward determinations, to the negations belonging to idiosyncrasy, and an ens such as would stand in the long run” (W 2: 239). Peirce introduces this distinction mainly to argue his point that the real is relative to the mind in being cognised, yet at the same time it is independent of that relation.

He then defines reality thus:

The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of you and me (W 2: 239).

By denying any particular thing in itself as absolutely incognisable, and claiming that our cognition is essentially inferential without any absolute beginning, Peirce draws the conclusion that there are real generals. And it is in this connection that he makes his first declaration for realism. He writes:

But it follows that since no cognition of ours is absolutely determinate, generals must have a real existence. Now this scholastic realism is usually set down as a belief in metaphysical fictions. But, in fact, a realist is simply one who knows no more recondite reality than that which is represented in a true representation. Since, therefore, the word “man” is true of something, that which “man” means is real. The nominalist must admit that man is truly applicable to something; but he believes that there is beneath this a thing in itself, an incognizable reality. His is the metaphysical figment. Modern nominalists are mostly superficial men, who do not know, as the more thorough Roscellinus and Occam did, that a reality which has no representation is one which has no relation and no quality. The great argument for nominalism is that there is no man unless there is some particular man. That, however, does not affect the realism of Scotus; for although there is no man of whom all
further determination can be denied, yet there is a man, abstraction being made of all further determination. There is a real difference between man irrespective of what the other determinations may be, and man with this or that particular series of determinations, although undoubtedly this difference is only relative to the mind and not in re. Such is the position of Scotus. Occam's great objection is, there can be no real distinction which is not in re, in the thing-in-itself; but this begs the question, for it is itself based only on the notion that reality is something independent of representative relation (W 2: 239-240).

It should be noted that it is the realism of Duns Scotus for which Peirce declared. Here it is evident that Peirce brings in his theory of categories to play a role in his argument for realism. He criticises the modern nominalists for not realising “that a reality which has no representation is one which has no relation and no quality.” Actually, Peirce’s newly adopted realism is limited to admitting the reality of representation, or thought, alone.

At this stage Peirce argues for realism from the standpoint of his category of Thirdness or representation, whereas the nominalism which Peirce opposes argues from particulars as things in themselves. In Peirce’s view, because nominalism denies the reality of representation, which is the only mode of knowing things, it commits an error of asserting the reality of something that is unknowable. If nominalism is to be consistent in maintaining that we have some knowledge of the entities it claims, then, it must admit the reality of representation, or universals. In further developing his realism, in his review of Fraser’s *The Works of George Berkeley*, 1871, Peirce says quite clearly that:

The nominalist, by isolating his reality so entirely from mental influence as he has done, has made it something which the mind cannot conceive (W 2: 481).93 In this article he declared for realism for the second time, and discussed the nominalism-realism controversy in more detail. Central to this discussion is the notion of ‘reality’, which Peirce defines thus:

The real is that which is not whatever we happen to think it, but is unaffected by what we may think of it (W 2: 467).

He contrasts two points of view from which one can define reality: the nominalistic and the realistic points of view. The nominalist, according to Peirce, construes reality in a way that does not allow for the possibility of different things having something in common, a common nature.

93 From now on I will refer to this article as Berkeley review.
the exact sense being that the realities external to the mind produce sensations which may be embraced under one conception, yet it can by no means be admitted that the two real men have really anything in common, for to say that they are both men is only to say that the one mental term or thought-sign “man” stands indifferently for either of the sensible objects caused by the two external realities; so that not even the two sensations have in themselves anything in common, and far less is it to be inferred that the two external realities have (W 2: 468).

The error of the nominalistic view, for Peirce, is its insistence on the reality of things external to the mind at the expense of the reality of their common nature, or of universals. The realist does not deny the externality of things to the mind, but goes further by arguing for the reality of universals and the possible common nature which may be shared by a group of different particulars. Thus the nominalistic and the realistic views of reality, Peirce thinks, are ultimately reconcilable, despite the vast difference between their fundamental principles.

In a manuscript titled ‘On Reality,’64 written in 1872, Peirce says:

I do not think that the two views [the nominalistic and the realistic views] are absolutely irreconcilable, although they are taken from very widely separated standpoints. The realistic view emphasizes particularly the permanence and fixity of reality; the nominalistic view emphasizes its externality. But the realists need not, and should not deny, that the reality exists externally to the mind (W 3: 29).

Now Peirce’s shift from nominalism to realism, is further underlined in his second article of the cognition series, the Berkeley review, and ‘On Reality.’ The position he develops results in an acceptance of the reality of external things, which he had previously maintained in 1868 was confined to thought. Thus Peirce, by his acceptance of realism, was able to escape the restrictions of the idealism and nominalism he maintained in 1868.

Peirce thus adopts a notion of reality that not only insists on the inevitable relation of reality to the mind, but also recognises the externality of real things. But how is it possible for things to be real independently of the mind, and yet essentially relative to it? Peirce already attempted to handle this question in 1868 in his ‘Some Consequences of Four Incapacities.’ He writes,

there is no thing which is in-itself in the sense of not being relative to the mind, though things which are relative to the mind doubtless are, apart from that relation (W 2: 238-9).

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He defines a theory of reality in which he distinguishes “between an ens relative to private inward determinations … and an ens such as would stand in the long run” (W 2: 239). Peirce then goes on,

The real … is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you (W 2: 239).

The theory of reality Peirce advances here asserts the relativity of reality to the mind without allowing individualism. Reality is not determined by what John, for example, thinks it to be; but, rather, it is that which John in his reasoning would finally come up against, provided that John pursued his reasoning far enough to ensure that he would arrive at it. Thus reality is relative to the mind in the sense that the mind is tending towards it.

By accepting the externality of real things, and reality as something towards which thought tends, Peirce introduces ‘objectivity’ as an essential element of his realism. He says, “The realist will, therefore, believe in the objectivity of all necessary conceptions, space, time, relation, cause, and the like” (W 2: 471). This is because, Peirce argues,

The realist will hold that the very same objects which are immediately present in our minds in experience really exist just as they are experienced out of the mind; that is, he will maintain a doctrine of immediate perception. He will not, therefore, sunder existence out of the mind and being in the mind as two wholly improporionable modes. When a thing is in such relation to the individual mind that that mind cognizes it, it is in the mind; and its being so in the mind will not in the least diminish its external existence. For he does not think of the mind as a receptacle, which if a thing is in, it ceases to be out of. To make a distinction between the true conception of a thing and the thing itself is, he will say, only to regard one and the same thing from two different points of view; for the immediate object of thought in a true judgment is the reality (W 2: 471).

Characteristic of Peirce’s realist notion of reality is an attempt to bring into harmony the externality of real things and the inevitable relation of the real things to the mind. Peirce explains why his theory of reality is realistic as follows:

It is plain that this view of reality is inevitably realistic; because general conceptions enter into all judgments, and therefore into true opinions. Consequently a thing in the general is as real as in the concrete. It is perfectly true that all white things have whiteness in them, for that is only saying, in another form of words, that all white things are white; but since it is true that real things possess whiteness, whiteness is real. It is a real which only exists by virtue of an act of thought knowing it, but that thought is not an arbitrary or accidental one dependent on any idiosyncrasies, but one which will hold in the final opinion (W 2: 470).
Following this passage Peirce adds another aspect to his theory of reality. He claims that it involves the phenomenalism of Kant, which, in Peirce’s words, “was to regard the reality as the normal product of mental action, and not as the incognizable cause of it” (W 2: 471). The adoption of these aspects of phenomenalism by Peirce brings out a number of points he had already identified in his realism. It reinforces Peirce’s denial of any unknowable thing-in-itself. In regarding reality as the “normal product of mental action” phenomenalism emphasises the idea that the mind is active, not passive. Furthermore, it harmonises with the view that reality is that towards which the mind is tending. For only if the mind is active can it tend towards something. That is to say, if the mind is something passive, then, there is no way it could properly be held to be capable of tending towards reality. For tending implies action or activity.

4.2.1.1 The Early Formulation of Pragmatism

Having developed his argument on realism thus far, Peirce was in a position to formulate the maxim of his pragmatism. This was possible due mainly to the following propositions on which his “one-category realism” was based: (1) There is no absolutely unknowable thing in itself. (2) Reality is both independent of and relative to the mind, but not confined to the private, inward experience of individuals. (3) Because reality does not depend on individuals and their private experiences, the idea of reality bears a future or forward reference. All these claims figure in the early formulation of Peirce’s pragmatism, which he expresses as follows in his paper, ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear’:

Consider what effects, which 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 (W 3: 266).

The idea of “practical bearings,” or “effects,” (by which Peirce means sensible effects) plays a key role in this formulation of his pragmatism, and it confirms his commitment to realism in two ways: Firstly, it indicates the role of “immediate perception” that is required by his realism. And, secondly, it defines the totality of the object of a conception, thus leaving no room for any “existing but unknowable” object.

Peirce applies his pragmatic maxim to the idea of reality and claims that “The only effect which real things have is to cause belief, for all the sensations which they excite emerge into consciousness in the form of beliefs” (W 3: 271-2). Peirce was
aware that this claim needs to deal with the objection: “how is true belief (or belief in the real) distinguished from false belief (or belief in fiction)”? (W 3: 272). He addresses this question by defining truth and reality in terms of the realism he had advanced in his cognition papers and Berkeley review. In ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear,’ the paper that carries the early formulation of pragmatism, Peirce gives the following definition of reality:

The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality” (W 3: 273).

From this it should be clear how the propositions or requirements of his realism figure in his formulation of pragmatism.

Peirce’s own pragmatic definition of reality, however, reveals the limitation of his one-category realism, in that it recognises only the reality of the category of representation. The categories of Firstness and Secondness as such, since they are neither representations nor representative, are not real. If they are real at all, their reality is implied in the category of representation. This shows only a degree of universality and reality embodied in Peirce’s categories. The categories of Firstness and Secondness are known only as elements or members of a representation; thus their reality is dependent on their being members of representation.

Peirce’s initial formulation of pragmatism was projected within the framework of a realism of the category of Thirdness alone. As discussed in chapter 3, he defined the concept “hard” as “that it will not be scratched by many other substances” (W 3: 266). And continued, “There is absolutely no difference between a hard thing and a soft thing so long as they are not brought to the test” (W 3: 266). The meaning of the belief that a diamond is hard consists in the habit of action arising from that belief.

Given that the “categories” for Peirce are universal conceptions, and that realism is concerned with the reality of universals, it would appear that there are some changes Peirce would have to make to his view of the reality of the categories of Firstness and Secondness. What we do not know is whether Peirce’s discovery of the logic of relations influenced his early formulation of pragmatism. However, what is certain is that Peirce made his discovery of the logic of relations in 1870, before his initial formulation of pragmatism. It would appear that if Peirce based his early version of pragmatism on his theory of categories, it was the theory of categories of the ‘New List.’
4.2.2 Two-Category Realism

It took about twelve years after the initial formulation of pragmatism in 1878 before Peirce accepted the reality of the category of Secondness. This occurred in about 1890 when Peirce adopted Duns Scotus’ principle of *haecceity*.\(^{95}\) It is a principle which postulates pure individuals where each individual has its own uniqueness that is not shared by any other. Peirce approves of Scotus’ *haecceity*, saying “What Scotus calls haecceities of things, the hereness and nowness of them, are indeed ultimate” (CP 1. 405). Now Peirce treats the *haecceity* of Scotus as Secondness as consisting of facts that are not “calling for and not capable of explanation” (CP 1.405). These facts of haecceity or Secondness are individual facts, not general facts. Although individual facts are not capable of explanation, they are essential to our experience. This is because the individual facts, i.e. Secondness, ensure the independence of external objects\(^{96}\) from our private, subjective wants and interests, according to Peirce.

Given the fact that Peirce claims that Secondness is not capable of explanation, and that he always denies any unknowable thing in itself, the question is: how can he accept the reality of Secondness? Peirce explains that Secondness as such is not capable of explanation as Thirdness is, but, still, it can be experienced in the form of “hefting its insistency then and there” (CP 6.318).

Before accepting the reality of Secondness, Peirce had already realised the importance of *actuality* for thinking. This was due to his discovery of quantification theory (which I discussed in chapter 1). The main thesis of the discovery is that all the three principal kinds of signs (icons, indices, and tokens or symbols) are essential for reasoning. In particular the discovery of quantification theory shows that indices are as essential to reasoning as icons and tokens. An index is required in reasoning for denoting the subject of judgement or discourse.

Thus Peirce criticises Josiah Royce for thinking

that the real subject of a proposition can be denoted by a general term of the proposition; that is, that precisely what it is that you are talking about can be distinguished from other things by giving a general description of it (CP 8.41).

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\(^{96}\) See Robert Almeder, 1980, p. 168, for a lengthy discussion of this point. Almeder’s point is that Secondness is Peirce’s criterion for the existence of the external world.
But it is clear from Peirce’s view on the indispensability of all the three kinds of signs for reasoning that Royce’s idea is unacceptable. For “the index … alone,” Peirce argues, “can designate the subject of a proposition, designates it without implying any characters at all” (CP 8.41). The main problem with the view that it is general terms rather than indices that designate the subject of a proposition, according to Peirce, is that it commits what Peirce calls “The capital error of Hegel” (CP 8.41). By that Peirce means an error of ignoring the “Outward Clash”, or “reaction”, or “opposition”, which is the characteristic feature of experience, that is, of the category of Secondness.

4.2.3 Three-Category Realism

Peirce did not become a “three-category realist” until 1897 when he accepted the reality of the category of Firstness, i.e. of possibility, in addition to his then acceptance of the reality of the categories of Thirdness and Secondness. He renounced the nominalistic view of possibility he held in 1896, just a year before he declared for a realistic view of it in 1897. His nominalistic view of possibility entails “that possibility may be understood in many senses; but they may all be embraced under the definition that that is possible which, in a certain state of information, is not known to be false” (CP 3.442). The next year, 1897, Peirce renounced this definition of possibility, saying:

I formerly defined the possible as that which in a given state of information (real or feigned) we do not know not to be true. But this definition today seems to me only a twisted phrase which, by means of two negatives, conceals an anacoluthon [a sentence or construction that lacks a proper grammatical sequence] (CP 3.527).

Peirce accepts the reality of possibility, i.e. Firstness, by claiming that possibility exists independently of the actual, the Secondness. He writes,

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97 See also CP 8.308.
a realist fully admits that a sense-quality is only a possibility of sensation; but he thinks a possibility remains possible when it is not actual. The sensation is requisite for its apprehension; but no sensation nor sense-faculty is requisite for the possibility which is the being of the quality. Let us not put the cart before the horse, nor the evolved actuality before the possibility as if the latter involved what it only evolves (CP 1.422).

Peirce then goes on to argue why the nominalistic approach of reducing possibility to actuality, and its general claim that only actual facts exist, is problematic. For Peirce the main problem with the nominalist reduction of possibility to actuality is that it treats laws as fictitious. But this is opposite to what Peirce wants to argue for, namely, that laws are real.

By accepting the reality of all of his three categories Peirce arrives at an “extreme” form of realism. He now criticises Duns Scotus as too nominalistic in reducing universals to particulars. Peirce says,

Even Duns Scotus is too nominalistic when he says that universals are contracted to the mode of individuality in singulars, meaning, as he does, by singulars, ordinary existing things (CP 8.208).

It seems that for Peirce there is no option, as far as his pragmatism is concerned, but to declare for an “extreme” realism in which he can consistently maintain the reality of possibility without reducing it to actual existing particulars. He writes,

The pragmaticist cannot admit that. I myself went too far in the direction of nominalism when I said that it was a mere question of the convenience of speech whether we say that a diamond is hard when it is not pressed upon, or whether we say that it is soft until it is pressed upon. I now say that experiment will prove that the diamond is hard, as a positive fact. That is, it is a real fact that it would resist pressure, which amounts to extreme scholastic realism (CP 8.208).

Another consequence of Peirce’s declaration for extreme realism is that it now recognises, in the sense that it takes seriously, any difference in the modes of speech, or signs, used in expressing a state of affairs. The early form of pragmatism, as Peirce indicates in the passage above, ignored this as having nothing to do with the fact expressed. From the point of view of his extreme realism, the early form of pragmatism in dismissing different modes of speech as “a mere question of the convenience of speech” fails to realise the reality of it.
4.2.3.1 The Later Formulation of Pragmatism

Since he now accepts that all of his three categories are real, Peirce feels that he has to demonstrate their reality. And this becomes a key task of the fourth lecture of his ‘1903 Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism.’

The series consisted of seven lectures altogether. Given all the refinements that took place in Peirce’s realism, it is clear that the pragmatism set forth in the 1903 series would be significantly different from its earlier form. By the time Peirce returned to this later defence of his pragmatism, he had already accepted the reality of all three of his categories. The question, that arises, is what aspect of the early pragmatism does Peirce now find unsatisfactory, and how does his final formulation of pragmatism capture the reality of all these three categories?

In Lecture One of the Harvard lectures Peirce refers to his early formulation of pragmatism, commenting on what he now finds unsatisfactory in it.

What is the proof that the possible practical consequences of a concept constitute the sum total of the concept? The argument upon which I rested the maxim in my original paper was that belief consists mainly in being deliberately prepared to adopt the formula believed in as the guide to action. If this be in truth the nature of belief, then undoubtedly the proposition believed in can itself be nothing but a maxim of conduct. That I believe is quite evident.

But how do we know that belief is nothing but the deliberate preparedness to act according to the formula believed?

My original article ['How to Make Our Ideas Clear'] carried this back to a psychological principle. The conception of truth according to me was developed out of an original impulse to act consistently, to have a definite intention. But in the first place, this was not very clearly made out, and in the second place, I do not think it satisfactory to reduce such fundamental things to facts of psychology.98 The most unsatisfactory element of his early version of pragmatism, according to Peirce, is that it reduces “apprehending the meaning of a proposition” to assertion (or judgment). He holds that these two things are totally different from one another. He analyses the difference between them and concludes that this lies in different species of practicality, or practical difference. One is about difference in words or modes of expressions, and the other about the practical difference in things expressed. The

kind of practical difference that pragmatism is concerned with, argues Peirce, is that of the things expressed, and not the practical difference in the expressions of the expressed.

Peirce attempted to resolve the problem of “reductionism” in his early pragmatism by insisting on the distinction between believing a proposition and the meaning of that proposition. As a matter of fact, the distinction is one between psychological and logical facts.

In 1905, Peirce asserted that his pragmatism committed him to a form of ‘scholastic realism’ which he explained thus:

It is plain that pragmaticism involves scholastic realism, since it makes all intellectual purport, and therefore, the meaning of reality itself, to consist in what would be, under conceivable conditions most of which can never be actualized. It thus involves making real being to include more than existence. Now that is precisely the point in dispute between Realists and Nominalists. ‘A real possibility,’ says the nominalist, ‘is nonsense. For that is possible which we do not know is not true.’ The realist says that there is, besides, a real possibility and real necessity (not mere compulsion, but rational necessity, as in the laws of nature).\(^9^9\)

4.3 **Is Peirce’s Realism a Presupposition or Consequence of his Pragmatism?**

Peirce consistently insists that pragmatism necessarily involves realism. At times his statements about this involvement seem to point in two different directions. In some Peirce claims that his pragmatism presupposes his realism.

pragmaticism could hardly have entered a head that was not already convinced that there are real generals (CP 5.503).

In other statements, Peirce takes realism as an “essential consequence” of pragmatism (CP 5.453). The question here is: how can realism be both a presupposition and consequence of pragmatism at the same time?

William Paul Haas raises this question in his *The Conception of Law and the Unity of Peirce’s Philosophy* and remarks that how this could happen “is not clearly explained by Peirce.”\(^1^0^0\) Haas does not pursue this question any further but simply emphasises “that the important point here is that Peirce does admit that both historically and theoretically realism in some way precedes pragmaticism.” Haas also points out only briefly that “Peirce was trying to make pragmaticism support his realism while fitting it into a general theory of philosophy conceived as part of a

\(^9^9\) Quoted in Max H. Fisch, 1986, p. 199n24. This passage is omitted at the end of CP 6.501.

\(^1^0^0\) William Paul Haas, 1964, p. 9.
unified scientific pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, rather than conceived as an instrument subordinated to merely practical ends.”\textsuperscript{101} While Haas does not resolve the issue, the question needs to be addressed in Peirce’s own terms.

Peirce’s statements (CP 5.503; 5.453) to which Haas refers were both written during the same year, 1905. Peirce clearly stated, as Haas points out, that he adopted scholastic realism before he first formulated his pragmatism. But it should be pointed out that Peirce made this statement while he was talking of his realism as a consequence of his pragmatism.

Another doctrine which is involved in Pragmaticism as an essential consequence of it, but which the writer defended before he had formulated, even in his own mind, the principle of pragmaticism, is the scholastic doctrine of realism (CP 5.453).

Peirce clarifies what he means when he explains scholastic realism as: “the opinion that there are real objects that are general.” Then, he adds,

But the belief in this can hardly escape being accompanied by the acknowledgment that there are, besides, real \textit{vagues}, and especially real possibilities. For possibility being the denial of a necessity, which is a kind of generality, is vague like any other contradiction of a general. Indeed, it is the reality of some possibilities that pragmaticism is most concerned to insist upon (CP 5.453).

By insisting on the reality of possibilities, Peirce’s pragmatism is now bound to differ from its early formulation. According to the early formulation of pragmatism, the meaning of the concept “hardness,” say, of a diamond relies on, or is determined by, the experimental test under which the diamond will be subjected to find out whether it is really hard or not. So, the question whether a diamond is hard even if it has not been tested, or has disappeared before it is tested, was ruled out by pragmatism in its early form as merely playing with words and expressions rather than dealing with facts themselves. Now, accepting the reality of possibility leads Peirce to review the question of the hardness of a diamond. This time ‘experiment’ is interpreted as referring to a possible future event rather than past event:

the question [of pragmatism] is, not what \textit{did} happen, but whether it would have been well to engage in any line of conduct whose successful issue depended upon whether that diamond \textit{would} resist an attempt to scratch it (CP 5.453).

Peirce clearly admits that he “defended [the doctrine of realism] before he had formulated, even in his own mind, the principle of pragmaticism” (CP 5.453). The

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
question about whether realism is a presupposition or consequence of pragmatism indicates two different, but not unrelated, issues which pragmatism is now concerned with, thus marking his ‘pragmaticism’ (the later version of his pragmatism) as having a broader scope than his early ‘pragmatism’. In the first place, pragmaticism presupposes the reality of things that are general. In the second place, pragmaticism holds that the “generals”, or meaning, it attains are real generals.

4.3.1 The Specific Sense of Realism as a Consequence of Pragmatism

There is one thing common to the early and the later formulations of pragmatism; they both treat the meaning of a concept to consist in the habits or conducts (or Thirdness) it involves. Instead of defining the meaning of a concept by looking for a static, qualitative essence assumed to be found in that concept, the pragmatist seeks to identify the dynamic process of habit or conduct resulting from believing in that concept. What is usually meant by “essence,” i.e., as a qualitative entity or existent, is a representation or habit, according to Peirce’s pragmatism. Now, in defining the meaning of concepts in terms of habits or conducts, Peirce explains how concepts do have meaning, which for Peirce is general. Thus the ability of pragmatism to demonstrate that there is meaning implies that there is a real general, which is the very essence of Peirce’s realism. In this sense Peirce’s realism is a consequence of his pragmatism.

Peirce’s pragmatic theory of meaning in defining a concept in terms of the habits it causes in a person, rather than in terms of a qualitative essence of that concept, shows his theory of categories ultimately provides the framework in which he constructed his ‘pragmaticism’. Robert Almeder sees both Peirce’s logic of relations and his pragmatism as having something to do with his view of universals construed not as essences, but as habits. Almeder is right that both the logic of relations and pragmatism agree that quality follows from relation and not the other way round. But Almeder’s argument confirms that Peirce’s theory of categories was developed before Peirce’s discovery of the logic of relations, but also that the categories are the source of Peirce’s pragmatic theory of meaning. Almeder also does not always make clear which version of Peirce’s pragmatism he is talking about. Almeder’s observation applies only to the later version of Peirce’s pragmatism. For it is only in this version of pragmatism that Peirce employed the logic of relations to argue the case that quality follows from relations. In the early version of pragmatism,
there is no evidence that Peirce used his logic of relations at all to argue for the view that relations presuppose qualities and not vice versa. So, Peirce got the idea of relations presupposing qualities, as manifested in the early version of his pragmatism, from his theory of categories.

4.4 Conclusion

Peirce’s realism first developed from accepting the externality of the reality of the category of Thirdness alone (one-category realism). Later, it accepted the reality of Secondness (two-category realism), and then finally that of Firstness (three-category realism). Within the development of his realism two levels of irreducibility in his categories have been noticed. First, his categories are irreducible to one another internally, with their interconnections being summed up in the category of representation, or Thirdness. As a result, Peirce ends up first with a one-category realism, where only the reality of representation is recognised. Secondly, his categories are irreducible externally for their interconnections are not slotted into the category of representation alone, but hold between three separate but interdependent categories. The first step toward recognising the “external irreducibility” of his categories occurred in developing his two-category realism, which finally developed into his three-category realism.

Moreover, the “internal irreducibility” of Peirce’s categories figures most prominently in the early version of his pragmatism where the primary, if not virtually the sole, concern is an epistemic search for definition and clarification of the meaning of concepts. But his pragmatism became extended in its task to include the metaphysical question of how “can a general be unaffected by any thought about it?” when his categories became not only internally but externally irreducible as well. In this version Peirce’s categories are absolutely irreducible and they are claimed to be “operative in nature.”

Finally, the three-category realism of Peirce serves his pragmatism in affirming that the categories upon which it is based are real generals, but his pragmatism is left with the task of defining the meaning of these generals as unaffected by any thought about them. The interaction between Peirce’s realism and his pragmatism leads him to make statements that are seemingly, but not actually, paradoxical: that his realism is a presupposition as well as a consequence of his pragmatism. In other words, the
interaction between his realism and his pragmatism is no more or less than the contention that the *real* is meaningful, and the *meaningful* is real.
Chapter 5:

PRAGMATISM AND METAPHYSICS
In this chapter, I will be concerned primarily with the relation between pragmatism and metaphysics. I will first discuss R. G. Collingwood’s notion of “absolute presupposition” with the aim of providing the groundwork for considering the absolute presupposition of Peirce’s pragmatism, namely, the claim that there are real generals, and how this requires the idea of a ‘community of inquirers’ and the adoption of a common-sense position. I will then discuss Peirce’s criticism of the positivist view of metaphysics, as providing the basis for Peirce’s own view of metaphysics. My concern is to show that underlying Peirce’s view of metaphysics is a doctrine of ‘continuity’ (which Peirce calls “synechism”), which requires that metaphysics must be directed towards the ‘future’ element of reality (or of ‘Thirdness,’ in the language of Peirce’s theory of categories). He maintains this position for two reasons: first, it is only in determining the future course of events that we can have some rational control, and, second, Thirdness is the only all-embracing element of reality in terms of which the process of meaning clarification is possible.

5.1 Collingwood’s Notion of “Absolute Presupposition”

R. G. Collingwood’s notion of “absolute presupposition” stems from his attempt both to do justice to metaphysics, and to reject as nonsensical the logical positivist attack on metaphysics as a pseudo-science. The logical positivists, A. J. Ayer for example, argue that metaphysical statements are meaningless for they fail to satisfy the ‘Verification Principle’ namely, that ‘every meaningful proposition is either analytic or empirically verifiable.’

Collingwood begins by analysing the process involved when someone states a thought in words, that is, making a statement or proposing a proposition. He seeks to demonstrate the logical priority of questions to propositions, and of presuppositions to propositions. He first observes two things: (1) That “Every statement that anybody ever makes is made is answer to a question,” and (2) “Every question involves a presupposition.” Here Collingwood wants to emphasise the point that a statement or proposition is made not in vacuo, but within a context comprised of a question and

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104 Collingwood, 1962, p. 23; emphasis in the original.
105 Ibid., p. 25; emphasis in the original.
an implicit or explicit presupposition. For example, when someone makes the statement “That inscription means something” s/he is both presupposing (even without realising it sometimes) that “Inscriptions have meaning,” and that this presupposition provides the context in which the question “What does it mean?” could arise. In this example, the statement “That inscription means something” is a proposition based on the presupposition that “Inscriptions have meaning” which at the same time serves as a presupposition of the question “What does it mean?”

The logical distinction between propositions and presuppositions, according to Collingwood, lies in the fact that while propositions by definition must be either true or false, it does not make sense to ask whether a presupposition is true or false. This is because, Collingwood argues, the significance of a presupposition consists not in its truth-value, but in what he calls its “logical efficacy,” that is, its function or power to cause a certain question to arise. He says, “The logical efficacy of a supposition does not depend upon the truth of what is supposed, or even on its being thought true, but on its being supposed.”

Collingwood draws another logical distinction between what he calls the “relative” and “absolute” presuppositions of thought. “A presupposition,” he says, “is either relative or absolute.” The distinction between relative and absolute presuppositions is based on how a presupposition functions in the logical hierarchy of particular thoughts or inquiry. Collingwood defines the former as follows: “By a relative presupposition I mean one which stands relatively to one question as its presupposition and relatively to another as its answer.” So, the statement “Inscriptions mean something” is a relative presupposition because it is presupposed by the question “What does that inscription mean?” and at the same time an answer to the question “Does that inscription mean anything?” Moreover, since a relative presupposition functions as an answer to a question, it may be expressed as a proposition.

Absolute presuppositions, on the other hand, are different from relative presuppositions. The question of truth and falsehood simply does not arise in relation to absolute presuppositions because, Collingwood argues, “An absolute

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106 Ibid., p. 27.
107 Ibid., p. 28; emphasis in the original.
108 Ibid., p. 29; emphasis in the original.
109 Ibid.; emphasis in the original.
presupposition is one which stands, relatively to all questions to which it is related, as a presupposition, never as an answer.”  

The proposition “Every event has a cause,” for example, is the absolute presupposition of the proposition “The cause of event A is B” (and every other statement of this type). The absolute presupposition — “Every event has a cause” — is simply taken for granted in all scientific thinking and inquiry based on causal explanation of phenomena. Thus it is absurd, according to Collingwood, for someone to try to verify an absolute presupposition. So, if someone speaks of verifying a presupposition s/he is assuming that the presupposition in question is a relative one.

Collingwood by means of his analysis of presuppositions is able to demonstrate that the logical positivist attack on metaphysics is based on a logical mistake. According to logical positivism’s ‘Verification Principle,’ which is the basis of its attack on metaphysics, ‘Every meaningful proposition is either analytic or empirically verifiable.’ However, Collingwood argues that the problem here is that one cannot prove the truth of Verification Principle without circularity. For the statement of the Verification Principle to be meaningful, it must be either analytic or empirically verifiable. If it is an analytic statement, then it is just a formal definition without any real meaning; but if it is empirically verifiable, then it is just a generalisation without any universal truth, in which case it cannot be taken as a universal working principle. Collingwood, in his criticism of the logical positivist attack on metaphysics, is saying that the Verification Principle of logical positivism cannot satisfy its own criterion of meaning without the paradox of vicious circularity. What the logical positivist does not realise, Collingwood argues, is that the principle of verification is an absolute presupposition of its metaphysics. He insists that while we cannot prove the truth of absolute presuppositions, they nevertheless can have logical efficacy, and therefore are very important in scientific and philosophical inquiry because they raise important questions and suggest new lines of inquiry.

There are two important points of parallel between Collingwood and Peirce. First, both Collingwood and Peirce focus their account of the logic of scientific and

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110 Ibid., p. 31; emphasis in the original.
111 Since this is an absolute presupposition, Collingwood would prefer to call it a “supposition” because, he would argue, it is not an answer to a question and, therefore, it is not a proposition.
metaphysical discourse on the process of inquiry or thought, rather than seeking to identify the criterion or criteria by which to judge the meaningfulness of propositions. As a result, Collingwood comes up with his “question-answer” logic of thought. He insists on “questioning activity” as the first general stage of the procedure of scientific inquiry,\(^\text{113}\) which seeks to find answer(s) to our questions. Peirce’s doubt-belief theory of inquiry (discussed in chapter 3) is generally about the same thing; inquiry starts off with doubt, which is in the form of a question, and seeks to settle that doubt by arriving at belief, i.e. when an answer to the question is attained.

Secondly, they both dismiss the positivist view of metaphysics on the ground that the logic on which it is based is problematic. Collingwood says:

… it was rash of the positivists to maintain that every notion is a class of observable … facts. This amounted to saying, what in fact positivists have always tried more or less consistently to say, that scientific thought has no presuppositions.

… If they [the positivists] had recognized that all thinking involves absolute presuppositions, they would have been eager to find out what, on this or that kind of occasion, was being thus presupposed. But owing to their too hasty analysis of scientific thought they failed to recognize the logical function of suppositions in general, and never discovered that there were such things as absolute presuppositions at all.\(^\text{114}\)

Compare this with what Peirce has to say of positivist metaphysics:

… I object to its [the positivist] logical doctrine that no theory is to be admitted except so far as it asserts or denies something with respect to possible impressions of sense or their sensible relations (W 2: 128).

For Peirce the problem with positivism is that its logic is too narrow to be able to give an adequate account of reality; and thus he concludes: “The logical rule, therefore, which is the whole basis of positivism appears to me to be entirely false” (W 2: 130). Both Collingwood and Peirce observe that the problem with metaphysics is that it is in an unsatisfactory state — due not to its subject matter, but to the inadequacy of the logic employed by its critics to explain the nature of metaphysics.\(^\text{115}\)

\(^{114}\) Ibid., pp. 146-7.
\(^{115}\) Note that Collingwood replaces the traditional subject matter of metaphysics, namely, pure being, with absolute presuppositions. However, the point is that Collingwood argues that the theory of metaphysics has been “in an unsatisfactory condition” because the logicians have neglected the theory of presuppositions upon which the theory of metaphysics is based. Ibid., p. 23.
Collingwood’s notion of “absolute presupposition” helps clarify the relation between the absolute presupposition of pragmatism, the claim that there are real generals, and the pragmatic formulation of the metaphysical question “In what way can a general be unaffected by any thought about it” (CP 5.503). It shows that asking “In what way can a general be unaffected by any thought about it” presupposes that there are real generals; and, moreover, the meaningfulness of this question rests on its absolute presupposition.

I should emphasise, however, that the comparison between Collingwood’s notion of “absolute presupposition” and the absolute presupposition of Peirce’s pragmatism cannot be taken too far. First of all Peirce does not go so far as to deny the applicability of the question of verification to the absolute presupposition of pragmatism. To prove or verify that there are real generals, according to Peirce, requires not a scheme of static objects corresponding to them (as Collingwood assumed), but a method of determining how real generals are unaffected by our thinking about them; and that is what his pragmatism sets out to do.

Secondly, Collingwood rejects the traditional view of metaphysics as the study of “pure being” or reality and argues that “metaphysics is the science of absolute presuppositions.” He adopts Aristotle’s formal definition of metaphysics that it is a science concerned with the underlying presuppositions of any and every science, but rejects its substantive content on the ground that it has no “definite subject-matter to think about.” Collingwood thus ends up with a formalist view of metaphysics that concentrates on the form and logic of the language of metaphysics with the aim of detecting absolute presuppositions. His view of metaphysics, in other words, is a meta-analysis of the language of science, i.e. a science of sciences. He says, “all analysis is metaphysical analysis; and, since analysis is what gives its scientific character to science, science and metaphysics are inextricably united, and stand or fall together. The birth of science, in other words the establishment of orderly thinking, is also the birth of metaphysics.” In the final analysis, Collingwood maintains a form of idealism in his view of metaphysics. Because he insists both on absolute presuppositions as the subject matter of metaphysics, and that the significance of absolute presuppositions consists entirely on their being supposed,

116 Ibid., p. 41.
118 Ibid., pp. 40-41.
Collingwood confines metaphysics to the realm of thought or the logical order involved in thinking or stating a thought.

Peirce, unlike Collingwood, maintains a realist and traditional view of metaphysics as the science of reality. He begins by arguing from given reality, or experience, to general laws. Peirce in following his realism maintains that metaphysics is more than just a logical analysis of the language of science and detection of absolute presuppositions of all thought. Metaphysics, Peirce argues, is also concerned with showing that there is a real connection between the categories and the structure of being or reality. (I introduced the connection between the categories and the structure of being or reality in chapter 1, and discussed it further both in the context of Peirce’s phenomenology, in chapter 2, and that of his semiotic in chapters 6 and 7.)

The general objective of Peirce’s pragmatist view of metaphysics is to purge traditional metaphysics of its over-speculative nature, or what may be considered the negative influence of speculation in metaphysics, and to adopt instead the rigour and clarity of logical and scientific thinking. Speculation is a form of reasoning based on the assumption that there is a cognition that is not “determined by a previous cognition” (CP 5.213n)\textsuperscript{119}. The problem with speculation, according to Peirce, lies not in the question of its validity as a mode of inference, but rather in the question of its tendency to undermine the necessity of ‘continuity’ — for example, when it assumes an absolutely undetermined cognition, or first principle, that bears no (direct) relation to reality.

However, metaphysics need not be completely free of speculation. Peirce’s pragmatist approach shows that metaphysics does involve speculation — as a hypothesis-formation process converging on the truth of whatever is in question — but not an end in itself. Peirce’s recognition of the place of speculation in metaphysics (and inquiry in general) culminates in a mode of inference he calls “abduction”. “Abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis” (CP 5.171), and it is “the only kind of argument which starts a new idea” (CP 2.96),\textsuperscript{120} according to Peirce. As an essential element in pragmatism, abduction provides room

\textsuperscript{119} In this context, Peirce means by the word “speculation” something similar to “intuition,” (CP 5.213n).

\textsuperscript{120} See also CP 5.196, 197.
for the metaphysician to be creatively speculative by employing his imagination (CP 5.196).

5.2 The Absolute Presupposition of Pragmatism

When Peirce strongly insists that pragmatism is merely a logical maxim for meaning clarification, he seems to hold the view that his epistemology can stand on its own and apart from any metaphysical considerations. I argue on the contrary that in order to have a coherent view of reality, one must embrace both metaphysical and epistemological realism — that is, that things must be both real and knowable. I believe Peirce fully recognises the need for the pragmatist to be both an epistemological and metaphysical realist. Consider what he had to say in the early formulation of his pragmatism where he argues that pragmatism must be based on scientific method, and that this is its “fundamental hypothesis”:

Such is the method of science. Its fundamental hypothesis … is this: There are Real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them (CP 5.384; my emphasis).

This fundamental hypothesis not only is a metaphysical claim, but it is absolutely presupposed in Peirce’s pragmatism. I emphasise that it is an absolute presupposition, precisely because it does not function as an answer to any particular case of meaning clarification, but is taken for granted in every case of meaning clarification.121

As I have shown in chapter 3, the clarification of the meaning of our concepts is a central part of the agenda of pragmatism. The meaning of a concept, according to pragmatism, is determined by the “conceivable effects” or the “habit of action” that would follow from believing in that concept. This is a consequence of the pragmatist claim that “The only effect which real things have is to cause belief, for all the sensations which they excite emerge into consciousness in the form of beliefs” (CP 5.406), and “The essence of belief is the establishment of a habit” (CP 5.398) or “rule of action” (CP 5.397). The absolute presupposition of pragmatism thus provides the framework within which the notion of the “conceivable effects” of concepts, as the basis for determining their meaning, must operate. In presupposing that the concepts with which the pragmatist is concerned must be real, Peirce appeals

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to the notion of “conceivable effects” as grounded in systematic or scientific thinking.

Pragmatism is thus an attempt to understand reality by way of considering what effect it has on us; and this, according to Peirce is a constitutive principle of any sound metaphysics. An objection to this account of pragmatism might be that the pragmatist is therefore unable to deal with reality directly. In answer to this objection, Peirce would argue that the issue with which pragmatism is concerned is not whether we can deal with reality directly or indirectly. For Kant the unknowability of the noumenon results from adoption of a detached speculative point of view whereby reality is assumed to function as a cause of our sensation, and yet remains unknowable to us. In contrast, Peirce argues that reality must be knowable, because what we call ‘reality’ participates in a dynamic and developing interaction with human beings, and human beings with reality.

5.2.1 The ‘Community of Inquirers’

The dynamic relationship between human beings and reality is fundamental to pragmatism. It is in this way that Peirce seeks to maintain the objectivity of knowledge which is essential to his understanding of scientific inquiry, and the only means to avoid the subjectivism that results from making the experience of the individual inquirer the basis from which we start.

Peirce seeks to ground the objectivity of knowledge in the social nature of inquiry and thus emphasises the role played by the ‘community of inquirers’. The individual inquirer is always understood to be a member of an actual or possible community of inquirers that has a set of standards or established norms and principles. Although an individual inquirer may be conducting research on his own (such as a physicist experimenting alone in a laboratory at home), he and the results of his research are always required to conform to the norms and principles pertaining to the relevant community of inquirers (otherwise they would lack meaning or

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significance). Objectivity is thus maintained by way of conformity of science to the norms and principles of the relevant ‘community of inquirers’.

Moreover, the concept of a ‘community of inquirers’ must relate to what reality is: “That is real which has such and such characters, whether anybody thinks it to have those characters or not” (CP 5.430). This understanding of reality denies significance to any attempt to conduct inquiry in complete isolation from the community of inquirers and its principles, for the truth of a belief resulting from such an attempt would be purely a matter of subjective judgement. The concept of a community of inquirers serves to emphasise not only the independent existence of reality, but accounts for reality as something publicly accessible to all (at least in principle).

5.2.2 The Common-sense Position of Pragmatism

Peirce associated his pragmatism with a doctrine he calls his “Critical Common-sensism.” The most fundamental idea of critical common-sensism is the claim that there are indubitable propositions, that is, propositions that are “acritical” (CP 5.440) and “uncriticized” (CP 5.442). This may seem a strange position for Peirce to hold, given his strong opposition to the Cartesian method of doubt as a means to arrive at indubitable propositions. There is an important difference, however, between the Peircean and the Cartesian conception of ‘indubitable’. Whereas for Descartes ‘the indubitable’ is that which is absolutely immune from any further doubt, and it is achieved through methodical investigation, Peirce rules out as unsound any claim for a proposition to be absolutely indubitable.

The critical common-sensist maintains that ‘the indubitable’ is relative to our present state of knowledge, and it is best understood within the context of Peirce’s doubt-belief theory of inquiry. It is relative in the sense that there is no guarantee that what is now thought of as indubitable will continue to remain indubitable in the future. Thus the critical common-sensist, according to Peirce, “fully acknowledges that even then it may be that some of his indubitable beliefs may be proved false” (CP 5.451). This brings to mind the common place saying in the judicial system to view the accused as “innocent until proven guilty.” In a similar vein, the pragmatist

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123 See discussion in chapter 3.
regards ‘the indubitable’ as really so until it is proven to the contrary by some facts encountered in the course of experience and inquiry.

This raises the question: “Should we refer to a proposition that never has been contradicted by any experience, and very unlikely it will ever be contradicted in the future, as absolutely indubitable?” This is a fair question, but, as I have pointed out, it has to be understood within the context of what is meant by inquiry — for two reasons. First, as already shown above, for Peirce we can talk meaningfully about the indubitable as both relative and absolute. Secondly, ‘the indubitable’ is absolute in the sense that when an inquirer has settled his belief and is unable to doubt it any further, the specific inquiry, of which the now settled belief is a result, comes to end. As Peirce puts it, “If you absolutely cannot doubt a proposition - cannot bring yourself, upon deliberation, to entertain the least suspicion of the truth of it, it is plain that there is no room to desire anything more” (CP 6.498).

The indubitable considered as both relative and absolute in the senses discussed above is an essential element of Peirce’s doctrine of fallibilism, which claims that we “cannot attain absolute certainty concerning questions of fact” (CP 1.149). Fallibilism, as a doctrine, is not so much about denying the possibility of “absolute certainty”, as it is concerned to emphasise that there is always room to further or advance our knowledge. Fallibilism maintains that while the inquirer will attain some true knowledge, such knowledge is always open to further determination and advancement — precisely because “our knowledge is never absolute but always swims, as it were, in a continuum of uncertainty and of indeterminacy” (CP 1.171).

Peirce identifies two features of indeterminacy that are of great importance for his critical common-sensist position. They are generality and vagueness.

A sign (under which designation I place every kind of thought, and not alone external signs), that is in any respect objectively indeterminate (i.e., whose object is undetermined by the sign itself) is objectively general in so far as it extends to the interpreter the privilege of carrying its determination further. … A sign that is objectively indeterminate in any respect is objectively vague in so far as it reserves further determination to be made in some other conceivable sign (CP 5.447).

For example, the sign “Man is mortal” is general because an interpreter has the right to choose whatever man or men they please. The sign “This month a great event is to happen” is vague since its determination lies in both possible sign and experience, that is, we have to wait and see before we can find out “what great event” this vague sign stands for (CP 5.505). The triadic relationship of signs and their functions in
pragmatism is stated here both in terms of *generality* (by the inclusion of the interpreter as having the “privilege” of making further determination of the object of a sign), and in terms of *vagueness* (by leaving the further determination of the object of a sign “to be made in some other conceivable sign”).

Peirce describes the relation between pragmatism and common sense in the following terms:

Pragmatism … is only an endeavor to give the philosophy of common sense a more exact development, especially by emphasizing the point that there is no intellectual value in mere feeling *per se*, but that the whole function of thinking consists in the regulation of conduct (CP 8.199).

Peirce’s characterisation of pragmatism as a development of the philosophy of common sense shows that the pragmatist program begins with the concreteness of reality as shown by its attempt to first identify what effects reality has on us, which is, as Peirce explains, the fixation of belief. The value of a belief as an entity of inquiry consists in its potential of becoming the “common property” of a community of inquirers, depending on whether or not that belief would remain undoubtable. Given a ‘community of inquirers’ an individual inquirer would introduce his belief to see if it is consistent with the standard principles of the community of inquirers. This would involve not only comparing his belief with the established principles, but also comparing his belief with other inquirers’ belief(s), especially those relating to the same subject matter. The objectivity required by science (and by the community of inquirers) is thus achieved by means of inter-subjectivity.

The established norms and principles of the community of inquirers are both constitutive of and regulative for inquiry. As constitutive of inquiry, they provide the “system” within which inquiry is practised; as regulative, they provide directions for the inquirer to follow in his inquiry. Here again an analogy can be drawn between inquiry and the way a legal system operates. In a legal system, laws are not only constitutive in the sense they are the building blocks of the legal system, but they are also regulative for the conduct of people of the society in question.

5.3 Peirce’s Critique of the Positivist View of Metaphysics

Peirce criticises positivism by saying that its rejection of metaphysics is based on a mistake, namely, the claim that the subject matter of metaphysics is beyond observation. For Peirce the true problem with metaphysics is that it is a science in an “unsatisfactory state” (W2: 128), meaning “its fundamental conceptions were vague
and consequently its doctrines utterly unsettled” (W2: 127). Thus for Peirce the task confronting philosophy is to develop a method appropriate for clarifying the fundamental conceptions of metaphysics, which would result in sound metaphysical theories. The positivist’s method, he observes, consists in the “logical doctrine that no theory is to be admitted except so far as it asserts or denies something with respect to possible impressions of sense or their sensible relations” (W2: 128). In relying on the senses and sense impressions as the ultimate criteria for judging the validity of inquiry, positivism is then drawn to the conclusion that the only scientifically valid domain of inquiry is one where its subject matter involves “observable facts.” Thus positivism sees no other option but to reject metaphysics.

Although both positivism and pragmatism consider the question of method to be central to philosophy,124 there is a significant difference between their approaches. One difference relates to the idea of “system,” as reflected in the phrases “philosophical system,” and “system-building.” Logical positivism substitutes the question of method (or methodology) for ‘system building’ and dismisses the latter as of any relevance to philosophy. The logical positivists tended to restrict their use of the term ‘system’ to formal systems — e.g. formal logic or systems of linguistic syntax — their value as consisting mainly in providing models for rigorous analysis of concepts. This position is reflected in the following remarks of Moritz Schlick, one of the leading figures in the Vienna Circle:

For I am convinced that we now find ourselves at an altogether decisive turning point in philosophy, and that we are objectively justified in considering that an end has come to the fruitless conflict of systems. We are already at the present time, in my opinion, in possession of methods which make every such conflict in principle unnecessary. What is now required is their resolute application.125

Peirce argues, however, that positivism is too limited in its approach, and proposes a broader basis from which to approach metaphysics. Let us turn to what he calls “the love of life” to clarify nature of the broader approach he advocates.

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5.3.1 “The Love of Life”

“The love of life” is a phrase Peirce uses to designate a whole range of passions he believes to be all closely connected in our nature as human beings. It is “one of the most original, strongest, and ineradicable” impulses we have (W2: 124):

If some man says he does not love life, other evidence rather bears down his testimony, and if he really does not he is only an unhappy exception, a miserable abortion, which is not to set aside the result of all experience.

This passion has for its object firstly and primarily ourselves, in a less strong degree our friends, then our blood, then our country, then our race, and finally it is still a deep and lively emotion even in its reference to intellect in general. It may be objected that the love of life of our family, for example, is not the same passion as the love of our own life. But all I say is, that we have a desire for the continued life of all these objects, and that these desires have this in common that they are all love of life in some form, all are lively emotions, all seem to spring from our original nature and all are in the great body of mankind incapable of being rooted out without shattering the heart almost entirely (W2: 124).

Central to “the love of life” is the idea that human life persists fundamentally in optimism, which shows not only that it involves a desire for some form of “continuity,” but also that it looks beyond even what the senses can apprehend. As Peirce emphasises, “The love of life is more than a love of sensuous life” (W2: 124).

For Peirce, “the love of life” helps to explain why scientists appear to be driven to engage in inquiry in the hope that they will reach the truth of the subject matter they are investigating. The hope of the scientist, however, is not just a mere feeling confined to the individual scientist (though it does have an element of feeling), but it anticipates a “future” mode of being (or, the category of Thirdness), an understanding of which could not be attained by employing a method based on immediate sense experience alone. On the basis of the category of Thirdness, Peirce undertakes to illustrate that science is not restricted to the “present” and to immediately “observable facts,” as insisted on by the positivist, but it is a process of inquiry concerned with the future (and future possibilities) as well.

Now … theories have this in common, they are inferences of the unobserved from the observed - from the present in experience to the future in experience. Now who does not see that the future is not observable except when the present is not, so that we either reason to conclusions which are absolutely unobservable or from facts which are absolutely unobservable. This is the conclusive objection to positivism. … Thus as every theory whatever concludes from the present to the future every theory necessarily concludes more than can possibly be verified by direct observation (W2: 129).
Thus positivism’s rejection of metaphysics, Peirce argues, is the result of its method being too restricted to be able to handle metaphysical problems, which ultimately are problems relating to the category of Thirdness. Because there is no room in the positivist account of experience for the “future” as a mode of being, it is not surprising that it is bound to reject metaphysics. Positivism fails to do justice to both the fullness of life and inquiry by putting forward and employing a method that is deficient to deal with reality as represented by “the love of life”. The way ‘observation’ is defined in positivism\textsuperscript{126} prevents it from understanding the true nature of metaphysics, whereas Peirce’s pragmatic approach makes this possible.

5.4 A Brief Account of Peirce’s Own View of Metaphysics

What Peirce understands by metaphysics emerges from his attempt to improve what he observes to be its “unsatisfactory state” by the employment of his pragmatism to establish that it can account for the “future” mode of being, which is the subject matter of metaphysics. An understanding of the category of Thirdness is thus the key factor in understanding Peirce’s metaphysics. In Peirce’s judgement, Thirdness is the mode of being that has not received sufficient attention in other philosophers’ theories. In one of his lectures on pragmatism delivered in 1903, Peirce makes the following statement.

In the present situation of philosophy, it is far more important that thirdness should be adequately dealt with by our logical maxim of abduction. The urgent pertinence of the question of thirdness, at this moment ..., when we see that the chief difference between philosophers is in regard to the extent to which they allow elements of thirdness a place in their theories, is too plain to be insisted upon (CP 5.208).

\textsuperscript{126} This may seem to be emphasising the place of observation in positivism too much, since the focus of some logical positivists, such as A. J. Ayer, is on the principle of verification: “a statement is held to be literally meaningful if and only if it is either analytic or empirically verifiable,” A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, 2nd ed.,1946, reprint , (England: Penguin Books), 1987, p. 12. My point, however, is that despite the fact that the principle of verification recognises that some statements are still meaningful though they are not directly observable, it still fails to go beyond observation in order to realise the “future” mode of being as expounded by pragmatism. Of course, Ayer talks about “possible observation,” indicating the he has in mind some reference to future observation as the means for the verification of statements. However, he is not talking about “possible observation”, in this context, as a distinct mode of being, but simply relating it to the statements concerned as if they related to the same mode of being.

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5.4.1 What is Metaphysics for Peirce?

Peirce understands metaphysics as the science that studies “the most general features of reality and real objects” (CP 6.6). He describes the concept of “reality” in terms of his theory of categories, saying that,

Reality is an affair of Thirdness as Thirdness, that is, in its mediation between Secondness and Firstness. … Metaphysics is the science of Reality (CP 5.121).

Peirce’s account of metaphysics is not as simple and clear as it may seem to be in the first instance. This is mainly because his view of metaphysics is derived from his understanding of the relation between metaphysics and logic, which in turn is based on his several different approaches to his theory of categories. Peirce holds that “Metaphysics consists in the results of the absolute acceptance of logical principles not merely as regulatively valid, but as truths of being” (CP 1.487). I should point out that Peirce is careful to distinguish his position from that of Kant, namely, that metaphysics is derived from logic, for he argues that Kant is “mistaking the logical and metaphysical correspondents in almost every case” (CP 5.448n1).

In contrast to Kant, Peirce takes the view that the categories are inherent in reality, in that they are discovered to be the most basic features or elements of experience. Early in his career (e.g. in his ‘New List’), Peirce shared Kant’s view that the categories are conceptions derived from the table of forms of judgement for unifying the manifold of experience. Later Peirce concludes that the categories spring from studying the phenomena as such.¹²⁷ Peirce is simply concerned to find the most satisfactory approach compatible with his view that metaphysics is a valid, proper field of inquiry. An effective approach to clarifying Peirce’s view of metaphysics would be from the standpoint of intentional logic.

Two characteristic features of intentional logic are of relevance to clarifying Peirce’s position. First, intentional logic insists that the logical is dependent on the real, in the sense that the determinations of the former rest solely on the basis that it is for displaying the structure of the latter.¹²⁸ Secondly, the formal structure of intentional logic is fundamentally triadic, in that it includes the existing subject (and by implication the community of inquiry) as a third term in its determination of the meaning of concepts, thus expanding the notion of dyadic relation as widely

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represented in positivistic logic as concerned simply with the extensional relations between signs and things signified, facts and propositions.\textsuperscript{129}

In the light of this account of intentional logic, one can say that Peirce could have added another sense in which logic is dependent on metaphysics. According to his classification of the sciences, metaphysics depends on logic for its fundamental principles, and logic depends on metaphysics for the data on which to operate. Although this relation of inter-dependence between metaphysics and logic is useful for determining certain aspects of his overall philosophical position, it is too rigid to account for another sense in which logic is dependent on metaphysics for Peirce, namely, that the whole end or intention of logic is contained within metaphysics. Logic, of course, has its own immediate goal, which Peirce identifies as the study of the laws and necessary conditions of the relation between the phenomenon and truth. But the point is that the laws that logic formulates would not be meaningful unless they are applicable to reality, or, to use Peirce’s phrase, “operative in nature.” The approach of intentional logic harmonises with Peirce’s scholastic realism by showing that the logical as a 	extit{meaningful} form of inquiry rests ultimately on its function to 	extit{intend} reality, and in these terms his claim of the logical principles as “truths of being” becomes plausible.

For Peirce, in giving an account of metaphysics, the question of method is prior to the question of the truth of metaphysics. The latter question is only worth pursuing if there is an appropriate method in place to be employed in its pursuit. This is reflected in his criticism of positivism where he attacks its underlying logic for dismissing metaphysics on the ground that the truth of the statements of metaphysics cannot be verified because they are beyond observation. In his classification of the sciences logic is prior to metaphysics, because it provides the basic constitutive principles of the method to be employed in metaphysics. However, he makes his point as follows.

The general law of metaphysics is little understood. The attention of thinkers has been so rivetted upon the question of its truth, that they have largely overlooked the importance of determining precisely what it is, even if it be not absolutely true, since it is certainly the product of natural thought and of reasoning which, however far it may be carried beyond the legitimate conclusion, is nevertheless true reasoning of a valid type (CP 1.486).

\footnote{Ian E. Thompson, 1981, p. 195.}
By “The general law of metaphysics” Peirce means the application of the logical categories to the real world (which I have already discussed). Despite the fact that Peirce sees the question of truth as an important one, he wants to point out that to pursue the question of the truth of metaphysics would be problematic without having an appropriate method in place first.

5.4.2 Some Characteristic Features of the ‘Future’ Mode of Being

Three of the characteristic features of the category of Thirdness\textsuperscript{130} are of great importance to our understanding of Peirce’s metaphysics, and why it relates to the ‘future’ mode of being. These are: mediation, generality, and continuity.

First, \textit{Thirdness as mediation} (between Firstness and Secondness), necessarily involves a triadic relation by introducing the sign-user as the third essential element of inquiry. It requires that our attempt to understand reality must be conducted within a sign-like framework, which involves the sign (the concept or concepts employed in our understanding of things), the object of sign (thing or things which the sign stands for or represents), and the sign-user (the person or mind, or community of inquiry, which uses the sign to represent its object). That is, the sign-user, which Peirce calls the ‘interpretant,’ mediates between the sign and its object.

Secondly, \textit{Thirdness is general}. I have explained what Peirce means by something is general in my discussion of “The Common-sense Position of Pragmatism,” but as an illustration mainly for the other two features of Thirdness. However, let us consider Peirce’s homely example of a cook who desires to make an apple pie for her master. The cook does not desire this particular apple pie or that, but she has an idea of what kind of apple pie she desires for her master (for example, a sweet apple pie). The cook’s idea of the kind of apple pie she desires for her master is just a pure possibility in the sense that it is not actualised yet. Between her idea of what kind of apple pie she desires for her master and the finished product, that is, the actual apple pie, is her desire that mediates them.

What she desires is something of a given quality; what she has to take is this or that particular apple. From the nature of things, she cannot take the quality but must take the particular thing. Sensation and volition being affairs of action and reaction relate to particular things. She has seen only particular apples. But the desire has nothing to do with particulars; it relates to qualities. Desire is not a reaction with reference to a particular thing; it is an idea about an idea.

\textsuperscript{130} Vincent G. Potter, 1997, p. 87ff.
namely, the idea of how delightful it would be for me, the cook’s master, to eat an apple pie (CP 1.341).

In this example, desire is Thirdness that mediates between a given quality (Firstness) and the concrete instance of that quality (Secondness). Without the desire of the cook to select a certain kind of apple, the given quality expected of the particular apples which she selects for use, would remain just a mere possibility yet to be actualised in the form of concrete apples possessing the desired quality to be selected. So the given quality which is a mere possibility without actualisation is a First, and the particular selected apples possessing the expected quality is a Second.

Thirdly, Thirdness as generality presupposes continuity. When something general “extends to the interpreter the privilege of carrying its determination further,” it does so because of the real continuity between its present state and its future state where the further determination of it would take place. Because of the great importance Peirce attributes to the concept ‘continuity,’ I will discuss it further in section 5.3.4. but here I want to stress that it is upon the basis of ‘continuity’ that Peirce was able to maintain his realism of the ‘future’ mode of being.

5.4.3 Metaphysics as an Observational Science

Peirce, unlike the rationalist philosophers, claims that metaphysics is an observational science. He goes on to argue that “even bad metaphysics, really rests on observations, whether consciously or not” (CP 6.2). The reason why this is not widely recognised, according to Peirce, is that it [metaphysics] rests on kinds of phenomena with which every man’s experience is so saturated that he usually pays no particular attention to them. The data of metaphysics are not less open to observation, but immeasurably more so, than the data, say, of the very highly developed science of astronomy (CP 6.2).

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131 As indicated when he says, “Continuity represents Thirdness almost to perfection” (CP 1.337).
132 Such as Descartes and Spinoza.
133 Frederick Copleston makes a similar observation in his Contemporary Philosophy, Cardinal Books edition (London: Burns & Oates, 1963), pp. 83-4, defending metaphysics against the anti-metaphysical attitude of logical positivism. He writes: “existence is a necessary condition of the possession of any characteristics; and it is thus more familiar than any particular characteristic. Therefore, if it is possible at all to notice or advert to existence, one can say that the familiarity of what is noticed is one of the main reasons why it is comparatively rarely noticed or adverted to.”
The first step towards revealing metaphysics as an observational science is to identify that its subject matter is common experience, meaning that the phenomena with which metaphysics is concerned are accessible (or at least possibly accessible) to every human being. This makes it possible for pragmatism to be a method appropriate for metaphysics, since pragmatism requires that the objects to which it applies must be experientially accessible. The metaphysician, unlike the natural scientist, employs no “special means of observation” (CP 1.282) such as microscope, and understanding his subject matter does not rely on them. What the metaphysician requires in order to conduct his inquiry effectively is a well-founded method or form of reasoning derived from logic.

The charge of positivism against metaphysics as an inquiry operating beyond the reach of human experience, (and, therefore, that no kind of metaphysical knowledge is possible), is based on a form of reductionism that seems to recognise only one mode of being, the being of individual particulars or facts. The phenomenalism of A. J. Ayer is a classic example of this for all statements about physical or material objects must be reducible to sensory experiences (or “sense-content,” in Ayer’s technical term). Because he treats the subject matter of metaphysics as corresponding to no sensory experience, he infers that metaphysics does not qualify as a source of meaningful statements. Thus, Ayer’s reductionist phenomenalism “blinds” him from recognising other modes of being which Peirce’s pragmatic metaphysics does recognise. As Peirce illustrates, however, metaphysics is concerned with the mode of being designated by the category of Thirdness, the reality of which is to be determined not by seeking any corresponding “sense-contents,” but by our future rational and deliberate conduct guided by it.

If positivism had realised that there is more than one mode of being, it could have recognised why metaphysics should not be rejected. Yet, this seems impossible since positivism restricts “observation” to the realm of sense experience, and thus allows for only one mode of being. Pragmatism, by contrast, begins with a theory of

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134 In CP 3.560, Peirce writes, “philosophy, although it uses no microscopes or other apparatus of special observation, is really an experimental science, resting on that experience which is common to us all.”

135 For “‘exact’ logic will prove a stepping-stone to ‘exact’ metaphysics” (CP 3.454).

136 “… we know that it must be possible to define material things in terms of sense-contents, because it is only by the occurrence of certain sense-contents that the existence of any material thing can ever be in the least degree verified,” A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, reprint (England: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 71.
categories that recognises three modes of being, and then explains how “observation”
applies to them, though in different ways. For pragmatism, as Peirce observes,

The things that any science discovers are beyond the reach of direct
observation. We cannot see energy, nor the attraction of gravitation, nor the
flying molecules of gases, nor the luminiferous ether, nor the forests of
carbonaceous era, nor the explosions in nerve-cells. It is only the premisses of
science, not its conclusions, which are directly observed (CP 6.2).

As Sandra B. Rosenthal clarifies this passage correctly, by speaking of “premises”
and “conclusions,” Peirce is referring not to the order of deduction, but of abduction.
She explains that Peirce talks about “the order of discovery, not the order of logical
analysis. Thus, the premisses are the observed data, while the conclusions are the
abductive hypotheses from the data.”  

That is, the metaphysician conducts his
inquiry by extrapolation from his common experience; and this, from a realist point
of view, is possible because of real “continuity,” which Peirce claims to be
indispensable to philosophy (CP 6.103).

5.4.4 ‘Continuity’ and the Metaphysics of the ‘Future’

Peirce defines his conception of “continuity” as follows.

A true continuum is something whose possibilities of determination no
multitude of individuals can exhaust. Thus, no collection of points placed upon
a truly continuous line can fill the line so as to leave no room for others,
although that collection had a point for every value towards which numbers,
endlessly continued into the decimal places, could approximate (CP 6.170).

Because no individual or set of individuals “can exhaust” the truly continuous aspect
of reality, metaphysics (and inquiry in general) must not take individual particulars
as its ultimate concern. Real “continuity” requires that metaphysics serves its
purpose upon a realist basis by dismissing the so-called “inexplicable” of any sort as
an explanation. If the metaphysician finds himself unable to explain an event at a
certain point in time, he should not draw the conclusion that that event is
inexplicable; what he can say though is that he is currently unable to explain it. As
Peirce argues, there is nothing more detrimental to science than for the scientist to
take the view that there is something inexplicable. Because:

to suppose a thing inexplicable is not only to fail to explain it, and so to make
an unjustifiable hypothesis, but, much worse, it is to set up a barrier across the
road of science, and to forbid all attempt to understand the phenomenon (CP
6.171).

Resorting to the idea of the inexplicable runs counter not only to real continuity, but also to inquiry as a hopeful human enterprise. This relates to Peirce’s pragmatic notion of truth where cooperation and collaboration among the inquirers are essential, because the truth of ideas or beliefs is a matter not for an individual inquirer, but for the community of inquirers. The reliability of a truth claim made by an individual inquirer consists in the truth claim being assessed with reference both to reality and the working principles accessible to the community of inquirers. In other words, no individual inquirer is in a more privileged position to have access to truth than any other inquirers.

Also, the idea of “continuity” must be reflected in metaphysics as a necessary element by allowing a place for it in the theories and hypotheses of the metaphysician. In his description of his doctrine of “synechism,” the cornerstone of which is the concept of “continuity,” Peirce says:

[Synechism is] that tendency of philosophical thought which insists upon the idea of continuity as of prime importance in philosophy and, in particular, upon the necessity of hypotheses involving true continuity (CP 6.169).

The doctrine of synechism denies “the inexplicable” in order to give way to “continuity” as a necessary condition of metaphysics. Thus, instead of dwelling on the past and present, the metaphysician attributes a special importance to future events, and this is because it is only the future where we can have some rational control on the course of events. It is here that intentional logic can help us understand the relation between pragmatism and metaphysics for Peirce.\textsuperscript{138}

Peirce applies his synechism to his classification of the sciences, where all the sciences are related to another in a strictly hierarchical manner. Each science provides the science below it in the hierarchy with its fundamental principles, whereas, in the upward direction, each science provides the one above it with its data. On this basis, Peirce argues that metaphysics is of great importance to the special sciences, and that it would be a hindrance for the special scientist to pursue his inquiry without any metaphysics, let alone a well-thought-out metaphysics.

[T]he special sciences are obliged to take for granted a number of most important propositions, because their ways of working affords no means of bringing these propositions to the test. In short, they always rest upon metaphysics. … The philosopher alone is equipped with the facilities for

\textsuperscript{138} Kelly A. Parker, in his \textit{The Continuity of Peirce’s Thought} (Nashville and London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), p. 116, expresses a similar point when he says: “the very possibility of an awareness of teleology presupposes a felt continuity of present and future.”
examining such “axioms” and for determining the degree to which confidence may safely be reposed in them. Find a scientific man who proposes to get along without any metaphysics … and you have found one whose doctrines are thoroughly vitiated by the crude and uncritized metaphysics with which they are packed. … In short, there is no escape from the need of a critical examination of “first principles” (CP 1.129).

It is a misinterpretation of Peirce to say that he is arguing that the special scientist must be a metaphysician first of all in order to be a good scientist in his specific field of inquiry. Rather, he implies that some kind of metaphysics is necessarily presupposed in the special sciences. This makes the task of the metaphysician an important one to the scientist, as the task of the logician is to the metaphysician. So, Peirce argues, not just any kind of metaphysics will do; it has to be a well-thought-out metaphysics based on well-established logic that science requires. He argues that modern science is unsatisfactory, because it is based on an inadequate empiricist epistemology and nominalist metaphysics.

Another important aspect of Peirce’s doctrine of synechism is that it allows for ethics to be an essential factor in inquiry. With the future course of events being the most important aspect of experience, human beings can have a “say” in its determination by exercising a degree of rational control in accordance with the normative and ethical considerations that are set out by the community of inquirers. The inquirer is expected to follow the working standards of the community of inquirers. For example, individual inquirers have the responsibility to be honest in following the established principles of the community of inquirers when conducting their inquiries.

The logic which observational science uses is not, like the logic that the books teach, quite independent of the motive and spirit of the reasoner. There is an ethics indissolubly bound up with it - an ethics of fairness and impartiality - and a writer, who teaches, by his example, to find arguments for a conclusion which he wishes to believe, saps the very foundations of science by trifling with its morals (CP 6.3).

The ethics inherent in science requires that the scientist cannot stabilise his beliefs in real things by wishful thinking, but by application of the procedure and rules of science itself, precisely because these are based on recognition of reality as independent of our thinking about it.

There is an important connection here with the question of meaning. Despite the fact that “meaning” is widely accepted as an area of logical inquiry, it still remains a task for the metaphysician to utilise only the theory of meaning that is
appropriate for his own inquiry as a metaphysician. This suggests that what Peirce calls “the Kantian principle that metaphysical conceptions mirror those of formal logic” (CP 3.487), may be expanded by saying that logical principles, or in particular the theory of meaning, should mirror what metaphysics should be like. A distinction may thus be drawn between Kant and Peirce. Whereas Kant recognises the centrality of the question of meaning to philosophical inquiry to the extent of doubting the possibility of metaphysics as a proper area of inquiry yielding possible knowledge, Peirce shows how the pursuit of the question of meaning leads inevitably into an account of what metaphysics should be like. The factor which seems most fundamentally responsible for this difference is shown in their treatment of the notion of thing-in-itself. For Kant we can only make sense of the appearances of the thing-in-self; the meaning of the real thing eludes us. Peirce, however, takes the notion of a thing-in-itself as a mental fiction, and argues that we can and do have real knowledge of real things. Peirce’s dismissal of the thing-in-itself as a fiction is based not on Kant’s dyadic relation between signs and things signified, but on his own triadic theory of meaning and reality, according to which there are always three terms involved in the process of meaning determination, namely, interpretant, sign and thing signified.

5.5 The Metaphysical Side of Pragmatism

Pragmatism is fundamentally a metaphysical position to be arrived at by application of the ‘pragmatic maxim’ (which strictly speaking is a logical principle) for meaning clarification. A distinction needs to be drawn here between two different views that may easily get confused. One is the view that logic is the source from which one can deduce metaphysics; the other view is that logic is instrumental in clarifying the position of metaphysics, which may otherwise remain obscure. Whereas the former view is reductionist in holding that metaphysics is reducible to logic, the latter view (adopted by Peirce and on which the argument of this thesis is based) completely rules out reductionism.

When Peirce strongly insists on his pragmatism as a logical principle initially devised for meaning clarification, he means not only that pragmatism is a product of his logical inquiry, but also that clarification of the meaning of fundamental concepts is the most important issue to be addressed in the early stage of any science or field of inquiry. This does not mean, however, that pragmatism does not involve direct
consideration of metaphysics, nor does Peirce deny any close connection between pragmatism and metaphysics. What becomes clear is that in defining metaphysics, pragmatism approaches the ‘What?’ question by way of an examination of the ‘How?’ question.

5.5.1 The Metaphysical Problem as Pragmatically Formulated

Perhaps Peirce’s most revealing statement on the metaphysical basis of pragmatism is from one of his unpublished papers written in c. 1905, where he claims that an understanding of pragmatism requires an understanding of the metaphysical problem it attempts to solve. Here he emphasises:

Now whoever cares to know what pragmaticism is should understand that on its metaphysical side it is an attempt to solve the problem: In what way can a general be unaffected by any thought about it? Hence before we treat of the evidences of pragmaticism, it will be needful to weigh the pros and cons of scholastic realism. For pragmaticism could hardly have entered a head that was not already convinced that there are real generals (CP 5.503; see also 8.12).

Despite the fact that Peirce strongly insists that his pragmatism is not a metaphysical doctrine, the reasons for which I have already discussed, here it is evident in the passage just quoted that accepting “that there are real generals” is a condition for understanding pragmatism. It is fair to say then that Peirce’s pragmatism is such a rich philosophical position that it comprises both logical and metaphysical propositions. The emphasis he puts on the metaphysical side of pragmatism suggests that Peirce here speaks of pragmatism on a different level when he considers how pragmatism is related to metaphysics, as compared with the passages in which he considers pragmatism in itself as a logical maxim. These are two points of view from which pragmatism can be judged and bring us full circle to an overall account of pragmatism. Although pragmatism is a logical maxim for clarifying the meaning of our concepts, it is also about the meaning of concepts considered as real, or at least potentially real. Pragmatism, therefore, involves a recognition of the distinction between the logical and the real by stressing that the function of the former is to express the latter. That is, pragmatism as a logical maxim is for clarifying and expressing our concepts about the real world.

139 Eg. “Suffice it to say once more that pragmatism is, in itself, no doctrine of metaphysics, no attempt to determine any truth of things. It is merely a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts” (CP 5.464).

Peirce’s pragmatic formulation of the metaphysical problem puts the focus of approach to the reality of generals on “In what way can a general be unaffected by any thought about it” (CP 5.503). The most important thing with the pragmatic approach is that it avoids the difficulty with the dichotomy of the mind-body problem where one entity becomes dependent on the other. For Descartes, the body is dependent for its existence on the thinking self. The difficulty with the Cartesian position is that it fails to realise that thinking can take place if and only if the thinking subject does exist first of all. Although Descartes resorts to the concept of God to provide an answer to this difficulty, it ‘solves’ the problem at the price of Descartes remaining locked in his own (abstract) world to which no one but he has access. Instead of preoccupying himself with seeking a fundamental entity to connect the body and the thinking subject, Peirce focuses on finding out how a real general is “unaffected by our thinking about it.” Thus Peirce goes beyond the mind-body dichotomy to consider the reality of generals in terms of a triadic relation. He introduces the way in which generals are “unaffected by our thinking about” them as a Thirdness or Representation. As a result, Peirce’s pragmatism does not collapse into either materialism or idealism, as happened in the dyadic way of thinking of rationalism and empiricism, based on the mind-body dichotomy.

5.5.2 Does Pragmatism Make Any Metaphysical Assertion?

If pragmatism is recognised as offering a more effective and fruitful approach to the question of the reality of generals, I must consider whether or not pragmatism makes any metaphysical claims or assertions. The importance of this question is that its exploration sheds some light on why pragmatism could, and should, be considered from the two points of view I have touched upon earlier. For whether or not pragmatism can be said to make any metaphysical assertion depends on what point of view one takes in attempting to answer the question. In one sense, it could be said that pragmatism does not make any metaphysical assertion, but simply concerns itself with clarifying the meaning of concepts, including the concepts employed in metaphysics. Christopher Hookway,\textsuperscript{141} for example, holds this view and thinks it to be Peirce’s preferred position. Although I agree that this is one position Peirce

adopts, I argue that this is too restricted a view to account for the fact that in its own peculiar way pragmatism does make some metaphysical assertions.

As I have pointed out, instead of asking whether there are any real generals, or whether generals are real, pragmatism asks how generals are not affected by our thinking about them. The point is that pragmatism as a logical maxim is set to serve the assertion that there are real things; for without that assertion, pragmatism would be a meaningless enterprise, no matter how hard we think of it as only a logical principle. In his classification of the sciences, Peirce describes logic as the science of the category of Secondness, and metaphysics as the science of Thirdness. His whole point is that the sciences are just as closely related to one another as are the three categories. That is, according to his theory of categories, Secondness is meaningful because of the Thirdness it involves. Similarly, pragmatism as a logical maxim would simply remain meaningless if it did not involve metaphysics.
PART III: PEIRCE’S THEORY OF SIGNS
Chapter 6:

THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THEORY OF SIGNS
This chapter explores the nature and scope of Peirce’s semiotic, or theory of signs and their functions, with the specific aim of determining its role in his account of inquiry. I will argue that his semiotic theory requires that observation and objectivity are recognized as essential elements of inquiry (and thinking in general). Peirce shows that both of these elements are presupposed by the representative nature of signs — the fundamental elements of semiotic. As such semiotic becomes a logical tool or method for demonstrating the metaphysical assertion that there are real things.

Discussion of Peirce’s semiotic will help to clarify that realism is both a condition and consequence of pragmatism. It will become evident that for Peirce realism and pragmatism are interdependent because realism depends upon pragmatism for ascertaining and explicating how reality exists independently from our thinking about it, whereas pragmatism presupposes the realist metaphysical assertion that there are real things.

While Peirce appears to be preoccupied with his theory of signs, and sees sign and sign-action in every phenomenon, he did not seek to reduce reality to a semiotic system, where the real would be construed as only that which is sign-like. For Peirce, such a reductionist view of reality would result either in a dismissal of metaphysics or require that metaphysics be reducible to logic. As I will show, both these views are inconsistent with Peirce’s overall philosophical position, which recognises the distinction between the logical and the real as important. He maintains that the function of the logical is to represent or to intend the real, whereas the function of the real is not to represent either the logical or anything else.

6.1 The Science of Semiotic

It is evident that Peirce attaches great importance to semiotic. His position stems ultimately from his conviction that “We think only in signs” (CP 2.302), and that “all thought is in signs” (CP 5.253). Hence, the scope of Peirce’s semiotic is the whole of human thought, whether as embodied in human reasoning, discourse, or

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142 See discussion in chapter 4.
143 Henry Babcock Veatch, 1952, pp. 16-17.
communication. This implies that semiotic is necessary for any science or inquiry. Peirce writes:

… the woof and warp of all thought and all research is symbols, and the life of thought and science is the life inherent in symbols; so that it is wrong to say that a good language is important to good thought, merely; for it is of the essence of it (CP 2.220).

Peirce conceives of semiotic as the theory or formal study of signs as such. Semiotic aims at observing:

the characters of … signs as we know, and from such an observation … we are led to statements … as to what must be the characters of all signs used by a “scientific” intelligence, that is to say, by an intelligence capable of learning by experience (CP 2.227).

Semiotic treats signs not only as the central part of our experience, but it is really by virtue of signs that we are “capable of learning by experience.” In a letter to Lady Welby on 12 October 1904, Peirce emphasizes the importance of studying signs as they make knowledge itself possible.

It appears to me that the essential function of a sign is to render inefficient relations efficient, - not to set them into action, but also establish a habit or general rule whereby they will act on occasion. … All other relations, of which we know so many, are inefficient. Knowledge in some way renders them efficient; and a sign is something by knowing which we know something more (SS 31).145

Fundamental to Peirce’s semiotic approach is his insistence on the triadic structure or three-term relationship inherent in the concept and function of a sign. I will discuss what is implied in this account of signs later. For my immediate purpose, I need only point out that in relation to knowledge semiotic considers not just the known and the knower, or the object and the subject, but also the representation of the known by the knower, or ‘the interpretant’ in Peirce’s terms. The dyadic or two-term relation between the knower and the known is inefficient, according to Peirce’s semiotic theory, because the third term, which is the knower’s knowledge or representation of the known is not yet considered. An inefficient relation would become efficient once some representation of the known by the knower starts to develop. This representation, or knowledge, “is a habit or general rule whereby” the knower “will act on occasion.”

145 Peirce believes that “the highest grade of reality is only reached by signs; that is by such ideas as those of Truth and Right and the rest” (SS 23).
Because a sign could be anything at all, real or imaginary, semiotic as such is not primarily interested in the question of reality. The primary concern of semiotic is the question of the nature and principles applicable to the functions of signs as such. The question of reality becomes a matter of interest to semiotic only in consideration of a sign’s capacity to be a sign of something else. From the semiotic point of view, ‘experience’ does not necessarily refer to experience of real things, but to any entity that is significative.

6.1.1 Logic Considered as Semiotic

Peirce identifies logic in general with semiotic, and there are two main reasons for this identification of logic with semiotic:

The first has to do with Peirce’s view of science — for he defines science as a process of inquiry within (the community of discourse of) a community of scientists or inquirers engaged in the actual practice of inquiry. While he understands that there is another view of science, that it is a body of organised knowledge and truth, he criticises this view as incomplete and limited, insofar as it does not account for the fact that science is “a living historic entity” (CP 1.44), with a social dimension implied in the very notion of a community of inquirers. This communal characteristic of science (as a community of discourse) is not captured by what we call mathematical or symbolic logic, which Peirce refers to as logic in the narrow sense. Logic in the narrow sense, or symbolic logic, is just a part of logic in general, which Peirce identifies with semiotic.

His second reason for identifying logic in general with semiotic, as he defines it, is that it serves the purpose of preventing logic from falling into a kind of psychologism — the view that logical principles are derived from the empirical findings of psychology. Peirce strongly opposed any psychologistic view of logic, because:

If the logician is to talk of the operations of the mind at all … he must mean by “mind” something quite different from the object of study of the psychologist. … Logic will here be defined as formal semiotic. A definition of a sign will be

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146 “If we are to define science, not in the sense of stuffing it into an artificial pigeon-hole where it may be found again by some insignificant mark, but in the sense of characterizing it as a living historic entity, we must conceive it as that about which such men as I have described busy themselves” (CP 1.44).
given which no more refers to human thought than does the definition of a line as the place which a particle occupies, part by part, during a lapse of time.\textsuperscript{147}

For semiotic, the phrase ‘laws of thought’ as it appears in the most common definition of logic as “the science of the necessary laws of thought” (CP 1.444), refers not to laws derived from empirical psychology but to the necessary laws of signs as such. Logic in general, then, is “only another name for semiotic” (CP 2.227), the study of signs and their functions.\textsuperscript{148}

6.1.1.1 The Division of Semiotic

Peirce’s division of semiotic into three branches is based on his reflection on the triadic nature of the sign-using function and its relationships. He says: “In consequence of every representamen being thus connected with three things, the ground, the object, and the interpretant, the science of semiotic has three branches” (CP 2.229). These branches are pure grammar, logic proper, and pure rhetoric.\textsuperscript{149}

The task of pure grammar lies in considering the conditions of signs \textit{qua} signs; that is, “to ascertain what must be true of the representamen used by every scientific intelligence in order that they may embody any meaning” (CP 2.229). It involves studying the classes of signs, the components of signs and characteristic principles that distinguish one species of signs from another. Logic proper “is the formal science of the conditions of the truth of representations” (CP 2.229). It is concerned with the relations of signs to its objects, establishing the conditions by which signs \textit{truly} represent their object. The task of pure rhetoric “is to ascertain the laws by which in every scientific intelligence one sign gives birth to another, and especially one thought brings forth another” (CP 2.229). Pure rhetoric also studies, as part of its task, “the necessary conditions of the transmission of meaning by signs

\textsuperscript{147} Quoted in Fisch, 1986, p. 343.

\textsuperscript{148} “Logic, in its general sense, is, as I believe I have shown, only another name for semiotic … the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs. By describing the doctrine as “quasi-necessary,” or formal, I mean that we observe the characters of such signs as we know, and from such an observation, by a process which I will not object to naming Abstraction, we are led to statements, eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense by no means necessary, as to what must be the characters of all signs used by a “scientific” intelligence, that is to say, by an intelligence capable of learning by experience” (CP 2.227).

\textsuperscript{149} Peirce called these branches variously. He also called Pure grammar: Speculative grammar, Formal grammar, Universal grammar, General grammar, Stechiology. He refers to Logic proper as Critic, General Logic; and Pure rhetoric as Speculative rhetoric, Formal rhetoric, Universal rhetoric, General rhetoric, Methodeutic, Objective logic. See James Jakób Liszka, \textit{A General Introduction to the Semeiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce}, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 9-11.
from mind to mind, and from one state of mind to another” (CP 1.444).

Peirce’s attribution of a specific task to each and every branch of semiotic shows that he considered it equally important to study the three necessarily interconnected aspects of signs: the sign itself (or representamen), the object of the sign, and the interpretant. The inclusion of pure rhetoric, as a proper part of semiotic, is however the most unique aspect of Peirce’s theory of signs and their functions. It acknowledges the involvement of the inquirer by way of ‘the interpretant’ as an important part of inquiry. It not only makes study of the role of the interpretant as the subject matter of pure rhetoric, but by the same means pure rhetoric becomes an essential part of semiotic as a whole, or logic in general. More specifically, pure rhetoric takes it as an essential part of its task to inquire into how a sign appeals to its interpretant or sign-user and to clarify the conditions and principles involved (CP 8.338).

The equal recognition of the three ingredients of signs and the triadicity of the relation holding between them stems ultimately, Peirce argues, from the sign-relation itself, which is irreducibly triadic:

A *Sign*, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its *Object*, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant*, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object. The triadic relation is *genuine*, that is its three members are bound together by it in a way that does not consist in any complexus of dyadic relations (CP 2.274).

He argues further for the triadicity of the sign relation by explaining it from the point of view of the interpretant.

That is the reason the Interpretant, or Third, cannot stand in a mere dyadic relation to the Object, but must stand in such a relation to it as the Representamen itself does. Nor can the triadic relation in which the Third stands be merely similar to that in which the First stands, for this would make the relation of the Third to the First a degenerate Secondness merely. The Third must indeed stand in such a relation, and thus must be capable of determining a Third of its own; but besides that, it must have a second triadic relation in which the Representamen, or rather the relation thereof to its Object, shall be its own (the Third’s) Object, and must be capable of determining a Third to this relation. All this must equally be true of the Third’s Thirds and so on endlessly (CP 2.274).

6.1.2 *Semiotic and the Sciences*

Semiotic is not about a particular kind of sign for a particular kind of inquiry, but about signs themselves, in their most universal features that are supposed to be
applicable in every form of inquiry. Peirce himself acknowledges the universal applicability of the theory of signs when he speaks of his own experience of studying various sciences and their relation to semiotic, in a letter to Lady Welby:

It has never been in my power to study anything - mathematics, metaphysics, gravitation, thermodynamics, optics, chemistry, comparative anatomy ... astronomy, psychology, phonetics, economics, the history of science, whist, men and women, wine, metrology — except as a study of semiotic.  

Some critics of Peirce fail to see the intended universal applicability of his semiotic. Richard Rorty, for example, criticises Peirce, saying, “For all his genius, however, Peirce never made up his mind what he wanted a general theory of signs for, nor what it might look like, nor what its relation to either logic or epistemology was supposed to be.” Since Rorty himself does not provide any evidence for this criticism, it is fair to say that it is a consequence either of an over-generalised observation, or a failure to understand the fundamental propositions and implications of Peirce’s semiotic. However, as I have previously shown, there are sound reasons why Peirce identifies logic in general with semiotic, and his account of representation explains how his semiotic relates to his epistemology.

Since an understanding of signs and their functions is necessary for any science, as explained earlier, semiotic may be said to be the science of the sciences. For semiotic is the only science concerned directly with the medium of thought itself, i.e. the sign. What distinguishes all other sciences from one another is the particular type of signs that constitutes the subject matter of that science. For example, “physics studies natural signs, psychology mental signs, linguistics verbal signs, anthropology socially conventional signs, art criticism visually aesthetic signs,” and so on. Despite the differences between the kinds of signs constitutive of each science, semiotic applies to each and every science, for it deals not with this or that kind of signs, but with the common and definitive nature of signs per se.

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6.2 The Components and Relationships of Signs as Paradigmatic for Truth and Meaning

6.2.1 Representamen

I have repeatedly mentioned the concept of sign, its three components, and the triadic relation that holds between them. Peirce’s technical term for sign considered in itself and apart from both its object and interpretant is ‘representamen.’ A “representamen … is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (CP 2.228). A representamen could be anything at all, depending on the particular context and circumstances in which it is identified and considered. However, it is necessary that the representamen must be both relational and representational in order to become a sign proper. Peirce argues for the necessary relational character of signs thus:

if there be anything that conveys information and yet has absolutely no relation nor reference to anything with which the person to whom it conveys the information has, when he comprehends that information, the slightest acquaintance, direct or indirect - and a very strange sort of information that would be - the vehicle of that sort of information is not, in this volume, called a Sign (CP 2.231).

Similarly, with reference to the necessity of representation, Peirce emphasises, “in order that anything should be a Sign, it must “represent” … something else … its Object” (CP 2.230). Both relation and representation are shown to intend the same thing, namely the triadicity of the sign-using relationship.

On the one hand, a representamen cannot begin to function as a sign if it does not stand in any relation to something else, i.e. its object, but to identify such an absolutely isolated entity is an impossible task, for such an entity, if there is one, is totally unspeakable. Representation, however, implies that the relation in which the representamen is involved, is triadic in nature, for the representamen must represent its object to some (actual or possible) interpretant.

On the other hand, relation may be contrasted with representation by considering the ontological and the logical status of the representamen. The ontological status of a representamen consists in its being related to things other than itself; that is, its function consists simply in being a part of a scheme of things related to one another. Theoretically, a representamen acquires its logical status once it comes to stand in a specific relation to an interpretant. However, the logical status of a representamen has to do with it standing in some actual or possible relation to a
subject (interpretant) who comes to understand the representamen, as representing something else. This does not mean that the representamen derives its ontological status from its logical status, but rather that both the ontological and the logical status of the representamen mutually imply one another and are inseparable from one another in fact and in theory. However, an actual understanding of the ontological status of a representamen only begins to take place when its logical status is clarified. The representamen’s ontological status is logically prior to its logical status, that is, the representamen must be a part of the scheme of inter-related things first before its interpretant can be identified or established.

6.2.2 The Object of a Sign

The object of a sign is whatever is signified or represented by the sign. Peirce distinguishes two kinds of object of signs: the immediate object and the mediate, or dynamical, object. The difference between these two kinds of objects of signs is that the immediate object is implied within the sign whereas dynamical object “is the Object outside of the Sign” (SS 83). “The sign,” Peirce says, “must indicate it [the dynamical object] by a hint; and this hint, or its substance, is the Immediate Object” (SS 83). The distinction between immediate object and dynamical object may appear paradoxical in the sense that it seems to introduce a fourth term into the triadic relation of signs. A closer look at the matter, however, shows that it is not the case.

The distinction is not between two different objects of the same sign, as may normally be illustrated by saying, for example, sign (C) has a dynamical object (B) and an immediate object (A). On the contrary, it is about the same object of the same sign with the difference lying between the object as it really is in itself and the object as the sign represents it. An adequate symbolic expression of the example above would be that sign (C) has a dynamical object (B), and an immediate object (B’).

The distinction between the immediate and dynamical objects of signs provides the theoretical ground for Peirce’s insistence on the objectivity of semiotic inquiry. It allows the objective content or dynamical object of a sign to stand in its own right, while the “Being [of the immediate object] is … dependent upon the Representation of it in the Sign” (CP 4.536). By distinguishing the immediate object,

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153 Peirce sometimes calls it “dynamoid object”, or “real object”.
from the dynamical object, Peirce seeks to prevent a sign and its dynamical object from collapsing into one another; a collapse that would have the sign-relation reduced into a dyadic relation between the sign and its interpretant.

### 6.2.3 Interpretant

The third term of the triadic relation of signs, the ‘interpretant,’ refers to (actual or possible subjects, or) an individual mind or group of minds which interprets or uses a sign; or, in terms of the definition of signs given earlier, it is ‘somebody’ for whom the sign stands as a sign. The interpretant, as an essentially distinct component of sign relation, marks a departure in Peirce’s semiotic from the traditional notion of signs, according to which sign is “a member of a dyadic relation between signifier and signified.”\(^{154}\) For, as I have noted, with the inclusion of the interpretant, Peirce makes the sign relation a necessarily triadic relation.

Peirce identifies three different kinds of interpretant: the immediate, dynamical, and final interpretant. The distinction between these three interpretants is a difference between the states (of ‘sophistication’) of interpretation or the interpretant’s understanding of the sign. He characterises the three interpretants in a letter to Lady Welby in 1909 as follows:

> My Immediate Interpretant is implied in the fact that each Sign must have its peculiar Interpretability before it gets any Interpreter. My Dynamical Interpretant is that which is experienced in each act of Interpretation and is different in each from that of any other; and the Final Interpretant is the one Interpretative result to which every Interpreter is destined to come if the Sign is sufficiently considered. The Immediate Interpretant is an abstraction, consisting in a Possibility. The Dynamical Interpretant is a single actual event. The Final Interpretant is that toward which the actual tends (SS 111).

Before this characterisation, Peirce in an unpublished paper ‘Pragmatism’ dated c.1906, distinguished between the emotional interpretant, the energetic interpretant, and the logical interpretant. Peirce’s description of this trichotomy of interpretants appears to be different from that of the three kinds of interpretant given in the letter to Lady Welby. He identified emotional interpretant as a feeling, energetic interpretant an action, and logical interpretant a habit-change. By habit-change Peirce means “a modification of a person’s tendencies toward action,

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resulting from previous experiences or from previous exertions of his will or acts, or from a complexus of both kinds of cause” (CP 5.476).

There is a difference among Peirce scholars in their interpretation of these two trichotomies of interpretants. Some claim that they are not identical, whereas others view them as meaning the same thing. ¹⁵⁵ Since each side of the issue stands equally well supported by evidences found in Peirce, I will not pursue this dispute any further. For my purpose I will consider something else that can be of assistance in understanding Peirce’s semiotic, namely his concern to distinguish stages in our developing understanding of signs or of the meaning of a particular sign.

Apart from the obvious similarities between the two trichotomies of interpretants, the division of interpretants in both trichotomies is concerned with the growth or development of our understanding of signs, as tending from a less to a more conscious state of mind. As evident in his characterisation of the first trichotomy, the immediate interpretant is the least developed of the interpretants. It is merely the effect caused by the sign without any reflection on it. The dynamical interpretant is more developed than the immediate interpretant, in that it involves some degree of thought, although a dynamical interpretant of a particular sign may vary from one instance to another. The final interpretant is the most developed of all the interpretants, for it is the ‘ideal’ “toward which the actual tends.” Unlike the dynamical interpretant, the final interpretant is free from variation, at least in principle. In other words, the growth of our understanding of the meaning of concepts embodies a teleology (“tendency to an end”¹⁵⁶) inherent in the whole of sign relation or process. The immediate interpretant has a tendency to cause a dynamical interpretant, which in turn tends to cause a final interpretant.

The second trichotomy of emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants expresses the same teleology. As said earlier, the emotional interpretant is not only the feeling produced by a sign, but is also “The first proper significate effect of a sign” (CP 5.475). In turn, the emotional interpretant tends to develop into an energetic interpretant, which is marked by the involvement of an effort or action. Peirce says of the energetic interpretant.

¹⁵⁵ See ibid., pp. 648, 683-4. Hulswit refers to T. L. Short’s argument, and reference to Peirce, for the two trichotomies of interpretants as different. Hulswit, on the other hand, cites a different passage from Peirce in favour of an argument for the two trichotomies as identical.

If a sign produces any further proper significate effect, it will do so through the mediation of the emotional interpretant, and such further effect will always involve an effort. I call it the energetic interpretant (CP 5.475).

Whereas the energetic interpretant is an effect of the emotional interpretant, the logical interpretant is an effect of the energetic interpretant, and this involves a mental effort. The main difference between energetic interpretant and logical interpretant is that the former is a single act, whereas the latter is a habit (of action), which is essentially general in nature.

While the two trichotomies of interpretants are both concerned with the (process of) growth in our understanding of concepts, they have a different point of emphasis from one another. The focus of the first trichotomy is on truth, and that of the second trichotomy is on meaning. As I have pointed out, Peirce defines final interpretant as “that toward which the actual tends” (SS 111). He clarifies what he means here when he says:

> there is certainly a third kind of Interpretant, which I call the Final Interpretant, because it is that which would finally be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter were carried so far that an ultimate opinion were reached (CP 8.184; the latter emphasis added).

Compare this with what he says of his pragmatic notion of truth: “The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth” (CP 5.407). With the second trichotomy, there is a similarity between his idea of logical interpretant, defined as “habit-change”, and his pragmatic definition of meaning, according to which the meaning of a concept is the habit or rule of action resulting from believing in that concept.

### 6.3 Semiotic as the Basis for Inquiry

I have noted the great importance Peirce attributes to his semiotic as an effective tool both in his scientific and philosophical inquiry. Finally I will focus on two further features of semiotic that are important for inquiry. First, semiotic makes it possible for every science to be observational without any metaphysical commitment to the question of the nature of reality. Secondly, semiotic assumes objectivity an essential part of any kind of inquiry.

#### 6.3.1 Observation in Inquiry

Semiotic understands ‘observation’ in a very broad sense. It is concerned with observation not in relation to the reality of things, but in relation to things as signs. There are different modes of observation employed in different sciences, for example
use of a telescope as a special means of observation for the astronomer is different from direct participant-observation by an anthropologist of a remote community. Semiotic, however, takes as of primary importance the common formal structure of the sign-relation involved in every mode of observation. Observation is a complex and active process that involves the employment both of the senses and analysis in seeking to make sense of any sign-relation in any given situation. Peirce expresses his view of observation as follows:

modern students of science have been successful because they have spent their lives not in their libraries and museums but in their laboratories and in the field; and while in their laboratories and in the field they have been not gazing on nature with a vacant eye, that is, in passive perception unassisted by thought, but have been observing - that is, perceiving by the aid of analysis - and testing suggestions of theories (CP 1.34).

Even the sciences such as mathematics that have been generally described as non-observational do involve observation, Peirce maintains, except that in mathematics, “it is observation of artificial objects” (CP 1.34).157

Because semiotic bases its understanding of observation upon the formal triadic structure of the sign relation, (which emphasises the continuity and inter-relationship between the three components of signs), a clear-cut distinction between observation and reasoning or analysis is not acceptable to Peirce. This is because observation is not a distinct type of inference that stands in its own right, but a stage of the process of inference. Thus Peirce criticises Kant:

he [Kant] drew too hard a line between the operations of observation and of ratiocination. He allows himself to fall into the habit of thinking that the latter only begins after the former is complete; and wholly fails to see that even the simplest syllogistic conclusion can only be drawn by observing the relations of the terms in the premisses and conclusion (CP 1.35; emphasis added).

6.3.2 The Metaphysical Neutrality of Semiotic

Semiotic is metaphysically neutral, not because it has no metaphysical presuppositions or implications whatsoever, but because its main concern is not to do with the question of reality as such. Peirce by strongly insisting that his pragmatism is merely a logical maxim, and is not a metaphysical doctrine, is saying that the metaphysical consideration of things falls outside the concern of semiotic, and

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157 See also CP 1.240.
pragmatism in particular. Thus the metaphysical neutrality of semiotic has to do with the ‘division of labour’ involved in the system or classification of the sciences, and not with the question whether semiotic should do away with metaphysics. Whereas the question of the reality of signs falls within the domain of metaphysics, the question of the logical structure, function and principles governing the use of signs as such is a concern of semiotic.

6.3.3 The Question of the Relation between Objectivity and Realism in Peirce

Objectivity is the second main feature of inquiry provided by semiotic. Because semiotic requires the subject matter of inquiry to be treated as a sign or group of signs, the inquirer is compelled to understand his subject matter as meaning or representing something other than itself, showing that there is always a degree of ‘externality’ involved in (the use of) every sign. This ‘externality’ is manifested in the ‘object of the sign,’ and applies both to the sign itself and also to the interpretant. The object of the sign is external to the sign itself because it is that for which the sign stands or that which it represents. Similarly, it is external to the interpretant, for the interpretant is the mind or somebody to which the object is represented by the sign.

A distinction may be drawn between the ‘object of the sign’ and the ‘object of thought.’ The objectivity of the latter does not have the same scope as that inherent in the former. The objectivity manifested in the ‘object of thought’ is designated by the fact that there is thought and a purpose, i.e. something other than itself, which it intends. Yet, the ‘object of thought’ is liable to fall into the subjectivity implied in doctrines such as idealism. Because the ‘object of thought’ is grounded upon a dichotomy between the object on the one hand, and the subject on the other hand, the idealist can still maintain the central idea of the ‘object of thought,’ but argues for the ‘object’ of thought as an entity restricted to the realm of thought itself by saying that ideas are the only objects of thought.

On the other hand, for Peirce, the ‘object of sign’ ensures objectivity to a greater extent, in the sense that both the object of sign and the sign itself are external to the interpretant or the knowing subject. Unlike the case of the ‘object of thought’ (where the object could be reduced or restricted to the thinking subject, hence to subjectivity), the ‘object of sign’ stands more secure against such subjectivity by insisting that the object of sign is irreducible either to the sign or to the interpretant.
Richard A. Lee expresses some concern about how Peirce tried to use medieval or Scotist realism for a purpose for which it was not intended. Lee argues that the problem with Peirce’s argument is that he attempted to make Scotist realism provide science with objectivity, which for Lee is foreign to the central issue of the medieval debate between realism and nominalism.\(^{158}\) Lee’s criticism fails to note two points important for our purpose. First, Peirce though claiming to be a committed Scotist, was still critical of Scotus for allowing some nominalist tendencies in his realism (see CP 8.208). Peirce thus took the view that Scotist realism needed to be employed critically and developed, and not just applied uncritically. Accordingly, Peirce identifies his realism as “extreme realism” (CP 5.470), and his metaphysics as “objective idealism” (CP 6.25).

Secondly, Peirce sees the issues of realism and objectivity as more closely inter-connected than allowed for in Lee’s position. As Vincent G. Potter rightly points out, Peirce “prefers to phrase his realism in terms of the objective reality of laws rather than in terms of universals.”\(^{159}\) The important point here is that for Peirce the question of objectivity, which for him is a logical question, is required for a solution of the metaphysical question in the debate between realism and nominalism: “whether laws or general types are figments of the mind or real” (CP 1.16).

Elaborating further on this question, Peirce writes:

> If this be understood to mean whether there really are any laws and types, it is strictly speaking a question of metaphysics and not of logic. But as a first step toward its solution, it is proper to ask whether, granting that our common-sense beliefs are true, the analysis of the meaning of those beliefs shows that, according to those beliefs, laws and types are objective or subjective. This is a question of logic rather than of metaphysics - and as soon as this is answered the reply to the other question immediately follows after (CP 1.16).

What Lee is saying about Peirce’s realism is quite the reverse of his position. For Lee assumes that Peirce wanted to retrieve Scotistic realism in order to “ensure the objectivity of our concepts against the rampant subjectivism introduced into philosophy since Descartes.”\(^{160}\) However, Peirce is clearly of the view that the question of objectivity is an essential question to be settled before considering the

\(\text{159} \) Vincent G. Potter, 1997, p. 82.
question of realism. In other words, for Peirce a sound realist philosophy cannot do without an objective approach to inquiry, as enabled by his semiotic.

Moreover, Lee fails to realise that Peirce bases his argument on his classification of the sciences, according to which logic is prior to metaphysics. That is, the question of the meaning of ‘objectivity’ is to be dealt with before the question of reality. Again, Lee’s understanding of Peirce as using Scotist realism to “ensure the objectivity of our concepts” is incorrect. It is true that Peirce’s scholastic realism seeks to undermine the subjectivism introduced into philosophy since Descartes, but it is incorrect to think, as seems to be implied in Lee’s account of Peirce, that Peirce assumes a position that attempts to deal with the question of reality without any independent consideration of the question of objectivity. Here it is important to remember that the principle of Peirce’s classification of the sciences is fundamental to his whole philosophy.

Lee might have realised the close connection between Peirce’s realism (‘Scotistic realism’) and objectivity, had he investigated the bearing of his pragmatism on the issue at hand. This is because pragmatism for Peirce is a method of thinking not only for the purpose of meaning clarification, but also for showing how universal concepts are really “operative in nature.” Instead of seeking after some kind of static ‘object’ or ‘thing’ as proof of or evidence for the reality of concepts, pragmatism looks for the ‘habit of conduct’ instituted by accepting and following those concepts, considered as beliefs.
Chapter 7:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEIRCE’S CATEGORIES, HIS THEORY OF SIGNS, AND HIS PRAGMATISM
This final chapter is concerned primarily with clarifying the relationship in Peirce’s philosophy between his categories, theory of signs and pragmatism, by examining their relationship in the light of his theory of inquiry. For, as I have repeatedly argued, Peirce developed his categories and theory of signs as philosophical tools applicable to reality in the process of inquiry — an approach that is coextensive with pragmatism.

I will begin my discussion by first elaborating on why inquiry is the framework within which to consider the relationship between the categories and signs, followed by an argument showing that the categories are pertinent to logic. Then I will seek to clarify the distinction between the categories and signs by using the Scholastic distinction between ‘real beings’ and ‘beings of reason’. While the distinction between ‘real beings’ and ‘beings of reason’ is useful, my analysis suggests that Peirce’s conception of sign goes beyond it and demonstrates that there is a sense in which the ‘sign’ does not belong either to the realm of ‘real beings’ or that of ‘beings of reason’. What is significant to Peirce’s distinction between the categories and signs is the question of whether there are ‘extra-semiotic entities’.

My conclusion on the distinction between the categories and signs, and the relationship between them, will be brought to bear on the question of the relation between logic and metaphysics. I will argue that for Peirce, whereas the validity of signs as logical tools (and the validity of the semiotic approach in general) is based on his theory of the categories, the legitimacy of logic is grounded in metaphysics. This follows from Peirce’s conviction that inquiry is the framework for considering both the relation between the categories and signs, and also applies, to the relationship between logic and metaphysics. Having determined the relation between the categories and signs, and that between logic and metaphysics, it becomes evident that pragmatism is a metaphysical position based on a certain view of logic. A brief account of intentional logic will be given in order to show that while it shares some fundamental ideas with Peirce’s semiotic, he goes further in treating as real what would normally be taken by intentional logic as belonging to the realm of ‘beings of reason’. This difference will be dealt with by discussing why the ‘sign’ is not, and cannot be, a category.
7.1 The Categories and Signs as Understood within the Context of Inquiry

‘Categories’ and ‘signs’ are two of the most fundamental ideas in Peirce’s philosophy. He views them as the basic conceptions to be employed in all inquiry. Here I use ‘inquiry’ in the broadest Peircean sense,\(^{161}\) which includes events and activities such as experience, understanding, interpretation, meaning clarification, science, and life in general.

7.1.1 The Reasons for adopting ‘Inquiry’ as the Framework for Considering the Relation between the ‘Categories’ and ‘Signs’

Both the categories and signs are investigated and derived in the first place not for their own sake, but first and foremost as ‘instruments’ to be used in our attempt to understand reality, that is, they are to fulfil some purpose. This is not to say that the categories and signs cannot be studied in their own right — for they are the subject matter of the theory of categories and the theory of signs or semiotic respectively. I employ inquiry, however, as the framework for determining the relations between the categories and signs in order to do justice to the fact that they arise from inquiry (and from our experience), and are adopted for the purpose of conducting further inquiry (and interpreting and understanding our ‘future’ experience). Thus the categories and signs are both a priori and a posteriori.

It is hard to make sense of the categories and signs if we try to consider them in isolation from the context in which they arise; their whole being and meaning depends on their context. Because they arise from inquiry itself, and are to be used for further inquiry, the categories and signs must reflect the nature of inquiry in general, by sharing some characteristics common to all forms of inquiry. It is upon the basis of these shared common characteristics that the categories and signs can be said to be applicable to all forms of inquiry. What the categories, signs, and inquiry have in common, however, are triadicity or triadic relation and intentionality.

The triadic relation of inquiry holds between the object of inquiry, the inquirer, and the inquirer’s knowledge of the object of inquiry. As regards the categories, the triadic relation, as I have discussed in chapters 1 and 2, is determined by the category of Thirdness, which essentially involves both the categories of Firstness and Secondness. I have pointed out too in the preceding chapters that a triadic relation is

\(^{161}\) This is the sense in which Peirce uses the term ‘inquiry’ in his ‘Fixation of Belief.’ See chapter 3 above for a fuller discussion of Peirce’s notion of inquiry.
definitive of the very concept of sign, in that it is the triadic relation holding between a representamen, object of sign, and an interpretant.

Such a triadic relation — whether in the case of inquiry, the categories, or signs themselves — is always intentional. In general, truth is the purpose of inquiry, as the purpose of inquiry applies to other related terms such as knowledge, meaning, understanding, and fact. The intentionality of the categories is defined by the category of Thirdness. It is the category of Thirdness which serves to unify the ‘manifold of experience’ and representation of reality. The intention of signs for the interpretant (person or persons) consists in what the sign represents — its object.

7.1.2 The Categories as Pertinent to Logic

In order for signs (and the semiotic approach in general) to be workable and useful as ‘instruments’, they must be applicable to reality. Peirce, in his criticism of some of the past metaphysical theories, points out that metaphysics is not about “meaningless gibberish” (CP 5.423), but about meaningful conceptions (CP 5.294; 5.423). By “meaningless gibberish” Peirce means the explanation of words by other words, which are themselves explained by other words “without any real conception ever being reached” (CP 5.423). Underlying Peirce’s criticism of the past metaphysical theories is his pragmatism, which defines the meaning of concepts not by words, but by the rule or habit of action that follows from our understanding of concepts. What is central here to pragmatism is that fundamentally the meaning of concepts is based on reality. Vincent G. Potter points to the same principle when he says of Peirce’s “metaphysical realism”: “whatever is needed to explicate reality must be granted a place within reality.”

The function of a sign by nature is to represent something to somebody (CP 2.228). The inclusion of ‘somebody’ (the interpretant), although implicit, indicates that the sign’s representation of its object is assumed to be intelligible and meaningful to the person for whom the representation is a sign. The whole concept of sign in general, and the interpretant in particular, is simply to make the signified intelligible and meaningful. A road sign, for example, is effective as a sign if, and only if, it serves its purpose successfully, that is, if it is meaningful to us. A road sign that is poorly designed, and is unintelligible because it does not serve its purpose

162 Vincent G. Potter, 1997, p. 84. What Potter is paraphrasing is CP 1.351.
successfully, is useless and meaningless.

The sign, then, is substantiated, hence made meaningful by the habit of action with which it is identified. That is, the sign is inevitably bound to reality by way of the category of Thirdness. According to Peirce, the habit of action, as so many other generals, is real not with reference to a static entity considered determinately fixed, but as a dynamic, evolving or developmental event or process. Thus Carl R. Hausman can say of Peirce’s notion of the real:

Peirce’s conception of generals as reals was not … a commitment to the reality of universals in the sense in which universals are construed as static, completely determinate identities. For Peirce, generals are dynamic; they are tendencies that grow. A general should not be thought of apart from a telos. With respect to being a habit, a third or general is what it is by virtue of its influence on its future instances.163

While a consideration of the sign may be conducted purely in abstract terms, pragmatism requires that to be meaningful it must be based on reality by employing the category of Thirdness, which Peirce identifies, as I have shown, as the ‘future’ mode of being. It is for this reason that pragmatism is ultimately a metaphysical position based on this recognition of the reality of the ‘future’ mode of being.

7.2 The Distinction between the Categories and Signs

To claim that there is a relation between the categories and signs presupposes a distinction between them. For a relation between any two entities, whatever they may be, implies that the two entities in question are distinct from one another.

7.2.1 The Distinction between ‘Beings of Reason’ and ‘Real Beings’

Scholastic logicians introduced a distinction between ‘beings of reason’ and ‘real beings’.164 Beings of reason are the logical concepts or signs we use in our understanding of real beings, and their existence depends on their being thought. Real beings, on the other hand, are things that exist independently of our thinking about them. In terms of this distinction, signs belong to the realm of beings of reason, and the categories to that of real beings; the categories exist as they are, whereas signs exist for representation of the categories, or instances of them.

Another related distinction employed by the scholastic logicians is between

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what they call first intentions and second intentions. According to this distinction, what we seek to understand are first intentions (or first intentional objects). Second intentions are the logical concepts and signs we use to refer to first intentions, or the first intentional objects that we seek to understand. Roughly, the categories are first intentions, in the sense that we know them by means of second intentions. In ontological terms, the distinction made is between the categories as having an (absolutely) independent existence and the signs as existing in a relation that is dependent on the categories.

### 7.2.2 The Distinction between Categories and Signs as both Relative and Absolute

It follows from our account of the distinction between beings of reason and real beings that the categories and signs may be considered as being both relative and absolute. A relative distinction is one that is based on something not universally distinct from any other thing, but distinct from other things only in relation to that thing being viewed from a certain perspective. An absolute distinction is based on something universally distinct from any other thing regardless of the point of view taken.

In terms of their ontological status, the distinction (between categories and signs) is **absolute**, in that the existence of signs as signs is always dependent on there being categories (or instance(s) of them) to represent, whereas the categories do exist independently of whether or not there is a sign or any signs whatever. On the other hand, the distinction between the categories and signs is **relative**, in that the distinction depends on whether we talk about things as they are in themselves or merely as signs. Smoke, for example, can be said to be a sign, depending on whether it represents anything to us. As a thing or object, smoke is in itself regardless of whether or not it represents something to us. Smoke as a sign (say, of fire) in this sense belongs to what the scholastics call the “instrumental signs”. An “instrumental sign” is one that we must know first before we come to know the object it signifies. Thus, we would be aware of fire only after we first know its sign, smoke.\(^{165}\)

This is not to say that the scholastics never considered signs in an absolute sense. What they call “formal signs” are signs that exist simply to intend. As Veatch expresses it:

\(^{165}\) Ibid., pp. 12-13.
A formal sign is one whose whole nature and being are simply a representing, or a meaning, or a signifying of something else. Such signs, in other words, are nothing but meanings or intentions. Thus if one were to ask, “What is it to be a formal sign?”, the answer would be, “It is simply to be of or about something else.”

Peirce’s semiotic, however, goes beyond the semiotic of the scholastics. The latter with its instrumental/formal distinction between signs involved a dichotomy between ‘entities’ that are signs relatively and those that are signs absolutely. This does not mean that the scholastics’ semiotic is not of great value, for Peirce acknowledged his indebtedness to scholastic semiotic. However, this dichotomy, as John Deely observes, diverts the scholastics from recognising what Peirce takes as fundamentally important in the very being of a sign: namely, “that the sign consists not in a type of sensible thing, but in a pure relation, irreducibly triadic, indifferent both to the physical status of its objects and to the source of its immediate provenance, nature or mind.”

Thus when we say, for example, ‘smoke is a sign of fire’ and ‘a fossil bone is a sign of dinosaur’, the sign proper here refers neither to the smoke nor to the bone themselves, but to the same relation that is equally present in both cases, though, of course, the two cases are materially different from one another. As Deely explains,

… strictly, it is neither the smoke nor the bone, but the relation itself so formed which constitutes the sign in its actual being as sign. Technically speaking, the smoke and bones are not signs, but rather sign-vehicles.

The sign-vehicle, thus, in contrast to the sign-relation, is the representative element in the sign, while the relation arising from this foundation, obtaining (or obtainable) over and above the foundation, and terminating at a signified object, alone makes this representative element a representation of something other than itself. In the absence of this relation, hence, the foundation becomes merely virtual or material as a foundation, and is then experienced, instead, simply as a self-representation or object.

In terms of Deely’s sign-vehicle/sign-relation distinction, for ‘smoke’ to be a sign depends on its being a part of a particular sign-relation. Smoke, as a sign-vehicle stands in a particular sign-relation, and cannot actually be separated from it. This is because everything is a potential sign (or sign-vehicle), meaning everything is

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166 Ibid., p. 13.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid., p. 208.
170 Ibid.
always both an object in its own right and at the same time a possible part of a sign relation. Thus Peirce says, “that all this universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs” (CP 5.448n1).

7.2.3 Clarifying the Question of ‘Extra-Semiotic Entities’

Considering Peirce’s view “that all this universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs”, and the idea (discussed in chapter 6) that Peirce neither suggests nor endorses any form of a semiotically-reductionist view of reality, it is fair to ask: Are there any ‘real’ things apart from ‘signs’?

From the Peircean point of view the question at issue is not about whether there is anything real that is not a sign, or a sign that is not real. Rather, as Fisch puts it, “The fundamental distinction is not between things that are signs and things that are not, but between triadic or sign-action and dyadic … action.”

The question of whether there are ‘extra-semiotic entities’ (i.e. Are there any ‘real’ things apart from ‘signs’?) assumes a dichotomy between reality and the sign. As I have noted repeatedly, this is a dichotomy that Peirce sets out to reject. Pragmatism argues that the relation embodied in the activity of inquiry (and the process of experience) is triadic in nature, and it is different from the dyadic relation assumed in empiricist epistemology. The dyadic relation involves no thought, for it results simply from an action between two objects caused by “brute force” (CP 5.472). This is why Peirce argues that a dyadic relation cannot be the basic formal structure of inquiry, which for him is co-extensive with life:

if pragmaticism really made Doing to be the Be-all and the End-all of life, that would be its death. For to say that we live for the mere sake of action, as action, regardless of the thought it carries out, would be to say that there is no such thing as rational purport (CP 5.429).

If inquiry is essentially concerned with the meaning and truth of reality, it must embody the triadic nature of the sign-using relationship. The question of ‘extra-semiotic entities’, then, does not really arise in Peirce’s semiotic and pragmatism. For not only does it assume a dichotomy and demarcation between the real and the sign, but it also fails to recognise that the focus of Peirce’s semiotic is the importance of relations in general, and the triadic sign relation in particular. The sign is not to be

contrasted with reality, but to be understood as the underlying, all-embracing relationship in reality of sign, thing signified and interpretant.

7.3 A Consideration of the Relation between Logic and Metaphysics within the Framework of Inquiry

7.3.1 Some General Features of Peirce’s View on the Relation between Logic and Metaphysics

Corresponding to the relation between signs and categories is the relation between logic and metaphysics. As noted in the preceding chapters, Peirce in his hierarchical classification of the sciences places logic before metaphysics, and identifies the former with the task of providing the latter with principles, and the latter with that of providing the former with data on which to operate. Consequently, Peirce describes metaphysics as follows, “Metaphysics consists in the results of the absolute acceptance of logical principles not merely as regulative valid, but as truths of being” (CP 1.487).

The idea “truths of being”\(^{172}\) here indicates how closely related logic and metaphysics are for Peirce. Unlike the view of logic favoured by some mathematical logicians where logic is considered a system mainly, if not entirely, of axioms and definitions, Peirce takes logic\(^{173}\) to be a normative science, meaning it is a science of the principles of correct reasoning and the norms of inquiry. Again, unlike the mathematical logician, Peirce’s theory of logic assumes both a dynamic view of inquiry and its actual exercise within a community of inquirers. He takes the view that the principles of correct reasoning and norms of inquiry identified by logic (or semiotic) not only are (shown to be) valid, but they are also (shown to be) applicable to, and true of, reality, in the actual process of or activity of inquiry.

Because inquiry is the theoretical (and practical) framework within which Peirce develops his view of logic just given, he is able to make the claims that logic is a normative science, and that it depends on ethics (CP 4.240; 1.577). What Peirce means here in relation to the latter claim is that just as ethics is a science of self-...

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\(^{172}\) In CP 1.300, Peirce states the same idea as “applicable to being.”

\(^{173}\) This is not say that Peirce rejects mathematical logic. In fact, Peirce’s contribution to mathematical logic is considered to be of great magnitude and importance. I refer here to Peirce’s theory of logic where he insists that logic, as intentional rather than merely extensional logic, is an essential branch of philosophy, as a normative science, and as semiotic.
control in relation to social matters (in which the distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad, etc. are central), logic is concerned with self-control in thought or reasoning where the distinctions between truth and falsity, validity and invalidity, etc. are mostly important. Peirce says, “logic as the science of the principles of how thought ought to be controlled, so far as it may be subject to self-control, in the interest of truth.”\textsuperscript{174} Further, just as a society would be chaotic without some ethical principles or norms, thought or reasoning would be poorly conducted without some logical principles. Thus for metaphysics to be successful in its inquiry requires the norms (of inquiry) discovered by logic (or semiotic).

\subsection*{7.3.2 Some Fundamental Ideas of Intentional Logic}

Intentional logic may be characterised in a number of ways. My discussion of intentional logic will be far from being comprehensive. However, for my purpose, the important characteristic of intentional logic is its inclusion of the existing, thinking subject in its consideration of meaning.\textsuperscript{175} By means of this characteristic, intentional logic takes meaning to be the expression of the triadic relation between the thinking subject, reality, and language, and this conviction, that meaning is based on a triadic relation, is common to pragmatism and intentional logic.

The similarities between intentional logic and pragmatism cannot be taken too far, for semiotic theory has different restrictions and implications for each of them. From Peirce’s point of view, intentional logic, though it maintains a triadic relation for meaning, tends to fall back into a form of dichotomy when it demands as necessary the distinction between the real and the logical,\textsuperscript{176} (see section 7.2.1 above). This is due to its restriction of the scope of its notion of ‘sign’. Because it sees ‘sign’ not as an underlying relation of, hence inseparable from, reality, intentional logic tends to contrast signs and reality. On the other hand, pragmatism in taking ‘sign’ as inseparable from reality, proceeds to consider that the important question is not about the real versus the logical, but about the difference between sign (triadic) relation and dyadic relation, within the context of interpretant, sign, and object signified, or between thinking subject, reality, and language.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{174} Quoted in Beverly Kent, \textit{Charles S. Peirce: Logic and the Classification of the Sciences}, (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987), p. 19.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{175} Ian E. Thompson, 1981, p. 195.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{176} Henry B. Veatch, 1952, pp. 16-17.}
7.3.3 The ‘Sign’ is not a Category

Given all the things that have been said about Peirce’s conception of sign, one may wonder why Peirce does not include ‘sign’ in his list of categories. This is because to make the sign a category would give rise to the same problem associated with the question of ‘extra-semiotic entities’ discussed earlier. For it would follow, from treating the sign as a category, that all the categories (and instances of them) other than the sign are not in any sign relation. As expressing the underlying relation of reality, the sign relation holds between the three categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness in the same irreducibly triadic structure of the sign itself, which Peirce states as follows.

… the third category - the category of thought, representation, triadic relation, mediation, genuine thirdness, thirdness as such - is an essential ingredient of reality, yet does not by itself constitute reality, since this category … can have no concrete being without action, as a separate object on which to work its government, just as action cannot exist without the immediate being of feeling on which to act (CP 5.436).

To attribute the same status to the sign that he does to the categories would vitiate the whole structure of Peirce’s philosophy.
This thesis has been concerned with clarifying the relationship in Peirce’s philosophy between his theory of categories and particular brand of pragmatism. In this thesis I have defended the claim that his theory of categories is the ultimate foundation of his pragmatism, and that he presents his form of pragmatism as the only adequate method for metaphysics.

In my Introduction I remarked that the problem which provoked my study of Peirce’s philosophical writings was to examine the reasons for Peirce’s apparent indecision about the foundation of pragmatism. He attributed the foundation of pragmatism in some parts of his writings to his theory of categories (eg. CP 8.256) and in others to his semiotic or theory of signs (eg. 8.191) without any clear statement on how these seemingly different foundations are related. Thus, I have sought to clarify the relation between these ‘two foundations’, in order to demonstrate why Peirce believed his form of pragmatism to be an appropriate method for metaphysics.

I began my discussion in chapter 1 by remarking that Peirce’s general philosophical project is both a methodological and a metaphysical quest, in that it seeks to establish a theory of categories that are applicable to both thought and reality. In consequence, his theory of categories requires as necessary both metaphysical and epistemological realism, in order to ground his view that things are both real and knowable. Further, because it is founded on the theory of categories, pragmatism must reflect both metaphysical and epistemological realism.

I introduced Peirce’s theory of categories by discussing his paper the ‘New List.’ There Peirce derived five categories: *being, quality, relation, representation,* and *substance*. The uniqueness of his theory of categories, as distinct from those of Aristotle and Kant, consists in the relation of inter-dependence he insists upon between these five categories, namely, that they are all involved in the formation of every meaningful proposition. I also discussed some later changes Peirce made to his theory of categories presented in the ‘New List.’ The most obvious of these changes is the reduction of the number of categories from five to only three categories. He excluded being and substance from his list of categories, and retained only quality, relation, and representation which he later called his standard technical terms Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness respectively. The arguments he offers for these
changes, I noted, include his sign theory of cognition, and certain discoveries he made in the logic of relations and quantification theory.

The exclusion of being and substance from his list of categories works both ways, however; it works both for and against him. On the one hand, it makes it easier for Peirce to maintain and develop his semiotic, in the sense that he does not have to find a place for being and substance in the triadic or three-term relation of signs, which he insists upon. On the other hand, it marks the beginning of a problem that becomes central throughout his philosophy. The ‘individual subject’ (or ‘first substance’ in Aristotle’s terminology) is taken as implied within the category of Thirdness in his theory of categories; as the basis for prediction in his phenomenology, and the community of inquirers in his theory of inquiry; for the focus on the ‘future’ mode of being in his metaphysics, and the importance of the interpretant in his semiotic. In other words, the individual subject becomes ‘locked’ within the irreducible triadic relation embodied in his theory of categories in particular, and his philosophy in general, within which his pragmatism operates.

Consequently, the classical distinction between the ‘transcendentalia’ as the ground for the possibility of other categories and the categories themselves, has diminished to a point that they become merged together. It seems that apart from the practical uses of his phenomenology, theory of inquiry, and semiotic for his general philosophy, Peirce tended to rely on these areas of his philosophy to provide the ‘transcendentalia’ for his categories.

As I discussed in chapter 2, his phenomenology assumes a ‘presuppositionless’ standpoint where it can disclose the ‘purity’ of the phenomenon without presupposing any idea or theory, whether metaphysical or otherwise. His claim to a presuppositionless standpoint for phenomenology is questionable. The very idea of phenomenology as a science of the phenomenon, I have argued, relies on presupposing the existence of the phenomenon, whether mental or physical in character. He seems to think that since phenomenology derives its working principles

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177 This is a major point of John F. Boler’s criticism of Peirce in his Charles Peirce and Scholastic Realism: A Study of Peirce’s Relation to John Duns Scotus (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963). However, while I agree with some of Boler’s criticism of Peirce, I disagree with his going so far as to say that there is no place in Peirce’s theory of categories for individual things. My point is that there is a place for individual things in Peirce’s categories, but they are contained within the category of Thirdness, or ‘future’ mode of being.

from the only science above it in his hierarchical classification of the sciences, namely, mathematics, and since mathematics is concerned not with the reality status of the objects of thought, but only with the hypothetical state of things, phenomenology therefore can be a presuppositionless science that makes no metaphysical claims.

This, I believe, is not a sufficient argument to prove phenomenology to be a presuppositionless science. The fact that he claims phenomenology to rely on mathematics for its principles presupposes that there is some reason on which the claim can be based. When he states that the ‘generalising power of the mathematician’ is one of the three methods required for phenomenological inquiry, he is implying that the phenomenologist should be like the mathematician. However, the problem here is that Peirce argues on the one hand that mathematics is concerned only with the hypothetical states of things and on the other that it should serve as a paradigm of exact thinking in philosophy. However, without circularity, this cannot be a sufficient justification for the claim either that phenomenology can derive its first principle from mathematics, or that it is a presuppositionless science. Furthermore, it must be realised that the mathematical principles (whatever they may be) which phenomenology borrows for its own use are (or at least thought to be) really applicable to or useful to phenomenology.

However, given his realist intentions, his phenomenology might be thought to be effective in providing the required experiential ground for his philosophy. His approach gives him reasons to claim that philosophy can be both an ‘observational’ science and a science of ‘discovery’.

In his phenomenology the individual subject seems to gain some recognition, but only to a certain extent before it is subsumed, in accordance with his classification of the sciences, under logic, and then metaphysics. The individual subject, or the phenomenologist, can observe whatever phenomenon appears to the mind, and in the process can make some ‘discovery’. What he means by ‘discovery’ here is individually based. It refers to some phenomenon that the individual subject knows for the first time, and is thus regarded as ‘new’ so far as the observing individual subject is concerned. Thus his phenomenology provides his philosophy with a kind of experiential ground based on his account of the growth of the individual subject’s experience and knowledge.
I have argued that in order to do justice to Peirce’s philosophy, his phenomenology alone cannot function as an adequate basis for philosophical method without reference to the other two main branches of his philosophy, namely logic and metaphysics. Phenomenology must be understood as only part of philosophy as a whole, not as synonymous with it.

While trying to do justice to his emphasis on phenomenology, this only points to a further difficulty with his philosophy. It shows how rigid his classification of the sciences, and his theory of categories on which he based his classification, in fact is. Because he follows his (tri-partite and hierarchical) theory of categories in classifying the sciences, he ends up with a strictly hierarchical system that requires phenomenology (which he also defines as the science of Firstness) to be the first science to which philosophy must attend before logic and metaphysics. Whether phenomenology is to be regarded as logically or experientially prior to logic and metaphysics is not clear.

His classification of the sciences fails to account for the fact that what he identifies and describes as phenomenology is a kind of inquiry or observation that can happen at any time and anywhere during our pursuit of philosophy. There is no guarantee that in following his ordering of the branches of philosophy it would be better to study phenomenology rather than metaphysics first, then logic, and then phenomenology, or logic first, then phenomenology, and then metaphysics. Further, attending to phenomenology first, as he proposed, could hardly be a successful affair if phenomenology is not clear about the meaning of its basic ideas, such as what the phenomenon is, and how the hypothetical status of ‘the phenomenon’ is different from reality of actual phenomena, and so on. As these ideas are not dealt with in mathematics, it is more likely that we are to find answers in logic or metaphysics.

The problematic status of the individual subject also features in Peirce’s doubt-belief theory of inquiry, which is a major part of my discussion of his pragmatism in chapter 3. His recognition of the role of psychological doubt as the starting point of inquiry in general recognises the essential role of the individual subject or inquirer in the process of inquiry. When he argues, for instance, that it is real doubt, (a real dissatisfied state of mind experienced by an actual individual subject or inquirer) that initiates inquiry, he is putting the individual subject to the fore. I have argued that his doubt-belief theory of inquiry escapes collapsing to psychologism due to the logical and realist perspective he employs in working out his theory. He uses doubt, after
observing that it is a state of mind that is always implied in every kind of inquiry, as a way to identifying the most reliable method (as far as truth is concerned) for fixing our belief. This he claims to be the method of science. His move from locating the place of doubt in inquiry to focus on identifying the most reliable method for fixing true belief, however, emphasises that the individual subject is recognised only for the sake of grounding the method of science and the community of inquirers.

His pragmatism, in its early or original formulation, resembles the verification principle of logical positivism in restricting the meaning of concepts to the ‘sensible (or practical) effects’ conceivable with regard to, or resulting from the actual test to which an object in question be subjected. I argued that because his pragmatism was founded ultimately on his theory of categories, the former was bound to reflect the latter and any changes he made to it. For example, because his theory of categories had not accepted possibility as a real mode of being by the time he formulated his early version of pragmatism, he denied possibilities ontological status, as a mere reflection of the modes of speech we use when we make any claims about the meaning of an object that has not been tested.

When he came to accept possibilities as real modes of being, he then reformulated his pragmatism accordingly. His later version of pragmatism treats the meaning of an object in terms not of the ‘sensible effects’ and the actual test applied to the object, but in the light of what would happen if we were to act upon or follow our belief regarding that object. Here his pragmatism is tied to the ‘would-be’ or ‘future’ mode of being (possibilities), and the individual subject, again, is subsumed under this future mode of being.

Peirce’s strong insistence on pragmatism as merely a logical maxim for meaning clarification could be misleading, and therefore, I have suggested, it should not be taken literally. It tends to give us the impression that pragmatism does not have any metaphysical presuppositions or implications at all. However, his commitment to his theory of categories compelled him to make the link between pragmatism and metaphysics explicit; and he sometimes makes this connection more explicit than he perhaps realised.

The relation between pragmatism and metaphysics became more evident in chapter 4, as I examined the close affinity he established between pragmatism and realism. His commitment to both a realist theory of categories and his scholastic realism makes it inevitable that pragmatism requires a realist approach to inquiry.
The underlying driving force behind pragmatism is the fundamental tenet of his scholastic realism, namely, the realist metaphysical claim that there are real generals. On its epistemological side, pragmatism functions to demonstrate how generals are really operative in nature. The way his pragmatism formulates the epistemological question giving rise to the metaphysical claims of his scholastic realism is genuinely illuminating and arguably unique in clarifying the meaning of intelligibility. It is illuminating because instead of seeking for any corresponding static object or substance as the evidence for the reality of generals, pragmatism asks “In what way can a general be unaffected by any thought about it” (CP 5.503). It is intelligible because it recognises that generals belong to a different mode of being, and thus avoids the fallacy or ‘category mistake’ whereby different modes of being are confused. The question about the reality of general must be logically different from the question concerning the reality of a particular object.

Peirce shows, however, that pragmatism is capable of explicating the future mode of being to the extent that the individual subject is both communally and future oriented. In other words, the individual subject is seen not in its own right, but as a term or member of the irreducible triadic relation moulded by generals (or habit of conduct as Peirce would also say).

In chapter 5 I discussed in more detail the relation between Peirce’s pragmatism and metaphysics. What he calls the “critical common-sensism” position of pragmatism, the doctrine that there are ‘indubitable propositions’, is illuminated by his blending together of fallibilism and ‘indeterminacy’ as an element of reality. Unlike the Cartesian ‘indubitable’, which is construed as absolutely impossible to doubt any further, the indubitable of the critical common-sensist is considered as only relatively and temporarily so. A proposition is indubitable so far as our present state of knowledge is concerned, yet there is still room that it may prove false and dubitable in the light of further (and future) inquiry and discovery. Underlying both the idea of ‘the community of inquirers’ and the common-sense position of pragmatism is the element of reality, which Peirce identifies as “indeterminacy”. ‘Indeterminacy’, it was noted, is both general and vague in character. An object is said to be general because it leaves the interpreter or knower with the ‘freedom’ of furthering its determination; and it is vague because its further determination may have “to be made in some other conceivable signs” (CP 5.447).
One thing of crucial importance that emerges from his critique of the positivist view of metaphysics is his conviction that there is more to reality and life in general than is allowed for and implied in the positivist perspective and its emphasis on sense experience. He rejected the positivist view of metaphysics not because it contains no value at all, but because its underlying logic is so limited that it fails to recognise the future mode of being (or the category of Thirdness). I remarked that despite the similarity between positivism and pragmatism in attributing great significance to ideas of meaning and method, Peirce’s pragmatism differs dramatically from positivism in recognising the ‘future’ mode of being.

The reasons Peirce gives for identifying metaphysics, on the basis of his theory of categories, as the science of Thirdness or the future mode of being, and for attributing importance to the ‘future’ mode of being is illuminating. He thinks that it is only in relation to the future course of events that we can have a ‘say’ regarding how things should happen. Three characteristic features of the ‘future’ mode of being were discussed: they are: mediation, generality, and continuity. As a form of mediation, the ‘future’ mode of being involves a triadic relation (or sign-like relation) as providing the framework in which to understand reality. As already mentioned, generality, seen as an element of the ‘future’ mode of being, requires that with regard to any object a further determination remains to be made in the future — whether immediate or remote. The third feature of the ‘future’ mode of being presented was continuity.

Based on its recognition of the future mode of being, together with its identification of common experience as the subject matter of metaphysics in particular, and philosophy in general, the pragmatist can claim that metaphysics involves some form of observation. Unlike the restricted understanding of observation by the positivist, which reflects its commitment to individual particulars as the only real things and the identification of ‘the observable’ with the immediate sense-data, pragmatist metaphysics counts as ‘observable entities’ those to be determined by our future rational and deliberate conduct, shaped by our understanding of those entities.

Continuity as an aspect of reality and a characteristic feature of the future mode of being consists in the assertion that no individual particular or sets of particulars can exhaust it. Thus the real world allowed in his pragmatist metaphysics is a world
of universals or generals with the individual subjects being contained within them. This is developed in his theory of signs or semiotic which I discussed in chapter 6.

Peirce’s semiotic, I noted, is concerned not with the question of the reality of signs, but with signs as such. Thus his semiotic understands observation in a very broad sense; it does not restrict observation as something that has to do only with real objects, but with any object that is significative — whether real or imaginary. I have argued that his semiotic played an important role in his philosophy. Its effectiveness as a logical tool and relevance to general semantics rests on his analysis of the representative nature of signs. His semiotic requires observation and objectivity as essential elements of inquiry, and demonstrates how the meaning of concepts consists not in a dyadic, but an irreducibly triadic relation between the sign, the object signified, and the interpretant. Importantly Peirce concludes that since every thought involves signs and sign relations, and since thought is involved in every science, semiotic is essential for every type of inquiry.

I have argued that while he is heavily preoccupied with semiotic, and sees every phenomenon (real or otherwise) in terms of signs and sign relations, he does not agree with reducing reality to signs, or identifying reality simply with signs.

Despite the merits and effectiveness of his semiotic for his own philosophy, and his widely recognised contribution to modern semiotic theory, Peirce was never clear as to any distinction between the categories and signs. This, I believe, explains his indecision on the question of the foundation of his pragmatism — whether to found his pragmatism on his theory of categories or on his theory of signs. As a consequence, he often speaks of the categories and signs interchangeably, defining the categories in terms of signs, and signs in terms of the categories.

Finally, in chapter 7, I discussed the relationship between his categories, his theory of signs, and Peirce’s pragmatism not only to clarify its place within his theory of inquiry, but also to demonstrate that there is another possible reason for his indecision about the foundation of pragmatism. I have argued that our awareness of the categories and signs, and the relations between them, arise in the first place from inquiry (and experience in general) and are employed for our understanding reality in further inquiry and future experience. It was observed that there are two important characteristics common to inquiry, the categories, and the theory of signs; namely, the irreducibly triadic nature of their relationship and of intentionality.
I also argued the categories are pertinent to logic, in the sense that signs as logical concepts are by nature to intend reality as represented by the categories. That is, the meaning of concepts is based on reality. I made use of the scholastic distinction between ‘real beings’ and ‘being of reason’, and some of the fundamental ideas of intentional logic both to help clarify the ideas of categories and signs in Peirce and to show how his semiotic goes beyond that of the scholastics.

Whereas the scholastic distinction falls back to some kind of dichotomy between the logical and the real, Peirce’s pragmatism insists that the distinction is not about the real versus the logical, but about triadic (or sign) action and dyadic action. That is, triadic action involves meaning or an interpretant, and dyadic action does not. Thus the question of the ontological status of ‘extra-semiotic reality’ (i.e. Are there any real things apart from signs?) does not arise directly in his semiotic.

Peirce’s pragmatism is based on this understanding of the categories and signs as both distinct from one another, yet inseparable. This, I believe, shows that Peirce seems to think that there is an ontological aspect of signs, and this is what he means when he says “that all this universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs” (CP 5.448n1). For that reason, I suggested, the sign is not and cannot be a category.

This seems to further explain his indecision about the foundation of pragmatism and his failure to give any explicit account of the distinction and/or relation between the categories and signs. Because he finds the categories and signs as existentially inseparable, and because he tends to rely on the sign as providing the transcendentalia for his categories, he becomes ‘locked in’ to his universe of signs, so that he views things only from within the system of signs.

The success of Peirce’s philosophy must be measured by his success in integrating his theory of categories, phenomenology, scholastic realism and his theory of signs to develop pragmatism as a method appropriate for metaphysics. Its limitation consists in its treatment of the individual subject, as he has subsumed the individual subject within the irreducible triadic relation basic to his theory of categories and semiotic. The result is that it cannot view the world except from within the trichotomy of which it is a part.
CHARLES S. PEIRCE: PRIMARY SOURCES


CHARLES S. PEIRCE: SECONDARY SOURCES


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**OTHER**


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