ANNA MICHALSKA

Between Phenomenology and Semantics: Charles S. Peirce's Conception of Categories Revisited

ABSTRACT: Underlying the famous Peirce's theory of signs is a much less frequently exa-mined conception of phenomenological categories, first laid out in the article *On A New List of Categories*. Whereas the theory of signs, developed, modified, and refined over many years, is immensely complex, and thus open to many interpretations and applications, Peircean categorical system is relatively simple and straightforward, and, as such, provides a stable frame of reference for the discussions about intelligibility and meaning. My main aim in this paper is to show the utility of Peircean conception of categories in overcoming the difficulties associated with two approaches to the problem of meaning and reference, which, for the sake of argument, I will refer to as realism and conceptualism. To this end, I will explicate the difference between the said categories by means of a distinction between perceptual gestalts, emotional feelings (affects), and non-emotional feelings.
KEYWORDS: Charles S. Peirce • meaning • conceptualism • realism • phenomenological categories

Introduction

Underlying the famous Peircean theory of signs is a much less frequently examined conception of phenomenological categories, first laid out in the article *On A New List of Categories*.[1] Whereas the theory of signs, developed, modified, and refined over many years, is immensely complex, and thus open to many interpretations and applications, Peircean categorical system is relatively straightforward, and, as such, provides a stable frame of reference for the discussion about intelligibility and meaning. My main aim in this paper is to show that Peircean conception of categories can substantially contribute to overcoming the difficulties associated with two

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[1] Ch. S. Peirce, *On a New List of Categories*, "Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences," 1868, p. 287–298.

approaches to the problem of meaning and reference, which, for the sake of argument, I will refer to as realism and conceptualism.

Let me begin with a brief characterization of the aforementioned approaches. Both can be traced back to the distinction between sense or meaning (*Sinn*) and reference or stimulus (*Bedeutung*) as proposed by Gottlieb Frege.[2] While realism focuses on the sign-object (or signifier-signified) relationship,[3] conceptualism is primarily concerned with relationships among concepts (signifiers), within certain paradigms or frameworks,[4] or within the "discourse," or "space of reasons," in toto.[5] The realist's emphasis on the epistemological problem of reference is motivated by the need to account for objectivity of cognition, or, to put it differently, for the way in which the stimulus shapes a response. The main difficulty with this position, which amounts to methodological individualism, lies in the possibility of falling back on Cartesian dualism (mind-body problem).

Conceptualism, on the other hand, is concerned with the problem of intersubjective communication, or more precisely, with the correctness of moves within the designated spaces of meaning, the moves usually taken to be determined by either universal or culture-specific norms of material inference. In philosophy of science, where this approach has been conceived

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[2] G. Frege, *On Sense and Reference*, [in:] *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. P. Geach, M. Black, Oxford 1980.

[3] See esp. H. Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism,* Illinois 1987.

[4] E.g. P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, London 2003; N. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science,* Cambridge, 1958; Th. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* Chicago 1996.

[5] E.g. W. Sellars, *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, ed. K. Scharp, B. Brandom, Cambridge, MA, 2007; R. B. Brandom, *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*, Harvard Cambridge (MA), London, 1994; T. Nichols (ed.) *Thomas Kuhn*, *Contemporary Philosophers in Focus Series*, New York, Cambridge, 2002. Importantly, these approaches constitute ideal rather than natural kinds, which is to say that they merely reflect differences in what their proponents consider as the most vital philosophical problem at a moment. Notably, Brandom explains meaning by means of conceptual scheme, while reference is explained by stimulus. Willard Van Orman Quine, in turn, has married concept and stimulus (object) by means of the field metaphor (*Idem, Two Dogmas of Empiricism*, [in:] *From Logical Point of View*, Harvard, 1953), which, however, lead him to a form of utilitarianism alien to Peirce and all other realists. Contrast also Philip Kitcher's attempt to reconcile conceptualism with the problematic of reference with Larry Laudan's downright rejection of realism (L. Laudan, *Science and Values. The Aims of Science and Their Role in Scientific Debates*, Berkeley 1984; Philip Kitcher, *The Advancement of Science. Science without Legend, Objectivity without Illusions*, Oxford, New York–Oxford, 1993.)

in reaction to Thomas Kuhn's theses,[6] conceptualism has been propelled by the need to reconcile the idea of progress with the circumstance that scientific paradigms, and not just theories, tend to undergo profound transformations in the course of historical development. Essentially, conceptualism annuls the problem of reference by internalizing it; what passes for an object is being relativized to an (or the) inferential structure. As far as the universalist version of conceptualism is concerned, there is an infinite number of possible correct moves within the space of reasons, whereas efficient cognition and action requires that the choices be made as to the appropriate response in specific circumstances, in the pertinent domain at a given stage of development.[7] Only by means of an objective pressure behaviors which are seemingly correct, but in fact unproductive, can be curbed. In turn, the relativistic version of conceptualism, inspired by language-game theory, attempts to eliminate the problem by making correctness dependent upon specific paradigms and related habits. However, in so doing it creates another difficulty. What is unclear with regard to this view is where the presumed adaptive value of paradigms is drawn from; in fact, the question of validity cannot even be legitimately asked within this framework.[8] In other words, relativistic conceptualism generates the problem of self-reference, and appears to incapacitate our critical faculties as they are applied to the frames of reference upon which we operate.

To my mind, what is needed in order to overcome the above difficulties is a tripartite model of intelligibility and meaning, which links subject and object by means of a third element, whose nature requires careful examination. Peirce's conception of categories, as I shall demonstrate, appears to be provide exactly what is needed: it links intelligibility with creativity and self-regulation, and thus can help to explain both the specificity of paradigms and their inter-connectedness. In order to be able to fully appreciate it, however, we must establish what it means precisely for all the three categories to be m o d e s of experience and interaction, and not merely ideal presuppositions, prone to hypostatization.[9]

6   Or revived: conceptualism clearly has Neo-Kantian origins. Cf. S. P. Turner, *Explaining the Normative*, Cambridge 2010.

7   J. Habermas, *From Kant to Hegel: On Robert Brandom's Pragmatic Philosophy of Language*, transl. B. Fultner, [in:] *Truth and Justification,* Cambridge (MA) 2003, p. 131–73.

8   K.-O. Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, transl. G. Adey, D. Fisbey, Milwaukee 1998.

9   S. Turner, *Explaining the Normative*, op. cit.; J. Habermas, *From Kant to Hegel*, op. cit.

Peirce's conception of categories

According to Peirce, the totality of our experience can be analyzed along three basic dimensions ("categories"): Firstness (quality), Secondness (correlate, reference), and Thirdness (representation, organizing pattern, meaning).

As has been mentioned above, this tripartite model of phenomenological experience is foundational with respect to Peircean theory of signs as advanced in his later writings. It is predicated on the premise that each category of signs (icons, indices, and symbols) represents objects in some respect.[10] In other words, each category represents an object in a logically and phenomenologically distinct way. Firstness is a qualitative component; Peirce refers to it as "the ground." It is subordinated to the principle of likeness or resemblance (2.88): under this aspect, a sign and an object are similar to one another. In a word, Firstness refers to perceptual gestalts which allow for object recognition.

Secondness, in turn, represents an object with respect to its "correlate," that is, its reference. Secondness is associated with the function of index, and is characterized by such phenomenological features as being obstinate, objective, being an obstacle, a source of resistance, having the power of insistence (2.89). In other words, whereas Firstness brings with it a sense of immediacy, ease, and smoothness, Secondness introduces an element of pressure, urgency, originality, and resistance. Objects, as represented by indices, impose themselves on the subject, demand attention, precipitate a response.

The third category, Thirdness, associated with symbols in their function as "interpretants," endows experience with continuity, lawfulness, order, repeatability, regularity, predictability, and comprehensibility (and hence founds Peircean synechism). In a word, Thirdness is a space of meaning as it is experienced by participants. Clearly, when advancing his theory, Peirce was preoccupied with the goal of laying foundations for scientific reasoning, hence the emphasis on lawfulness as contributed by symbols. It has to be remembered, however, that while Thirdness is the necessary condition for thinking and reasoning, it has a much broader scope than scientific thought, as I hope will be made clear later on.

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[10] All references are taken from: Ch. S. Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, ed. Ch. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, vols. I–VI, Cambridge (MA) 1931–1935; *Idem*, *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, ed. A. W. Burkes, vols. VII–VIII, Cambridge (MA) 1958. The author uses electronic edition of the collection: *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce. Electronic Edition*, ed. J. Deely, 1994.

Importantly, the higher categories presuppose the lower level ones.[11] What this means is that (1) the function of index presupposes that whatever confronts us is of certain quality – an object without perceptual qualities is simply inconceivable; (2) the meaning presupposes that there is an object of certain quality, to which we can refer (1.557).

Another way to put it, suggested by Carl R. Hausman,[12] is to say that Firstness represents a monad, Secondness a dyad, and Thirdness a triad. Clearly, the order of determination runs counter to the order of presupposition ("prescission"): Secondness presupposes that an object has a certain quality, but does not determine it – whatever quality the object possesses is decided autonomously at the level of Firstness. The same goes for the relationship between Secondness and Thirdness: in order to make any sense at all, ideas and concepts (Thirdness) have to refer to something that is pre-determined under the aspect of Secondness and Firstness. Thirdness has ordering power with respect to Firstness and Secondness – in fact, it links the two – but it is, at the same time, circumscribed by the material as supplied by the remaining two categories. Simply put, there is not a meaning without an object, which has the power to affect the perceiver, and which can be interacted with.

Discourse-figure dynamics

Jean François Lyotard's conception of discourse-figure offers some further insight as to the possible relationship between the object (reference) and meaning.[13] In so doing, however, it generates problems in its own right. A brief recapitulation of Lyotard's analysis might prove instructive when it comes to proper understanding of Thirdness.

Essentially, according to Lyotard, a figure (object) is the driving force behind discourse (linguistic articulation). On this account, as far as human subjects are concerned, discourse is the only effective way to get to the figure understood as an object endowed with certain qualities and representing specific values:

> One can get to the figure by making clear that every discourse possesses its counterpart, the object of which it speaks, which is over there, like what it designates in a horizon: s i g h t o n t h e e d g e o f d i s c o u r s e . And one can get in the figure without leaving language

[11] Peirce calls this "prescission," and explains that: "The category of first can be prescinded from second and third, and second can be prescinded from third. But the second cannot be prescinded from first, nor third from second" (1.353).

[12] C. R. Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy*, Cambridge 1993, p. 31.

[13] J. F. Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, transl. A. Hudek, M. Lydon, Minneapolis, London 2011.

> behind, because the figure is embedded in it. One only has to allow oneself to slip into the well of discourse to find t h e e y e l o d g e d a t i t s c o r e, an eye of discourse in the sense that at the center of the cyclone lies an eye of calm. The figure is both without and within.[14]

Language (signification) is characterized by temporal order (intervals), discrete units and forward movement, whereas the figure (object) represents thickness of a material form, and spatial continuity. We may say that discourse has energy, whereas the figure has gravity.

Continuing with Lyotards's metaphor, discourse always "yearns" for the figure (object), which is always "out there" with respect to it, moving ever further along the horizon. It is this insatiable yearning that makes the language at once referential and inferential. The subject of discourse perpetually "chases" its object by producing ever newer categories and inference schemes, but whenever being on the verge of merging with the object, it realizes that there are other dimensions to it, which can be explored. In a word, the objects, being as they are multidimensional, can be given in many different and often conflicting ways. Therefore, there is indelible tension and the state of unrest involved in every contemplation of the object, which promotes discursive engagement with it.

Importantly, Lyotard's argument is not that the object is, in fact, outside the discourse; in other words, he does not succumb to dualism. Rather, the object's transcendence has to do with the fact that there is always a part of it which escapes articulation, and thereby provokes further efforts at explication and engagement. This part of discourse-figure is in full accord with Peircean presuppositions. But Lyotard does not stop there: to his mind, the above entails that the object is the drive ("libidinal energy") behind discourse, which the latter consistently fails to acknowledge. It is worth noting that, in making his point, Lyotard uses the same metaphor as Wittgenstein in *Tractatus* (5.632): discourse is likened to an eye that always looks ahead, but never attends to itself. Simply put, it is obvious to Lyotard that discourse is incapable of self-reference, and hence unable to contain or regulate its own urges. As we shall see below, this conclusion does not follow from Peircean model, in which Thirdness is the proper medium of human rationality and enables self-reference. It is hence imperative to explain what it is about Thirdness that permits self-reference and self-regulation without conjuring the spirit of dualism. As I shall demonstrate, Lyotard's fallacy has to do with the fact that he identifies Thirdness with language, whereas Peircean conception points instead to feeling-toned tacit models as its basic medium.

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 7.

Thirdness and affect regulation

As noted by Sandra Rosenthal,[15] Peirce was struggling with serious difficulties trying to frame his categorization in terms of logical distinction between particulars and universals: both Firstness and Secondness can be deemed to be particulars: Secondness points to the appearance of an object in specific spacio-temporal setting, whereas Firstness to its unique qualities.

What is even more troubling, however, is that, since all the three categories are experience-related, Thirdness must also be, at the same time, universal as a pattern of organization and particular with respect to specific experiences in which it is embodied. To complicate the matter even further, please note that all the three categories can also be considered under the aspect of universality. After all, the objects of sensory perception are organized along the lines of certain patterns (gestalts) transcending their spacio-temporal particularity, which is what guarantees object permanence and permits recognition.

Related to the above is the following question: what do Secondness and Thirdness amount to on phenomenological level? Answering this question is a critical task, especially if one wishes to avoid Lyotard's conclusions, as reconstructed above.

To my mind, it appears most fitting to assume that these three categories designate different combinations of features or dimensions of objects, as well as the types of responses to them on the part of the subject. More specifically, the difference between Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness can be readily explained by way of the distinction between perceptual gestalts (patterns of sensory qualities), reaction-producing emotional feelings, and action-regulating non-emotional and cognitive feelings.[16]

On this interpretation, Firstness points to sensory qualities of objects (combinations of shapes, colors, smells, and tactile impressions), and, by the same token, to the most rudimentary judgments (seeing something as something). Secondness, in turn, refers to objects' power of repulsion as well as of attraction (see below), and thereby to such emotional reactions as being driven toward something, or, conversely, frustrated, undermined, or challenged. In other words, Secondness, which operates through emotional feelings (affects), allows us to label (emotionally mark)[17] objects as given by Firstness in terms of their adaptive value. There is clearly an overlap between

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[15] S. Rosenthal, *Charles Peirce and the Firstness of Process*, [in:] *Knowledge and Value: Essays in Honor of Harold N. Lee*, ed. A. J. Reck, Hague 1972, p. 39–50.

[16] J. D. Laird, *Feelings: The Perception of Self*, Oxford 2007.

[17] See A. Bechara, A. Damasio, *The Somatic Marker Hypothesis: A Neural Theory of Economic Decision*, "Games and Economic Behavior," v. 52, 2005, p. 336–372.

Firstness and Secondness: what we sense (Firstness) is immediately classified as either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, which is the basis for more complex valuations (safe/threatening, good/bad, *etc*.), which are the province of Secondness.

Further, while Firstness, by itself, is not sufficiently simulating to produce a response, unmediated Secondness tends to be reactionary. As a matter of fact, Secondness, when stripped of the connection to Thirdness, gives very rudimentary responses, which are usually defensive in character, in the sense that they are aimed at the protection and accumulation of resources and possessions. Secondness is by nature adverse to novelty, and thus, if unmediated, may stand in the way of learning and development.

For the values as communicated by means of Secondness to be adaptive, they must serve the agent's long-term interests. The long-term interests, which provide the criteria of assessment, however, can only come into the equation via Thirdness, since it is Thirdness that gives us the necessary outlook upon our current situation, future prospects and the resources to take stock of. It is the clash between the object's perceived inertia and the agent's agenda that explains the motivating force of negative affect; conversely, the coincidence between agent's goals and the objective affordances explains the perceived gravity of certain objects. That is to say that while Secondness motivates specific moves, our being stimulated by particular occurrences can only be explained by reference to meaning and purpose as mediated by Thirdness, as it is the latter that decides what is vital overall and in given circumstances. Thirdness endows our experiences with the sense of orderliness, meaningfulness, and purposefulness by virtue of the fact that it allows us to find a nexus, or a standpoint, in a given problem-situation, from which possible trajectories of exploration can be seen. Thirdness is hence a form of universality enveloped in our specific experiences, where it acts as a vehicle for exploration.

According to Peirce, Secondness has to do with the "veto-power" of the world.[18] As indicated above, however, it makes much more sense to include both repulsive and attractive force of objects in this category. On the proposed interpretation, Secondness is the force released as a result of matching between what had been anticipated and what turned out to be the case. In other words, Secondness is the way in which one becomes alerted to the presence of potential obstacles in the way of achieving one's ends in specific circumstances, as well as to the presence of a goal within one's grasp. Simply put, it seems most reasonable to assume that Secondness comprises

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[18] J. Habermas, *From Kant to Hegel*, op. cit.

everything that signifies pivotal points in a pursuit and, by causing arousal, points the pursuer in the right direction.

The following example may be helpful in elucidating this point. A deer-hunter is motivated by the goal of tracking down and killing his prey. His understanding of this purpose, from which a general action-blueprint can be derived, is based in Thirdness, but the specific steps he has to take are, in a large part, suggested by Firstness and Secondness. When, for instance, the hunter sees the traces of hooves on the ground, he knows he is on the right track. If, however, no such traces are forthcoming, his motivation will eventually drop, and he is likely to give up the pursuit, despite being convinced of its overall purposefulness (Thirdness). On the other hand, if the hunter encounters both what appears to be traces left by a deer and scratches on a tree suggestive of the proximity of, say, a bear, he will be forced to resolve a resulting avoidance-approach conflict by recourse to Thirdness. He will have to reevaluate his position, and update his plans. He may, for instance, decide not to continue the pursuit in the given circumstances, and to resume the hunt when a better opportunity occurs. The same is likely to happen when the positive signs are found in an unexpected location; in this case, Secondness signals novelty (Peircean "originality") and, via affect, provides the energy needed to revise the plan (Thirdness).

The very idea of hunt, in turn, functions in the context of other vital ideas. It is well-known that, for hunter-gatherers, hunting was driven, in part, by mundane requirements of survival, and in part by religious needs. These kinds of networks, whose nexuses reflect points of intersection between different domains of existence, appear to be something that only humans are capable of creating and navigating.

What all this means is that the state of arousal as elicited by an encounter with the (sign of) the object, which needs to be channeled properly. In every pursuit, the pursuer must be at once energized, focused and directed. We can hence conceive of Thirdness as the level at which conflict resolution between different motivational systems, as well as novelty processing can take place. As it has just been hinted, the most critical among these conflicts is that between approach and avoidance. As John Gray and Neil McNaughton explain, this sort of conflict arises when an animal must overcome an obstacle without abandoning a goal. For example, behaviors suitable when "a rat must l e a v e an area where there is a cat are quite different from those that are appropriate when a rat must e n t e r an area where a cat has been or might be."[19]

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[19] J. Gray, N. McNaughton, *The Neuropsychology of Anxiety. An Enquiry into the Function of the Septo-Hippocampal System*, Oxford 2000.

In other words, the resolution of avoidance-approach conflict, which always takes place in the context of some pursuit, requires mental reorganization, which in humans may take very complex forms. In crises like this, pursuit must be suspended, but not given up entirely, so that the proper space for reevaluation can be granted. The reevaluation which is necessary for the reorganization (learning) works in the opposite direction to the very pursuit – we may say that it has "to-from", as opposed to "from-to," structure.[20] This form of looking inwards, which takes place within the bounds of pursuit, is one of the conditions of the possibility of successful exploration and is mediated by Thirdness.

Thirdness as a feeling

One question still remains, though: what does Thirdness actually feel like? As suggested, the distinction between emotional (affect) and non-emotional (pride, confidence, self-esteem, *etc.*) and cognitive (familiarity, knowing, "tip of the tongue"[21]) feelings may be of use in this regard. When explicating the concept of Thirdness, Peirce himself referred to such feelings – cognitive according to the above classification – as belief or doubt. As far as non-emotional feelings are concerned, Peirce was admittedly silent about them; it was William James who made this category central to his analysis of religious experience.[22] According to James, faith ("the state of assurance") is the necessary condition for successful dealings with the world. As he writes:

> Conceive yourself, if possible, suddenly stripped of all the emotion with which your world now inspires you, and try to imagine it a s i t e x i s t s, purely by itself, without your favorable or unfavorable, hopeful or apprehensive comment. It will be almost impossible for you to realize such a condition of negativity and deadness.[23]

Faith is clearly not an affect, since its role is not that of causing arousal. Rather, it signifies a rather permanent, if uneven, state of liveliness, of being able to cope with whatever comes one's way. In this sense, it underlies long-term endeavors, not specific actions.

In deciding if it is justified to include non-emotional feelings as components of Thirdness, one must proceed carefully, especially that, to put it

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[20] M. Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, Chicago, London 1966.
[21] J. D. Laird, *Feelings: The Perception of Self, op. cit.*
[22] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, New York, London, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras 1917.
[23] *Ibidem*, p. 147.

mildly, James's version of pragmatism did not impress Peirce.[24] Nonetheless, my take is that Peirce's conception presupposes non-emotional feelings, as well as permits further explication thereof.

Consider this: Peircean view entails that a massive doubt is impossible. We are always-already in the space of meaning as delineated by the threefold categorical system, which we cannot transcend even if we wanted to. What is more, as shown above, Thirdness is not merely a feature of specific beliefs, but being, as it is, the source of continuity, it underlies exploration by pointing to essential objects and events which are yet to materialize before us, and conceivable consequences of their presence (5.402). Hence, it is attached to the pursuit and its goal rather than the end-results (e.g., belief, disbelief). Further, one must not forget that Peirce advocated the view to the effect that one's is capable of direct perceptions of counterfactuals (such as past and future).[25]

In this light, Thirdness is that part of our life-form, which organizes and i s   e x p e r i e n c e d as organized: by means of it, sensory impressions and emotional feelings are weaved into a fabric of complex, fluctuating feeling-states (in the form of what phenomenologists refer to as prereflective awareness), which are ultimately named and expressed by intellectual constructs (concepts), but are not identical with the latter. Simply put, Thirdness denotes the organizing structure which links different facets of problem-situations – and, at higher levels, also the whole domains – and which become aware of in the process of embodied, *in actu* self-reflection. Specific intelligibilia (marked by specific cognitive states, such as "belief-that's") are experienced against the background of a generalized, prereflective sense of order, which opens up possibilities and opportunities.[26]

At the same time, Peircean conception of categories permits us to specify the contents of the "faith", which is necessary for any pursuit. The faith which is the source of meaningfulness and purposefulness is not a blind kind of faith, alien and resistant to reason, which takes the form of unsupported conviction to the effect that all we embark on will turn out all right, no matter what we decide to do. Rather, it is associated with our ability to anticipate what is to come and deal with it, and hence with a sense of intelligence (on

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[24] After 1905, Peirce famously changed the name of his conception from pragmatism to pragmaticism, to distance himself James and others (See R. Burch, *Charles Sanders Peirce*, [in:] *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/peirce, 13.01.2020.

[25] Ch. S. Peirce, *The Law of Mind*, "The Monist," v. 2, 1892, p. 259–533.

[26] Cf. Polanyi's distinction between focal and subsidiary awareness: *idem*, *Personal Knowledge. Towards post-Critical Philosophy,* London 1958.

the part of the subject) and intelligibility (on the part of the object), reinforced by any endeavor during which we prove to ourselves that we can overcome inevitable obstacles and are able to regroup, should our attempts fail.

Concluding remarks

As shown above, one of the apparently productive ways of bridging the gap between concept and stimulus is to do it by means of discourse-figure interplay. In this conception, Thirdness is what makes the object worthy of pursuit. Admittedly, this conception goes a long way towards reconnecting meaning with reference, which have been somewhat loosened by conceptualism, but does so at a rather high cost. In Lyotard's exposition, discourse, despite its apparent rationality, proves to be but a mindless urge for the union with the object, which can never be satiated. The dilemma as discussed in the introduction is hence reformulated rather than overcome: either concepts are bereft of motivating power, or become mere instruments at the hands of something they are incapable of grasping and fathoming. Peircean conception of categories shows that there is a better way to go about the problem.

According to Peirce's model as reconstructed above, Thirdness is, first and foremost, a map of possibilities, something that mediates our contacts with objects without severing the connection between ourselves and the world. It allows us to look at the object as signaled by Secondness from a multitude of perspectives, and thereby to come to know it, and ourselves, better, and to enlarge the scope of involvement as a result. Importantly, while Thirdness underlies thought, it does so by making it possible for the agent to function in "as-if," counterfactual mode during the very interaction with the object. In a word, it allows us to experience (directly perceive) what could be, not just what is.

Further, as shown by Michael Polanyi, it would be a mistake to maintain that what energizes pursuits is a blind urge for the union with the object. In fact, the exploration of hidden possibilities for action can be even more rewarding than goal-attainment or fusion with the object (consummation thereof) in themselves. This notion can be explicated by way of the distinction between consummatory (or exploitative) and explorative behaviors and drives.[27] Whereas the former are strictly related to specific goals, the latter are subordinated to the purpose of the transformation of the cognitive structure and perception, and thus to the goal of uncovering new ways of being and interacting.

[27] J. Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience. The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York 1998.

Notably, Jung classified both thought and feeling as rational faculties, at a difference with sensory and emotional experiences.[28] The rationale behind this is that both thought and feeling have power to put things on display. The agent can feel his way through the world, and hence track and monitor the changes he or she undergoes in the course of interaction with the object, whereby tacit models of subject-object relationships emerge, which ensure object permanence and subsequently come to provide a frame for future interactions.[29] In the end, these models become subjected to creative elaboration in both practical and intellectual domains. Circling back to the eye metaphor, we can say that though the eye admittedly cannot turn its gaze upon itself, it is nonetheless capable of an inner perception of its own activity, and hence of self-regulation.

All in all, it appears that there are no grounds to construe Thirdness as merely a matter of language. It would be more appropriate to state that Thirdness belongs at the level of semantic representational systems, as Merlin Donald calls these,[30] understood as a network of tacit models which organize our experience and conduct along the lines needs, interests, and capacities, and thus determine the kind of transactions with each other and other "objects" we are capable of.[31] From the stage of mimetic culture onward, the representational system becomes increasingly more complex and is itself rendered accessible to consciousness, allowing us to perceive things simultaneously from different perspectives. Crucially, this development is to do with what psychologists refer to as executive control system,[32] which serves the role of a switchboard, allowing for smooth transitions from one vantage-point and mode of action to another, and integration of these perspectives into both coherent and dynamic outlook on the situations we find ourselves in. On this interpretation, Thirdness is an organizing principle, by means of which our perceptual, emotional, and cognitive states are being put together into unfolding stories, thus linking the present moment with past events and future prospects.

Contrast this with Ruth Millikan's functionalist reading of Peirce's categorical system, which proposes that icons (Firstness) represent certain

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[28] C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, transl. H. G. Baynes, New Jersey 1971.

[29] A. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, New York 1999; *idem*, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, New York 2010.

[30] M. Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution and Culture and Cognition,* Cambridge (MA), London 1991.

[31] Cf. J. Habermas *The Theory of Communicative Action*, transl. T. McCarthy, vol. 1, Boston 1984.

[32] N. Spreng, *The Fallacy of a 'Task-Negative' Network*, "Frontiers in Psychology", vol. 3, 2012.

features of the environment to a certain agent, whereby the relationship between sign and reference – and more precisely, between a subject as an interpreter of a sign and an object as its referent – is established (index, Secondness) with regards to some critical biological need, value, or function (symbol, Thirdness).[33] On this account, meaning as carried by symbol is a natural, biological phenomenon.

Since we are biological creatures, it stands to reason to assume that Thirdness has something to do with adaptive values. Nonetheless, Millikan's interpretation downplays the fact that Thirdness is what supposedly allows us to travel across domains and paradigms, owing to the power to generate and perceive the "would-be's".

According to Donald's classification of cognitive cultures,[34] it is only at the level of episodic culture (to which mainly mammals belong) that something akin to Millikan's rendering would apply. In episodic culture, the quality and affect (Firstness and Secondness) appear to form unbreakable units, each reflective of a specific biological drive. An object causes arousal, which almost automatically activates specific behavioral programs (e.g. mating behaviors), based in its presumed function. In this type of circumstances, Firstness and Secondness are indeed connected by a third element (function or purpose), which can be conceived of as a precursor of Thirdness. The thing is that most mammals cannot establish conscious connections between different situations (episodes), and hence cannot creatively elaborate on their habits. This proto-Thirdness is hence paradigmatic, but not progressive.[35]

As mentioned earlier, both Firstness and Secondness, as well as even the simplest relationships between them, are patterned, and hence partake of universality. Universality of fully fledged Thirdness, however, lies elsewhere: thanks to Thirdness, one is able to establish communication among different experiences and hence to integrate them, which in turn enables prioritization and planning, thereby considerably increasing the power of self-regulation. Simply put, while other animals are condemned to constant repetitions, humans appear capable of progressive thought, which is built upon, but not reducible to, natural cycles.

Therein lies the solution to the problem of universality versus particularity as hinted at before. While l o g i c a l l y, all three categories have a say in how interactions are systematically structured, and hence partake

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[33] R. G. Millikan, *Language, Thought and Other Biological Categories,* Cambridge (MA) 1984.

[34] M. Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind*, *op. cit.*

[35] Note that in this light, language-game theory compounds the logic of episodic and post-episodic (mimetic, mythic, and theoretic) cultures.

of universality, unmediated Firstness and Secondness are indeed e x p e r i - e n c e d as particulars, in that their role is to confer a sense of uniqueness (Secondness) and specificity (Firstness) upon objects and episodes. By means of Thirdness, however, our experiences are being additionally endowed with t h e   s e n s e of inter-connectedness (continuity) among different objects and dimensions of experience (along both temporal and lateral planes), from which it follows that Thirdness is, at a difference with firstness and Second-ness, also p h e n o m e n o l o g i c a l l y related to universality, and thereby, to intelligibility.[36]

All in all, the relationship between meaning (sense) and reference should not be conceived of in terms of the interaction between thought or conceptual structure and stimulus, but rather in terms of the relationships between stimulus and tacit, embodied models, which confer higher-order qualities (feelings) upon our experience. The object's stimulating power is to do with Thirdness in that the latter constitutes the dynamic structure behind our drives and interests, both biological and otherwise, and thus produces values to the presence or absence of which Secondness alerts us. Importantly, our interests (motivational systems) are often in conflict, where the conflicts are also resolved by means of Thirdness; the integration of conflicting themes may in fact be considered as a critical force behind our conduct. Importantly, the order of prescission ensures that our basic categorical system does not constitute a closed loop: Secondness attracts or repulses, owing to its relation-ship with Thirdness, but our current understanding of objects or situations often proves insufficient when it comes to dealing with specific challenges. Thirdness, let me repeat it once more, allows us to uncover, or intuit, hidden possibilities, and hence design, master, and test new coping strategies. To put it in another way, Thirdness does not amount to knowledge or framework, but to the possibility or capacity for knowledge acquisition and develop-ment (the ideal community in Apel's sense).[37] In turn, the interplay between Thirdness (feeling-toned models) and Secondness (affects) ensures that the thought is both inferential and referential, and thus explains, among other things, the power of abduction construed as a creative process of hypothesis formation.   ∽

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[36] Note that construed along these lines, Thirdness, and by the same token, symbols/interpretants, cease to invite an intractable form of realism as regards universals. See J. Habermas, *Post-Metaphysical Thinking*, transl. M. Hohengarten, Cambridge (MA) 1992.

[37] See K.-O. Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, op. cit.

ANNA MICHALSKA

ANNA MICHALSKA – adiunkt w Instytucie Filozofii i Socjologii PAN. Zainteresowania naukowe obejmują filozofię nauki, w tym nauk społecznych, epistemologię, historię idei naukowych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem problematyki racjonalności.

ANNA MICHALSKA – PhD, assistant professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her main research interests include philosophy of the social and natural science, epistemology, history of scientific ideas, with an emphasis on the problematic of rationality.

ORCID: 0000-0002-2551-4556