

Review of *Charles S. Peirce. Selected Writings on Semiotics, 1894-1912*, edited by Francesco Bellucci, *Semiotics, Communication and Cognition*, Volume 21 (Paul Cobley and Kalevi Kull, editors), Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter Mouton.

The bizarre year of 2020 is turning to a bit of a treat for Peirce aficionados, with an arrival of several new editions of Peirce's writings in printed form. Among them is *Charles S. Peirce. Selected Writings on Semiotics, 1894-1912* (SWS), a collection of Peirce's late and previously unpublished writings masterly edited by Francesco Bellucci from the University of Bologna, and available in De Gruyter's *Semiotics, Communication and Cognition* series as its 21st volume. In addition, the first volume of the *Logic of the Future* trilogy, subtitled *History and Applications*, is an edition of Peirce's writings on existential graphs and is to be followed later in the year by two more editions in that department, *The 1903 Lowell Lectures* and *Pragmaticism and Correspondence*. These appear in De Gruyter's new *Peirceana* book series, which has been launched in 2020¹. The only remaining wish to bring the year to its well-deserved closure would be a jab from the Peirce Edition Project, as their much-awaited Volume 9 of the critical chronological edition *Writings of Charles S. Peirce* is reputedly nearing completion.

Peirce scholarship will without doubt be much accelerated by the appearance of the edition of Peirce's late writings on the theory of signs, a selection of texts from the vast textual mass of the last two decades of Peirce's life, which is not to be covered by the *Writings* for years or decades to come. The greatest obstacle to progress has been the lack of access to the central corpus covering Peirce's main areas of interest in a literary and scholarly form: collated, transcribed, critically edited, annotated and made widely

¹ The purpose of the *Peirceana* series is to provide a forum for the best current work on Charles Sanders Peirce's thought worldwide. Besides monographs, the series will publish thematically unified anthologies and edited volumes with a defined topical focus and untranslated English selections from the writings of this American polymath.

available. The present edition certainly redeems the promise of fulfilling those gaps, as far as Peirce's most mature views on semiotics are concerned. The edition also includes important pieces on logic and reasoning – undetachable from the theory of signs and speculative grammar as they are – and despite having manifest significance in Peirce's later thought, some have remained not only unpublished but virtually unacknowledged in the secondary literature.

Among the examples of such novelties one finds the selections on the status of speculative grammar around its later incarnations and reforms in the mid-1890s, the meaning of conditionals in the Schröder reviews (R 787), the early 1900 status of the theory of semiotics (e.g. excerpts from the *Minute Logic* and «Reason's Rules») and the revision of speculative grammar in Peirce's 1903 Lowell Lectures up to his final attempts at classifying signs during the last decade. In many instances Peirce's explorations in speculative grammar were to set the ground for his logical, philosophical, mathematical and methodological investigations that followed these preparatory matters, while in many others they constitute a field of semiotics worth exploring on its own terms, as it were.

The thematic editions of this sort not only quench the thirst of those having immediate scholarly needs caused by the lack of access to Peirce's mature texts. Bellucci's edition portrays a carefully selected, researched, transcribed and annotated standalone volume, with a valuable introductory essay and survey of the individual texts, annotations, editorial and textual notes, and the textual apparatus of emendations and alternations accompanying every selection. Such nearly critical, thematic volumes nurture the long-term study of Peirce's thought. Despite the bulk of Peirce's manuscripts being available online from the microfilm edition prepared in the 1960s, without such thematically researched collections it would be nearly impossible to agree even on what constitutes the key set of texts on, say, Peirce's semiotics, let alone to put to rest needless controversies caused by the lack of access to authorial evidence. Many of the items have also been this reviewer's favourites for a long time and it is a pleasure to see them finally published, fulfilling Peirce's goal to have many pieces of his work put together and interpreted in unison.

No doubt thematic collections reflect editors' own preferences and ideas on what the future of the scholarship should look like. Many of the eighteen selections included in the present edition are

referenced in the recent studies by Bellucci and others. The edition as such comprises some of the key textual evidence for the editor's arguments on Peirce's later theory presented in *Peirce's Speculative Grammar: Logic as Semiotics* (Routledge, 2017). Its production was in fact largely prompted by the need to have a clear idea of what constitutes the key corpus of Peirce's doctrine of speculative grammar and its progress especially throughout the later years.

The selections, organised chronologically, represent some of the most important signposts in Peirce's mature development of semiotics, highlighting his contributions to the analysis of propositions and assertions, the method of classifying signs, and the nature of reasoning. Even so, the items selected in the book resist repeating what has been published before, even by Peirce himself, and rather complement, or even supplant, those earlier snippets and better-known papers that have contributed to the received wisdom, especially those that appeared in the *Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce* from the 1930s in distorted and unorganised form. For one thing, as the numerous divisions of signs, and the speculative grammar overall, were something of a prelude to the theory of logic, foundations of mathematics and methodology of science, excerpts on them are to be read not in isolation but in the context of the wider picture of the logic of science, human inquiry and pragmatism, which Peirce wanted to paint in the later years of his life. Editorial introduction, brief surveys of the texts, and extensive editorial notes added to each selection guide the reader well in this regard.

There is little more one could hope to be accomplished by useful editions of this kind. Pointing out what has not been included in it would be all too easy, as the material available in the Peirce Papers from his later years is simply overwhelming. One could point at a roughly 5-year gap from 1896 until 1901 in which there are no items included in the collection, which does not mean that Peirce was inactive in his semiotic studies during those interim years. Concerning most of what has been included in the eighteen selections, the archives possess a number of additional and alternative versions, both discrete and non-discrete, and often of considerable length, that could have been included in the volume to complete the picture of Peirce's thought. Here, each selection is rather an aperture to those wider vistas that only the entire *Nachlass* can open.

Among the most important lessons of Peirce's semiotics is to be

able to answer the “most vexed of questions” concerning the nature of propositions. One should highlight Peirce’s account, included in Selection 15, «The Rationale of Reasoning» (R 664, late 1910), of distinguishing assertions from propositions by the former being «no more than it is the intention of the Utterer to declare», while a proposition is «any product of language which has the form that adapts it to installing belief into the mind of the person addressed, supposing him to have confidence in its utterer» (pp. 288-289). Something similar appears earlier in the year, in «How to Define, 4th Draught» (R 646, January 1910), in the context of the definitions of the three signs of logic that denote connections between propositions. Here it is the sign of inclusion (or the copula, as in “M implies N”), of which Peirce states that it «stands to “M therefore N” in somewhat the same sort of relation as the nominal description of an act, such as “The murder of Abel by Cain”, stands to the more vitalized assertion of the same act, “Abel was murdered by Cain”», concluding that «“M therefore N” expresses a living procedure of the utterer’s reason, while “M implies N” only asserts that such inference, if it were drawn, could never carry the reasoner from Truth into Error. In doing this it manifests the Utterer’s living effort to make the interpreter believe this: “the logical inclusion of M under N” would not have even this much life; it only *refers* to the inclusion, as something that might be without asserting its existence». This was Peirce’s reason, as he was looking back to it in 1910, to define the copula in the way he did already in his 1880 «Algebra of Logic», and how to distinguish it from the relations of reasoning from premises to conclusions and those given by nominal descriptions.

Interest in such issues has been resurfacing in contemporary philosophy of language and philosophy of logic, and Peirce is seen to suggest useful distinctions and definitions that have been proposed or rediscovered only much later if at all. At all events, one is thrown back to logic from the standpoint of semiotic considerations. Peirce’s theory is far from being merely of historical interest. Indeed, as Bellucci’s edition aptly demonstrates, the principal question of logic is to embark on the definition of sign, without which the theory of logic would not get off the ground. In Peirce’s words, «logic is merely the science of ideas considered as signs» («Logic Notebook», R 339, September 8, 1908). The clarification of the role of signs in context, and especially the nature and status of the theory

of speculative grammar, are thus of utmost importance to be gotten right at the outset.

There is little to be criticised in either the form or substance of the presentation of the selected texts. I would give Selection 5 (R 7, «On the Foundations of Mathematics») a somewhat earlier date of late 1901 (it belongs e.g. to R 501), thus preceding Selections 3 (R 425, from the «Minute Logic») and 4 (R 599, «Reason's Rules»). Perhaps the only disadvantage is that the book has no index.

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