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When Peirce's philosophy is approached in terms of his theory of meaning, it is usual to think of the connections between the pragmatic maxim and the more reductive accounts of classical empiricism or modern operationalism. The point of this paper is to suggest that this angle of approach is narrow and makes several aspects of Peirce's philosophy difficult to understand; on the positive side, I want to show how both the glories and miseries of Peirce's philosophical endeavor are thrown into high relief by noting his affinities and breaks with Hegel's dialectical theory of meaning. Peirce himself often pointed to his similarities with Hegel, citing in various contexts Hegel's genius for triadic structures, his denial of the unknowable, and his insistence on the principle of continuity. All of these themes appear in the treatment of meaning in both Peirce and Hegel, not merely as isolated doctrines, but as essential aspects of their systematic thinking.

The significance of these Hegelian themes in Peirce becomes clearer when two different kinds of theoretical concern about meaning are distinguished. In a way analogous to Aristotle's two statements of the problem of metaphysics, we may be interested either in (1) meaning qua meaning, or (2) the highest or prime instance of meaning. In the pursuit of (1), we can focus either on the minimal conditions that something must meet in order to be meaningful, or on a method of saying what the meaning(s) of something is. It is this approach to meaning that seems characteristic of most philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition. Inasmuch as Peirce was American and spoke of a criterion or method for establishing meaning, it may sound strange to say that the second concern was of at least equal importance for him. Yet, when we recall the significance that he himself attached to the ultimate opinion of the scientific community and his attempt to discern an ultimately satisfactory goal that can be *the meaning* of scientific and ethical activity (which for Peirce tended to coincide), this approach becomes a bit more plausible. Precisely at this point, those of a reductive empiricist persuasion may be tempted to reply that there is a great difference between talking about the meaning of a scientific theory or a proposition, and considering the meaning of science, morality, or life. There may be differences, but surely one of Peirce's more daring philosophical ventures was his proposal of a general theory of meaning that claims that there are also far-reaching similarities and that the minimal or "garden variety" cases of meaning must be understood in terms of the highest instances.

The last statement and Peirce's general similarities with Hegel on this issue appear when we consider that meaning is construed as a form of purposive activity. To mean something is essentially to have an intention to do something, or to mean to do something. Purposive activity admits of a va-

riety of gradations in terms of its effectiveness and internal plausibility. Some purposes, when explicated, are revealed as self-defeating or hopelessly contingent on a variety of circumstances; others are seen to be self-certifying, as in the case of trying to think, while some may even be such as to strengthen themselves through activity or be applicable to all possible situations. Both Peirce and Hegel believed that a rational analysis of meaning reveals not only its minimal feature as purposive activity but also discloses an ascending hierarchy of ever more realizable, successful, and widely applicable purposes.

The elementary structure of meaning, which is the basis of its higher instances, appears in both Peirce's and Hegel's criticism of the idea of immediate meaning. Peirce saw that the fault of all forms of intuitionism is the failure to see that thought involves signs, which themselves involve a triadic relation between object, sign, and interpretant. When it is thought that there are basic units of immediate meaning (whether conceived as sensible or rational intuitions), it is supposed that there is an immediate identity between what something is in itself, how it is presented to someone, and how it is taken or understood by someone. Yet to suppose such an immediate identity must also be to suppose something so hermetically self-enclosed that it is undescribable, unknowable, and therefore meaningless.[1] The alternative to immediacy is cognition by means of signs; signs are species of thirds and involve purposive activity. In sense certainty, I want to mean just this immediate presentation; but my meaning (meinen) is only mine and wildly indeterminate because I refuse the mediation of all concepts.[2] Both the intuitionism described by Peirce and the sense certainty analyzed by Hegel fail to see their own purposive structures; they reject the notion that they are trying to get anywhere, and therefore also reject all forms of mediation. But the consequence of this rejection is the experience of failure: intuitionism is caught up in an infinite regress of self-justifications, and sense certainty, by attempting even a minimal form of articulation, finds itself to be abstract and indeterminate. In other words, each finds out that it is not what it intended to be.

The lesson drawn by both Peirce and Hegel is that the failure of the project of immediate meaning to realize its purpose comes just from the fact that it does not face up to its own purposive character. The weakest form of meaning, then, is the sort destined to have a realization quite contrary to its own intention. One useful result of adopting the pragmatic maxim is that we can judge such attempts at meaning by their fruits rather than by their often self-serving accounts. There is also a positive suggestion that emerges from this critique. The desire for realization or consequences that are really appropriate to the intentions we have is not hopeless; it can proceed to dis-

1. This is a drastically abbreviated statement of Peirce's demonstration, repeated throughout his work, that meaningful thought or discourse always involves signs or thirds. The locus classicus is in Peirce's papers of 1868 (CP5.135ff.).

2. Hegel's text is replete with puns on "meinen" and its derivatives that suggest that in trying to mean something in a purely immediate way, I do not get beyond me or the merely mine (*Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. Baillie [New York: Macmillan, 1931], 149-160.)

cover, not by postulating an immediate identity but by surveying the various forms of purposive activity, which ones have a chance of success. For Peirce, this is the search, in regard to any proposition, for "that form in which the proposition becomes applicable to human conduct, not in these or those special circumstances, nor when one entertains this or that special design, but that form which is most directly applicable to self-control under every situation, and to every purpose" (*CP* 5.427). For Hegel, it is the quest for that meaning in which "appearance becomes identified with essence," truth with certainty, or realization for us coincides with what it takes itself to be in itself.[3] Hegel distinguished this achieved identity of meaning from the illusions of immediacy by designating it as an identity in difference. Peirce was interested in discovering a sign or a sign process in which sign, object, and interpretant are all appropriate to one another and yet distinct; they are neither immediately identical nor wildly disparate. It was in symbolic meaning that Peirce found the possibility of such a realized identity, for symbolic meaning involves concepts and habits whose working out is continuous with their intentions.

An apparent divergence between the Peircean and Hegelian approaches is likely to come to mind at this point and needs to be accounted for. Peirce seemed to be interested in the absolute or ultimate meaning of propositions, whereas Hegel seemed to be seeking the single or unique meaning of all human activity. Inasmuch as propositions are unlimited in number, there appears to be no single absolute meaning for Peirce, but only an absolute meaning of *P*. This would be consistent with the usual contrast drawn between the pluralistic or pragmatic temper and the speculative tradition. I think that the disparity is not so great. Peirce's treatment of the absolute meaning of a proposition refers us to the process of self-control; the absolute meaning of *P* is those habits of conduct which *P* suggests in the context of an ultimately self-sufficient form of purposive activity. Peirce's theory of self-control is an attempt to spell out those forms of conduct that realize their purposes by overcoming all forms of otherness.[4]

The last point suggests that there may be a closer connection between Peirce's conception and practice of philosophy and his view of meaning than is sometimes suspected. Philosophy itself is one of the higher forms of purposive activity and self-control; as such, it does not simply contain a theory about absolute meaning but it is an important constituent of the realization of absolute meaning. Here the similarities with Hegel's view of philosophy as the culmination of spirit's development are striking. On the view that I am claiming is common to both, philosophy not only is capable of critically discriminating among various grades of purposive activity, but also appears itself as the most valid form of purposive activity that issues from the inquiry. While Hegel was more explicit on this point, it is revealed clearly in Peirce's practice. Consider for a moment the argument of "The

3. *Ibid.*, 131-145.
4. *CP*8.139.

Fixation of Belief." There Peirce began with an initial statement of a purpose, fixing belief, which is, presumably, widely shared. His inquiry has to do with ascertaining the method, or mode of purposive activity, that will most successfully realize the purpose. The inadequate methods all frustrate their own purposes by generating doubts that they cannot resolve. The unique position of the scientific method is due to its applicability under all circumstances and its ability to be self-reflective. The scientific method—of which philosophy is not only an instance, but the self-reflective component—is, then, both the method of inquiry employed here and the uniquely valid form of meaning that was sought. Yet, although one often finds this pattern in the structure of Peirce's arguments and in his all too brief accounts of critical self-control, it does not seem to be officially recognized in his description of philosophy as a positive science of experience.[5] In one sense of the last phrase, philosophy is a kind of second that must respond to the contents of experience, whatever they may be. Yet if we catch the Hegelian overtones of this phrase, we will focus on the cumulative aspect of experience and philosophy as its self-critical outcome.[6] A clearer emphasis of this sort by Peirce might have eliminated many of the distressing suggestions in his system to the effect that Thirdness is ultimately reduced to Secondness; and a more conscious attempt at dialectical inquiry might have freed Peirce from some of the embarrassments consequent to his rigid ethics of terminology.

Peirce's relation to Hegel was obviously complex and includes much that is not discussed above. Nonetheless, it is interesting to observe that Peirce's situation shares in the ambiguity of some other great philosophers of the nineteenth century whose ostensible criticisms of Hegel often mask their deep dependence on his thought. Just as Kierkegaard individualized the dialectic and Marx transposed it into socioeconomic history, Peirce gave us a natural-scientific version of what aimed at being simply science überhaupt. If we are to find a difference that makes a difference between these two quests for absolute meaning, it may be in an element that Peirce borrowed for philosophy from the natural sciences (with perhaps some debt to Kant). This is the view of truth or absolute meaning as a regulative ideal to be sought by an open-ended, self-critical activity. The contrast with both the traditional view of an eternal truth to be grasped directly, and the skeptical antithesis that it has always generated, is obvious. Hegel's innovation in the tradition was to see the absolute as a result to be achieved only through purposive activity ("the effort of the concept"). Peirce's apparent break with Hegel lies in his separation of the search after absolute meaning from any one of its concrete embodiments, and, a fortiori, from the actual science or philosophy of the present. Tempting as this contrast is, I think it will have to be softened when we take into account the following: Peirce's claim to have found, in the pragmatic maxim, the *form* of all intellectual meaning;

5. *CP*1.184, 241.

6. Hegel sometimes described his *Phenomenology of Mind* as the "science of the experience of consciousness" (p. 144).

Hegel's refusal to prophesy about the course of history or philosophical inquiry; and the ineluctable contrast, for both, of the mediated structure of absolute meaning and the contingent materials and circumstances in which it is embodied.[7]

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