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Charles Sanders Peirce and Coimbra

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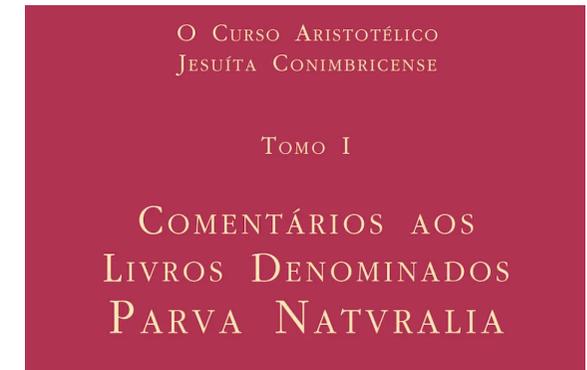
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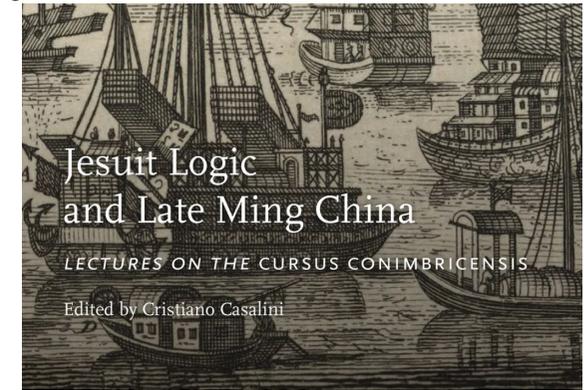
🕒 September 11, 2020



Mário Santiago de Carvalho

A NEW PUBLICATION

Charles S. Peirce, “one of America’s greatest and most original thinkers” (Gaines 2018), was born in Cambridge, MA, in 1839. Peirce began his studies at college in 1855 and graduated in 1859, when he started to work for the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, where his assignments included measuring the intensity of the earth’s gravitational field using swinging pendulums, often designed by him. In 1863, Peirce obtained a bachelor of science degree in chemistry. In 1873, Peirce was nominated member of Washington’s Philosophical Society, and in 1877, he was elected to be a member of the National Academy of Sciences. In 1879, Peirce began teaching Logic at Johns Hopkins University, a second job he kept until 1884. Meanwhile, in 1880, Peirce was elected a member of the London Mathematical Society. During this period (79-84), when Peirce occupied his only academic position, he had various students who happened to make a name for themselves, such as Christine Ladd-Franklin, Thorstein Veblen and John Dewey. After Peirce lost the Johns Hopkins job, he was left with his job – which came to an end in 1891 – at the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, plus the twofold task of composing entries for the *Century Dictionary* and writing book reviews for the *Nation*. *Inter alia*, Peirce, who never finished a book, was a philosopher, an inventor, experimental psychologist, historian of science and expert in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, cartography, and metaphysics, whose writings – which extend over around six decades, from the late 1850s until his death in 1914, in Milford, PA – amount to over ninety-thousand pages: about twelve-thousand published plus eighty-



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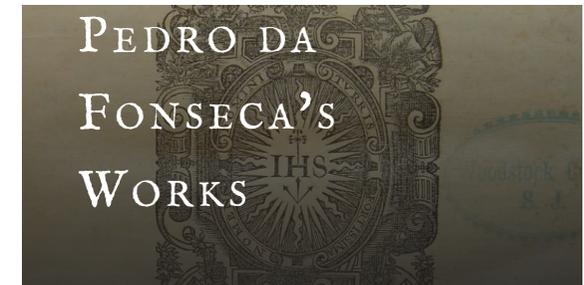
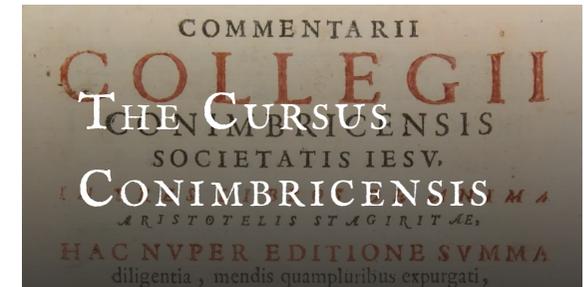
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thousand manuscripts. After Peirce's death, his unpublished manuscripts were bought by the Department of Philosophy at Harvard University. Anyhow, Peirce published on a vast collection of topics, and this material got spread among various publication media.

The best way to make acquaintance with Peirce's publications is through anthologies and collections. Let us list some examples: *a) The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce (CP)*, an 8-volume collection first edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss and then by Arthur Burks, started being printed over one decade after Peirce's death. Even though the *CP* played a vital role in the dissemination of Peirce's legacy, being "for half a century the only published source for many important papers" (Hoopes 1991: 4), the texts were not arranged chronologically; for this reason, Peirce's thinking came to look "much more obscure than it really is" (Burch 2018)); *b) in the 1980s, Max Fisch and Edward Moore – from the Peirce Edition Project, formed at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis in 1976 – began to publish a chronological edition of a selection of Peirce's works: the Writings of Charles S. Peirce: a Chronological Edition. After publishing seven – out of thirty predicted – volumes, this undertaking remains in fieri; c) Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce was edited by James Hoopes and published in 1991 by the University of North Carolina Press. This anthology is devoted to providing a general overview to Peirce's writings on semiotics, and it is aimed at showing that the*



doctrina signorum is at the center of Peirce's philosophy. There are excellent and open resources for organizing research on the published works of Charles Sanders Peirce, as well as facilitating access to secondary studies. E.g., a) in 2012, Kenneth Laine Ketner edited *The Published Works of Charles Sanders Peirce*, which include *A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Published Works of Charles Sanders Peirce with a Bibliography of Secondary Studies*, published in book format in 1986; b) Mats Bergman, Sami Paavola & João Queiroz created and maintain *Commens. A Digital Companion to C. S. Peirce* which includes not only a Dictionary and an Encyclopedia, but also a vast bibliographic database of secondary studies on Peirce; c) in 1996, the Peircean Studies Group (GEP, in Spanish) published the "Peircean Bibliography" (*Bibliografía Peirceana*), a very complete and up-to-date – last update in December 2019 – resource, including primary and secondary sources, as well as a third section devoted to Peirce's works translated to and secondary studies in Spanish. From over eighty-thousand pages handwritten by Peirce, about a third has been published. Numbers confess the insufficiency of the published writings of C. S. Peirce in the face of the nearly fifty-thousand unpublished pages – approximately one half of Peirce's (mainly mature) work – available in Houghton Library. The ubiquity of this material in the Boston metropolitan area demonstrates the need for ongoing research.

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Coimbra and Peirce

North-American philosophy was bolstered with the doctrines of the Jesuits. The penetration of the Coimbra Jesuits in the United States of America (USA) can be examined through the paradigmatic case of Charles Sanders Peirce. The extent to which Peirce was affected by the Coimbra Jesuits has not yet been researched. However, it is known that Peirce was acquainted with the *Coimbra Jesuit Aristotelian Course* (CJAC). One acknowledged antecedent of Peirce's philosophical thinking was Pedro da Fonseca, the Portuguese Aristotle (See Beuchot 2007). Fonseca was a canonical logician whose institutional prestige permeated the entire cultural tissue of the Society of Jesus, as well as one of the most distinguished intellectuals among the groundbreaking developers of semiotics, i.e., "the general study, science or doctrine of signs" (Beuchot and Deely 1995: 541). Fonseca was Couto's mentor as well. Couto was the key mediating element between Fonseca and Peirce. By interpreting the Conimbricenses' treatise on logic, Peirce was rendering - i.e., inheriting from and becoming more like - Couto, and through him, Fonseca, whose pupil is recognized to have initiated 17th-century publications on the general study of signs. Couto's treatise - "one of the major pieces in the puzzle of how to see the Latin Age of philosophical development as a whole in its own right, not merely as a lengthy footnote to or development in function of the ancient Greek

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heritage” (Deely 2001: 10) – may have been a fundamental source not only for Peirce but also for other notable thinkers, such as João Poinot who was thinking in the wake of Pedro da Fonseca, and “as a student in Coimbra, (...) would have had read the Jesuit’s treatise” (Carvalho 2019b). Because Peirce read Couto, Fonseca’s *magnum opus* (See Fonseca 1964) was not unknown to him. Fonseca is mentioned in Couto’s treatise, where the author declared that the omissions relating to Aristotle’s *Topica* and the corresponding interpretation in the Coimbra Logic result from the fact that Fonseca had already prepared a masterful summary in his *Dialectical Institutions* (published in Lisbon in 1564), an exordium to logic that, as the facts came to show, “would be hugely successful in many European university centers until the middle of the 17th century” (Martins 2019).

The measure of Fonseca’s impact on Peirce’s works may be difficult to unravel if we concede that the connection between them was not immediate. Not only Couto’s *doctrina signorum* but his whole treatise on logic is a medium for interpreting the lengthy train of the repercussions of Fonseca’s project on the history of philosophy. Fonseca’s (at least partial) orchestration of the [*Cursus Conimbricensis*](#) remains undisputed, and this is a key to explaining the intersections between his works and those of thinkers such as Peirce and Poinot. After all, it is unlikely that Peirce read Fonseca’s *Dialectical Institutions*. Peirce’s Conimbricity could not be genuinely linked to

Coimbra if descent from Fonseca was not taken to form an earnest hypothesis, after considering that the Portuguese Aristotle was a professor in Coimbra who stimulated and preconditioned the making, not only of the Coimbra Logic but the entire *Cursus*. The Conimbricenses were a source of Peirce's pragmatic philosophy. John Doyle said Peirce was "very familiar" with the Conimbricenses (Doyle 2001: 21); throughout the decades, this exceptional North-American philosopher continued to rely on them.

Surprisingly, one hand has more than enough fingers to count the researchers who, albeit superficially, addressed the relationship between Peirce and the Coimbra Jesuits. Up until now, there have been just four men: John Deely, John Doyle, Mário Santiago de Carvalho, and Mauricio Beuchot (Beuchot and Deely 1995; Deely 2001; Doyle 2001; Beuchot 2007 [originally published in 2006]; Carvalho 2018, 2019a, and 2019b). The missionary attitude of the Society of Jesus, plus the extension of the Portuguese empire, caused the works of the Coimbra Jesuits to be studied all around the world. The *Conimbricenses'* presence in China is paradigmatic (See Carvalho 2019b). It did not seem improbable to Carvalho (2018: 22) that pivotal players of the Western philosophical, cultural and scholarly scene, such as René Descartes, John Locke, Wilhelm Leibniz, Karl Marx (See Carvalho 2020) or Charles Sanders Peirce had contacts with the Conimbricenses. The Conimbricenses were a source in the intellectual evolution of Charles Sanders Peirce. However, we do not know to

what extent Peirce relied on the Coimbra Jesuits. Nevertheless, some of Peirce's references to the Coimbra Jesuits have already been detected. Beuchot and Deely (Beuchot and Deely 1995: 552n35; Beuchot 2007: n3) noted the following: 'Some Historical Notes,' *circa* 1893-5, where Peirce manifested awareness about the historical importance of the Coimbra Jesuit Logic. As Beuchot and Deely (Beuchot and Deely 1995: 552n35; Beuchot 2007: n3) may have noticed, Peirce could be thinking of the Coimbra Jesuits even when he was not distinctly thinking of or unambiguously mentioning them. This is due to what Peirce wrote: "For Thomistic Logic, I refer to Aquinas, to Lambertus de Monte whose work was approved by the Doctors of Cologne, to the highly esteemed Logic of the Doctors of Coimbra, and to the modern manual of [Antoine] Bensa" (Peirce 1933a: para. 27). Doyle (2001: 28n60) pointed to some among Peirce's pieces of writing: *a*) a lecture on logic, written in 1883, in which Peirce invites his students to "dip into" the medieval controversy about "whether logic is an art or a science" by "looking over the Commentary of the Conimbricenses" (Peirce 1989: 509); *b*) 'Abstractive,' an 1867 manuscript dictionary entry in which Peirce uses the Coimbra Jesuits' treatise on the soul to give an account on 'abstractive knowledge' as "the cognition of a thing not as it is present; for example, the knowledge by which I know Socrates when absent, and that by which an astronomer in the house considers an eclipse which he does not observe, supposing that he knows that at that time the earth is between the moon and the sun. And also, that by which the

philosopher from creatures knows that God is. For although these cognitions are directed to the thing as to its existence, yet they are not so directed to it that the presence of their object is discerned”; he points to “Conimbricenses, De Anima, lib. 2, cap. 6, qu. 3, art. 1” (Peirce 1984: 117); and *c)* ‘That These Conceptions Are Not so Modern as Has Been Represented,’ also written in 1867, where Peirce declared the vim of Port Royal’s doctrine to be contained in Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. Afterwards, to exemplify the legacy of the scholastics, he mentioned the Conimbricenses: “It would seem, indeed, that the tree of Porphyry involves the whole doctrine of extension and comprehension except the names. Nor were the scholastics without names for these quantities. The partes subjectives and partes essentials are frequently opposed; and several other synonyms are mentioned by the Conimbricenses” (Peirce 1932c: para. 391). In 1902, Peirce referred to the Conimbricenses’ treatise on logic no less than three times (including ‘Perseity and Per Se’ (Peirce 1935)). Doyle (28n61) detected the following: *a)* ‘Predication,’ where Peirce points to “Conimbricenses in Praef. Porph., q.i. art. 4” (Peirce 1932a: para. 361) immediately after giving two examples of ‘identical predication; *b)* ‘Fallacies’ – cited by Doyle –, where Peirce and Christine Ladd-Franklin wrote that, due to “the neglect of fallacies by the more scientific logicians, it is not easy to cite many who define the fallacy correctly. The Conimbricenses (than whom no authority is higher) do so”, and pointed to “Commentarii in Univ. Dialecticam Arist. Stagir., In lib. Elench., q. i. Art. 4” (1932b: para. 613). The Coimbra Jesuits were a source of Charles S. Peirce: this

much is transparent. However, how great an impact did their *Cursus* have on the North-American philosopher? This can only be ascertained up to a certain extent without frequenting the Houghton Library. What we have discovered is that *a)* in 1902, Peirce wrote ‘Perseity and Per Se,’ where he invites the reader to see “Conimbricenses in I. Anal. Post., iii”, right after informing about a “great controversy” that there was “between the Thomists on the one hand and the Scotists with the Nominalists on the other, as to whether, in the above definition [A proposition is known per se if, and only if, it is cognoscible from its own terms but not cognoscible in any other way], the word “terms” was to be taken *objective* or *formaliter*” (Peirce 1935: para. 385); *(b)* in ‘Proposition,’ *circa* 1894, Peirce appealed to the Coimbra Jesuits’ authority in the following manner, straight after reprimanding Karl von Prantl’s view about the authorship of the commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* attributed to Thomas Aquinas being spurious: “How is it that men of such learning as the doctors of Coimbra should get no wind of the substitution?” (See Peirce 1933b: para. 38); and *c)* Peirce mentions “Sebastianus Contus” [Sebastião do Couto], the author of the Conimbricenses’ Logic, in ‘A Practical Treatise on Logic and Methodology,’ which is revelatory of the Coimbra Jesuit’s value for his understanding of Scotist Logic: “... [Sebastião do Couto] has acutely observed that although Scotus and his school profess to regard logic as a purely speculative science yet in their whole method of treatment of it, they show that they really consider it in a practical point of view; and the same may be said of

most of the other writers who term it a purely speculative science” (Peirce [1869-70]). Though Peirce also handled the Conimbricenses’ treatise on the soul, written by Manuel de Góis, Baltasar Álvares, and Cosme de Magalhães, it is highly tempting to maintain that the Coimbra Jesuit Logic should be Peirce’s key Coimbra source, as well as a valuable work in the history of semiotics. Peirce may have taken from Couto’s theory to establish his notable definition of the sign – e.g., as “something determined by something else, its Object, and itself influencing some person in such a way that that person becomes thereby mediately influenced or determined in some respect by that Object” (Peirce 2019) –. The ultimate purpose of Couto’s *doctrina signorum* is “to make reality, as a whole, semiotically accessible to humans” (Carvalho 2019a); in other words, to make reality be based on interpretation, thus granting humans semiotic awareness, i.e., access to the future – “... reality consists in the *future*” (Peirce 2020c) – via signs. In 1904, Peirce wrote a letter to Lady Welby in which he formulated his opinion on the eminent value of reaching reality semiotically. According to him, “the highest grade of reality is only reached by signs; that is by such ideas as those of Truth and Right and the rest” (Peirce 1958: para. 327). Peircean signs work not to trigger efficient relations – i.e., “... not to set them into action...” –, but “to render inefficient relations efficient” by setting up a habit, i.e., a law – such as all the laws of physics, which are “habits that we must impute to nature to render it scientifically intelligible” (Fernández 2010: 3) – by which such relations will act or tend to act when necessary (Peirce

1958: para. 332). Semiotic access to reality is enabled by means of an insular feeling, quality or unanalyzed total impression (firstness), plus the experience of resistance, reaction, purposeless action, ineffective relation or sustained effort (secondness), and mentality, mediation or the transcendence of the mere brute fact by the introduction of a mental element in the relation (thirdness) (See *Ibid.*). It would be opportune to compare not only the Peircean account of the triadic structure of the sign – “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Peirce 1932d: para. 228) – with the fundamental idea of the Coimbra Jesuits’ Logic – the following definition: “[a] sign is what represents something to a knowing power” (Couto 2001: 39) –, but also other aspects of Peirce’s semiotics with the Conimbricenses’ sign doctrine, grounded on the questions raised by the latter. There are five central questions: “(1) On the nature and conditions common to signs; (2) On the divisions of signs; (3) On the signification of spoken words and of writing; (4) Whether concepts are the same among all and whether spoken words are different; then (5) Whether some concepts in our minds are true or false, and others devoid of truth and falsity” (Doyle 2001: 17). The research into the impact of the Coimbra Jesuits on the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce requires starting a systematic endeavor from scratch. Otherwise, it will not be possible to give a reliable account of the significance of the Conimbricenses throughout Peirce’s intellectual journey. Even though the American philosopher might have only once referred to Sebastião do Couto by name, and not more

than ten times to the *Cursus*, such references are already evocative of the continual and scholarly use that Peirce made of the Conimbricenses' treatises. The Coimbra Jesuits may be fundamental for a better understanding of Peirce's semiotics (by employing the term 'semiotics,' we refer to the "broader sense" of the term "logic" found in 'Dyads,' written in (c.) 1896, i.e., "general semeiotic" (Peirce 1931: para. 444); according to Peirce, "Logic is [...] synonymous with semeiotic, the pure theory of signs" (2020a)). There are some clues in Carvalho, Deely, and Doyle. Carvalho (2019a) suggested that there is a connection between Couto and Peirce regarding the division of logic into two modes or levels: *docens* (theoretical) and *utens* (practical) (according to Peirce, every reasoner has a *logica utens* – i.e., "some general idea of what good reasoning is" (1932d: para. 186) –, which is distinct from the *logica docens*, i.e., "the result of the scientific study" (1932e: para. 204)); Deely recognized the importance of the Conimbricenses' *Dialectica*, particularly their *doctrina signorum*, by stating that it is "a missing link (...) in understanding the postmodern development of semiotics after C. S. Peirce" (2001: 12); Doyle affirmed that Peirce "was familiar with their [the Conimbricenses'] sign doctrine, and while he gives no indication of adopting their views, his various thoughts on signs can at times suggest their earlier thinking" (2001: 21). As an example, Doyle (28n62) suggested looking at the range of the Peircean definition of the term 'sign' in 'Ideas, Stray or Stolen, about Scientific Writing,' wrote late in 1904, where Peirce, according to Nathan Houser et al., "focuses on the third science of his

semiotic trivium, [*speculative* (See Peirce 2020b)] rhetoric, which he has liberated from its traditional limitation to speech” (Peirce 1998: 325). Primary questions remain unanswered or yet to be put; e.g., how did Peirce get access to the Coimbra Jesuits’ treatises? Peirce determined the history of the American branch of semiotics, which centers on logic and meaning, to a great extent. The grandness of Peirce’s legacy is enough of a reason for it to be true that the history of this branch of semiotics contains the substance of authors such as Kant and Scotus, as well as Fonseca and Couto. All that has been said makes it possible to discern that Fonseca and the doctors of Coimbra had a noticeable presence throughout Peirce’s intellectual itinerary. Peirce did not simply take the Portuguese Jesuits into account, but valued their legacy, as they qualified him to engage fruitfully with his age’s collective undertaking for the evolution of logic. Serious research into the influence of the *Cursus Conimbricensis* on Peirce requires a systematic endeavor, mainly centered on his unpublished materials. Only then will it be possible to give a fair account of the significance of the Coimbra Jesuits throughout Peirce’s intellectual journey. *Unfortunately*, there is still a great deal to be done. Let us hope that this interesting investigation finds an open door.

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