

## 4 Idealism Operationalized

### How Peirce's Pragmatism Can Help Explicate and Motivate the Possibly Surprising Idea of Reality as Representational<sup>1</sup>

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This paper departs from a profound challenge currently posed by Paul Redding (2014 and see also Redding 2010, 79–84) and others (for instance, McDowell 1997, Levine 2012, and see also Koopman 2007) to a certain lineage within contemporary pragmatism sometimes referred to as *analytic pragmatism*. The challenge concerns perception. Redding argues that Robert Brandom, in his flight from discussing experience, which he famously described as “not one of my words” (Brandom 2000, 205n7),<sup>2</sup> fails to do justice to the way in which we form beliefs *de re* as well as *de dicto* (Redding 2014, 664–665). Thus, we might say that perceiving a yellow chair (for example) is something more than perceiving that the proposition that the chair in question is yellow *is true*. As Redding puts it, “let us say I am wearing a blue tie . . . experience will show the tie to be some particular *shade* of blue” (Redding 2014, 668). Any real-world perceptual encounter seems to possess an informative richness that is not fully translatable into any swathe of propositions, however numerous. To put the same point another way, perception seems to be a belief-forming mechanism characterized by a kind of direct confrontation between mind and world that differs from “merely thinking,” or communicating with other minds in a space of reasons.

Perception has been thought to differ from purely propositional traffic in the space of reasons in at least two ways: (i) its significantly greater *determinacy* (e.g., Redding's tie's particular shade of blue), although it is acknowledged that not all of the detail offered up in a given perceptual experience will (or can) make it into the space of reasons and (ii) its role as a *ground for indexical utterances* which also enable us to traffic in content which outruns what we could articulate in explicit propositional form, through ostensive definition (e.g., “*That* man's personality is amazing.”). Redding diagnoses Brandom's apparent lack of recognition of this phenomenological dimension of our knowledge-gathering as forced by his strong inferentialism—an important plank of his pragmatism. Redding acknowledges that Brandom does attempt to reconstruct the *de re* from the *de dicto* anaphorically within the space of reasons (“as when we infer from Ralph believes that the shortest spy is such and such, to ‘Ralph believes of the shortest spy that he is such

and such'”) (2014, 666), but he argues that this does not do justice to the *de re* of perceptual belief, since “Ralph’s actually having a proper *de re* belief directed towards some particular person would necessitate his being able to use demonstratives such as ‘this man,’ in saying something like ‘*This man is a spy*’” (2014, 666).

As a solution, Redding recommends the more fully conceptual inferentialism of Hegel, which explicates the logic of perceptual and reflective or inferential judgments differently: the former as judgments of the inherence of a specific individual in a kind (“This chair is yellow”) and the latter as judgments of subsumption between two kinds (“Yellow is a warm colour”) (2014, 672). Whereas the latter kind of judgment is true or false in some overall sense, the former’s truth-value is “context specific” (2014, 674), as it depends on the nature of the specific individual (such as a chair) that one is interacting with perceptually, that kind of openness being what constitutes perception. In a subtle and interesting argument, Redding suggests that, whereas Brandom essentially reduces the *de re* to the *de dicto* by simply denying that there is such a thing as nonconceptual content, for Hegel the *de re* is *aufgehoben* in (“preserved within, integrated into”) the *de dicto* (2014, 675). This means that, whereas Kant demanded a unified space of reasons in his transcendental unity of apperception, in which “logical structure must reflect the logical relations among diverse judgements that apply to different aspects of a *single world*” (2014, 676), Hegel considers it more appropriate to admit some unreconstructed perspectivalism (in more contemporary terminology one might well say “essential indexicality”) into Thought. In a way, this means that, although Kant and Hegel both imported Aristotle’s categories from ontology into epistemology, rendering them forms of judgment, Hegel’s “idealist understanding of logical form” (2014, 676) is more complete than Kant’s, because in his demand for a *single world* through transcendental unity of apperception, Kant essentially retains the notion of a God’s-eye view—a realist holdover. One is truer to Mind when one recognizes, with Hegel, that it is essentially embodied and located.

I have previously argued (Legg 2008a) that many (though not all) of the views Brandom puts forward under the banner of inferentialism may also be found in Charles Peirce, particularly in his critique of intuitions in his early “Cognition” papers. I have suggested that, whereas Brandom stops short at a merely “strong” inferentialism, which allows for some non-inferential mental content in the form of reliable dispositions to respond to certain apparently primitive concepts, such as “red” (although Brandom claims that such content can only be “inferentially articulated”), Peirce embraces a total or “hyper-” inferentialism. This might seem to expose Peirce equally—or even more—to this “experience problem for pragmatism.”

In this essay, I turn to Peirce’s theory of perception (which I did not discuss in 2008), in order to inquire whether his pragmatism is so vulnerable. I shall argue that Peirce’s account of perception does do justice to the phenomenology of perception as *de re*. But I shall also argue that Peirce realized

something that Brandom has not (yet), viz., that in order to be consistent with pragmatism, our naïve conception of perception as some kind of direct confrontation between mind and world (in Brandom's terms: "reliable dispositions to respond differentially to stimuli" [2000, 48]) needs to be revised. The result will be an idealism operationalized—a very pragmatist process for this venerable position within the history of Western philosophy to undergo.

Peirce paid significant attention to perception later in his career, developing a rich and subtle theory of it around 1902–1903. Interestingly, although I have just positioned Peirce as an inferentialist, his theory of perception also postulates a direct, *de re* apprehension of objects, in the form of what he calls the *percept*, which is so integrated, definite, and perfectly explicit that it cannot be put into words. At the same time, though, he layers onto the percept a *perceptual judgment* that has propositional form. The relation between these two aspects of perception will be explored.

The clearest and most influential foil for inferentialist arguments, as Brandom notes, is the British Empiricist legacy, which is still a pervasive background within contemporary mainstream analytic philosophy. According to Hume, for instance, every idea is decomposable into ultimate simple parts, registered by the mind as impressions in a purely causal process. Every Humean idea is also a *particular* consisting of entirely determinate qualities, to the point that Hume will not admit any such thing as an abstract idea. We shall see that, according to Peirce, on the other hand, a perception is *general*—both with respect to its content and also temporally—in that it constitutes a moving window of awareness embracing immediate past (memory), fused to present experience, fused to immediate future (anticipation). This temporal extension means that perception is, as Hookway remarks, "not entirely free from characters that are proper to interpretations" (2012, 17).

This paper's guiding hope is to suggest some ways in which, in contemporary debates between inferentialism and representationalism, rationalism and empiricism, "concepts and intuitions" may be transmuted from warring opposites to mutually supportive categories within a richer overall philosophy.

## The Experience-Truth Gap

A significant problem for any philosophy of perception is how to reconcile two aspects of the mind's encounter with the world in which it finds itself that seem rather different and opposed. On the one hand, my perceptions are suffused with immediately felt experience (for instance, the juicy, sweet "cherry-ness" of a cherry I am biting into), which it seems that in some important sense "no one can take away from me." Thus, the nature of our sensory feels appears to enjoy some degree of infallibility. ("Even if that cherry was a total hallucination, I can't be wrong about how it tasted to me.") On the other hand, much of the point of perception seems to be to enable us to endorse new propositions about the world that are truth-apt.

(“This cherry is delicious! But is it *really* a cherry, or rather a small plum?”) In this regard, our perceptions seem perfectly fallible.

This is all rather confusing. We might dub this issue *The Experience-Truth Gap* in perception. In order to address it, in philosophy of perception, one traditionally encounters talk of seemings, sense-data, and other like entities, which are postulated as further objects of perception over and above the real-world objects allegedly being perceived.<sup>3</sup> What is said about the intermediary objects is then treated as bearing the full weight of perception’s apparent infallibility, while what is said about the real-world objects is treated as bearing the full weight of perception’s apparent fallibility.

However, postulating these intermediary objects arguably does not solve the problem at hand. If the role of representing sensory feels is given over entirely to the intermediary objects (which is what has tended to happen), delicate issues emerge concerning which of the qualities of those objects are “primary” (had by both intermediary and real-world objects) and which merely “secondary” (had by the intermediary objects alone), ultimately leading to skepticism about whether there are any primary qualities at all, or any that can be known—a skepticism that has its logical conclusion in Kant’s entirely unknowable *noumena*. Meanwhile, if the role of logical assessability is given over entirely to statements about the putative real-world objects, we seem to be deprived of sufficient contact with them in order to assess them properly. (Of course these issues have been more than well rehearsed in the literature.) A related dilemma, expressed in more modern terminology, turns on whether the intermediary objects should be thought of as possessing “nonconceptual content.” On the one hand, the objects’ apparent infallibility seems to speak for their content being non-conceptual. On the other hand, as McDowell has argued (see 1994a and 1994b), if this is conceded, how on earth is perception informative? Surely it must have conceptual content in order to deliver truth-apt belief? Such issues were influentially explored by Sellars in his discussion of the Myth of the Given (Sellars 1997 and see also Forman 2007).

British Empiricism sought to paper over this breach by designing its key concept of an *idea* to play the dual role of both representing sensory feels and being logically assessable. It is sometimes remarked, particularly in the Lockean tradition, that ideas in their role as representing sensory feels are viewed as *caused by* the world, whilst they are logically assessable by virtue of *resembling* the world. (Understanding ideas as copies of impressions is meant to ensure this second role of ideas as resembling the world.) It has been probed to what degree these two roles of being caused by and resembling the world are compatible, or guaranteed to deliver the same results. We might also ask whether resemblance is able to “do all the world-representing work” that might be required in our perceptual contact with our surroundings—more on this later.

Understanding how Hume thinks about perception is important for understanding his epistemology, in particular, since he claims that, in an

important sense, all functions of the mind reduce to it: “To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see; all this is nothing but to perceive” (*Treatise* 1739–40/1978, 1, I, ii, 67 and see also *Enquiry* 1784/1975, 152). Impressions may enter from “outside the mind” (impressions of *sensation*) or be generated “inside the mind” (impressions of *reflection*), but the latter must consist in some combination of impressions that have previously entered by the senses, which are the building blocks of all thought.<sup>4</sup> It is by this kind of mental *passivity* that Hume imagines that he ensures empiricism. Crucially, Hume holds that ideas and impressions are all essentially *distinct*. By this he means wholly separable in the imagination, if not in reality.

### Peirce’s Theory of Perception: “Nothing at all . . . Is Absolutely Confrontitional”

I will now discuss the detailed theory of perception Peirce developed around 1902–1903, in the still largely unpublished *Minute Logic* and a piece which the *Collected Papers* entitles “Telepathy and Perception.” By contrast to the British Empiricists’ use of *ideas* to model both immediate experience and truth-apt propositions derived from it, Peirce suggests that we need separate, though interlocking, accounts of these two things. The first becomes his account of the *percept*, the second his account of the *perceptual judgment*.

#### *The Percept*

The percept comprises a *felt quality* and the *vividness* with which it is presented. Neither of these is what nowadays would be called “cognitive.” Peirce notes that one might call the percept an “image,” except that an image is often taken to represent something other than itself, and the percept does not do that (CP 7.619, 1903). Nevertheless it has *insistency*: it makes a real impact on my consciousness.

Peirce explicates the insistency of the percept along three dimensions. The first is that the percept contributes something positive to my thinking. If, for instance, I have a percept of a cat, I do not just perceive some abstract state of affairs, such as the absence of any dog in that spatiotemporal region. I perceive something that possesses qualities of its own, such as colors, shapes, sounds. Secondly, the percept compels my thinking insofar as I cannot pretend that it is not present in my consciousness. Thirdly, the percept is not reasonable. By this, Peirce does not mean that the percept is *ir*—so much as *a*-rational. He states, “it does not address the reason, nor *appeal* to anything for support” (CP 7.622, 1903). For one thing, the percept does not have sufficient structure to be rationally evaluable, or for itself to be a rational evaluation. It does not have any parts, or more strictly, “it has parts, in the sense that in thought it can be separated, but it does not represent itself to have parts” (CP 7.625, 1903). Attentive Peirce scholars will recognize that in this explication he is making use of his three fundamental philosophical

categories. He is affirming that Firstness and Secondness—and denying that Thirdness—pertain to the percept.

The percept in its directness bears some similarity to a Humean impression, but it cannot be a Humean idea insofar as it cannot be used to make truth claims, nor is it the subject of belief or disbelief (CP 7.626, 1903). Peirce writes that the percept “does not stand for anything. It obtrudes itself upon my gaze; but not as a deputy for anything else, not ‘as’ anything. It simply knocks at the portal of my soul and stands there in the doorway” (CP 7.619, 1903).<sup>5</sup>

If the percept is really so mute, we might ask: What is the point of positing it, epistemologically? Here we might look to the two roles that (it was noted) ideas have been said to play in British Empiricism: resembling and being caused by the world. We might ask whether the role of Peirce’s percept is to *resemble* the world in the positive qualities that we have noted that it possesses. This is not the case, however. In Locke, the claim that our ideas resemble objects entirely external to those ideas was a hypothesis empty of the very empirical consequences so beloved by empiricists—an insight decisively seized upon by Berkeley—and Peirce does not make it.

Perhaps, then, the percept might play a *causal* role in philosophy of mind and related epistemology—perhaps analogous to the causal role Hume gives to impressions in producing ideas? There is some truth to this, insofar as Peirce claims that percepts are related to perceptual judgments by “forceful connections.” But this forcefulness should not be understood as *the cause of a copy*, where that copy is a particular. Rather, it is a *trigger for* (general) *habits*. This claim will be explained further below.

### *The Perceptual Judgment*

The perceptual judgment cannot be a copy of the percept, as they are too unlike one another. Peirce describes them to be “as unlike . . . as the printed letters in a book, where a Madonna of Murillo is described, are unlike the picture itself” (PPM 160, 1903). Why is this? First of all, the percept has an *integration* that cannot be possessed by the perceptual judgment, which *qua* judgment requires subject and predicate. Peirce offers as an example his perceiving a yellow chair: “The judgement, ‘This chair appears yellow,’ separates the color from the chair, making the one predicate and the other subject. The percept, on the other hand, presents the chair in its entirety and makes no analysis whatever” (CP 7.631, 1903).

The percept also has a *definiteness* that conflicts with the general predication that a judgment must contain. Peirce analyzes this definiteness into two dimensions. The first is that it is *individual*: The percept pertains to some particular chair and no other. The second is that the percept is *perfectly explicit*: All of its determinables are determinate (CP 7.625, 1903). Thus, the yellowness of the chair-percept will be some perfectly specific color, such as a dark lemon yellow, whereas our predicate “yellow,” due to its wide

usage, must perforce be more general. It is worth noting that the generality of the yellow predicate is a kind of *specifically sensory* generality, which Peirce refers to a number of times using the metaphor of a “composite photograph,” a technology popular in his time that involved exposing the same negative to different objects in order to achieve a kind of “visual average”:<sup>6</sup> “Let us consider, first, the predicate ‘yellow’ in the judgment that ‘this chair appears yellow.’ This predicate is not the sensation involved in the percept, because it is general. It does not even refer particularly to this percept but to a sort of composite photograph of all the yellows that have been seen” (CP 7.634, 1903). A further dimension of the perfect explicitness of the percept is that, whereas the perceptual judgment with its chosen color-predicate makes no comment on other “chair-determinables,” such as shape, these will be discernible in the percept too.

Since the perceptual judgment is composed of subject and general predicate, thereby expressing a truth-apt proposition, its interpretation opens out to the community of inquiry. As Forster puts it, “while the content of a percept is inherent in it apart from everything else, the content of a sign is not” (2011, 114). Rather, the perceptual judgment takes its (logical) place in “an endless series of judgments, each member of which is logically related to prior members” (2011, 120). Thus, in our example above, inquirers may develop the meaning of *yellow* and *chair* in unanticipated ways: for example, by determining the wavelength of light which typically produces yellow experiences in humans or by inventing a chair that lacks some feature previously thought essential, such as legs.

Despite its pathways into public discourse, however, the perceptual judgment *compels assent* as much as the percept. It is equally insistent. As much as if I open my eyes in front of a yellow chair I cannot avoid having certain sensory experiences, neither can I avoid judging “This is a yellow chair,” if I have the appropriate concepts. But how is it possible that the perceptual judgment produces such compulsive belief? Does not this endow it with a form of *de facto* infallibility? We have just noted that the perceptual judgment opens out logically into the community of inquiry, for which it is well known that Peirce makes thorough fallibilism the guiding principle. Surely it cannot be both fallible and infallible at the same time?

This is an important objection. A superficial initial answer might point out a temporal dimension to the belief-forming process and note that the perceptual judgment’s apparent infallibility holds *at the time*, but it might be corrected subsequently in the light of further perceptions. (“For an instant I saw a yellow chair in the corner. But when I blinked and looked again I only saw floorboards. Therefore, I infer that what previously appeared to me as a perception of a yellow chair was in fact a hallucination, and I choose to ignore it.”) But shortly we will see that in Peirce’s philosophy the temporal mediation of *what we perceive* applies on a yet profounder level.

Finally, despite the fundamental differences between the perceptual judgment and the percept that have been noted, the former nevertheless

“professes to represent” the latter. In this representing function, it embodies the Thirdness that is missing from the percept (CP 7.630, 1903). But one might wonder: How on earth is it possible for the perceptual judgment to represent the percept, if they are so different? We have just made clear that the perceptual judgment is not a copy of the percept. Peirce adds that neither does it represent the percept *logically*, since this would require that the percept serve as some kind of premise from which the perceptual judgment is inferred. As the percept is not itself in propositional form, it cannot serve as a premise for the perceptual judgment, nor can it be described in such a way that it could so serve, without recapitulating the perceptual judgment and begging the question (CP 7.628, 1903). The issue of the true relationship between percept and perceptual judgment will be resolved in the next section.

### *The Relationship between Percept and Perceptual Judgment: The Percipuum*

Now it might seem that Peirce has so convincingly separated the Firstness/Secondness of the percept from the Thirdness of the perceptual judgment that one might wonder: How are we to bridge the two? In particular, how are we to bridge the *uncontrollable* in perception to the *controllable* in thought? Do not we now have a great mystery at the heart of perception? Is not Peirce deeply entrenching the Experience-Truth Gap, rather than giving us any theoretical means to resolve it?

The answer is that the British Empiricists (and their downstream followers) are too unimaginative in assuming that the only possible relation between percept and perceptual judgment (or in Humean terms: impression and idea) is that the latter *copies* the former. But *how* can the idea convey the same information as the impression, other than by copying it? Otherwise, surely we would be engaged in some mere blind, causal transaction between our minds and the world? Peirce claims, “there is no relation between the predicate of the perceptual judgment and the sensational element of the percept, except forceful connections” (CP 7.634, 1903). The previously unanticipated third possibility for the relation between perceptual judgment and percept is that the former is an *index* of the latter—a “true symptom, just as a weather-cock indicates the direction of the wind or a thermometer the temperature” (CP 7.628, 1903).

How does this work? The human mind is organized such that each percept produces “direct and uncontrollable interpretations” (CP 7.648, 1903) that lead the mind to form various perceptual judgments. These interpretations are sometimes referred to by Peirce via a third term: the *percipuum*. Insofar as the percipuum consists in an interpretative welding of percept to perceptual judgment, it may be understood to manifest full-blooded Thirdness. So we may ask: With the percipuum, have we finally bridged perception into the controllable in thought? Alas, no—Peirce notes that the



percipuum is equally insistent! He writes, “the percipuum . . . is what forces itself upon your acknowledgment, without any why or wherefore, so that if anybody asks you why you should regard it as appearing so and so, all you can say is, ‘I can’t help it. That is how I see it’” (CP 7.643, 1903).

However, although this interpretative process cannot be willed, it can be (indeed must be) trained and perfected by cultivating appropriate mental *habits*.<sup>7</sup> For example, parents spend considerable time training children to correctly apply predicates that are useful in their daily lives (“food,” “bath,” “red,” “one,” “two,” “three”). Over time, those children learn how to produce appropriate judgments about the objects around them with the help of whatever perceptual experiences they notice reliably correlate with those judgments. But the exact nature of the experiences themselves—in Wittgenstein’s famous phrase—may be “divided through” as irrelevant. This process is broadly known as “education.”

### *The Experience-Truth Gap Mediated*

The answer to the Experience-Truth Gap in our philosophical understanding of perception is not to split the object of perception in two, postulating one object that is unreal but is the one that is actually perceived and a second object that is real but “lies behind” the first and is only inferred (the manifest problems of which for British Empiricism soon emerged). Rather than two objects, the answer is *time*. The percipuum is not a temporal particular. It occurs across a timespan that has at its “back end” a memory of the immediate past (which Peirce calls the *ponecipuum*) and at its “front end” an expectation of the immediate future (which he calls the *antecipuum*). This timespan—which is of effectively infinitesimal duration—forms a “moving window” in which each new perception enters the mind at the “front end” in the form of anticipation just as the most recent falls back into memory.

The ponecipuum is a kind of sediment of past perceptions, interpreted such as to trigger us to view current percepts in the categories required for us to make perceptual judgments. In the case of the yellow chair, this will involve a synthesis of previous perceptions that have been judged to “involve chairs.” At the heart of the ponecipuum lies a pure sensory *ponecept*, which, in the case of our example, will consist in some kind of generalization of all our past “chair-like” and “yellow-like” experiences, although once again it is strictly unable to be put into words (again, the specifically iconic metaphor of a composite photograph is appropriate).

The antecipuum is our present experience interpreted in terms of its most immediate predictive implications (e.g., “This object is good to sit on, and unlikely to change color at random.”). Under pragmatism, such hypothetical conditionals constitute the meaning of concepts and propositions. The antecipuum also rests on a kernel of pure experience—an *antecept*. Rosenthal describes the antecept as an “element of vague, not fully conscious anticipation of future experience” (2001, 3) and notes that it (and indeed

all these rather alarmingly proliferating entities in Peirce's theory of perception) is not a literal or consciously experienced stage in perception but "the abstraction of a 'stopping point'" in its logical analysis. In a more epistemological register, they are "not the building blocks of perception but a verification level brought about by a change of focus when a problem arises" (2001, 4).

In order to explicate this last claim, we may now examine the deeper analysis of the fallibility of perceptual judgments that was promised in the last section. It is presented by Rosenthal in an acute analysis of this difficult passage by Peirce:

Now let us take up the perceptual judgment "This wafer looks red." It takes some time to write this sentence, to utter it, or even to think it. It must refer to the state of the percept at the time that it, the judgment, began to be made. But the judgment does not exist until it is completely made. It thus only refers to a memory of the past; and all memory is possibly fallible and subject to criticism and control. The judgment, then, can only mean that so far as the character of the percept can ever be ascertained, it will be ascertained that the wafer looked red.

(CP 5.544, 1903)

Rosenthal interprets this as saying that the perceptual judgment is indubitable not in the sense that doubts about it can be answered with certain knowledge, but in the "pragmatic" sense that doubts about it cannot coherently be formulated:

To doubt it is to put into question something for which there is no tool for getting "behind" it to compare it with anything more fundamental. For us it must itself be the final court of appeal. The apprehension of an appearance is not certainly true as opposed to possibly false. It is "certain" in the sense that neither truth nor falsity is applicable to it . . . for what the percipuum is is determined only in its recognition and can be determined in no other way. It becomes a "repetition" of previous contents only by being assimilated to those contents in the perceptual judgment.

(2001, 4)

To explore this further, let us return to the case of the disappearing yellow chair percept. Our initial analysis of this scenario held that we have two distinct percepts: the first percept "yellow-chair-like" and the second percept judged to represent only floorboards. On the basis of such a mismatch, so close together in time, I infer that the first percept is a hallucination and so I both remember and disregard it. But what if a similar sensory event were to happen all the time, with yellow chair images momentarily appearing and disappearing without a trace? Would I continue to perceive and disregard

them? Peirce suggests, in an interesting discussion of the action of optical illusions on the mind over time, that insofar as the yellow chair percepts were *regularly* recognized as illusory, they would *become much less vivid* and possibly even disappear altogether:

It is one of the recognized difficulties of all psycho-physical measurement that the faculties rapidly become educated to an extraordinary degree. Thus, contrast-colors, when properly exhibited, are incredibly vivid. One is not easily persuaded that they are not real. Yet the experimenter becomes in time almost incapable of perceiving them. This is a case in which the same educational course which gives control over appearances which sometimes do and sometimes do not accord with the mass of experiences, only serves to strengthen the forcefulness of those appearances which always do so accord.

(CP 7.647, 1903)

The contrast-color illusion involves staring at a bright patch of color (e.g., red) then looking at a white surface, which will initially appear to be the opposite color to the one stared at (e.g., green), but over time, as the mind learns that the white surface is not really green, the perceived greenness literally fades. The obviousness of these illusions enables the training of the percept-to-perceptual judgment relation, which it was noted above largely takes place unconsciously in childhood, to be resuscitated and studied within an observable time period.<sup>8</sup>

The most important thing to note is that this training of perception is a *rational* process. Its guiding force is the mind making the best overall sense it can of ponecipuum, percipuum, and antecipuum as a total package. If that involves imperceptibly reinterpreting something just apparently seen as in fact illusory, then so be it. Hookway puts this point well:

What we experience is not just a clash between our beliefs and our experience; we often experience incoherence within the experience itself, which simultaneously involves anticipations and thwarts those very anticipations. The fact that, in these cases, “the perceptual judgment, and the percept itself, seems to keep shifting from one general aspect to another and back again” (CP 5.183) shows that the percept is not “entirely free from . . . characters that are proper to interpretations.”

(CP 5.184) (2012, 17)

Thus future experience can, at least in part, *literally determine previous experience*. Although it might seem an obvious homily that “experience just shows us what is right in front of us,” in Peirce’s understanding of perception, remarkably, “nothing at all . . . is absolutely confrontitional”—although he does us the favor of adding, “although it is quite true that the confrontitional is continually flowing in upon us” (CP 7.653, 1903).

## Idealism Operationalized

The title of this paper promised an “idealism operationalized”—an account of how pragmatism (far from its original popular picture as a slapdash philosophy dismissive of anything but immediate practical concerns, and tangible material objects—see Misak 2013, 99–105) might motivate the idea that reality is in some sense representational. This “identity between mind and world” is one of idealism’s defining ideas, and the idea scares many philosophers. Redding well describes how part of the creation myth of analytic philosophy consists in founding fathers Russell and Moore staking a claim (against British Hegelians) that “fact is independent of experience” (2010, 2).

We might perhaps soothe some of the fear by viewing the idea of reality as representational in a metaphysical key, as meaning merely that predicates have some role to play in charting ontological commitment, not just Quine’s bound variables. Thus, the world contains yellowness as well as yellow things. (Surely if the world contains yellow things it must also contain yellowness? This is an old, old story.) Peirce’s labeling of his scholastic realism as *Objective Idealism* has been noted. For instance, Robert Stern (2011 and 2013) has explored ways in which Peirce and Hegel share an Aristotelian moderate realism about universals, which assumes that world and mind share a common structure.

But whether it be Subjective or Objective, idealism and its fellow-travelling rationalism have always seemed to have as their Achilles heel a failure to acknowledge that some primal confrontation between the mind and the world’s objects is what perception actually consists in.<sup>9</sup> The need to acknowledge this would seem to be one major reason Kant felt obliged to adjoin a separate faculty of sensible intuition to the understanding, in order to avoid what McDowell nicely describes as “a frictionless spinning in a void” (McDowell 1994b, 11). Redding also builds the primal confrontation into his philosophy through his account of perception *de re* as an encounter with a (pre-given) specific individual, and he embeds an intuition-concept dualism in his Hegelian distinction between perceptual judgments understood as judgments of inherence, as opposed to reflective judgments understood as judgments of subsumption. Peirce mediates this dualism into a unitary account of judgment by noting that although percept and perceptual judgment share no content, nevertheless the perceptual judgment serves as an index or true symptom of the percept, which unifies the two in a percipuum constituting a single signifier which has *both* sensory feel and logical purport (as all Peircean signs do).

What makes this an idealism *operationalized*, though—what makes this a distinctive contribution from pragmatism to idealism—is the role played in Peirce’s theory of perception by *habit*.<sup>10</sup> It is habit (continually refined and corrected) that laces the perceptual judgment to the percept over time, enabling the former to stably index—and then even correct—the latter. Habit is the *ur*-ingredient of mental life for the pragmatist, as idea is for

the British Empiricist. In the form of a habit we are able to experience a universal “from the inside,” not as metaphysical theory but as lived experience. Within this lived experience, the rational fluidity of the perceptual judgment-percept nexus (and the fact that the fluidity is two-way, percepts modifying perceptual judgments *and vice versa*) can even be exposed and studied in certain optical illusions. The revisable nature of the percept itself means that on this theory of perception “nothing at all . . . is absolutely confrontational.” In this regard, then, it still seems appropriate to call Peirce a hyper-inferentialist (as our perceptions do not “bottom out” in any ultimate set of represented *objects*). At the same time, frictionless spinning in the void is avoided because *the indexical nature of the process of perception* (as the percipuum is continually formed and reshaped) ensures that “the confrontational is continually flowing in upon us” (CP 7.653, 1903). In this way a representational *function* is recapitulated within perception and it seems inappropriate to call Peirce a hyper-inferentialist if that term is understood not merely to claim that mental content involves “inferences all the way down,” but to *ban any representational function from it*. But the latter is an extreme position which, although it is in fact claimed by Brandom, seems an overreaction to the arguments which he cites in its support, as has been astutely pointed out by McDowell.<sup>11</sup>

Redding argued that Hegel’s “idealist understanding of logical form” ran deeper than Kant’s in recognizing that Mind is essentially embodied and located, and therefore perspectival. Peirce’s understanding arguably dives deeper still in distributing across the space of reasons (and thus Being) not just Mind’s characteristic features of embodiedness and locatedness, but also its infinite *corrigeability*.

## Notes

- 1 The two middle sections of this paper are taken from a longer paper with a different focus—on perceiving mathematical truth: “‘Things Unreasonably Compulsory’: A Peircean Challenge to a Humean Theory of Perception: Particularly with Respect to Perceiving Necessary Truths.” *Cognitio*, 15:1, 89–112. I am grateful to *Cognitio* and its editor Professor Ivo Ibric for kind permission to reprint these sections here. This version of those sections has some minor typographic and clarificatory changes. Material from this paper was presented (in two different forms) at both the 2014 Peirce Congress and the *Bridging Traditions: Idealism and Pragmatism Conference*, Goethe University, Frankfurt, Germany. I am grateful to participants at both conferences for helping me clarify and develop my ideas, in particular: Gary Richmond, Robert Stern, Christopher Hookway, Gabriele Gava, Jean-Marie Chevalier, Neil Williams, and Joshua Black. For stimulating discussions at a colloquium at University of Nevada at Las Vegas, I am grateful to David Beisecker, James Woodbridge, and David Forman. For recent interesting conversations about Peirce’s theory of perception, I am grateful to André Sant’Anna.
- 2 Levine has noted that although Brandom obviously clearly *understands* a notion of experience as “not best thought of as the possession of items of knowledge, but as . . . a kind of adaptive attunement to the environment,” he does not *accept* it (Levine 2012, p. 129).

- 3 For classic texts, see Russell (1912) and Ayer (1956). For a particularly nuanced account, see Sellars (1982).
- 4 In (*Treatise* 1739–40/1978, 1, I, ii, 67) Hume also mentions the formation of “secondary ideas, which are images of the primary,” but assures the reader that these, too, derive ultimately from impressions.
- 5 In this way, Peirce’s concept of the percept seems close to Charles Travis’s account of “The Silence of the Senses” (2004).
- 6 For a nice, clear explication of this idea, and tracing of it through Peirce’s philosophy, see Hookway (2002). One aspect Hookway does not highlight is that the composite photograph might be understood as capturing a distinctively iconic kind of generality which corresponds to Peirce’s category of Firstness, as opposed to a more conceptual understanding of generality as “extension of an idea” that might correspond to Peirce’s category of Thirdness.
- 7 In appreciating this point, I have benefitted from extended philosophical conversations with Joshua Black.
- 8 At this point it might be protested that, if it is possible for the yellow chair percept to disappear, what did it consist in when it *was* present? Consistently with the searching integrity of Rosenthal’s pragmatic analysis of perception’s truth-conditions, one must concede that this question will have to be answered by the perceiver in their particular context over time. I hope to address this question more fully in a future publication which places Peirce’s theory of perception in its lineage of Reidian direct realism. I am grateful to James Woodbridge for pressing me on this point.
- 9 For the influence of this idea at the birth of analytic philosophy, see Hylton (1990, 105–166).
- 10 How best to understand the concept of habit in the pragmatist tradition is worthy of a paper in itself. The interested reader is referred to Shapiro (1973) and Miller (1996) in the first instance.
- 11 “Inferentialism is nothing if not a general thesis. That semantic insights can be achieved in this or that particular area by focusing on inferences does not vindicate inferentialism. It is compatible with the view that semantic concepts come in a package, each intelligible partly in terms of the others, rather than conforming to the foundational structure that inferentialism envisages” (McDowell 2005, 138, and see also McDowell 1997).