*Peirce’s Account of Purposefulness: A Kantian Perspective*

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All Peirce scholars know that Kant was *the* major early influence on his philosophy and certain Kantian outlines remain in his later thought. As such it would seem natural for Kant and Peirce scholarship − both currently thriving, serious and systematic traditions − to cross-pollinate and share ideas. But little has been done in this area, apart from the ground-breaking work of Karl-Otto Apel, which had a specific context in Apel’s goal of making his own contribution to the Western philosophical tradition through his transcendental pragmatics. This carefully researched and meticulously-written book aims to address this gap in the philosophical literature. Its overarching theme of *purpose* is a valuable unifying idea to show the similarities and the differences between these two great thinkers. At the same time the very high-level nature of this idea triggers in the book a discussion of a wealth of further philosophical topics on which I am unsure that it has the last word − but in Peircean circles at least this is not considered a flaw.

Chapter 1 introduces Peirce’s thought with an overview of his philosophy’s architectonic aim, and basic structure in the fundamental categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. Although this material has already been ably presented by a very large number of Peirce scholars, the exposition is clear, and useful for this project. Chapter 2 then outlines Peirce’s three-way taxonomy of logic into the conditions for signs’ i) having *meaning*, ii) possessing and preserving *truth*, and iii) being *interpreted*. The guiding aims of the third branch of logic are the most contested, and Gava claims that Peirce said a range of different things about this during his career. Gava divides these discussions into two main disciplinary purviews which he labels (following terms that Peirce himself used at different points) *speculative rhetoric* and *methodeutic.* Gava claims that speculative rhetoric pertains to any interpretation whatever of a sign (whether *emotional*, *energetic* or *logical*: these are said to roughly correspond to a feeling, an act or an inference) and thus it constitutes a general theory of communication. On the other hand methodeutic concerns *logical interpretants alone*, and thus constitutes a theory of scientific method (where science is understood very broadly − following Peirce − to encompass any truth-directed inquiry). Alongside this discussion Gava offers a critique of Habermas for reading Peirce’s logical interpretant solely in instrumental terms (p. 37), and an original analysis of one of Peirce’s most discussed papers, “The Fixation of Belief”, in terms of the *purposes* aimed at by the famous four methods of fixing belief, suggesting that they are not as discontinuous as has been assumed.

This second chapter is rich, though it is tempting to ask whether speculative rhetoric and methodeutic as characterised might be reunited under Peirce’s naturalistic pragmatism, with its broad evolutionary cosmology. A key issue would seem to be whether emotional and energetic interpretants are devoid of any logical meaning, or whether they are better understood − in the light of Peirce’s embrace of continuity (his “synechism”) − as merely possessing some lesser degree of it. In other words, they might also have some (tiny) place in an overarching process which culminates in Peirce’s heartening ideal of “the growth of concrete reasonableness”.

With Chapter 3 we reach the book’s heart in terms of engaging Peirce with Kant. It begins by exploring the key concept of “purpose”. Here Gava draws an intriguing distinction between *purposefulness* and *purposiveness*. Where the former merely consists in signs having some kind of generalising tendency (“orientation toward an end involved in a thought process”), the latter consists in “conformity to an end” in Kant’s sense of *Zweckmässigkeit* (p. 69). The difference appears to be that for the former, the end(s) are not necessarily identifiable in advance. Gava identifies purposefulness so characterised as the crucial concept for Peirce, suggesting that it is more general and infuses his thought more completely than Kant’s purposiveness infuses his – thereby endowing *all* Peircean signs with self-corrective teleology under the overarching esthetic ideal indicated in the last paragraph.

How does this self-corrective teleology function? The chapter’s guiding question, “How are Synthetical Judgments Possible?” points toward answering this. Gava notes how Peirce’s searching philosophical intellect discerned under Kant’s great question of how synthetic *a priori* judgements are possible this greater question, which Peirce argued was even more pressing. The great problem of modern philosophy is its principled separation of reason from sensibility. Since post-17th century science seems to teach us that we are nothing but natural creatures engaging with the world through our senses in order to acquire particular experiences, where do general concepts come from, and how do we manage to apply them to our particular experiences?

Gava notes that the first step in reuniting reason and sensibility in both Peirce and Kant (particularly of the Third Critique) is nicely illustrated by Schiller’s “play-drive”. This postulated faculty mediates “the passivity of our feelings and the activity of our reason” by being “a state in which we experience form before a determinate form of reason is at hand (p. 71). How do we achieve such a thing? The answer is: *aesthetically*. A key concept here is Peirce’s *iconic sign*, understood as a “schema” capable of being observed but at the same time functioning as logically general. (For a simple example, think of a triangle diagram.) With Peirce’s theory of judgment now in place, Gava links it through Peirce’s esthetic “hope for the admirable” (towards which all thought is argued to reach from its particular historical context) to the final interpretant, understood as an ideal state of knowledge. It has arguably now been explained how inquiry can be *fully purposeful*, and yet (avoiding the pitfall into which other well-known pragmatists have arguably tumbled) how inquiry outruns any *particular* person’s *particular* purposes, and the specific feelings that necessarily initiate any judgment. Thus is revealed the depth and dazzling originality of Peirce’s ‘semiotic’ contribution to modern epistemology and First Philosophy. I learned much from reading this chapter.

Teleology having figured so prominently so far, Chapter 4 now turns to investigating it in the context of Peirce’s evolutionary metaphysics. A famous early Peirce quote states, “...[t]he meaning of a thought is something altogether virtual”, by which he sought to claim that meaning is not something ever held by a single sign, but consists solely in *relationships between* *signs*. Along the same lines, one might worry that a fully teleological account of the Universe renders reality rather ghostly in any given time and place. Gava suggests that the early Peirce (in his “Cognition papers”) was Hegelian in this respect, holding that, “what decided the reality of an object was its being represented in the final opinion” (p. 94), but from the 1880s he placed a new emphasis on signs’ indexicality: their ability to point in unmediated fashion to the world and its objects. This led Peirce to reevaluate *individuality*, which he had previously supposed did not exist (Gava claims, p. 103), and to more strongly stress *givenness* in his theory of perception − for instance in 1903 advocating for direct perception of universals (Thirdness). Thus Peirce ends up less of a Hegelian absolute idealist than a Reidian direct realist.

Although the broad outlines of this chapter seem sound, I did feel that in a number of places it could usefully have dug deeper. For instance, the key points concerning Peirce’s post-1880s recognition of indexicality were already made in (Hookway, 2000). Also, in any discussion of Peirce’s relationship to Hegel it is a pity not to reference the careful and nuanced work by (Stern, 2009) testing Hegel’s ideas against the reality of Peirce’s three categories in turn. I also wonder whether the contrast between pre- and post-1880s treatments of individuality is quite as stark as Gava presents it. Although in the early Peirce it is correct that there is no ‘pure individual’, such a thing can be approached as a limit of ever-greater determination, and even as early as his “New List of Categories” paper he identified the subject and predicate of a proposition as irreducibly different semiotic functionalities. Conversely, although in the later Peirce’s account of perception a direct realism is present in the form of the ‘percept’, this item literally cannot be discussed and would appear to lie outside the semiotic sphere.

No comparison of Kant and Peirce would be complete without a consideration of transcendentalism, and this is the subject of chapter 5. Informed by recent Kant scholarship, Gava distinguishes two ways of understanding Kant’s transcendentalism: as a *justificatory* and an *explanatory* project. The former (which owes much to Peter Strawson) sees Kant as attempting to validate our ordinary common-sense and scientific knowledge by ‘grounding’ them on an epistemic foundation which is antiskeptical, ‘mentalistic’ (privately held by an individual) and deductively verified (p. 132). It should be no surprise to Peirce scholars that Peirce was highly critical of all these approaches and − to the extent that he saw Kant as holding them − critical of Kant. The explanatory conception however, sees Kant as aiming merely at determining the limits of what can be known by pure reason (“Kant did not want to determine whether our beliefs were adapted for representing reality. On the contrary, he wanted to determine whether the purely speculative endeavours of philosophers had any chance of getting settled”, p. 147).

Gava argues that Peirce’s philosophy does in fact have transcendental tendencies of this second kind when one considers the role it gives to prescision (a form of abstraction, conducted *a priori* insofar as it is part of phenomenology in Peirce’s mature thought). Precision reveals “hierarchical relationships between concepts...which concept is necessary to think the other” (p. 150). But any such ‘transcendentalism’ must be understood as tempered by Peirce’s pragmatism, so Gava claims that such inquiries remain *fallibilist*. This combination may seem a difficult row to hoe, and Gava embarks on three further sections to argue for it by attempting to reevaluate the meanings of *a priori*, *necessary* and *infallible*, using mathematics as a case-study. This is not the strongest part of the book insofar as Gava struggles to theorise mathematics as necessary but not infallible by opining, “infallibility is something that is attributed not to the *objects* of a proposition (like necessity) but to the *beliefs* we have about those objects” (p. 166). Crying out to be covered at this point are: i) Peirce’s account of mathematics as “experimenting on diagrams” (often to surprising effect), ii) the role of *abduction*, which would seem to connect back to the good work Gava did with the iconic sign in chapter 3. Here one thinks particularly of the powerful account of Peirce’s abduction as opening out into transcendental argument in (Pihlström, 1998), which could have lit a path for Gava here.

A final chapter and conclusion discuss Peirce’s common-sensism as a foil to the previous chapter’s transcendentalism. To this end Gava returns to Peirce’s famous Pragmatic Maxim which explicitly links belief to lived experience. Along the way he compares this vision of pragmatism with William James’. Although he acknowledges differences between the two philosophers, he tries to avoid them contradicting one another by attributing them different aims in view. “In James’s hands, pragmatist clarifications become elucidations of what would follow from our believing a proposition expressing the belief at issue. On the contrary, for Peirce they were more elucidations of what would follow from the truth of a proposition containing the conception at issue...This shift in James is dependent not on a misunderstanding but on his attempt to vindicate the rationality of religious beliefs” (p. 191). This ‘kind answer’ seems to me to dodge the important question whether James’ method of supporting religious beliefs in fact strikes at the heart of the broader purposefulness in Peircean rationality, which Gava himself so well outlined in earlier chapters, so I found this particular discussion disappointingly anodyne. But it is followed up with a carefully considered suggested reconciliation of common-sense and transcendentalism in the closing sections of chapter 6, while a conclusion usefully summarises key themes in the work as a whole.

This book is on the whole lucidly-written in a beautiful prose style. Although in places it could benefit from being somewhat more argumentatively focused overall, with the links between chapters made clearer, this is a fault deriving from trying to cover too much ground, rather than shallowness. Most importantly, the book asks a wealth of searching questions which one hopes will be taken up further by both Peirce and Kant scholars. Gava’s research career is just beginning and I look forward to reading further insightful works by him in the future.

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