

# How many concepts of normative sign are needed

## About limits of applying Peircean concept of logical sign

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## How to clarify the meaning of the Peircean concept of sign?

### 1. Pragmaticism

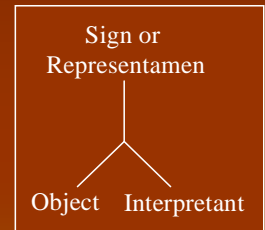
- a concept of *MEANING* for ‘*intellectual concepts*’
- Designed as a general *methodeutic* for science in order to avoid “unclear and nonsensical hypotheses” (CP 5.212, 1903).  
It is a method for ‘making our ideas clear’ (1878).
- To make an idea clear is to define and construct as *definite concept* as possible, i.e. to diminish its necessary *vagueness*.
- Let’s apply Pragmaticism to the concept of sign.

# Peircean concept of sign

- The concept of sign described and defined primarily as

the irreducibly triadic unity of *Representamen*, its *Object*, and *Interpretant*.

- How universal is the concept?
- What kind of presuppositions its structure contains?
- What is its legitimate domain of application?
- β E.g. the argument for “all thought is in signs” (CP 5.251-253, 1868) does not employ the triadic structure of sign



## What else is needed?

### 2. Ethics of terminology – six rules

(CP 2.225-6, EP 2:266, 1903.) :

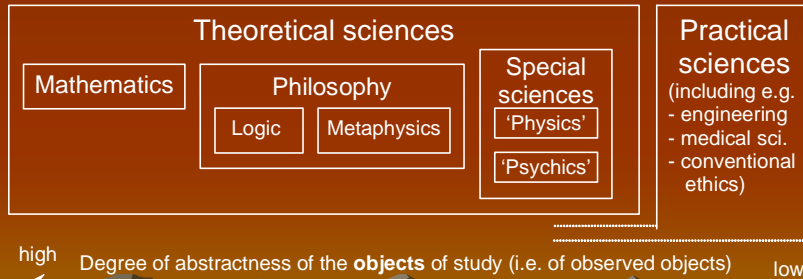
- “First. To take pains to avoid following any recommendation of an **arbitrary** nature as to the use of philosophical terminology.”
- “Sixth. For philosophical conceptions which vary by a hair’s breadth from those for which suitable terms exist, to **invent terms** with a due regard for the usages of philosophical terminology and those of the English language but yet with a distinctly technical appearance.”

à Changes and stabilities in Peirce’s terminology should be taken seriously.

# What else is needed?

## 3. Classification of sciences (early version before 1901)

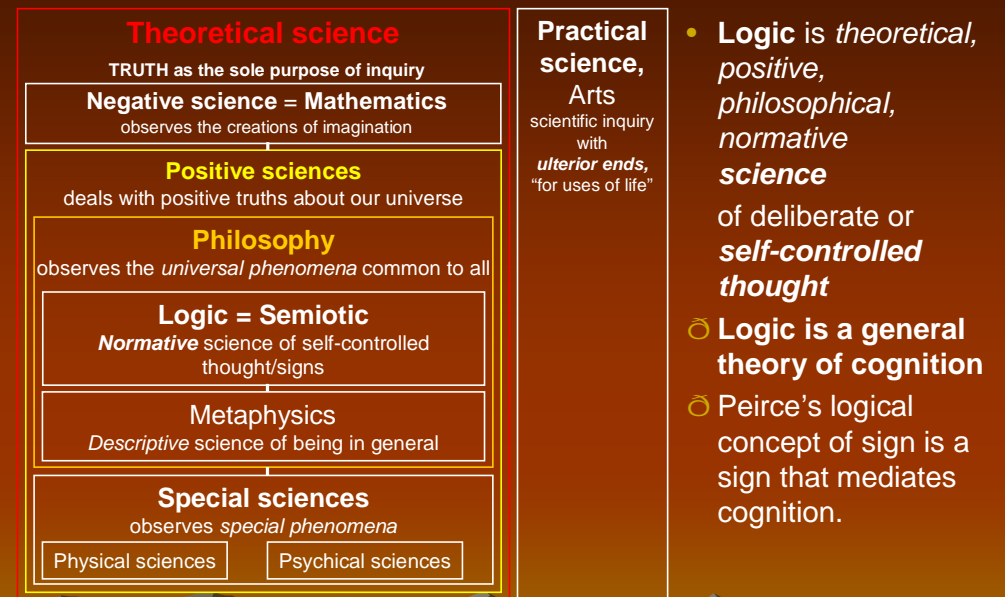
- Hierarchical according to the abstractness of the *objects* of study
- Higher sciences are independent on the lower ones in their principles and concepts – the lower ones provide examples, applications, and critical test for higher ones
- Concept of sign was described and defined primarily as a **logical concept** by Peirce.



## Pragmaticism and the triadic concept of sign

- Pragmaticism as a concept of *meaning* for *intellectual concepts*:
  - *Maxim of pragmatism* (from "How to make our ideas clear", 1878): "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the **object** of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object." (CP 5.402, 1878.)
- What is the intended or legitimate **object** of the concept of sign?
  - à Another (later) maxim of pragmatism (1903): "The **elements of every concept enter into logical thought at the gate of perception** and make their exit at the gate of purposive action" (EP 2:241, CP 5.212, 1903).
- *What kind of perception* or observation are the elements of Peirce's conception of sign based on, i.e. **how were they derived?**

## Logic in classification of sciences (before 1901)

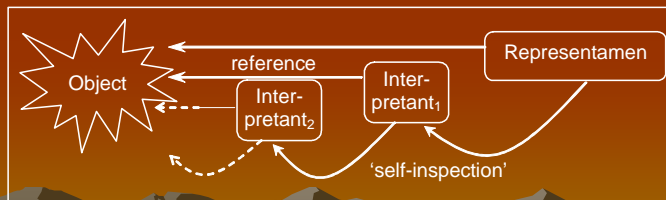


## Derivations of the concept of sign

- Peirce had (at least) two different derivations of the concept of sign, 1867 and 1907.
- 1<sup>st</sup> derivation: "On A New List Of Categories" (1867)
  - **Starting point** intuition: **proposition** or conception as an **internal thought-sign**.
    - β Kantian questioning: how to "reduce manifold of sensuous impressions to unity".
    - **Result**: The three **categories** to substitute Kant's categories of **transcendental logic**.
    - the construction of the three **elements** of sign and the **concept of sign** as their irreducible unity as its by-product.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> derivation: "Pragmatism" (MS 318, EP 2, 1907)
  - **Starting point** intuition: **external communicative sign**, uttered and interpreted.
    - **Result**: The essential ingredient of an **utterer** is the **object** of sign. The essential ingredient of an **interpreter** is the **interpretant** of sign.
  - In both derivations, the same components were constructed although their mutual relation is described differently — from different **perspectives**.

# The execution of 1<sup>st</sup> derivation

- Directing an investigating thought into itself in order to find out *how* the present thought (conception) can *refer* to its object (substance/subject) and *state* something (being/predicate) about it.
- A present thought is directed to observe itself, i.e. directed toward *its* object, to find **truth** about it.
- The transformation of the thought into another *more self-aware* thought about itself, into its **interpretant**, which is a new *mediating representation* that connects the representamen to its object.
- The interpretant is produced as a means for thought to take a full control over itself ○ logical sign of self-controlled thought



# From Transcendental to Objective perspective

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> derivation was executed from perspective that can be called **objective where**
- the whole semiotic *process* or succession of signs, the whole *chain* of signs, is taken as an object of study.
  - The mind is methodically split into the observed 'object-agent' and the observing 'meta-agent'.
  - A sign is not considered merely from the perspective of its own.
  - An investigating thought in observer's head is not a part of the object of study
    - it is not the interpretant of those signs that are studied.
- Makes possible to study the signs of **other minds** and **external signs** (not only *internal* thought-signs).

# Consequences of 1<sup>st</sup> derivation

- The derivation from a 'TRANSCENDENTAL PERSPECTIVE', from an internalist, atemporal, epistemic, and the first-person point of view.
  - The investigating thought and a thought-sign investigated ('the derived concept') are identical or conflated in an 'on-line' process
  - derivation *from the perspective of a sign itself*.
- **THE INTERPRETANT IS CONSTRUCTED BY LOOKING FOR TRUTH ABOUT THE OBJECT** — no interpretant without an interest on truth
- the **aim toward truth** —the *logical normativity*— is **inbuilt** in the construction of the triadic structure of sign, and consequently, in *any such departments of semiotic* that uses *this* concept of sign *and its three components* as its basic concept.
  - Presupposes a transcendental subjectivity capable of cognitive self-inspection and of genuine interest on representational truth.
  - What is the applicability of such concept in presumably non-rational sign-action e.g. in biosemiotics, in instinctive, associative, 'artistic, or creative interpretation of humans, etc?

# Transcendental and Objective perspectives

## Transcendental perspective:

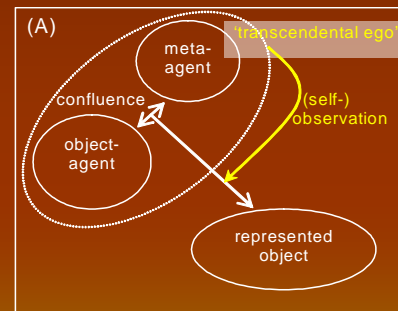
- a thought thinking of itself
  - Subject and object of thought blended
- 'Transcendental logic'

**Sign:** The *interpretant* mediates between representamen and its object  
à atemporal **sign-object**

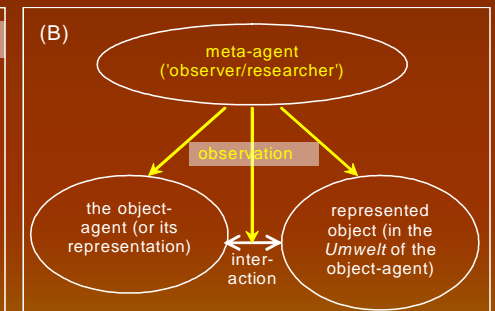
## Objective perspective:

- a thought thinking of another thought for which it is *not* an interpretant.
- 'Logic of the other one' ('Objective logic')

**Sign:** The *representamen* mediates information from object to interpretant-signs  
à temporal **sign-process**



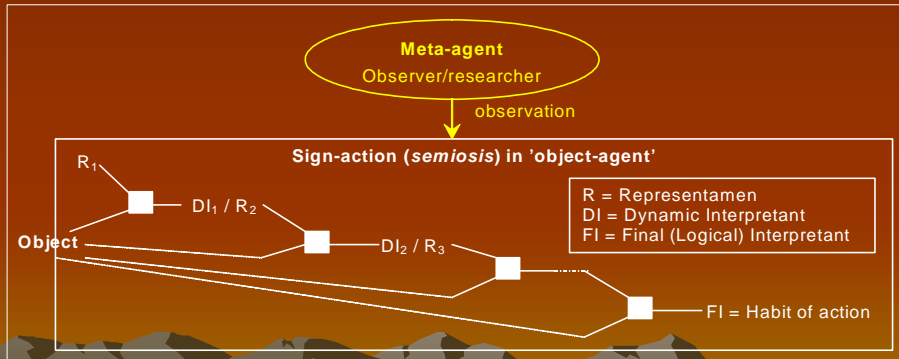
A. Observation from 'transcendental perspective'



B. Observation from 'objective perspective'

## 2<sup>nd</sup> derivation from the objective perspective (1907)

- The new prototype for the concept of sign: a common sense conception of an external *communicative* sign, an *uttered* and *interpreted* sign
- The purpose of interpreter is to reveal the cognitive content of the uttered sign
- the chain of interpretant-signs tends to internalize the full information that the sign contains  $\bar{O}$  final logical interpretant being so irresistibly internalized conception that it carves itself in the object-agent's habits of action.



## Execution of 2<sup>nd</sup> derivation

- Execution of the 2<sup>nd</sup> derivation:
  - The utterer is not necessary for all signs (e.g. natural signs)  $\bar{O}$  abstracted and substituted by its *essential ingredient*, the **object** of sign.
  - The interpreter is not necessary either (e.g. uttered sign with only *potential* 'would-be' interpreter)  $\bar{O}$  abstracted and substituted by its *essential ingredient*, the **interpretant** of sign.
- However, in order to get **real, effective** sign *process*, an **actual interpreter is needed** – signs without actual interpreters can act only *dynamically*, i.e. they can have only physical effects – there are no **sign-action**.
  - $\exists$  No examples of signs where *both* interpreter *and* utterer are absent
  - $\rightarrow$  e.g. natural signs are not signs until they are *considered* as signs

## Properties and consequences of 2<sup>nd</sup> derivation

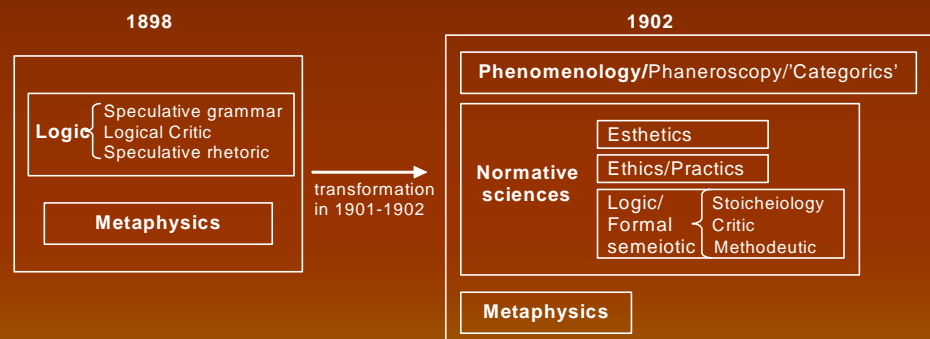
- Conditions of the interpreter (object-agent):
  - The (both actual and 'would-be') interpreter is not an empty shell
  - it must have such a minimal cognitive structure that makes it *capable* of interpreting the sign in question.
  - it has to be capable of *perceiving* those characters of the Representamen that connect it to its object.
  - The object must be somehow beforehand or independently acquainted  $\bar{O}$  The interpreter needs a *collateral observation* about the object:
    - “The Sign can only represent the Object and tell about it. It cannot furnish acquaintance with or recognition of that Object; for that is what is meant in this volume by the Object of a Sign” (CP 2.230-231, 1910.)
    - “by collateral observation, I mean previous acquaintance with what the sign denotes.” (CP 8.178-9, EP 2:493-4, 1909.)

## 'Essential ingredients' of 2<sup>nd</sup> derivation

- The starting point intuition of the 2<sup>nd</sup> derivation is governed by the ideal of transparent *rational* communication, the ideal of scientific inquiry produced by community of autonomous inquirers.
- The idea of an *inquiry* is not abstracted away in the derivation  $\bar{O}$  the normative criterion of communication or any interpretation of a sign is still the truth about its object.
- **Concluding hypotheses:**
  1. The *only* role of the object of sign is to give to a sign a capability of being *true*.
    - “Truth is the conformity of a representamen to its object, *its* object, ITS object, mind you. [...] There must be an action of the object upon the sign to render the latter true. Without that, the object is not the representamen's object. [...] (CP 5.554, 1906)
  2. The concept of sign resulted from **both** derivations is the concept of **representational sign** designed to model rational or scientific inquiry

# New philosophical sciences (1902)

- One reason for the need of the 2nd derivation is the finding of new *pre-logical* philosophical sciences of Phenomenology, Esthetics, and Ethics in *Theoretical* philosophy at 1902.
- Logic were no more depended merely on mathematical principles, but also on phenomenological, esthetic, and 'ethical' ones.



## Logic and Practics

### Logic / semiotic

- Self-controlled thought vs.
- Thought-guided thought vs.
- Truth-seeking thought vs.

- Theoretical normative **logic**  
= Science of **self-controlled thought**

à **Logic is a subspecies of Practics** (thinking is a species of mental action).

### Practics / (ant)ethics

- self-controlled action
- thought-guided action
- thought seeking *practical ends*

- Theoretical normative **ethics**  
= Science of **self-controlled conduct**  
= Science of **thought-guided action**

# Signs that do not seek the truth?

- Not all phenomena that are commonly considered as signs are interested in their truth.
- If the interpretation has some *other* normative criterion of success than truth (like practical applicability, effectiveness, novelty, 'beauty', entertainment value, etc.) or no criterion at all (e.g. 'wild' stream of consciousness), are there any need for the object?  
Is the object of sign then irrelevant and thus 'reducible'?
- Do such 'may-be' signs belong merely to the objects of relevant special sciences?
- Answer: perhaps not – the pre-logical normative science of Practics or (ant)ethics might be relevant.

## Concept of Practical sign?

- The concept of controlling thought in *Practics* should be **independent** on the *logical* concepts of thought and *sign*.
- Controlling thought in *Practics* does not need to be in itself controlled.
- Possible 'practical' concept of sign is purely future-oriented, **anticipative thought-sign**  
à **No object is needed**, because it does not have to be true of anything, its origin is irrelevant – all that matters is whether the resultant action is succesful, whatever the practical normative criterion is.

# Theory and Practice

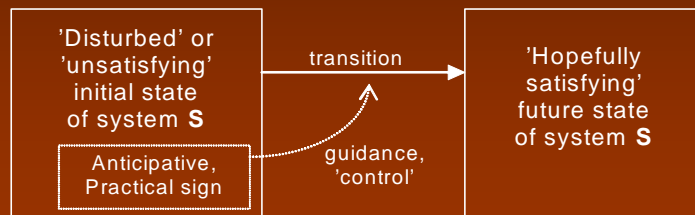
“Of the two great tasks of humanity, *Theory* and *Practice*, the former sets out from a sign of a real object with which it is *acquainted*, passing from this, as its *matter*, to successive interpretants embodying more and more fully its *form*, wishing ultimately to reach a direct *perception* of the entelechy; while the latter, setting out from a sign signifying a character of which it *has an idea*, passes from this, as its *form*, to successive interpretants realizing more and more precisely its *matter*, hoping ultimately to be able to make a direct *effort*, producing the entelechy. But of these two movements, logic very properly prefers to take that of Theory as the primary one.”  
(EP 2:304-5, 1904, from “New Elements”)

# The place of Practical sign

- Self-controlled action does employ also logical signs:
  - in a transition of an *Idea* into practice, i.e. into **action**, the conditions of actualization of the idea have to be *inquired*
  - The execution of control proper is done within logical signs
- However, the *Idea* that initiates the whole process of self-controlled action, is mere wish to get rid of experienced ‘disturbing state of mind’ that demands some action in order to feel better.

# The form of Practical sign

- An anticipative, non-representational sign *mediates* the transition between two states of a system, i.e. it has a triadic but non-representational form:



- The criterion for the success of the transition is determined solely by the *result state* – it is **independent** on the initial state.
- The origin of a practical sign is irrelevant to its successfulness.
- The initial state is **not** the object of sign

# All thirds are not signs

- “In 1867, [...] I saw that there must be a conception [of thirdness] of which I could make out some features, but being unfamiliar with it in its generality, I quite naturally mistook it for that conception of representation which I obtained by generalizing for this very purpose the idea of a sign. I did not generalize enough, a form of error into which greater minds than mine might fall. I supposed the third class of characters was quite covered by the representative characters.” (CP 1.565, c. 1899)