

## The role of emotional interpretants in Peirce's theory of belief and doubt

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**Abstract.** The theory of emotional interpretant is mentioned only a few times in Peirce's works. My hypothesis is that if Peirce did not develop this concept through and through, and reflected on it only very late in his writings, it is because it had been implicit in almost all his previous epistemological and semiotic works. The qualitative nature which defines belief and doubt makes the whole theory of inquiry rely on feelings, and is a consistent part of the characterization of beliefs as dispositions. In spite of this, objectivity is still preserved.

**Keywords:** belief, disposition, doubt, emotional interpretant, feeling, interpretant, Charles Peirce, *quale*, Christoph von Sigwart

Charles S. Peirce characterized belief in at least two different ways. First, it is what puts the process of inquiry to an end. The aim of any research process is the fixation of beliefs in the safest way, so that they will not be shattered again in an immediate future. The second approach to belief is through the notion of habit: a belief is not necessarily something occurring in our minds, but rather a rule which guides our actions. The two views are, according to Peirce, not only compatible, but also complementary, like the front and the back sides of a same view. Nevertheless, their articulation might seem uneasy. It is not so much to say that belief-habit is not cogent with belief as an event: the relations between occurring states of mind and dispositions to act under certain circumstances have been investigated for some decades, and have yielded a better understanding of belief. But the problem here is different. The first characterization of belief as the stopping point of inquiry implies that it has an emotional nature. Indeed, while inquiry is ignited by real doubt, which manifests itself through a sense of uneasiness and discomfort, doubt vanishes when something provides a retrieved feeling of certainty and comfort – namely, belief. To believe *p* is to accept *p because*

it provides a feeling of comfort which would not have been reached if one had not believed *p*. It entails an emotional nature of beliefs: one has to believe what it is agreeable or pleasant to believe *in view* of not revising one's beliefs again. It seems to imply at least some commitment to psychologism, despite Peirce's repeated claim that he opposed any psychological view of logic. Does it mean that the dispositional analysis of beliefs should be led in terms of emotional dispositions? Does the late notion of emotional interpretant provide some clue in order to reconcile cognitive and affective aspects of belief?

## 1. General theory of the interpretant

The theory of the interpretant was introduced in the seminal article "A new list of categories" in 1867. It is defined as "a mediating representation which represents the relate to be a representation of the same correlate which this mediating representation itself represents" (W 2.53–54). In other words, not only does it represent the same thing as a sign, but it represents itself as doing so. An interpretant is equivalent to a sign – or is more developed, or denotes only part of the object of the sign it determines – and was created by the same sign. It is a sign determined by another sign, and immediately created by this sign. Each of these criteria implies some consequences.

First, since an interpretant is equivalent to the sign it is the interpretant of, it conveys in its signification all that the sign bears with itself, except the contact with the object. The interpretant is the signification determined by a sign from an object. Peirce said that it is the adequate signified result or "proper significate outcome" of a sign (CP 5.473, 1907). The interpretant can therefore signify "all that is explicit in the sign itself apart from its context and circumstances of utterance" (CP 5.473, 1907).

The second criterion implies that an interpretant, which is immediately created by the sign, has been created in a mediate and relative way by the object of the sign whose signification it conveys. As such, the distinction between the interpretant and the object of a sign is not always easily traced. In particular, Peirce acknowledged that if the final interpretant encompasses the whole of what the sign could reveal concerning the object, it seems to be reducible to the dynamic object (MS 339, 1906).

Finally, the interpretant of a sign may be characterized in reference to its recipient. For instance, it may be what the author of a book wants to point out to its reader. Peirce granted as a "tribute to Cerberus" that in this sense the interpretant is in a mind – or rather, a quasi-mind, namely the mental effect of a sign on an interpreter, like the intention to obey to an imperative command, or even simply the corresponding action. "Such a mediating representation may be termed an *interpretant*, because it fulfills the office of an interpreter, who says that a foreigner says the same thing which he

himself says" (W 2.54). The interpretant thus plays a reflexive role, saying not only what the foreigner says, but that he himself says the same thing. Such is the basis of signification: both translating a sign into some intelligible content and warranting that it is an acceptable translation.

So, an interpretant is this explanation which reinforces a sign and determines it further in relation to its object, thus producing a new sign. The potential regress from meaning to meaning and from sign to sign must stop somewhere (or there would be an absolute first sign not determined by previous signs, which contradicts Peirce's demonstration of the impossibility of first intuitions). Such a "bottom meaning" of a sign consists in the idea of a feeling or of an action (CP 5.7, 1906): unsurprisingly, firstness and secondness, emotional and energetic interpretants, or icon and index, form the basis of representation. To sum up, the process of signification involves a sign determining an interpreter "to a feeling, to an exertion, or to a Sign" (CP 4.536, 1906), and the relation of determination between sign and interpreter is the interpretant.

Thus, it seems that an interpretant is neither the mind which interprets nor the effect on this mind, but the relation of determination of this effect produced by a sign on a (quasi-)mind. It does not necessarily determine an action. Indeed, although pragmatism may be legitimately defined by its focus on practical consequences, it does not mean that all interpretants are doomed to be an action in the end. While executing an order is a natural outcome and the proof that the order was understood, one may claim that some actions would only be the ultimate test for clarifying a concept whose signification is not essentially related to anything practical (like hardness).

Whereas action is not particularly related to interpretation in another mode than in the form of a conceivable, possible, final practical test in order to make significations crystal clear, one may wonder to what extent interpretants depend on feelings in the most concrete manner. If this is the case, any sign – inasmuch as it is interpreted as a causal determination and a vehicle for meaning – would produce a "what it is like", some sort of sensation, for the following reason. An interpretant does not convey a new signification, and must rely on some previous piece of knowledge, belief or representation. It sheds light on an element of reality which the interpreter was already familiar with, thanks to a "collateral experiment".

In other words, a primary acquaintance is necessary to develop further signification – one reason why a brain in a vat could never have the semantic notion required to think in concepts. It does not imply the endorsement of a realism in which we would immediately access dynamic objects, but only a constant reference to immediate objects, since an interpretant emerges from the relation between a sign and an object. A sign does not bring such a parcel of reality to be known as much as it determines how it is to be known. The sign presents it in a certain light, so that it produces a certain effect.

Peirce gave the example of a writer and a painter, who both draw attention to “the quality of the sympathetic element of the situation, generally a very familiar one – a something you probably never did so clearly realize before” (CP 8.179, 1909). A familiar situation is a good example because a sign can only denote a reality with which a previous contact has been established – otherwise it would be an absolute unknowable: the indexical part of the sign refers to the thisness of reality, but cannot take its place. Every sign points to the quality of a “sympathetic element”, which means that the qualitative nature of signification comes first, for it can be shared and enjoyed both by those that produced and received the sign.

Such an asymmetry in favour of the *quale* is due to a specific fact of signification. It might be expected that linguistic universals, like universals in thought, should be conceptual, and belong to thirdness. But subjects and predicates in propositions, even when they seem to refer to universals, do so in being indices (for subjects) or icons (for predicates). Even in propositions with abstract terms, “the predicate represents the Firstness that it signifies. The predicate is necessarily an *Iconic Sumisign*” (CP 2.316, 1902). For example, ‘man’ denotes individual men, not a class or a concept, signifying a firstness and referring to possibles or qualities. Peirce famously explained that it may iconically refer to generalities through the mental superimposition of composite photographs. “The signification of a term is all the qualities which are indicated by it” (CP 2.431, 1900). There are no such *things* as genera or species (W 3.98). If generality *in language* is on the side of firstness rather than concept, or even on the side of the possibility of sensations, that is, pure qualities, it may be a way to find the universal in the particular (Scotus’ theory, which was not extreme enough for Peirce, though). It provides a form of indeterminacy which is not general but vague: ‘tree’ or ‘man’ refer to a single thing, but without saying which in particular.

## 2. Role of the emotional interpretant

Can we legitimately speak of the emotional interpretant? The foregoing indicates that any sign has an interpretant, that is, its signification or one of its possible significations, which is essentially of a qualitative or “emotional” nature. It is certainly on purpose that Peirce did not speak of emotion *simpliciter*. It is rather a feeling, which is not to be equated with sentiment, sensation or emotion. Sensation is “everything which is directly known to us by our feelings” (W 3.54). It differs from a feeling by being appended to a subject (even though Peirce sometimes referred to “feeling or sensation”, e.g. CP 7.625, 1903). That emotional interpretants refer to feelings appears quite clearly from the few Peircean texts devoted to it. Such a scarcity does not necessarily mean that emotional interpretants are second-rate. One may even suspect that if Peirce

did not develop this concept through and through and reflected on it only very late in his intellectual career, it is because it had been implicit in most of his previous epistemology and semiotic. Here is the main text where the notion was presented:

The first proper significate effect of a sign is a feeling produced by it. There is almost always a feeling which we come to interpret as evidence that we comprehend the proper effect of the sign, although the foundation of truth in this is frequently very slight. This 'emotional interpretant', as I call it, may amount to much more than that feeling of recognition; and in some cases, it is the only proper significate effect that the sign produces. Thus, the performance of a piece of concerted music is a sign. It conveys, and is intended to convey, the composer's musical ideas; but these usually consist merely in a series of feelings. If a sign produces any further proper significate effect, it will do so through the mediation of the emotional interpretant, and such further effect will always involve an effort. (CP 5.475, 1907)

Peirce mentioned several features of the emotional interpretant. First, it is a feeling produced by (almost) every single sign, and it is what it produces in the first place. Second, it is a feeling of understanding. Indeed, if a sign has some effect on us, we are aware of such an effect, hence of understanding it or at least acknowledging it. Its minimum effect is something like the recognition of this effect. Third, this feeling of comprehension is no clue toward truth. Peirce added that the emotional interpretant may be the only interpretant, as in the case of a work of art. In the case of further interpretants, they emerge from or through the emotional interpretant, for instance an action (energetic interpretant) or a thought.

The emotional interpretant belongs to the trichotomy of emotional, energetic and logical interpretants. It is unsure whether it is equivalent to the trichotomy of the immediate, dynamic and final interpretant. Thomas Short maintains that they are conceptually separate (Short 2007). If so, this leaves open the possibility that a final interpretant could be emotional, that is, that the full meaning of a sign (such as "the performance of a piece of concerted music") could consist in feelings. It would blatantly contradict Short's claim that works of art are not meaningful signs in themselves because they can be understood entirely in terms of emotional interpretants (Short 2004: 229). For a discussion of this issue, see Henrik Rydenfelt's 2015 paper in the present volume.

Reduced to a minimal feeling of comprehension, the emotional feeling is to be understood as what characterizes us as rational beings. It is the sentiment of our ability to interpret a sign or catch a meaning, that is, the sentiment that we can do more than receive the causal influence of some signs: we have the awareness that something further is possible. Awareness or consciousness is a vague term. Its first grade is "that emotion which accompanies the reflection that we have animal life" (W

1.494). A feeling in its purity (if ever it could be isolated) would be this total unanalysed impression of the “*tout ensemble* of consciousness” (CP 6.345, 1907).

Thus, the interpretative feeling of a sign is the felt effect it has on us, its impact in our consciousness. It manifests itself through an emotional intensity relating the flow of thought-ideas in our stream of consciousness. This is why Peirce dropped the idea that we have a specific faculty of attention. After assuming first that “sensation and the power of abstraction or attention may be regarded as, in one sense, the sole constituents of all thought” (W 2.231), he finally contended that what Théodule Ribot mistook for attention, and John Stuart Mill and Alexander Bain called subjective intensity, is nothing but the emotional intensity of association (CP 7.396n.13, 1894).

There is at least one more example of emotional interpretant in Peirce’s texts which appeared many years before its explicit theorization: “Now, when a thing resembling this thing is presented to us, a similar emotion arises; hence, we immediately infer that the latter is like the former” (W 2.237).<sup>1</sup> Perceiving resemblances results, like any perception, from an unconscious process of inference, but includes a further stage, namely the expression of an emotion. It may remind us of the pragmatist maxim: a meaning of something (viz. resemblance) is the whole of its possible effects, not practical (the energetic interpretant), nor conceivable (the logical interpretant), but, first of all, felt and experienced in emotion.

The purport of the pragmatist maxim may be viewed as delineating what counts as meaning; and in this regard, two signs producing different emotional effects but having exactly the same practical consequences in every possible situation would mean the same. Emotion is too weak a criterion, just as conceptual sense is too strong (it is not a criterion of meaning, it *is* meaning); hence action (in a sufficiently qualified sense of a conceivable behaviour or rule of conduct) is the right criterion. In other words, a difference in feeling would be significant only if it resulted in a difference in conduct. In order to be more than a mere impression, resemblance has to be possibly expressed in behavioural terms, like in Pascal’s example: “Two faces which resemble each other make us laugh by their resemblance, when they are seen together, though neither of them by itself makes us laugh” (Pascal 1994: 196). In Peirce’s perspective, it should be said not that faces resembling each other are a symptom of the ridiculous, but rather that laugh is a sign (namely, an emotional interpretant) of resemblance.

The primacy of the emotional interpretant (in the sense that it comes first) implies that any proposition, thought, observation or experience comes with a certain feeling. Does it mean that when one believes *p*, one necessarily feels something regarding *p*? Or even, that every single belief produces its own particular emotional effect?

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<sup>1</sup> An alternative draft of the text does not mention emotion: a similar object “excites an idea naturally allied to the idea that object would excite” (EP 2.13, 1895).

### 3. What is it like to doubt and believe

The first rule of reason is, according to Peirce, a sincere search for truth, or a “will to learn”. Its starting point is doubt. Real doubt is characterized by the state of dissatisfaction it creates, thus triggering the quest for truth. Or even more, doubt *is* this state of dissatisfaction when confronting an uncertain, unstable, or simply missing belief. Belief and doubt differ like two qualitative states: “Doubt and belief are two states of mind which feel different. We can tell by our immediate *sensation* almost always when we doubt and when we are convinced. This is such a difference as there is between red and blue, pleasure and pain” (W 3.21). Nevertheless, as a qualification, Peirce added that a thought is not only a feeling: if it includes such a qualitative part, it is also constituted by a separate contentful part. “A thought is something that we feel we have; at least, this is usually the case and the exceptions can conveniently be considered separately. [...] Now let any feeling have a meaning in the mind of the feeler, and that fact will constitute a thought; so that a thought may be defined, in the first place, as a feeling with a meaning” (W 3.38). It is true that the relation between feeling and meaning is not very explicit, and that it is not clear if the meaning is reducible or entirely enclosed in the quality of feeling.

As a consequence, just like one cannot believe at will but only at the term of an inquiry, one cannot doubt at will. For as long as one is rather satisfied, one *is* satisfied, and there is no point in continuing the discussion (MS 606, 1906). Writing a question down or expressing an uncertainty does not create a genuine doubt, contrary to what Descartes supposed. “A proposition that could be doubted at will is certainly not *believed*” (CP 5.524, 1905). Peirce drew a link between doubt and rationality: self-control requires criticism, which implies doubt (CP 5.523, 1905). And self-control is no more voluntary than doubt. If I were to control doubt and apply it in a certain proportion to such or such of my beliefs, it would probably be too small or too big (CP 7.109, 1911).

A possible picture of Peirce's theory of belief and doubt is the following one. The kind of rationality here at play is coherence, since the irritating feeling which launches inquiry comes from noticing a breach in the coherence of our beliefs. Coherence theories are often objected to with the “too much to ask” objection, namely that absolute coherence is too high a requirement because no one is perfectly consistent. However, in terms of emotions, Peirce's coherentism does not require to be thoroughly rational, but only to be let in peace by one's irrationality. It is a kind of hedonistic coherentism, so to speak: only the emotionally unbearable discording beliefs are to be corrected.

This raises the question of what types of signs really create a stoppage in inquiry. If the semiotic chain is perpetuated until satisfaction, it implies that emotional, not

logical interpretants suffice to reach the stopping point of inquiry. However, the inquiry stops when a new belief, that is a habit of action, is obtained. This ultimate situation requires a final interpretant, which is supposedly logical. How could a pure feeling be the terminus of a scientific inquiry? Should it be said that the inquiry brings about a logical interpretant which itself yields a feeling of comfort, or that both emotional and logical interpretants arise at the same time?

It may be because of such an ambiguity that Peirce importantly changed his position. The previous conception was present in the 1870s, and might seem not to have evolved much; but it actually did. Thirty years later, Peirce did not view doubt exactly as the basis of the process of knowledge. Still, belief comes long before the power of doubting. Again, the process is the same: among well-set beliefs, new circumstances create a surprise, which makes doubt arise (CP 5.512, 1905). Doubt is a kind of emotion, a “coarse” sensation, likely to vary in intensity and in quality (CP 7.109, 1911). Thence a whole typology of doubts, and perhaps a specific sensation for each particular situation of doubt: feelings of doubting that God exists, that the world exists, that I am myself, that I turned off the lights, etc., may induce various qualities in my consciousness.

However, the difference is the following: if doubt is indeed characterized by a feeling of discomfort, it cannot be reduced to it. A conceptual clarification shows that it is much more than that: “Doubt is a state of mind marked by a feeling of uneasiness; but we cannot, from a logical, least of all from a pragmatic point of view, regard the doubt as consisting in the feeling” (CP 5.510, 1905). Otherwise, we would have an immediate knowledge of what we doubt, i.e. an introspective faculty giving access to our beliefs. Beliefs and doubts would be purely actual, and pragmatism would be useless. When I doubt, I do not really doubt *that x*, for it would suffice to believe that *x* or that non-*x*, on the basis of the most convincing evidence, to ease off such doubt. To doubt is not to ignore whether *x*, but to wonder whether *x*, *y*, *z*, etc. It arises from conflicting lines of action (real or imaginary). Doubt is often caused by some uncertainty in front of several alternatives, and by the imaginary transition from one to another. Therefore, it is more than a state of consciousness: it supposes an end. Contrary to ignorance, doubt really interferes with belief-habit, and it affects someone essentially as a question likely to become practical (MS 828, 1910).

#### **4. Belief: disposition or emotion**

An accurate analysis of doubt shows that emotion is not enough to define it, and that it is necessary to mention possibilities of action. Conversely, a precise analysis of belief shows that potentialities of action or dispositions to act are not sufficient to characterize it, and that it also requires a sensitive criterion. It may even be that this

part of feeling forbids any strict interpretation of beliefs in terms of propositional attitudes and of dispositions. Indeed, the relation between belief and action does not account for all the characters of belief. If a belief is realized in "a clear impulse to act in certain ways" (W 3.50), or if, in other words, "it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action, or, say for short, a *habit*" (W 3.263), it also goes together with "a certain feeling with regard to a proposition" (W 3.50).

It is true that this feeling may be viewed as a more or less favourable "disposition" toward some propositional content: this kind of feeling is "a disposition to be satisfied with the proposition" (W 3.50). The feeling produced in us by a certain proposition is experienced as a sensation of pleasure, or perhaps rather of acceptance, assent or satisfaction, thus easing off the irritation caused by doubt. Such a link between truth and satisfaction may remind us of what Peirce much later would condemn as a hedonist doctrine (CP 5.559–562, c. 1906). To Peirce, hedonism should be predicated to "pluralist pragmatism", namely James's position, as opposed to Cenopythagorean pragmatism.

The definition of belief as a disposition to be satisfied with a proposition is reminiscent of a much more recent conception, namely L. Jonathan Cohen's. To him, to believe that  $p$  is to entertain the disposition to "feel it true that  $p$  and false that not- $p$ " (Cohen 1992: 4). Such beliefs he calls "belief-feelings" or "credal feelings." This view accounts for the involuntariness of belief, as opposed to the voluntary acceptance of a proposition: "feeling-dispositions themselves are certainly states of mind that we cannot switch on and off at will" (Cohen 1992: 26). Peirce of course would agree that there is no possible "will to believe".

Thus far, the relation of belief to disposition, action and emotion seems to work as follows: any belief, as a belief-habit, has a dispositional nature because of its implicit practical purport, and is furthermore accompanied by a disposition to feel satisfied when some corresponding evidence is expressed or displayed. For instance, if I believe that all bodies have a tendency to be attracted by the earth according to the law of gravity, then not only will I behave so as not to make fragile objects fall down, but I will feel comforted if I learn that when dropped from the top of the tower of Pisa a ball fell down instead of taking off in the air. One could perhaps explain the relation between belief and emotion in saying that both are dispositional in a different way: to belief, which is a disposition to act in a determinate way under certain circumstances, corresponds character, which is a disposition to react emotionally in a rather indeterminate way under certain circumstances.

The claim that every belief is accompanied with a qualitative state is both difficult to defend and at the basis of the theory of inquiry. While Peirce had not developed a theory of epistemic feelings at that time yet, attaching a *quale* of confidence to beliefs was a first step toward it. This feeling is the more or less reliable sign of a disposition

to act, “a more or less sure indication” (W 3.247), for it is possible to be mistaken about one’s own beliefs. That could be an argument to consider the impression of satisfaction as purely incidental, having no part to play in belief. Such is Russell’s position, who considered that the feeling of believing does not belong to epistemology but to psychology:

As regards the “emotion” of belief, the only thing that needs to be understood here is that, however real and important it may be as a psychological fact, it does not concern epistemology, and must be noticed only to avoid the confusions which might result from its unobserved intrusion, *like an undesirable alien whose photograph is furnished to the authorities at the frontier.* (Russell 1992: 141)

Such a position is supposed to prevent us from losing the objective profit of pragmatist analyses and falling back again into the myth of interiority. Pragmatism teaches that it is not in scrutinizing our souls that we will have a clearer access to our dispositions to act. We do not have inner affections the observation of which would reveal the content and nature of our mental states. As Kim (2006) writes: “One thing that is certain is that we do not find out whether we believe or hope by looking inward to detect specific qualia. Nor is it obvious that we know that we are angry, or that we are embarrassed, by detecting a special phenomenal quality.”

However, one might argue that experiencing a feeling toward a proposition may not be so different from what Russell called a propositional attitude. An attitude toward a proposition is a tendency to view it in a certain way, for instance as a question, as a hope, as a rule of conduct, etc. Essentially, it seems to include a qualitative element.

## **5. Belief, consciousness and epistemic emotivism**

The relation between belief and disposition still calls for further clarification. To believe  $p$  is equivalent to be disposed to behave according to the law that  $p$ , or to adopt a conduct coherent with the consequences of  $p$ . A belief is not a mental content but a disposition to act. It seems to echo Wittgenstein’s analyses, in spite of a big difference: while for Wittgenstein a dispositional belief does not require any mental presence, for Peirce no belief exists before it has given rise to a first judgment. For Wittgenstein, a belief need not be instantiated by a sign. I believed that Fula people have two legs before actually thinking about it, which Peirce would probably have denied. For Peirce, beliefs are not dispositions but produce dispositions to action: “Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in a certain way, when the occasion arises” (W 3.247).

Therefore, various comprehensions of the interplay of belief and disposition are at hand. First, one could expect belief to be essentially practical, which implies that emotion is not a constitutive part of it. Second, emotional feeling may be part of the activity of believing *and* of acting. It is a disposition to behave in a certain way; in other words, belief is a disposition to both act and feel or react. Third possibility, any belief has in its nature characters belonging to feeling and to the impulse to act.

The latter option does not imply that belief would necessarily belong to consciousness. As a practical rule, a belief does not need to be made explicit, nor to occur in one's mind. Such or such definite practice is a sufficient sign of such or such belief, and does not require something more in consciousness. Furthermore, one can believe something without even knowing that one believes it. Yet, one could object that a belief which is not believed reduces to almost nothing. In a certain way – viz., judgments and thoughts – a belief needs to be represented. Arguably, this was Peirce's position, due to his analysis of beliefs in terms of sensations (Tiercelin 2005).

As the feeling which goes with any belief is an essential part of it, a belief is always "something that we are aware of" (W 3.263). If this "feeling of belief" (e.g. W 3.293) is not immediate, it then results from a logical critic of beliefs, which develops judgments in imagination, but it must in any case be present for belief to exist. "Strictly then every actual thought is felt" (W 3.38). How about the objection that some habits of action have not been made explicit by a judgment? Peirce very clearly held that unconscious operations of the mind are not thought but only processed, and may be deemed as the effect of a computing machine, which may be said to think only in a derived sense.

In a nutshell: belief and feeling or emotion are normally bound together. One's beliefs are most of the time accompanied by a feeling of familiarity, recognition, pleasure, etc., even with aesthetic emotions, passions, and so on. When emotions and beliefs do not fit together, doubt arises. It might seem to entail that one's true criterion is emotional, and that belief has to be confronted to this unmistakable norm. It is not so. One can of course "misfeel", so to speak, and experience inappropriate emotions. Peirce called them "appearances" "which we know to be emotional" (W 2.169). As they are constantly denied by perceptual evidence and by testimonies, they even constitute a safe basis for discovering error.

Moral emotivism holds that axiological statements fundamentally express emotions: what we judge good (or respectively, bad) is what provokes good (or respectively, bad) emotions in us. On the same principle, let us call "epistemic emotivism" the claim that our beliefs express emotions. According to epistemic emotivism, believing *p* means accepting *p* because of the positive emotion it provides. It very much sounds like wishful thinking or a quite vulgar version of pragmatism, whose maxim would be that whatever is agreeable is true. If feelings accompany beliefs, and if they are a rather secure criterion of what is held to be true, how to avoid the risk of having

beliefs rely on sentiments of believing, emotions, pleasure and pain, or an instinct of rationality? If meaning is in great part conveyed and delivered through an emotional interpretant, are we forced to believe on the basis of a sentiment of rationality? It would be a very un-Peircean path.

Hence the following clarification, which Peirce may have found necessary in order to make a difference with some German thinkers such as Sigwart, who contrived to found logic on a correct feeling (CP 3.432, 1896). To leave it to a criterion of *Gefühl* of logicity (CP 5.87, 1903) is to put the cart before the horse, and expect to feel the satisfaction of an inference before having drawn this very inference (EP 2.169, 1903). Sigwart's error is semiotic: as a feeling, an emotion (of trust, for instance) is the sign of nothing else, and especially not of truth. Thus, "we cannot trust a feeling as such, since a feeling as such neither is nor utters any proposition to be a subject of trust or distrust" (EP 2.386, 1906). In other words, for Sigwart a good reasoning is a reasoning which satisfies our logical taste (CP 2.19, 1902); but the logician is not interested in any gratification or personal satisfaction, even to some logical taste (MS 339, 1898). A reasoning is not good because it pleases us, it pleases us because it is good.

A last point prevents Peirce from sinking in epistemic emotivism: he did not conflate emotions on feelings (about the dangers of such a conflation, see Tappolet 2000). While phenomenalism tended to identify emotions through their phenomenal manifestations or qualia, Peirce understood that there is more to an emotion. An emotion is essentially triadic, and includes elements of sensation, experience of reality, and judgment. The theory of emotion as hypothesis, which was defended by Peirce, even requires considering any emotion as having some conceptual content.

## 6. Conclusion

I would like to conclude in stressing that Peirce's remarks on the relation between emotional interpretants and beliefs are too scattered and unsystematic to make a full-fledged theory. Here are six theses that Peirce seems to endorse or allude to at one point or another, and which all contribute to his reflection without building together a cogent position. First, sometimes Peirce claimed that a certain kind of feeling is the *cause* of one's having a certain belief. Having this belief provides a feeling of comfort, and therefore the belief *should* be endorsed. The major problem with this view is that it tends to view the pleasantness of a belief as a good reason for endorsing it. Second, Peirce sometimes *characterizes* one's belief that *p* as one's having a certain kind of feeling or attitude towards the particular proposition that *p*. It is the position defended in Cohen 1992. Third, one's belief that *p* is sometimes said to *go together with* a disposition to be satisfied with the proposition, and also to be satisfied when

some corresponding evidence is expressed or displayed. On some other occasions, belief or thought is *characterized* as a feeling with a meaning. The fifth point is that the qualitative dimension of belief is also thought to be a particular emotional effect *produced by every single belief* (and doubt), and the (fallible, although reliable) way through which we (usually) know what we believe (and doubt). However, the pragmatic clarification of beliefs remains the only real and precise indicator of their content. Moreover, in the case of beliefs that have not been made explicit by a judgment, or which one does not know one has, it might be argued that no emotional effect is immediately attached to them. Finally, the qualitative dimension of belief is said to give us a means, not to identify the particular content of our beliefs (and doubts), but to *know* whether the attitude we have toward a certain issue is that of belief or that of doubt. This last position is defended by Goldman 1993.<sup>2</sup>

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### **Роль эмоциональных интерпретант в пирсовской теории верования и сомнения**

Теория эмоциональных интерпретант упоминается в пирсовских работах только несколько раз. Моя гипотеза состоит в том, что Пирс не развивал эту концепцию и касается ее только в своих самых поздних работах, поскольку на самом деле эта концепция в скрытом виде присутствовала почти во всех его более ранних эпистемологических и семиотических работах. Качественная природа верования и сомнения ставит всю теорию знания в зависимость от чувств и является важной частью характеристики верований как диспозиций. Но, несмотря на это, объективность сохраняется.

### **Emotsionaalsete tõlgendite roll Peirce'i uskumuse ja kahtluse teoorias**

Emotsionaalse tõlgendi teooriat mainitakse Peirce'i töödes vaid paaril korral. Minu hüpotees on, et kui Peirce ei arendanud seda mõistet lõpuni ning mõtiskles selle üle vaid oma väga hilistes kirjutistes, siis seetõttu, et mõiste oli implitsiitselt esindatud peaaegu kõigis tema varasemates epistemoloogia ja semiootika alastes töödes. Kvalitatiivsus, mis määratleb uskumust ja kahtlust, muudab kogu teadmise teooria sõltuvaks tunnetest ja sel on järjekindel osa uskumuste iseloomustamisel dispositsioonidena. Sellest hoolimata säilib objektiivsus siiski.

## **COMMENT**

### **Emotion and belief**

*Henrik Rydenfelt<sup>3</sup>*

While such things as feelings often receive a rather limited discussion in Peirce's writings, it appears that emotions play a pivotal role in the interpretation of signs and hence the development of thought and inquiry. In particular, Peirce sometimes connects belief with a type of feeling. Jean-Marie Chevalier asks if, in Peirce's view, "when one believes *p*, one necessarily feels something regarding *p*?". Chevalier sets out to defend the view that aside a habit, a belief, in Peirce's view, also involves or requires "a sensitive criterion", maintaining that "the relation between belief and action does not account for all the characters of belief". Chevalier then claims that Peirce verges on lapsing into the view that the settlement of opinion (or inquiry) is grounded in emotions, save for his insistence (ascribed to him by Chevalier) that an emotion is "the sign of nothing else, and especially not of truth".

Chevalier appears to think that this is Peirce's predicament because he reads Peirce as claiming that (1) all interpretation of signs begins with an emotional interpretant; (2) every

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belief is conscious or “felt”; (3) a belief entails a feeling or attitude towards a proposition; and (4) believing entails a feeling of satisfaction over corroborating evidence. I will argue that (2) and (4) are not plausible readings of the claims Chevalier quotes from Peirce, whereas (1) and (3), while these are views Peirce proposed, should not be taken to imply that inquiry is grounded in emotions in the manner suggested. I will conclude by remarking that emotions or feelings might turn out to play a central role in the process of the development of the norms (or aims) of inquiry, but this does not imply that inquiry is merely a consultation of feelings that a proposition or a belief elicit.

### The emotional interpretant and belief

As Chevalier points out, in Peirce's view any actual formation of interpretants begins with an emotional interpretant. In MS 318, Peirce maintains that this dynamical emotional interpretant is at least “the feeling of interpretability” of the sign. Because of the role of the emotional interpretant, Chevalier contends that “a primary acquaintance is necessary to develop further signification”. But while some experience appears quite necessary for any interpretation of signs, acquaintance with the same thing (in any sense of the word) does not seem to be. The feeling that a sign arouses may also be the feeling of novelty, excitement or intrigue.

Be that as it may, Chevalier then asks if it follows that the belief that *p* is always accompanied with a certain feeling or emotion, for “any proposition, thought, observation or experience comes with a certain feeling”. The verb ‘comes’ is misleading, however. Even if the formation of thought (and belief) requires feelings (emotional interpretants), those feelings are not themselves embedded in the thought (or belief).

Consider a case of observation, or a judgment based on sensation. Following Peirce's account, the sensation must spark, or itself be, an emotional interpretant, which (through some effort, or an energetic interpretant) results in a logical interpretant, a thought which is the judgment itself. The sensation or the emotional interpretant itself is not a *part* of the judgment, however; moreover, if the judgment is consequently believed – as it often is, for it is very hard not to believe one's eyes – the sensation or the emotional interpretant is not a quality characterizing the belief.

Chevalier asks: “If meaning is in great part conveyed and delivered through an emotional interpretant, are we forced to believe on the basis of a sentiment of rationality?” It seems to me that Peirce's account of the emotional interpretant does not bear on his account of belief in the fashion Chevalier is suggesting here. Emotional interpretants are necessary for any interpretation of signs, hence for thought, and hence for inquiry. But it would be a mistake to take this to imply that some feeling, particular or general, is part and parcel of a thought or belief. (I do not claim that thought occurs without feeling; of this more below.)

### The consciousness of belief

A second way in which Chevalier argues that beliefs have an emotional component is by drawing from passages by Peirce which suggest that beliefs are in some fashion *felt* in the consciousness. Chevalier claims that “for Peirce, no belief exists before it has given rise to a first judgment”. What could be meant by such a claim is, it seems, either (1) that every belief

has at some point been present to the consciousness as a judgment; or, *a fortiori*, (2) that every belief is a conscious judgment present to the consciousness. Neither view, as Chevalier himself seems to hold, is very plausible; moreover, both fit uneasily with Peirce's insistence that a belief is a habit of action, or a disposition to act. Nevertheless, he argues that either must have been Peirce's view.

In support of this interpretation, Chevalier quotes Peirce as saying, "Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in a certain way, when the occasion arises" (W 3.247). Yet here Peirce is driving a distinction between belief on the one hand, and a particular, actualized action on the other hand, in an attempt to emphasize the conditional nature of beliefs *qua* habits. Another quote which Chevalier presents in favour of his interpretation is Peirce's statement that "Strictly then every actual thought is felt" (W 3.38). However, here Peirce discusses *actual thought*, or thinking, which, obviously enough, is not equivalent to believing.

### Propositional attitudes

At more length, Chevalier discusses Peirce's view that beliefs goes together with a feeling, namely "a certain feeling with regard to a proposition" (W 3.50) or "a disposition to be satisfied with the proposition" (W 3.50). Here if anywhere it seems clearest that Chevalier must be on a right track: in Peirce's view, belief indeed is accompanied with a feeling. But what feeling, and how? Chevalier seems to be right in holding that what Peirce has in mind in the remarks just quoted is something like the attitude of 'acceptance' (or more generally the notion of 'propositional attitudes') as used in contemporary debates on epistemology.

Here, however, it is important to pay due attention to the conditional nature of the disposition Peirce points towards. Peirce does not say that a belief is, has been, or will be felt; he claims that belief comes with a disposition to be satisfied with the proposition believed *were* it to cross one's mind. The proposition need never even occur to the one believing it. Peirce's account of belief does not entail any *actual* (past, present, or future) feeling or attitude towards the relevant proposition, but a conditional disposition to feel.

It could be said that, in Peirce's view, belief thus combines a disposition to act and a disposition to feel; doubt appears to allow for an analogous treatment. Peirce characterizes doubt by a feeling of discomfort, but as Chevalier aptly points out, doubt "cannot be reduced to it". There is a practical side to doubt: in Chevalier's words, it "really interferes with belief-habit". Here we have two dispositions that doubt entails: a disposition to a feeling of irritation over a proposition and a disposition to hesitate in relevant conduct.

In line with his concerns about Peirce's account of inquiry, Chevalier asks: "If feelings accompany beliefs, and if they are a rather secure criterion of what is held to be true, how to avoid the risk of having beliefs rely on sentiments of believing, emotions, pleasure and pain, or an instinct of rationality?" We have seen that belief, in Peirce's view, entails an emotional element: a disposition towards satisfaction with a proposition. However, this does not itself make inquiry a matter of consulting feelings.

Indeed, we might even argue that, following Peirce's triad of feeling, action and thought, a belief entails – leaving aside the dispositions of feeling and of action already discussed – a disposition of thought: the disposition to apply the belief as a premise in reasoning or a

starting point in inquiry. (Were it interjected that reasoning is itself a form of conduct, and the third disposition in this sense entailed by the second, I would have no objections.) Similarly, beside the dispositions of irritation and of hesitation, doubt may also involve the disposition of problematization, the impetus of any genuine inquiry. None of this implies that inquiry proceeds based on emotions, however, or that the settlement of opinion is grounded in feeling.

### Emotions and evidence

There appears to be a further reason as to why Chevalier thinks that feelings and emotions could be taken as grounding the settlement of opinion. Chevalier argues for a self-admittedly coherentist interpretation of Peirce: "When emotions and beliefs do not fit together, doubt arises". By this view, doubt results from the perceived incoherence in beliefs, and "emotionally unbearable discording beliefs are to be corrected". But why should we think that there is such a connection between emotions and the impetus of inquiry? Chevalier argues that there is a disposition to experience feelings of satisfaction when faced with evidence that accords with what one believes: "[...] any belief, as a belief-habit, has a dispositional nature because of its implicit practical purport, and is furthermore accompanied by a disposition to feel satisfied when some corresponding evidence is expressed or displayed".

Based on the quotations already presented, however, I doubt that this would be Peirce's view. Consider Chevalier's example: "[...] if I believe that all bodies have a tendency to be attracted by the earth according to the law of gravity, [...] I will feel comforted if I learn that when dropped from the top of the tower of Pisa a ball fell down instead of taking off in the air". The satisfaction Peirce discusses is, however, not one from confirming or falsifying *evidence*. The feeling of satisfaction is directed at the proposition believed, not what tends to corroborate it. Similarly the feeling that accompanies doubt is an uneasy feeling concerning a proposition, not a feeling concerning *another* proposition which could be counted as evidence for or against its truth.

### Emotions and inquiry

I have argued, firstly, that the role of the emotional interpretant as the starting point of any actual interpretation (as well as, plausibly, all experience) does not imply that the emotional interpretant is as if retained as a part of that thought, let alone that beliefs rely on sentiments. Secondly, Peirce did not suggest that a belief is (or has been or will be) a conscious judgment. Thirdly, both belief and doubt both come with an emotional disposition – the disposition to feel satisfaction and uneasiness over a proposition, respectively – but this is neither here nor there concerning the grounds of settling opinion. Fourthly, in particular, such a disposition should not be taken to imply any attitude towards other propositions such as those that would count as evidence for or against a belief.

What, then, is the role of emotions in inquiry? Sometimes Peirce writes as if feelings had no place in logic, or the theory of good reasoning and inquiry, and that the goodness of an inference is reviewed against ever higher aims of reasoning, ultimately the promotion of reasonableness (such as in the 1903 "What makes a reasoning sound?"). But such notions remain vacuous if not given content in terms of their concrete development. In other places, it appears that this development is due to feelings: in MS 318, it is feelings of pleasure and

displeasure concerning imaginary circumstances that make us revise our purposes. Already in the central passages of “The fixation of belief” from 1877, the impetus forcing us from one method to another is a “social feeling” or the “social impulse”. The test of whether the scientific method is correctly applied to a question is not, as Peirce points out, “an immediate appeal to my feelings and purposes, but, on the contrary, itself involves the application of the method”. But in this application, it may be that emotions need to be consulted. The test of good reasoning is not in immediate feelings that ensue upon an inference, but support for the goodness of the reasoning might ultimately be found in the feelings that would ensue of the general application of the rule of inference of which that inference is an instance. Much more, of course, should be said to protect this view from various misunderstandings, such as that it makes logic and inquiry ultimately rest on something wholly subjective.

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