Hegel and the Peircean 'object'

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Abstract. Peirce's semiotics is well known for advocating a triadic, rather than a dyadic, sign structure, but interpretations of how such a structure works in practice have varied considerably. This paper argues that the Peircean 'object' is central to understanding Peirce's philosophical intent and that this element should be construed as a mediating element within the sign rather than as an originating source of it. This interpretation resonates with the fundamentally anti-dualist character of Peirce's philosophy and it creates potential convergences with the medieval philosophy of Duns Scotus – which was so influential in Peirce's thinking. Moreover, construal of the 'object' as a mediating entity within the sign highlights important parallels with Hegelian thought and the role of the 'essence' in the latter's dialectics. It is argued, indeed, that Peirce's triadic template for the sign has strong Hegelian roots. This substantially repositions Peirce's semiotics; it becomes, as in Hegel's dialectics, an account of concept formation. The over-arching framework in which this takes place, however, retains an adherence to Peirce's empiricist background and so avoids the reliance on logic which is the defining characteristic of Hegel's dialectical method.

Keywords: sign structure; Peirce; Hegel; Leibniz; object; concept

Introduction

There is, perhaps, no other term in Peircean thought that causes more confusion than the 'object' in the triadic structure of the sign. Given his rejection of dualism, the fact that Peirce uses this term when describing his sign structure seems to present the reader with a paradox. Is Peirce abandoning his anti-dualistic stance, or is he actually using the term in a manner that incorporates his rejection of dualism? In this paper, it will be argued that a Hegelian interpretation of the Peircean 'object' has the effect of positioning it *within* the Peircean sign, and in a role that parallels the 'Essence' in Hegelian dialectics. This, in turn, allows us to view Peirce's semiotics as a post-Hegelian endeavour to understand the activity of

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concept formation. Signs, in this construal, are not simply entities that we perceive and which we interpret – they become the very mechanisms through which we form our concepts.

Interpretations of Peirce's sign structure

Before embarking upon a discussion of the nature of the Peircean 'object', we should first evaluate the underlying structure of the Peircean sign itself. The central issue here is how the three elements of the sign structure relate to one another. One might assume that this would be a settled issue in the literature, but this is, in fact, far from being the case. As Short observes, "there is considerable trouble over how the relation of object to sign and sign to interpretant is to be conceived" (Short 2007: 165). In this context, we should begin by considering the various interpretations of his sign structure that emerge in the secondary literature.

The most common construal places the Peircean sign within a triadic relationship, but, critically, it also views the sign itself as only *one element* of that relationship:

<p style="text-align:center">Object – Sign – Interpretant</p>

An example of this interpretation is Jappy's account of Peirce. His version of the Peircean sign construes the object as the sign's source – and he positions the object as something 'behind' the sign "as an 'absent' entity which it represents" (Jappy 2013: 2). And Jappy goes on to describe semiosis as follows: "The dynamics of semiosis [...] can now be illustrated schematically [...] where the arrows indicate the direction of the semiotic determination – the semiotic 'determination flow', so to speak – from the object to the interpretant via the sign" (Jappy 2013: 6).

This interpretation of the sign structure has several important effects. Firstly, because the sign is placed between the object and the mind, it is often viewed as being *caused* by the object. De Waal, for example, talks of the sign being *compelled* by the object (De Waal 2013: 87). Liszka (1996: 21), likewise, argues that there is a sense of *compulsion* in the 'dynamic object': "The dynamic object can be considered as the dynamism, the machine that drives the semiotic process; it is what compels the sign".

Secondly, such interpretations tend to construe the sign itself as the experiential link between an object ('behind' the sign) and the mind. The sign acts, as a result, rather like a Humean 'sense impression', or as a 'communication vehicle' providing

information about the object which it 'represents', or which it 'stands for' (Forster 2011: 81). This leads to the sign being viewed as something that needs to be 'deciphered', as Brier suggests, with the object construed as its reference point: "For Peirce, signs always consist of a primary sign (Representamen), the object that is referred to (Object), and an interpreter (Interpretant) who deciphers the sign in relation to the historical processes of life and culture" (Brier 2008: 284).

In some accounts, commentators call the sign, in this specific role, by another term – the 'representamen'. For example, Smith outlines a similar triadic relationship to the one above, but with the 'sign' now described as the 'representamen': "In an abstract depiction of the sign, the representamen is determined by the object and in turn determines the interpretant" (Smith 2010: 38–9). Peirce, however, is not always consistent with his use of the term 'representamen'. As Deledalle points out, Peirce employs it until 1873, then he drops it until 1895, and then it is re-adopted until 1903, when it is abandoned once again (Deledalle 1992: 294). We will return to the conflation of these two terms shortly.

Elsewhere in the literature there is also another, and less common, interpretation of the Peircean sign structure. This adopts an alternative relationship between the three elements:

<div align="center">

Object – Interpretant – Sign

</div>

In this construal, Ma, for example, suggests that the interpretant should be placed in the *middle* of the triadic relationship, rather than as its concluding element: "The mediatory effect of the *interpretant* in the *sign–object* relation is predicated on the meaning of a sign being tied to the cultural, historical milieu within which the sign is understood" (Ma 2014: 379). And this model echoes the earlier view of Ogden and Richards who adopt a triadic structure when they place 'thought or reference' (in otherwords, the act of meaning creation) *in between* the 'referent' (e.g. the 'object') and the 'symbol' (e.g. the sign) (Ogden, Richards 1989: 11). More recently, Semetsky follows a similar line of argument, suggesting that Peirce's interpretant should be positioned between the representamen and the object: "His triadic conception affirms the dynamic character of signs and the ubiquitous role of this mediating component called interpretant as the included Third between a sign *per se* (alternatively called a representamen) and its object or referent" (Semetsky 2015: 17). In this second interpretation of the sign, meaning is created through the interpretant. This structure is clearly different from the first model of the sign that we considered. However, both models still place the 'object' *outside* of the sign, and also at the *beginning* of the signification process.

Reading Peirce, there certainly seems to be considerable evidence for the first construal of his sign structure – hereafter referred to as the 'received view'. Peirce states, for example:

> I will say that a sign is anything, of whatsoever mode of being, which mediates between an object and an interpretant; since it is both determined by the object *relatively to the interpretant,* and determines the interpretant *in reference to the object*, in such wise as to cause the interpretant to be determined by the object through the mediation of this 'sign'. (EP 2: 410)

This passage clearly construes the 'object' as the determining element in the signification process – with the sign positioned in between the object and the interpretant. But we should now assess whether this 'received view' is, in fact, the correct interpretation of Peirce's triadic sign structure.

Against the 'received' view of Peirce's sign structure

A deeper understanding of Peirce's philosophy raises questions as to whether the received view of his sign structure is, in fact, the correct one. For this reason, we must consider, very briefly, some other aspects of Peirce's broader philosophy.

Firstly, Peirce was a critic of dualism throughout his career. Indeed, he was so assured in this view that he treated his rejection of Cartesian Dualism as almost a settled issue: "The old dualistic notion of mind and matter, so prominent in Cartesianism, as two radically different kinds of substance, will hardly find defenders today" (EP 1: 292).

It would be surprising in this context, therefore, to find Peirce advocating an account of sign structure that seems to institutionalize such dualism. It would be a disservice to Peirce to suggest that he is simply being inconsistent here. We should establish, instead, how his actual use of the term 'object' can possibly work alongside his rejection of dualism.

Secondly, the "received" account of his sign structure takes little account of Peirce's broader philosophy of perception. Peirce insists that our perceptions are 'vagues' (EP 2: 324) and it is also clear that he rejects 'Kantian intuitionism' (EP 1: 113). This means that, for Peirce, our perceptions cannot provide us with direct (and non-inferential) knowledge. In these circumstances, it is difficult to see how signs can operate in the manner advocated by the 'received' view. A sign cannot provide us with direct information about a noumenal 'object' 'behind' it if its perceptual element is 'vague'. This aspect of Peirce's broader philosophical position is critical in understanding how he views the role of the 'object' in the sign. Peirce

believes that, when we are confronted with indeterminacy in our perceptual field, our mind attempts to deal with this by 'picking out' things from the perceptual continuum. This is the first step in transforming our initially indeterminate perceptions into more 'determinant' forms of knowledge.

At the centre of this process is the 'object' itself. This is created, for Peirce, as the mind 'picks out' something from the perceptual field. The Peircean 'object', therefore, is *formed by the mind* in creating a sign. In a letter to William James, for example, Peirce confirms this interpretation: "[...] the Object is brought into existence by the Sign" (EP 2: 493), and "The Object of a Sign may be something to be created by the Sign" (EP 2: 493). In this construal, it is sign action *itself* which creates the 'object' – and not the other way around. The object, created *within* the sign, now enjoys a *mediating* role because the sign is created in between the initial perception (the 'vague' representamen) and its signification in the mind (the interpretant).

Thirdly, this has important implications for how we actually understand Peirce's statements about the sign. Many of the passages where Peirce seems to suggest that the 'object' determines the sign are open to the challenge that he is, in fact, discussing *the whole triadic relationship of the sign structure* – rather than just the *experiential* element of the sign. The quotation at EP 2: 410, indeed, comes from a period (1907) when Peirce had dropped the term 'representamen'. As such, Peirce is not suggesting that the interpretant is determined by the object via the sign (the 'received view'), but rather that the *whole triadic relationship of the sign* (including the 'object' within it) determines the interpretant.

In support of this view, it is clear that Peirce's usage of the term 'representamen' is different from that of the 'sign'. The former is used by Peirce to describe the 'vague' experience from which the sign takes a "representative quality" (EP 2: 273). In contrast, the 'sign' involves the whole triadic structure. If this were not the case, we would find passages in Peirce where he states that the object determines *the representamen* – and these do not seem to be present in his work. Indeed, the slightly differing roles of the two terms (the sign and representamen) may also explain why Peirce dropped the latter for long periods of his career. It has a certain degree of superfluity given that the 'object' fixes the relevant parts of the perceptual continuum in the very formation of a sign.

Fourthly, on occasions Peirce clearly describes the 'object' – at least in one of its forms – as a *mediating* element. In a letter to Lady Welby, he states:

> It is usual and proper to distinguish two Objects of a Sign, the Mediate without, and the Immediate within the Sign. Its Interpretant is all that the Sign conveys: acquaintance with its Object must be gained by collateral experience. The Mediate

> Object is the Object outside of the sign; I call it the *Dynamoid* Object. The Sign
> must indicate it by a hint; and this hint, or its substance, is the *Immediate* Object.
> (EP 2: 480)

This passage clearly indicates that there is an object *within* the Peircean sign –
something that the 'received' view of the sign structure tends to ignore. We will
discuss, later, how the 'immediate' and the 'dynamical' objects are related to each
other. In brief summary, however, the 'immediate object' is the 'object' as it is
initially 'fixed' in the act of signification. This is why it is "within the sign". As the
'object' develops and evolves, however, it forms a 'dynamical' object.

One question, however, is why does Peirce, in the passage above, describe
the 'dynamical' object as "without" the sign? The answer resides in the fact that
the 'dynamical object' is always evolving into a 'third'. It is becoming, in Peirce's
phrase, a form of "concrete reasonableness" (CP 5.3). And, as this status evolves, it
becomes a *mediating* entity. Peirce explains – combining 'mediation' and 'thirdness'
as follows:

> Now Thirdness is nothing but the character of an object which embodies Between-
> ness or Mediation in its simplest and most rudimentary form; and I use it as the
> name of that element of the phenomenon which is predominant wherever Media-
> tion is predominant, and which reaches its fullness in Representation. (EP 2: 183)

In summary, the Peircean sign structure, proposed here, suggests that the 'object'
is, firstly, *within* the sign; secondly, it is created in the act of signification as the
mind *'fixes'* the 'object'; and, thirdly, the 'object' determines the interpretant simply
because the 'object' is part of the *whole of the triadic structure* of the sign. As such,
we can now envisage a structure for the Peircean sign which, beneficially, also
gives the representamen a distinct role in the overall triadic relationship:

SIGN

Representamen − Object − Interpretant
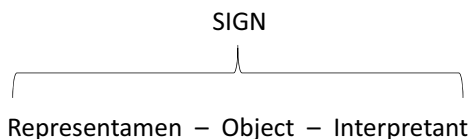
Peirce describes this structure as follows:

> A *Representamen* is the First Correlate of a triadic relation, the Second Correlate
> being termed its *Object*, and the possible Third Correlate being termed its
> Interpretant, by which triadic relation the possible Interpretant is determined to
> be the First Correlate of the same triadic relation to the same Object, and for some
> possible Interpretant. (CP 2.242)

Significantly, Peirce confirms the *mediating* role of the 'object' in this triadic sign structure a few paragraphs before this passage, stating: "The Second Correlate is that one of the three which is regarded as of *middling* complexity […]" (CP 2.237, my italics, C. B.).

The 'object': the medieval and Kantian models

Is there any evidence, within the history of philosophy, that would support the claim that the 'object' is, in fact, both within the sign, and that it has a mediating role?

It is widely acknowledged that Peirce was strongly influenced by Duns Scotus (Boler 1963: 145–165). In his philosophy, we find the term 'object' being used in precisely this mediating role – unencumbered by any dualist assumptions which are modern in origin. In Duns Scotus's view, individual sense data are the 'objects' of the senses (e.g. colour is an 'object' of sight) (Lagerlund 2007: 11–32). Thus, in order to understand an 'object', as it might exist in reality, it is necessary to establish an additional, *and mediating,* 'object', which forms *within* the mind. As Pasnau (2003: 289) explains, it is this second 'object' that renders something cognizable:

> He [Scotus] gladly allows that the external object is present – that it has *real presence* – and that it is the efficient cause of the cognitive act. Still Scotus insists that this is not enough to account for cognition. Another kind of presence is needed, the presence of the object-as-cognized.

It is this medieval *"object-as-cognized"* that Peirce adopts in his triadic sign structure. And this 'object', because it is a mental construction, also opens up the possibility of developing concepts of things that we have not yet encountered:

> Of course, the object in itself can be present and can make an impression on our cognitive faculties. But that does not explain cognition: that sort of relationship obtains throughout the natural world, between the sun and a rock, or waves and a beach. To account for the special sort of relationship at work in cognition, Scotus appeals to a further kind of presence [...]. It is this sort of presence, here said to be brought about through species, that is required for the intentional relationships found in cognition. The need for this special kind of presence is more clear in cases in which the object of thought is not itself present. Even here, thought has a kind of relationship to an object: one must be thinking about something. But since the object has no *real* presence, and so exerts no causal influence, the relationship is entirely conceptual. (Pasnau 2003: 289–290)

For Duns Scotus, therefore, an act of cognition must involve an 'object-as-cognized'. We might, for our purposes, call it an 'object of thought'. And, importantly, this mental entity can be 'entirely conceptual'. Tweedale confirms this view in a book with a sub-title which explicitly mentions the role of 'objects of thought' in medieval philosophy:

> Toward the end of the thirteenth century a distinction between *esse subjectivum* and *esse objectivum* comes into common usage among the scholastics. Perhaps the first thinker to make heavy use of it is John Duns Scotus. The idea here is that something might have two ways of existing: (1) a real existence in no way dependent on being the object of any mental act or state; (2) existence as an object of some mental act or state. The former is *esse subjectivum*; the latter, *esse objectivum*. Something can have either of these without the other, or both at once. (Tweedale 2007: 73)

It is, of course, of relevance that Peirce confirms that his use of the term 'object' derives from medieval philosophy. In a letter to Lady Welby, he states: "I use the term 'object' in the sense in which *obiectum* was first made a substantive early in the XIIIth century; and when I use the word without adding *'of'* what I am speaking of the object, I mean anything that comes before thought or the mind in any usual sense" (Peirce 1977: 69).

Elsewhere, Maritain explains that the notion of something becoming an 'object of thought' is still being used several centuries later. Discussing the work of the 17th-century philosopher, John Poinsot, he notes the 'object' is something that is "brought into the womb of the mind". Significantly for our discussion, he sees this activity as involving the 'object' evolving into a mediating 'concept':

> The concept is a *mediator;* by and in it the object is brought into the womb of the mind in the state of ultimate intellectual actuation. Thus, our intellect attains things only according as its concepts render them present to it. The manner of our understanding corresponds to the more-or-less complete, or the more-or-less defective way in which the thing is objectified in the concept. (Maritain 1995: 416)

Later in the history of philosophy, we find the notion of an 'object of thought' is still being used by Kant. In his famous passage on 'The Idea of a Transcendental Logic', Kant (2007[1781]: 85–86) states:

> We are so constituted that our *intuition* can never be other than *sensible*; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects. The faculty, on the contrary, which enables us to *think* the object of sensible intuition is the *understanding*. Neither of these properties is to be preferred to the other. Without

sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.

Here Kant talks of 'the object of the sensible intuition' and he argues that "without understanding no object would be thought". He is clearly using the term 'object' here as something that is created by the mind. And Peirce highlights this Kantian usage, confirming that he adopts the same perspective, and clearly stating that the 'object' should be seen as "the normal product of mental action" and not the cause of it:

> Indeed, what Kant called his Copernican step was precisely the passage from the nominalistic to the realistic view of reality. It was the essence of his philosophy to regard the real object as determined by the mind. That was nothing else than to consider every conception and intuition which enters necessarily into the experience of an object, and which is not transitory and accidental, as having objective validity. In short, it was to regard the reality as the normal product of mental action, and not as the incognizable cause of it. (EP 1: 90–91)

Elsewhere, Kant also agrees with Peirce that there exists a mediating (and third) element involved in cognition – *in between* the intellect and 'the sensible'. Kant asks: "How, then, can the intuition be *subsumed* under the concept, or how can the categories be *applied* to appearances?" (Kant 2007[1781]: 176). His answer, a few lines later, is that:

> In our case there must be some third thing, which must be homogeneous on the one side with the category, and on the other with the appearance, and which thus renders the application of the former to the latter possible. This mediating representation must be pure (that is free from all that is empirical), and yet be *intellectual* on the one side, and *sensible* on the other. Such a representation is the *transcendental schema*. (Kant 2007[1781]: 176–177)

Here Kant retains the view of Duns Scotus that cognition involves three elements, and that mediation is required for an act of cognition to take place. It is of some considerable significance, however, that Kant calls this mediating element a 'schema' – a term that Eco (1999: 80–84) explores in his discussion of the icon. The exact relationship between the Peircean icon and his 'object' falls, however, outside the scope of the current paper.

The 'object': the Hegelian model

Unsurprisingly, Kant's usage of the 'object' is also found in later German Idealism with Hegel using the term in a similar manner. Again, writing only a few decades before Peirce, the 'object' is described by Hegel as something created by the mind: "The real nature of the object is brought to light in reflection; but it is no less true that this exertion of thought is *my* act. If this be so, the real nature is a *product* of *my* mind, in its character of thinking subject [...]" (Hegel 2014[1892]: 26). As such, Hegel views the 'object of thought' as something that develops within the mind. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit,* he argues that, when consciousness is confronted with reality in an unexpected form, it is the 'object' itself that changes:

> If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge. (Hegel 1977: 54)

In this context, Hegel also makes a critical (and now familiar) distinction between two types of 'object'. Inwood (1992: 204) highlights that Hegel uses *two words* in German which are both commonly translated as 'object':

> He [Hegel] stresses the etymology of *Gegenstand* more than that of *Objekt*, so that a *Gegenstand* is essentially and immediately an object of knowledge etc, whilst an *Objekt* is at least initially independent. A *Gegenstand* is an intentional object whilst an *Objekt* is a real object. [...] A *Gegenstand*, by contrast, may be the object of a simple form of consciousness, such as sense certainty, which is not yet a fully-fledged subject.

This parallels the distinction that we have observed in Peirce. Deely makes a similar distinction between 'objects' (of thought) and 'things'. He argues: "Objects as such exist only in relation to a knower, a being that is aware or virtually aware of them; whereas 'things' by definition are what they are regardless of whether anyone is aware of them or not" (Deely 2008: 26–7). In Hegelian thought the 'object' (*Gegenstand*) is thus construed as an entity, within the mind, which develops in a way that reflects the 'object' (*Objekt*) that may, or may not, exist ('outside') in reality. The *'Gegenstand'* is, in Hegelian guise, the 'object-as-cognized', or the 'object of thought'.

   This historical background provides us with a useful way of understanding the role of the 'object' in the Peircean sign. This can also be seen more explicitly,

however, if we consider the way in which Hegel views the overall development of the concept.

Using his own triadic structure of 'Being', 'Essence', and 'Notion', Hegel argues that the mind is initially confronted with an *indeterminacy* of 'Being' (Hegel 2014[1892]: 101). Hegel proposes that the human mind then 'posits' an 'Essence' as an imperfect approximation of that reality in order to make sense of it. Over time, this Essence evolves through the logical workings of dialectics (Hegel 2014[1892]: 133–186). This process brings the 'Essence' closer and closer to a true 'representation' of reality. As such, and in Hegelian terms, the *'Gegenstand'* thus becomes more and more like the *'Objekt'*. And, at the same time, the evolving Essence becomes embedded in a web of other concepts ('Notions') that mutually define each other. This final complex of interrelated concepts Hegel calls the *'Absolute Idea'* (Hegel 2014[1892]: 186–246).

In this context, the Hegelian 'Essence' has a number of important characteristics which are relevant to our current discussion of Peirce. It acts as a mediating entity between the mind and our 'indeterminate' perception, it is created by the mind, it brings the 'object' into the 'womb of the mind', and it also has the capacity to evolve over time. Critically, it is through this process that Hegel believes the human mind is able to create, and then develop, the concepts that enable us to understand our world.

This paper proposes that the same project is at the heart of Peircean semiotics. Peircean signs are frequently understood in the literature as providing information about the 'objects' that initiate them, or which are 'behind' them. In contrast, it is argued here that the purpose of Peircean signs is, in fact, to facilitate the evolution of effective concepts. In this context, the mediating 'object of thought' within the Peircean sign can be viewed as a parallel of the Hegelian 'Essence'. In Peirce's account of perception, the 'representamen' is only capable of providing us with sensory 'vagues' (CP 7.632). This part of the Peircean sign, therefore, corresponds to Hegel's 'Being'. As such, the representamen is not a 'sign vehicle', but rather a source of initial perceptual 'indeterminacy'. The 'immediate object', within the sign, serves to 'fix' an element of this 'indeterminacy' and it acts as a hypothesis of what the real 'object' may eventually turn out to be. As this 'object' evolves (via sign action – rather than through Hegelian dialectics) it progressively 'determines' the meaning of the third component of the sign – the interpretant. This third element is the equivalent of the Hegelian 'Notion'. Peirce's semiotics can thus be reframed as the very process through which we form our empirical concepts – and the 'object' within the sign is the locus of such development.

This, however, brings us to the question of how such evolution takes place – and the idea of 'determination' within the structure of the sign.

'Determination' in the Peircean sign

Peirce's concept of 'determination' is another term that leads to confusion in the secondary literature. Peirce often uses it in his definitions of the sign. We have already noted one instance of this, but here is a further example with an indication (significantly in German this time) of what it may entail:

> A Sign is a Cognizable that, on the one hand, is so determined (i.e. specialized, *bestimmt*) by something *other than itself*, called its Object [...]. while, on the other hand, it so determines some actual or potential Mind, the determination whereof I term the Interpretant created by the Sign, that that Interpreting Mind is therein determined mediately by the Object. (EP 2: 492)

This passage is, again, notable in placing the *object* in a mediating role. However, it can still be read as suggesting that Peirce views 'determination' as meaning being 'caused by'. We have already noted interpretations of the Peircean sign that cast the 'object' an initiating element of the sign and it is clearly tempting to reach for this particular conclusion. Hookway, for example, when explaining the latter, uses the example of some 'stripped bark': "The stripped bark, here, is the sign; as its object we can take the deer or the fact that there have been deer nearby; and the interpretant is our thought that there are deer nearby" (Hookway 1985: 122). In this passage, Hookway sees the deer as the 'object' and as the *cause* that leads to the bark being stripped (the sign).

Short, however, is more nuanced in his discussion of 'determination'. He fully recognizes the importance of the term to Peirce's philosophy and he devotes several pages to its meaning. Critically, he recognizes (as quoted above) that Peirce sometimes uses the German word '*bestimmt*', and that its meaning is "to limit as in 'The water's edge determines where your property ends'" (Short 2007: 167). Short, however, still insists that "each object limits, or determines, what may be a sign of it, and each sign similarly determines what may be an interpretant of it" (Short 2007: 167). Short, therefore, is correct in identifying the sense of 'limiting' in the idea of 'determination', but he still retains a causal interpretation of it. In his view, objects have a determining role in relation to signs because they causally limit "what may be a sign of" each one.

However, in order to fully understand the true import of the term 'determination', we need to evaluate this term in relation to Peirce's philosophy of perception. Echoing Hegel once more, Peirce argues that what we perceive are 'percepts' and that these are intrinsically "vague" (CP 7.619). These percepts form the cornerstone of his rejection of Kantian 'intuitionism' which assumes that we know the sense content of our perceptions (EP 2: 155). Peirce goes on to argue that

our 'perceptual judgments' take our 'percepts' and categorize them as *members of classes* (CP 7.632). As a result, we are only able to perceive something *as something* (Gallie 1952: 67) and as the member of a putative class. It follows from this that our 'perceptual judgments' are 'classes' *awaiting further determination* (CP 7.392).

With this theoretical background in place, the role of 'determination' in Peircean sign development now becomes much clearer. And the 'object', within the sign, now has a clear role to play; it encapsulates a *putative identity* ('posited' by the mind) which is more 'determinate' than the originating 'vague' in the representamen. In other words, the 'object' does not *limit* the representamen by restricting the possible meanings that can be represented by it. Instead, the 'object' limits the sign by 'picking out' a key element from the perceptual field. And it does this in a manner that parallels the Hegelian Essence. Of course, this procedure is never entirely accurate enough to make the 'object' completely 'determined' (i.e. an accurate representation of reality itself), but the formation of the 'object' within the sign marks the very beginning of concept formation. As Peirce puts it: "[…] thoughts are determinations of the mind" (CP 4.582).

On one occasion, Peirce made explicit the relationship between 'determination' and 'fixing' in a letter entitled "What is meant by determined". And here he also makes a reference to Hegel:

> Perhaps, therefore, I shall do well to state more fully than I did before, the manner in which I understand Hegel (in common with all other logicians) to use them. Possibly, the original signification of *bestimmt* was 'settled by vote'; or it may have been 'pitched to a key'. Thus, its origin was quite different from that of 'determined', yet I believe that as philosophical terms their equivalence is exact. In general, they mean 'fixed to be *this* (or *thus*), in contradistinction to being this, that, or the other (or in some way or other). (W 2: 155–6)

Here, the idea of 'determination' is linked to the idea of 'fixing'. As we have seen, it plays a central role in Peirce's work (EP 1: 109–123).

If we also place this Peircean account of 'determination' in an historical context, we find that it is widespread in late-18th-century philosophy. Kant uses the verb 'determine' in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as follows (and note, again, his use of the term 'object'):

> The pure concepts of the understanding refer, through the mere understanding, to objects of intuition in general, whether it be our own intuition or any other, provided only that it is sensible intuition. But the concepts are, for this very reason, mere *forms of thought*, through which as yet no determinate object is known. (Kant 2007[1781]: 147)

Forty years later, Hegel is still using the idea of 'determination' to refer to the way in which concepts develop in the mind. He states: "What are called concepts, and indeed determinate concepts, e.g. man, house, animal etc, are simple determinations and abstracted representations" (Hegel 1991[1830]: 242).

If the 'object' initially 'fixes' elements of the representamen we are still left, however, with a secondary question as to how the 'object' continues to evolve within the sign. If the mind is able to 'fix' a putative identity in the initial stage of sign development, how does this process subsequently develop? Hegel argues that his Essence evolves through dialectics. For Peirce, however, it is reality itself which plays the critical role in further determining the nature of the 'object'. And this on-going process takes place through his category of 'secondness'.

Commentators are sometimes misled by Peirce's notion of secondness and they can interpret it as a form of 'objectivity' – often encouraged by Peirce's description of it as "a hard fact" (EP 1: 249). This leads to various assertions such as "objectivity is the definition of secondness" (Olteanu 2015: 267), or "secondness represents causality and reactance" (Smith 2010: 39). Murphey comes much closer to the underlying nature of secondness when he describes it as "upagainstness" (Murphey 1993: 373). Secondness is the category that *limits* our 'vague' perceptions ('firsts') and makes it clear to us that our 'indeterminate' perceptions (and the misplaced thoughts that they may have encouraged) have boundaries in the real world. As such, the action of secondness is intimately connected, for Peirce, with his notion of 'determination'. Fundamentally, the category of secondness acts *to limit the indeterminate nature of our perceptions* – including those caught up in signification. Our day to day experience of the world can, therefore, be construed as an on-going 'determination of belief':

> Experience is that determination of belief and cognition generally which the course of life has forced on man. One may lie about it; but one cannot escape the fact that some things *are* forced upon his cognition. There is the element of brute force, existing whether you opine it exists or not. (CP 2.138)

And, elsewhere, Peirce highlights the action of secondness in the process of determination itself:

> A genus characterised by Reaction will, by determination of its essential character, split into two species, one a species where secondness is strong, the other a species where the secondness is weak, and the strong species will subdivide into two that will be similarly related, without any corresponding subdivision of the weak species. (CP 5.69)

Therefore, the 'object', within the sign, evolves through the action of secondness. Hegel saw this process as taking place on a dialectical basis; but Peirce introduces an empirical element. And this is, of course, precisely where Peirce believes his philosophy diverges from Hegelian thought:

> The capital error of Hegel which permeates his whole system in every part of it is that he almost altogether ignores the 'Outward Clash'. Besides the lower consciousness of feeling and the higher consciousness of nutrition, this direct consciousness of hitting and of getting hit enters into all cognition and serves to make it mean something real. (EP 1: 233)

> When Hegel tells me that thought has three stages, that of naïve acceptance, that of reaction and criticism, and that of rational conviction; in a general sense, I agree to it […]. But be that as it may, the idea that the mere reaction of assent and doubt, the mere play of thought, the heat-lightening of the brain, is going to settle anything in this real world to which we appertain, – such an idea only shows again how the Hegelians overlook the facts of volitional action and reaction in the development of thought. I find myself in a world of forces which act upon me, and it is they and not the logical transformations of my thought which determine what I shall ultimately believe. (EP 1: 237)

These comments, and his wider discussion of Hegel in "On Phenomenology" (EP 2: 145–159), can easily suggest that Peirce is a whole-hearted critic of Hegel. But this would overlook the much stronger convergences between their two systems of thought. Peirce openly agrees, for example, that his philosophy shares similarities with that of Hegel and that his categories "agree substantially" with Hegel's "three moments" (CP 2.87). But what Peirce seeks to establish is an account of concept development based on sign action, rather than dialectical logic, and so he adopts the terminology of the 'representamen', the 'object', and the 'interpretant' – instead of Hegel's 'Being', 'Essence' and 'Notion'.

    In summary, once we have established that the Peircean 'object' enjoys a 'mediating' position within the sign – in between the representamen and the interpretant (but still *within* the overall structure of the Peircean sign) – we can discern certain parallels with the Hegelian Essence. As noted, this interpretation of the mediating 'object' also has roots in medieval, and Kantian, interpretations of the 'object'. These posit an 'object of thought' which initiates and facilitates concept development. In this mediating position, the object still determines the sign – but it does so because the 'object' is what 'fixes' (and develops) part of the perceptual field – thereby creating sign action.

    And, if this interpretation is accepted, then it has the significant effect of placing Peircean semiotics within a Hegelian framework that construes his sign

theory in a very different light. Signs become the very mechanisms through which we build our empirical concepts and develop increasingly valid knowledge of the world. They are, therefore, at some theoretical distance from the kind of perspectives that insist that semiotics is "the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie" (Eco 1976: 7).

Leibniz: the immediate and dynamical objects

We have already noted the distinction that Peirce makes between the 'immediate' and the 'dynamical' objects. But if we look further, we can also identify the origins of these two 'objects' in the philosophy of Leibniz. A number of commentators have already highlighted the influence of Leibniz on Peirce (e.g. Chevalier 2013: 1–22; Bellucci 2013: 331–356; Bellucci 2015: 399–418) and one Leibniz scholar has, indeed, gone so far as to state that Peirce "knew Leibniz better than any other American of his time" (Loemker 1989: 57). But we will now consider how Leibniz may have influenced Peirce's formulation of his 'immediate' and 'dynamical' objects. In particular, Leibniz offers us insight into how these two 'objects' are related to each other in a non-dualistic framework, how the 'dynamical object' is able to evolve from the 'immediate object', and what kind of 'reality' is created in this process. This Leibnizian influence can also be discerned in Hegel, and the latter's construal of the kind of reality that is formed through dialecticism.

In Leibniz's philosophy, the Universe comprises a web of interrelating 'monads' which are defined entirely by their relationships with each other. This means that monads do not exist and *have* relationships with each other – instead, they are *defined by their relationships with each other*. In this model, the human soul is construed by Leibniz as constituting just one particular kind of 'monad' within the web of Creation. As such, the human soul is not set aside from reality (and looking in upon it in a "sideways" fashion (McDowell 1994: 34)). Rather, it is immersed in reality and it forms part of it. This echoes the Peircean view that "we ought to say that we are in signs and not that signs are in us" (CP 5.289). In this interpretation of reality, every monad is connected, however remotely, to every other monad and so is partially defined by it. As Leibniz (1951[1714]: 523) states:

> The world is a plenum, everything is connected and each body acts upon every other body, more or less, according to the distance, and by reaction is itself affected thereby; it follows that each monad is a living mirror, or endowed with an internal activity, representative according to its point of view of the universe, and as regulated as the universe itself.

In Leibniz's system, of course, it is assumed that every 'monad' is known by God. This means that the relationships between the monads (both potential and actual) are accessible to the Divine Mind in a structure of "Pre-Established Harmony" (Leibniz 1951[1705]: 190–199) which defines *both* their identities and their relationships with each other. By the 19th century this theistic option is not open to Hegel; but we find that he still retains the same underlying Leibnizian template:

> Existence is the immediate unity of reflection-into-self and reflection-into-another. It follows from this that existence is the indefinite multitude of existents as reflected-into-themselves, which at the same time equally throw light upon one another, – which, in short, are co-relative, and form a world of reciprocal dependence and of infinite interconnection between grounds and consequents. (Hegel 2014[1892]: 149)

Critically, however, this Hegelian system is created by the human mind through the process of concept formation itself. It follows that our concepts are necessarily interrelated with each other. As Inwood notes: "[...] each concept is different from the other in the system and is determined by its relationships to them, by its place within the system" (Inwood 1983: 173).

If we accept that our concepts are interrelated in this manner, then it follows that, from any point within the web of conceptual connections, we can only achieve limited understanding of these relationships. In such circumstances, we can only ever attain *partial levels of comprehension* of potential concepts. Leibniz sees this partial understanding as resulting in *'nominal definitions'*; and these equate with Hegel's '*Gegenstand*'. They are, of course, provisional understandings and they can always be revised in accordance with further experience. In his *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding* Leibniz (1996: 299–300) writes:

> So there is a kind of redundancy in our perceptions of sensible qualities as well as of sensible portions of matter: it consists in the fact that we have more than one notion of a single subject. Gold can be nominally defined in various ways – it can be the heaviest body we have, the most malleable, a fusible body which resists cupellation and aquafortis, etc. Each of these marks is sound, and suffices for the recognition of gold: provisionally, at least, and in the present state of the bodies around us [...]. So one can say [...] that in matters where we have only the empiric's kind of knowledge our definitions are all merely provisional.

These 'nominal definitions' are contrasted by Leibniz with what he calls 'real definitions' which would give us, if they were ever achieved, complete knowledge of a thing. Leibniz openly acknowledges that this level of comprehension is only

possible in the mind of God, although he insists it is something that the human knowledge should always aspire to.

I would argue that this Leibnizian distinction between 'nominal' and 'real' definitions equates to that drawn by Peirce between 'immediate' and 'dynamical' objects. Peirce sees the 'object' that we initially encounter as the 'immediate' object and, as we saw above, he argues that it provides an initial '*hint*' of the 'dynamical' object. The 'immediate' object is not a 'representation' in a Humean sense – it is not something that stands 'in between' our mind and a putative reality behind it. It is, rather, a "provisional" representation of what the object might eventually turn out to be. It is a 'vague' and a partial approximation of what the 'dynamical object' might evolve into as further determinations takes place. Bellucci is correct, therefore, in arguing that the distinction between 'immediate' and 'dynamical' objects is not the same as Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (Bellucci 2015: 399–418). The latter distinction focusses on the object as it really is and the ways that we can *express* that reality; such a distinction exhibits an intrinsic nod in the direction of dualism. In Peirce's and Leibniz's framework, the ways in which we might express the reality of *Bedeutung* is not the main consideration – they are insisting upon a partial (and yet still true) approximation to reality. Deleuze also makes this distinction clear when, in his book on Leibniz, he talks of "perspectivism as a truth of relativity (and not a relativity of what is true)" (Deleuze 2003: 23).

When Peirce claims that the 'dynamical' object is "outside of the sign" he insists that it is *not* a noumenal entity that exists 'behind' the 'immediate' object. In a letter to William James, he explains that he has deliberately *not* called the 'dynamical' object the 'real' object:

> We must distinguish between the Immediate Object, – i.e., the Object as represented in the Sign, – and the Real (no, because perhaps the Object is altogether fictive, I must choose a different term; therefore:), say rather the Dynamical Object, which, from the nature of things, the Sign *cannot* express, which it can only *indicate* and leave the interpreter to find out by *collateral experience.* (EP 2: 498)

The evolving 'dynamical object' is thus the 'object' in all of its potential, and relational, richness. It represents what we would know if we were omniscient, or if we had the time to consider an 'object' from all relational perspectives (via 'collateral experience'). And Peirce accepts, following Leibniz, that this level of knowledge can never be fully achieved – even suggesting that 'no concepts, not even those of mathematics, are absolutely precise' (CP 6.496).

In drawing this distinction, Peirce avoids using the term 'real' because he knows that it could be interpreted in a dualistic manner. This is why he calls it the 'dynamical' object rather than the 'real' object. He wants to emphasize the object's ability to evolve from the 'immediate' object which is its initial source. Some commentators, however, do not fully appreciate Peirce's desire to avoid this problem, and assume that Peirce does, after all, now admit of a reality that is *separate* from the knower. Short, for example, concludes that "The dynamic object is exactly that about which more can be learned. Therefore, it must be independent of our experience of it" (Short 2007: 199). Here Short slips from the correct idea that we have *incomplete* experience of the 'dynamical' object to the questionable conclusion that it must be 'independent' of us. This is mistaken because, paradoxically, it is the very fact that we are immersed in a relational web *in which we are all connected* which renders the 'immediate' object incomplete. Deledalle also misunderstands Peirce on this point. He agrees that knowledge of the 'dynamical' object is gained by 'collateral experience', and that such knowledge cannot be 'direct knowledge of the dynamical object' itself. But he concludes that Peirce must, as a result, admit of an 'external existence':

> We must therefore, unless we fall back into idealism, admit the *existence* of an 'external' object: the dynamical object, which is *'as it is regardless of any particular aspect of it, the Object in such relations as unlimited and final study would show it to be'* (CP 8.183). What is known is thus the relations of an *existing* object independent of ourselves in the course of the semioses in which we are, it and ourselves, engaged. (Deledalle 2000: 46)

Like Short, Deledalle takes the fact that we have no direct knowledge of the 'dynamical' object to mean that it is 'independent of ourselves'. Proni, likewise, asserts that the 'dynamical object' is equivalent to Kant's noumenal reality: "The Dynamical Object is that which puts the whole process in motion, standing behind the scenes, unreachable in its completeness (as in *Ding an Sich* in Kant), but effective in its empirical existence" (Proni 2015: 19). And Greenlee reaches the same conclusion; the 'dynamical' object, for him, is construed as something 'apart from relation to thought': "The dynamical object is the represented thing, as it is in itself, apart from relation to thought, while that same thing, brought into relation to thought, is the 'immediate' object" (Greenlee 1973: 66).

These interpretations are clearly some distance from the framework of partial, incomplete, and yet *connected* 'objects' which Peirce is advocating. Indeed, using Leibniz's framework, we can now understand the 'dynamical object' as being the end point towards which the evolving 'object of thought' is always progressing. Hausman captures Peirce's intent:

> While the Dynamic Object is not something that is itself revealed as a cognitive object, or as something given complete interpretative determination, it is something that *would* be so determined in an infinite long-run, or if interpretation could reach an ideal limit in the infinite future. (Hausman 1987: 388)

In summary, therefore, Peirce's account of the 'immediate' and 'dynamical' object does not force him to commit to a form of dualism. In fact, it is further evidence that the 'object' evolves *within* the sign – beginning with the 'immediate' object. As its evolutionary path progresses the 'immediate object' becomes better defined – aided, of course, by the effects of secondness upon it. In this process, therefore, reality has a critical role to play in the development of our concepts – in contrast to the Hegelian contention that such progression can only be achieved through the logical workings of the mind. What Leibniz's analysis of 'nominal' and 'real' definitions adds to our understanding of Peirce's two 'objects', however, is that the 'dynamical' object is never separate from us.

Conclusion

It could be argued that Peirce was a life-long critic of Hegelian philosophy. But this would be to overlook the substantial similarities that exist between them, at a general level, and in relation to the 'object' in the sign, in particular. As we have seen, the Peircean 'object' shares some key features with the Hegelian 'Essence'. On this basis, it is possible to construe it as a posited, and mediating, element in Peirce's triadic sign. It should not be viewed as an entity that is 'behind' the sign, or one which originates sign action. This interpretation also has the advantage of clarifying Peirce's distinction between the 'immediate' and the 'dynamical' object – the latter is not a noumenal 'object' 'behind' the sign (or one that 'compels' it); rather it is the 'object of thought' that would be fully understood if we could take our experience to an infinite conclusion *within* an evolving web of conceptual relations. In this respect, it has been argued that Peirce's position reflects Leibniz's much older distinction between 'nominal' and 'real' definitions.

However, the effect of placing the 'object' in a mediating position within the sign has further consequences. Firstly, the 'object' is now placed centre stage as the critical focus of the sign and, as it evolves, it results in new interpretants being formed.

Secondly, in the Hegelian model, the 'Essence' develops in a dialectical manner that creates new concepts. If this template is transposed to the Peircean sign, we can reframe his semiotics in a more Hegelian light. Sign action, in this construal, becomes an on-going process of *concept development* – enabling us to develop and

refine our conceptual 'tools' to understand our world. This is in contrast to the semiotic tradition of the 20th century, inspired by Saussure, which tends to view signification as a process involving a class of culturally determined sense data which we interpret. The Peircean view, rejecting this position, argues that signs, in combination with each other, become the very means by which we fashion our empirical meanings. And rather than being viewed as the providers of 'clues' about 'noumenal' objects, signs become, instead, the mechanisms which enable us to form our synthetic knowledge of the world.

Thirdly, Peirce's category of secondness gives reality a fundamental role in the formation of our 'objects of thought'. As a result of this, 'interpretation' takes a more recessive role in meaning creation. In the Saussurian tradition, interpretations (entailed in 'cultural codes') play a key role in meaning creation. In Peircean semiotics, in contrast, it is the 'Outward Clash' that makes our concepts mean what they do. They are formed through a combination of our thinking and the actions of reality upon that thinking. The outcome, for Peirce, is a form of human knowledge that is quite distinct from that created by Hegel's dialecticism, or by Kant's intuitionism. Critically, Peirce's model retains a strong element of the empiricism which is a hallmark of his thought.

The scope of the present paper does not permit further discussion of how such synthetic knowledge is created through the combinatory actions of the icon, the index, and the symbol. Nor have we discussed how the inter-relationships of Peirce's three categories and the elements of his triadic structure create these three specific sign types. It is hoped, however, that this discussion of the 'object', within the sign, has helped elucidate its role and the Peircean parallels which exist in relation to the philosophy of Hegel.

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Гегель и пирсовский «объект»

Семиотика Пирса хорошо известна тем, что она отстаивает триадическую, а не диадическую знаковую структуру, однако интерпретации того, как такая структура работает на практике, значительно варьируются. В данной работе утверждается, что «объект» Пирса является центральным для понимания философского замысла Пирса, и что он должен толковаться как промежуточный элемент внутри знака, а не как источник происхождения знака. Эта интерпретация перекликается с фундаментально антидуалистическим характером философии Пирса и с философией Дунса Скотта, которая оказала столь большое влияние на мышление Пирса. Более того, трактовка «объекта» как опосредованной единицы в знаке подчеркивает важные параллели с гегелевской мыслью и ролью «сущности» в диалектике последнего, приводя к мысли, что триадический знак Пирса имеет сильные гегелевские корни. Это существенно переосмысливает семиотику Пирса; она становится, как и в гегелевской диалектике, объяснением образования понятия. Всеобъемлющий каркас, в котором это происходит, сохраняет при этом эмпиризм Пирса и тем самым избегает опоры на логику, которая является определяющей характеристикой диалектического метода Гегеля.

Hegel ja peirce'ilik 'objekt'

Peirce'i semiootika on tuntud selle poolest, et toetab pigem kolmetist kui kahetist märgi-struktuuri, ent tõlgendused, kuidas seesugune struktuur praktikas töötab, on olnud erinevad. Käesolevas artiklis väidetakse, et peirce'ilik 'objekt' on kesksel kohal Peirce'i filosoofilise tahtluse mõistmisel ja et seda elementi tuleks pigem tõlgendada vahendava elemendina märgi sees kui märki tekitava allikana. See tõlgendus sobib Peirce'i filosoofia fundamentaalselt antidualistliku iseloomuga ning loob võimalikke lähenduspunkte Peirce'ile tugevat mõju avaldanud Duns Scotuse keskaegse filosoofiaga. Veel enam, 'objekti' mõistmine vahendava üksusena märgi sees juhib tähelepanu olulistele paralleelidele hegelliku mõtlemisega ning „olemuse" rollile viimase dialektikas. Nii väidetaksegi, et Peirce'i kolmetisel märgimatriitsil on tugevasti hegellikud juured. See positsioneerib Peirce'i semiootika oluliselt ümber; nagu Hegeli dialektikaski, saab sellest kontseptimoodustamise seletus. Kõikehõlmav raamistik, milles see aset leiab, jääb aga edasi Peirce'i empiritsistliku tausta juurde ning väldib seeläbi sõltuvust loogikast, mis on üks Hegeli dialektilist meetodit defineerivaid omadusi.