

Essays

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Prep.

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Essays. By C. S. Peirce

This may serve a "Preface", the long piece already

written under this title figuring as the "Introduction".

The most celebrated of all modern treatises on logic, the L'art de penser, of Buridan and Nicole, commonly called the Port Royal Logic, which, as may well be inferred from its celebrity is more distinguished ~~for~~ by good sense and by literary excellence than by really penetrating ~~into~~ far into its subject or by ~~the~~ its laying bare the true nature of reasoning, begins with two charming paragraphs which tell how it was undertaken with the conviction that all that ~~we~~ is of any genuine value in the doctrine of reasoning can easily be developed in a few hours. The present writer quite agrees that when ~~one~~ ^{a person} has once ^{found out} discovered what reasoning really

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consists in, - a task for which he should allot a time varying from five seconds to fifty years, proportionally to two factors. By far ^{of these} the more variable will be the degree of distinctness that of conception that will satisfy him. But the natural aptitude of the person for this kind of study should also be taken into account, since with this aptitude the number of difficulties he perceives will be increased, and the time needed will be increased. Once this part of the work is done, the ~~setting down~~ recording of the result will be mere child's play comparatively. Its place in the scale of difficulty of different kinds of writing ^{technically} will not be far from that of the composition of fables.

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Sonnets. When ~~one~~ one has gone so far as to frame a definition of what the word reasoning ought to mean in its broadest sense, without allowing one's conception to be in any degree trammelled by the usages of speech, the next step ~~would~~ ^{should} be to distinguish the different types of reasoning.

Every reasoning consists in interpreting a sign. For whenever we think, we think in signs. Every action of thought is either the formation or the application, or the interpretation of a sign, or else it is some other kind of action upon a sign or signs, this action being rather psychological, or say, physiological, than rational. Those psycholo-

Egg says

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who tells us that thought ~~needed~~ language
and could not have taken
place before men possessed language
are so far right that speech is man's
instinctive vehicle of thought, even
from himself to the self of a subsequent moment,
and that we know as yet little or nothing of
how this faculty originated. But every mathe-
matician and every logician will tell the linguist
that they are in possession of other quite other sys-
tems of signs into which they are accustomed to
translate words and forms of words and so to ren-
der them more intelligible.

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One ~~sys~~ such system, equivalent to a syntax, and of great utility for logic is ^{broken} described in this volume. It is called the system of Existential Graphs.

Find the ~~so~~ simplest possible system that is capable of expressing with exactitude every possible assertion. In this system, ~~the simplest~~ there are none of the ordinary parts of speech; ~~but~~ for the indivisible elements are, one and all, complete assertions. It may be that this is the case in some existing language, ~~since~~ grammarians have, until very recently, had such an inveterate habit in their accounts of all languages of stretching them

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all alike upon the Procrustes Bed of Greek-Latin grammar that we cannot tell. But in one respect at any rate Existential Graphs is essentially different from Language. Namely, instead of being merely protracted in time, its expressions are diagrams upon a surface, and indeed must be regarded as only a ~~picture~~ a projection upon that surface of a sign extended in three dimensions. Three dimensions are necessary and sufficient for the expression of all assertions; so that, if man's reason was originally limited to the line of speech, it has now outgrown

(which I do not affirm)

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the limitation.

By a Sign I mean anything whatever, real or fictile, which is capable of a sensible form, is applicable to something other than itself, that is already known, and that is capable of being so interpreted in another sign, which I call its Interpretant, as to communicate something that may not have been previously known about its Object. There is thus a triadic relation between the any Sign, an Object, and an Interpretant.

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consists in, - to do which will require from five seconds to fifty years or more, according to one's aptitude for the subject and according to the degree of distinctness of conception aimed at — it will be comparative child's play to set down the result, although he does not hesitate to say that it is the most slowest kind of prose writing there is, every paragraph, if in many places every sentence, being an under-graph, ~~of~~ ^{to} the composition of a sonnet. That taking comparable ~~to~~ however, comparatively very few words are required, to enunciate a truth of logic ~~and~~ is certainly quite true, although those words must be understood in such precise senses, that the distinct apprehension of them always requires deliberate and close attention.

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For instance, if I were required to condense the science of Logic into a single paragraph, I should, with my present lights, write something like the following:-

Logic is the business of that social group who devote themselves to ascertaining the principles upon which the attainment of one's purposes in thinking depends.