Peirce and German, especially Hegelian, Philosophy

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On Ruskin’s critique of Schiller: “Ruskin is one of those who, without pretending to understand what they term the “German Philosophy,” yet presume to censor it.” (“I fear I may fall under this reproach in the present instance.”) Peirce, MS 12:26 (1:10), 1857.

Introduction

Peirce apparently believed, and I think that he correctly believed, that there was something to be gained by comparing various parts of his philosophical system – if not his philosophical system taken as a whole – to German, especially Hegelian, thought. Peirce’s so-called juvenilia is steeped in references to German philosophers – especially Kant, to whom Peirce was at one point passionately devoted, at least with regard to the transcendental analytic which Peirce revered “as if they had been brought down from Sinai,” but also Schiller (who he read with Horatio) and Schelling who he associated with Hegel and – though less explicitly – Fichte. Because Peirce was a strong reader, i.e. someone who reads not only to understand but also overcome the precursers, his comments are often very critical. Perhaps the following quote is illustrative: “The study of formal logic on which Kant’s list is built is so extremely superficial as to be simply despicable. There is no milder word to fit it.” And yet, in 1885, in the first chapter to his “Guess at the Riddle,” titled “One, Two, Three: Kantian Categories,” in which Peirce does not mention – except in title – Kant, Peirce claims to have acquired something “very vast” in identifying “three active elements in the world, first, chance, second, law, and third, habit-making”; in a later chapter of the “Guess” manuscript, Peirce discusses Kant as illustrative of a derivative psychological triad (i.e. a specific application of the three universal categories): Feeling, Knowing, and Willing. Schiller adopts this trisection of consciousness also: The sense drive, the form drive, and the play-drive (qua the joyous cooperation or interaction of the first and the second). The universal categories, however, which are our primary concern here, which Peirce considers to be implicit in Kant and Aristotle, are better understood – in an introductory fashion – by way of Peirce’s analysis of Hegel. This, at any rate, is my hypothesis in a nutshell.

Peirce’s assessment of Hegel, his associations as well as his disassociations, throws more than a little light on what Murphey calls “one of the darkest areas of
[Peirce’s] philosophy—namely, his synecism ("the connectedness of things"). When Peirce refers to Hegel’s philosophy, the topic – almost without exception – is either the doctrine of continuity or the three universal categories of thought. (Peirce’s attitude toward Hegel is extremely complex. And while something should be said about the “anxiety of influence” in Peirce’s thought, as well as in the thought of the classical American pragmatists in general, that is not the point of the present essay.) Peirce wanted to be understood, and his references to Hegel are essentially heuristic in character; in this, Peirce was simply following James’s sage advice to write more popularly – i.e. to establish a “connection with things already in the air.” Certainly, the atmosphere in Cambridge at that time – not unlike Concord – was thick with Hegelisms (as Peirce sometimes called them). What I find most interesting here, in viewing Peirce’s relation to Hegel as having far more to do with heuristics and far less to do with indebtedness or influence, is that it teaches us something about Peirce as educator.

In Part I of the following essay I quickly rehearse Peirce’s complex attitude toward Hegel. In Part II, I want to concentrate on how Peirce used Hegel to teach us something about his three categories. In Part III, I turn to how Peirce used Hegel to teach us something about his doctrine of continuity. In my concluding remarks, I simply suggest that Peirce’s assessment of Hegel – especially when viewed as a heuristic device – is not insignificant to those who want to appreciate his thought correctly.

I. Peirce’s “complex attitude” toward Hegel

In 1855, while still in his teens, Peirce claimed that “Hegel, so far as I knew him repelled me.” And while Brent notes that Peirce’s German was “passable” at Harvard, it was exceptionally good at the time of his correspondence with W. T. Harris of the “Journal of Speculative Philosophy” in St. Louis. Peirce discussed Hegel with great confidence in 1885, in his Nation review – which James considered to be “very good” – of Royce’s Religious Aspects of Philosophy. Peirce was “acquainted” not only with the Logik, the Encyclopaedie, and the Phänomenologie,
but with the earlier Jenazeit collaborations (with Schelling) as well. In 1902, Peirce invited Royce to spend several months at Arisbe; Peirce proposed a cooperative study of logic on Royce's part and Hegel on Peirce's. Certainly, Peirce was "acquainted" with - that is to say, recalling the attention Peirce attached to this term, he understood - Hegel's thought.

According to Peirce, "the best thing about Hegel is that he dimly sees in his way, and under his unfortunate paradox-form, the only value of which is that it brought him to this idea, that he sees continuity and the logic of continuity."8 Peirce's complex attitude toward Hegel is fairly well-documented. The Collected Papers begin - somewhat curiously - with a bitter polemic against the Hegelian Gedankengebäude, pronouncing the German mansion "uninhabitable" (CP 1.1). Hegelianism is elsewhere described as "a pasteboard model of a philosophy that in reality does not exist" (CP 6.305). And while Peirce conceded, in a letter to Harris, that "there is music in the logic of Hegel," he qualifies his compliment by saying: "But that is all I discover there."9 Bemoaning Hegel's dialectic, Peirce says that Hegel reaches "each category from the last preceding by virtually calling 'next!'" (CP 1.236; 1896). In MS 893, Peirce quips: "If there be any truth in the logic of history, this should be proof enough that the Hegelian system is radically wrong." Stated in its most extreme formulation, Peirce claims to reject Hegel's philosophy "in toto" (CP 1.193; 1890).10

But in all fairness to Hegel, as well as to Peirce, who encourages us to treat all sincere students of philosophy with gentleness,11 we must confess that this is but one side of the story. Indeed, these criticisms are significantly neutralized by comments at the other end of the spectrum. In his unpublished, and incomplete, shorter prospectus to the projected Principles of Philosophy: or Logic, Physics and Psychics considered as a unity in the light of the Nineteenth Century, which accompanied a letter to Wm. James on 01 January 1894 (1 a.m.), we read: "The principles supported by Mr. Peirce bear a close affinity with those of Hegel; perhaps are what Hegel's might have been had he been educated in a . . ." [The remainder of this document, i.e. all but the first two pages, the second page of which ends here, is missing]. And while it is true that Peirce's thought - as well as his prose - is full of surprises, there can be little doubt about how this sentence ended; let me suggest the term "laboratory" or the phrase "properly scientific fashion, i.e. in the exact sciences" or, similarly, "mathematically sophisticated manner." To these comments let it be added that Peirce refers also to Hegel as "a vast intellect,"12 whose theory of formalities - i.e. a doctrine concerning the various kinds of identity and difference

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8 Peirce, MS 943, CP I: 451-453.
10 These comments must be taken with a grain of salt; recall Peirce's response, e.g., to Kant, whose study of logic was said to be "so extremely superficial as to be simply despicable" (K.140).
11 See, especially, Peirce's letter to James dated November 1891; in reference to Royce's treatment of Abbot, Peirce writes: "Let us insist that sincere students shall treat one another with gentleness."
12 Nation, 75 vol. 3, 103.
(EP 1:93) — was subtler even than that of Duns Scotus, and who “in some respects the greatest philosopher that ever lived.” Perhaps the following statement is illustrative of Peirce’s complex attitude toward Hegel: “Hegel, of course, blunders monstrously, as we shall all be seen to do.” Professor Parker goes so far as to suggest, in The Continuity of Peirce’s Thought, that “the similarity between Peirce’s thought philosophy and Hegel’s is so striking that the question of Hegel’s influence must be addressed.”

II. “Phenomenology” and Hegel’s “three grades of thinking.”

In Peirce’s celebrated 1905 Monist essay, “What Pragmatism Is,” he writes: “Had Hegel, instead of regarding the first two stages with his smile of contempt, held on to them as independent or distinct elements of the triune Reality, pragmaticists might have look up to him as the great vindicator of their truth” (CP 5.436). In his “Lectures on Pragmatism,” Peirce claims: “In regard to [his three universal categories], it appears to me that Hegel is so nearly right that my own doctrine might very well be taken for a variety of Hegelianism, although in point of fact it was determined in my mind by considerations entirely foreign to Hegel” (CP 5.38). In 1905, in a lengthy letter to Mario Calderoni, one of the Italian “Peircean pragmatists,” we find the association again: “My three categories are nothing but Hegel’s three grades of thinking. I know very well that there are other categories, those which Hegel calls by that name. But I never succeeded in satisfying myself with any list of them.” And in his “Considerations for 8 Lectures” (CP 1.451), Peirce claims:

Were I to take the categories of First, Second, and Third, and to classify in their order all the forms of secondness and then all those of thirdness, connecting each with the preceding by a process of transition, — a work which, by the way, I have performed, — I should be developing my doctrine as it seems to me very much in the spirit and method in which Hegel develops his Encyclopaedia.

Elsewhere, however, in reference to Hegel’s Enzyklopädie, Peirce says: “In its main features his catalogue is utterly wrong, according to me” (CP 5.38). Drawing our attention toward and then away from the ostensive categories in Hegel, Peirce seems convinced that “the case is quite different, with the three universal categories, which Hegel, by the way, does not look upon as categories at all, but as three stages of thinking.” These three stages represent, “roughly speaking, the

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10 Peirce, CP 1.277 (1903).
11 Peirce to James, 25 November 1902.
12 Parker, The Continuity of Peirce’s Thought, 232 n. 1.
correct list of Universal Categories” (CP 5.43). In general, says Parker, Peirce’s philosophy conceives logic in “Hegelian terms, as the science of triadic action.”18 Peirce believed, apparently, though the strategy may seem bizarre to us today, that comments such as these would clarify what he meant by Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. But what are these “three stages of thought” in Hegel? Martin Suhr’s suggestion is that Peirce was thinking of § 83 of the *Enzyklopaedie*; the editors of the *Essential Peirce*, in a footnote to the “American Plato” essay, refer the reader to § 82 of *The Logic of Hegel* (Oxford, 1874; E1.383 n. 24). And generally speaking, surely, both are correct in relating Peirce’s universal categories to Hegel’s “doctrine of thought”; in short, Hegel divides logic into the doctrine of being (i.e. immediacy), Essence (i.e. reflection or mediation) and Concept (i.e. being returned to itself).

But consider also the following: As early as his “American Plato” essay (1885), Peirce writes: 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 . . .” (EP 1.237, my italics). At this point in Peirce’s thought, it seems pretty clear that the three stage of thought in Hegel refer to what are now translated the three “positions of thought” in the *Encyclopedia Logic* of 1817 (originally translated by Wallace, in 1873, as *The Logic of Hegel*); but Hegel himself, in that same text, sends us back to the *Phenomenology* as “the first part of the system of science.”19 In their psychological aspect, says Peirce, these three categories “appear as Feeling, Reaction, Thought.”20 Heuristically, Peirce wanted to begin with First, Second, and Third viewed as moods or tones or postures of thought.

To my mind, the very best introduction to Peirce is his correspondence with James. For the purposes of this essay, I want to focus on a letter dated June 8, 1903. In an attempt to explain the “heart of his idea,” Peirce writes: “By the phenomenon I mean whatever is before our minds in any sense. The three categories are supposed to be the three kinds of elements that attentive perception can make out in the phenomenon.” I find it curious, to say the least, that of the three amendments to the published version of this letter21 is the exclusion of Peirce’s reference to Hegel. I want to cite this omitted portion of the letter (in italics) and then explain why the reference was important to Peirce.

If one imagine that feeling retains its positive character but absolutely loses all relation, (and thereby all vividness, which is only the sense of shock), it no longer is exactly what we call feeling. This is a mere sense of quality. It is the

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18 According to Martin Suhr, in “On the Relation of Peirce’s ‘Universal Categories’ to Hegel’s ‘Stages of Thought’” (in the Proceedings of the C. S. Peirce Bicentennial International Congress, Texas Tech Press, 1981, p. 275), this coincidence “follows from the proposition as a unity of differences, the dialectic being nothing other than the aspiration of absolute identity between subject (reality) and predicate (concept). . . . it seems obvious that the correspondence follows from the fact that both of them started from Kant’s ‘highest point,’ the ‘I think,’ that is, from the transcendental unity of apperception, which is the concept mediating between Sinnlichkeit and Verstand, mediating between the disparateness of sensation and the unity of the categories.

19 Ibid., 134.


21 Peirce to James, BMS Am 1092, 25 November 1902.

source of element that makes red to be such as it is, whatever anything else may be. I do not see how that can be described except as being such as it is, positively, of itself, while secondness is such as it is relatively to something else. / Anything familiar gains a peculiar positive quality of feeling, of feeling of its own; and that I think is the connection between Firstness and Hegel's first stage of thought. The second stage agrees better with Secondness.

The third state is very close indeed to Thirdness, which is substantially Hegel's Begriff. Hegel, of course, blunders monstrously, as we shall all be seen to do; but to my mind the one fatal disease of his philosophy is that, seeing that the Begriff in a sense implies Secondness and Firstness, he failed to see that nevertheless they are elements of the phenomenon not to be aufgehoben, but as real and able to stand their ground as the Begriff itself. / The third element of the phenomenon is that we perceive it to be intelligible, that is to be subject to law or capable of being represented by a general sign or Symbol. But I say that the same element is in all signs. The essential thing is that it is capable of being represented. Whatever is capable of being represented is itself of a representative nature. The idea of representation involves infinity, since a representation is not really such unless it be interpreted in another representation. But infinity is nothing but a peculiar twist given to generality. There is not anything truly general that does not actually make irrational existences conform to itself. That is the very heart of the idea.

This letter was written in response to James's sustained complaints that Peirce's categories were "so unusual to other minds," that "even first-, second-, and thirdness are outside [James's] sphere," and that there were only two or three minds at Harvard who could follow Peirce through the thickets of his relatives and graphs. James suggested that Peirce's lectures would benefit from "a good deal of interstitial expansion and comparison with other modes of thought," and that he should "keep the ignoramus in view as [Peirce's] auditors" (Perry, II: 428). James admonishes Peirce, in short, that: "You cannot start with too low an idea of their intelligence. Look at me, as one!" Peirce very much wanted to be understood by James, and the letter cited above is quite possibly Peirce's finest attempt to make himself intelligible.

Peirce's references to Hegel here, his attempt to explain his thought by comparing it with other modes of thought, suggest that Hegel's "three states of thinking" were shared intellectual territory. Peirce compared his thought to Hegel's because he believed that it would serve the heuristic purpose of explaining the lesser known by way of the better known.22 Although Peirce was using this terminology as early as 1885, thirty years after his impoverished introduction to Hegel's thought (i.e. Vera), James admits that he first read the *Logic* in 1906; indeed, James claims to have first "learned to read Hegel" — from Kino Fischer's *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* — in 1901. I mention this because I do not think it possible to pin down a specific text in Hegel, as Stuhr and Hauser want to do, as decisive to the meaning of the "three grades of thinking"; we are dealing instead with a popular gloss on Hegel's thought — i.e. with something

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22 Already in 1880, in a letter to Mr. Clark, James claims that the "Hegelian wave" was "deluging" Harvard College. The standard commentary to Hegel's *Logic* at that time, with which both James and Peirce were "acquainted," was Kino Fischer's *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*. James says that Fischer's two volumes taught him how to read Hegel; James' reading of Hegel was influenced also by F. H. Bradley, who encouraged James to be more just in his use
much more in the air than something on the page. Perhaps it is safe to assume also that James and Peirce discussed Hegel’s “three stages of thinking” during the latter’s visit (together, for the first time, with Juliette) to Cambridge one week earlier. It would be safe for us to assume also that Royce, whose *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* was published in 1892, and whose influence was significant on James and Peirce alike at this time, is an important piece of the puzzle. Royce suggests that Hegel’s “secret”, his formula for the very essence of consciousness and his fundamental law of rationality, is the principle of self-differentiation: “Hegel’s principle amounts to showing us how conflict and active mastery continually enlarge our finite selves” (214). Moreover, this fundamental paradox defines the relationship of the finite to the infinite.

But let us take stock of the clues we do have, rather than bemoaning the fact that we have so few: First, Hegel’s “third state is very close indeed to Thirdness, which is substantially Hegel’s “Begriff.” Hegel’s “Begriff” has the basic meaning of “to grasp [begreifen] thoroughly” – the “concept” is a concrete universal, i.e. particularity completely synthesized with its congruent universals under the agency of thought. Ultimately, the “Begriff” represents the synthesis of the “ens” [that it is] and “esse” [what it is]. Second, whereas Peirce applauds Hegel’s recognition that “the Begriff in a sense implies Secondness and Firstness,” Peirce wants to distinguish himself from Hegel’s tendency to treat the First and Second as somehow less “real” and less able to “stand their ground” because *aufgehen* [rendered intelligible, i.e. represented or sublated under the concept] into the Third. Peirce’s objection here has the makings of another essay, one which – I believe – would be as useful to Peirceans as it would be to Hegelians. Third, in an unpublished section of MS 304 (“First Draught” to the “Lectures on Pragmatism,” c. 1903), from the same period, Peirce identifies his first category (i.e. “the very first character” to be noted “when anything is present to the mind”) with what Hegel calls “immediacy.” The Hegelian “procedure” always begins with immediacy, i.e. the “in-itself” which is potential to further elaboration. Ultimately, in Hegel, nothing is immediate. For Peirce, immediacy – in this context – is a genuine

of Hegel. And by 1903, James was carefully following Dewey’s career, a career steeped at that point in Hegelianism. James had not read the Logic until roughly 1906.

3. James suggests that his indebtedness to Peirce is second only to Royce, the unabashed Hegelian at Harvard; and while it is true that Peirce was highly critical of Royce, both professionally and personally, claiming as he did that Royce’s philosophy was “simply too Hegelian” and that Royce had mistreated Abbot, he respected Royce immensely. I am thinking here of Peirce’s striking comment, in a 1970 interview by Bernstein (TCSP 6): “Peirce was a great admirer of Royce and Peirce of Peirce; both of them are Hegelians, both acknowledged the great influence of idealism on them and both thought of themselves at times as being idealists. This is worth probing.”

4. In his “Law of the Mind,” Peirce refers to the element of Thirdness as “personality.” According to Hegel, in a celebrated phrase from the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, the truth is the whole [Das Wahre ist das Ganze]: this means that because Thirdness understands its relationship to Firstness and Secondness, whereas Firstness and Secondness do not understand their relationship to the others, the consciousness indicative of Thirdness is somehow truer and more complete than Firstness and Secondness. In a famous letter to James, Peirce claims that “There is not anything truly general that does not actually make irrational existences conform to itself.” This truly general, this third, this personality, is not – according to Peirce – the whole (better: only) truth or the only thing that can “stand on its own”; but perhaps, Peirce would have conceded that Thirdness stands on its own in such a fashion that other truths eventually – let’s say, in the long run – become “docile” under its influence.

5. Peirce, MS 304: “When anything is present to the mind, what is the very first character to be noted in it, in every case, no matter how little elevated the object may be? Certainly, [it] is presentness in / [4] a certain sense. So far Hegel is quite right. I immediacy he calls it. But to say that presentness, presentness as it is present, present-presentness is abstract, is Pure Being! is a falsity so glaring that it is a wonder to me that any mind, – let alone Hegel – could ever be deceived by it. That the Hegelians find it all right does not surprise me, because they let Hegel do their thinking for them. How shall I show you anything so manifest? I wish we were out of doors. Philosophizing ought to be done under the light of heaven. Hegel himself in the opening of the *Phenomenologie* supposes that he and the reader are out of doors. But somehow his theory that the abstract is more primitive than the concrete blinded his eyes to what stood before him. Let us try to get into an unsophisticated state so that we can perceive what is present to us. Let me read you a bit of poetry just to rinse out your thoughts.” Several pages of this document were published as part of “The Categories in Detail” (CP 1.322-323).
though not particularly vivid state of consciousness. Roughly one year later, fourth, Peirce confides to James: "I am not sure that it will do to call this science phenomenology owing to Hegel's *Phänomenologie* being somewhat different. But I am not sure that Hegel ought not to have it named after his attempt." The original title of Hegel's *Phenomenology* was *The Science of the Experience of Consciousness*. Fifth, in the "Pragmatism Lectures" of 1903, however, Peirce reminds us that "a Phenomenology which does not reckon with pure mathematics, a science hardly come to years of discretion when Hegel wrote, will be the same pitiful club-footed affair that Hegel produced" (CP 5.40).²⁶ Phenomenology, for Peirce, and let this count as our sixth clue, is the study of "the three elements that attentive perception can make out in the phenomenon." Seventh, and last, in the "First Draught" to his "Lectures on Pragmatism" (II), in an unpublished section titled "On Phenomenology," Peirce makes reference to the *Phaenomenologie* in the context of a critique of Hegel's doctrine of immediacy.

Taken together, these hints suggest that while Peirce's references to Hegel's three stages of thought were originally rooted in *The Logic of Hegel*, perhaps § 83 (namely, the division of logic), but much more likely referring to the three positions described in §§ 26-80,²⁷ he wanted to refer James — "the first psychologist," as Peirce called him — to Hegel's *Phenomenology*. It is here that we find Hegel's three "dialectical" stages of thinking in the form of (1) identity, (2) non-identity, and (3) the identity of identity and non-identity. The object of this perceptual consciousness becomes for us the concept (Begriff), i.e. when immediacy (an-sich) returns to itself (an-und-fuer-sich) mediately (fuer-sich).²⁸ Peirce distinguishes his science of phenomenology from Hegel's *Phenomenology* in the follow manner: "I will not restrict it to the observation and analysis of *experience* or what might conceivably be experienced or become an object of study in any way direct or indirect" (CP 5.37). Though Peirce criticizes Hegel for emphasizing Thirdness to the neglect of Firstness and Secondness,²⁹ especially Secondness, he admits that "it may be that *logic* ought to be the science of Thirdness in general" (CP 1.539).

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²⁶ On the other hand, Peirce insists that while "phenomenology is one science and psychology a very different one," he believes also that "phenomenology has no right to appeal to logic, except deductive logic" and that "logic must be founded on phenomenology" (Perry, II: 431; October 1904).

²⁷ According to the 1817, the three "positions available to thinking with respect to objectivity" are §§ 26-36 (characterized by naïveté, § 26), §§ 37-60 (the decisive shift of which occurs due to scepticism and "critical philosophy," § 40), and §§ 61-80 (characterized by the standpoint of knowing, believing, thinking, and intuiting; § 63). This division corresponds, of course, with Peirce's 1885 description of Hegel's three stages of thinking.

²⁸ As an aside, the three moments of the "Begriff" are universality, particularity, and specificity; in the Logic, Hegel compares universality to love (SW, IV, 242). Stirling is convinced that the general movement of thought, and "Hegel's secret," is expressed in Fichte's method (i.e. Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis) or, "in Hegel's phraseology — 1, Reason; 2. its other; 3. Reason and its other" (SH: 141). Inherent in this method is a principle of movement, by which "all particulars are carried up ever toward the general unity and completeness of the whole" (SH: 142).

²⁹ See Gary Shapiro's "Peirce's Critique of Hegel's Phenomenology and Dialectic," Transactions, 1981; Shapiro wants to argue that Peirce's thought is closer to Hegel's thought than he was able to acknowledge" and that Peirce's charge that "Hegel ignores or neglects Firstness and Secondness is an exaggeration which needs to be corrected."
Perhaps this is enough for our present purposes, stopping as it were just shy of stating the speculative conclusions suggested by the scholarship, perhaps it is enough for one scholar to point other interested scholars in a more promising direction. In short, I think that the best entrée into Peirce’s categories – at least for the neophyte, i.e. auditors such as James himself – is his “phenomenology”; and if we were to follow James’s advice to Peirce, advice which Peirce obviously took to heart, there is something to be gained by comparing – at least by way of orientation – Peirce’s universal categories to Hegel’s three stages of thought.

These three categories, without which “pragmatism cannot be understood,” when applied systematically, “lead to synechism, which is the keystone of the arch.” Synechism is “that tendency of philosophical thought which insists upon the idea of continuity” (CP 6.169). In order to understand the Peircean pantology, it will be necessary to understand what he meant by the term “continuity.” According to Peirce, Hegel “has for his chief topic the importance of continuity” (CP 1.41).

III. Synechism and the ‘Secret of Hegel’

Peirce believed that Hegel understood, though dimly, the logic of continuity: “Most of what is true in Hegel is a darkling glimmer of a conception of continuity” (CP 6.31). And the majority of Peirce’s references to Hegel are associated with synechism. Peirce suggests, in two separate unidentified fragments (c. 1892), that the “Secret of Hegel” consisted in the importance he attached to continuity, i.e. “that the universe is everywhere permeated with continuous growth” (CP 1.40-42). Peirce’s phrase here is surely an allusion to a fairly popular two-volume study of Hegel’s Logic, titled “The Secret of Hegel,” written by James Hutchinson Stirling. Harris refers to these volumes in his 1867 “Paul Janet and Hegel” essay (in SJP; W 2:132 ff.), and Royce mentions Stirling’s work on several occasions in his Spirit of Modern Philosophy. The “secret of Hegel,” according to Stirling, is also the secret of Kant, “who showed that our world was a system of sensuous affection woven into connexion by the understanding (SH: 129-130). Because reason is “the principle of the whole, the Absolute, for it is itself and its other,” it “reassumes this other into its own unity.” This fundamental law of rationality, the logic of which was expressed in Fichte as “Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis; or, in Hegel’s phraseology – 1, Reason; 2, its other; 3, Reason and its other” (SH: 141), “has a principle of movement in it, when applied, by which all particulars are carried up ever toward the general unity and completeness of the whole” (SH: 142). According to Royce, the “secret” was the principle of self-differentiation. In Peirce’s words, “[continuity] is the essence of

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30 Peirce to James, 25 November 1902.
31 Stirling’s title page carries the following quote from Hegel: “The hidden secret of the universe is powerless to resist the might of thought; it must unclose itself before it, revealing to sight and bringing to enjoyment its riches and its depths.” Equally elusive is Peirce’s claim: “If I were to attempt to describe to you in full all the scientific beauty and truth that I find in the principle of continuity, I might say in the simple language of Matilda the Engaged, ‘the tomb would close over me e'er the entrancing topic were exhausted’ . . . (CP 1.171).
thought” (CP 5.436) and the ‘Secret of Hegel’ is that “the world is permeated with continuous growth.”

Peirce’s own definitions of continuity display a continuous evolution. For our purposes, I want to focus on one of the 1892 fragments – titled “Hegel and Continuity” (CP 1.40-1.42) – in which Peirce claimed that his philosophy resuscitated Hegel. Following Potter and Shields, these definitions belong to the “Kantistic period,” i.e. falling between the “Cantorian” and the “post-Cantorian” periods in Peirce’s development of a satisfactory definition of continuity. That said, it should be said also that Peirce’s reference to Hegel apropos continuity have very little to do with his attempt to solve, say, Cantor’s paradox of asserting that there is a greatest transfinite cardinal; Peirce is primarily interested in Hegel’s theory of universals, in which sensuous immediacy is continuous with concrete concepts. In his “The Law of Mind” (1892), Peirce stated “there is but one law of the mind, namely, that ideas tend to spread continuously and to affect certain others which stand to them in a peculiar relation of affectibility. In this spreading they lose intensity, and especially the power of affecting others, but gain generality and become welded with other ideas” (CP 6.104). Further, “whenever ideas come together they tend to weld into general ideas; and wherever they are generally connected, general ideas govern the connection; and these general ideas are living feelings spread out” (CP 6.153).

Parker claims that these texts represent “not only Peirce’s conception of thought as a continuum of ideas, but also the precursor of his mature account of the summum bonum.”

At about the same time, roughly 1893, Peirce alludes – again, en passant – to a well-known metaphor toward the conclusion of the Phenomenology:

In the absence of external impressions of interest, thoughts begin to dance through the mind, each leading [the other] by the hand, like a train of Bacchants on a Grecian vase, as Hegel says. After a while the clear train of thought breaks, and for a time ideas are scattered, soon, however, to take places again in another train.

There is a law in this succession of ideas. We may roughly say it is the law of habit.

In this account of the association of ideas, Peirce also cites – approvingly – Hume; the law of habit is “a gentle force which commonly prevails.” Of vital importance, here, is Peirce’s suggestion that “the very supreme commandment of sentiment is that [one] should generalize, or what the logic of

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23 This thesis has been developed beautifully in Parker’s The Continuity of Peirce’s Thought (Vanderbilt University Press: Nashville and London, 1998); it has been documented also by Potter and Shields in “Peirce’s Definitions of Continuity” (Transactions, XIII, 1977, pp. 20-34), M. Otte’s “Das Prinzip der Kontinuität” (Mathematische Semesterberichte, XXXIX, 1992, pp. 105-125), and Hausman’s Charles S. Peirce’s Evolutionary Philosophy (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1993).
24 Potter and Shields, “Peirce’s Definitions of Continuity,” Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society, XIII (1977), pp. 20-34. The four main periods, see pp. 20-21, are: (1) pre-Cantorian, until 1884; (2) Cantorian, 1884-1894; (3) Kantistic, 1895-1908; and (4) post-Cantorian, 1908-1911.
25 Parker, The Continuity of Peirce’s Thought, 131. The highest business and duty of philosophy, thinks Peirce, perhaps not altogether unlike Socrates of old, or Hegel for that matter, consists in encouraging inquiry (see NEM 4:346) and “proclaiming the subordination of reasoning to sentiment” (CP 1.679). Said all at once: “Generalization, the spilling out of continuous systems, in thought, in sentiment, in deed, is the true end of life” (NEM 4: 346).
relatives shows to be the same thing, should become welded into the universal continuum, which is what true reasoning consists in" (CP 1.674).

At each turn of the page, Peirce bemoans the fact that “the seminarist Hegel” was hopelessly inept – and uninformed about the then contemporary advances – in the exact sciences;36 be that as it may, Peirce did believe that Hegel “understood the logic of continuity” – i.e. the “doctrine that all that exists is continuous” (CP 1.172, 6.103). And indeed, in the 1893 fragment “Hegel and Continuity,” Peirce claims that his philosophy “resuscitates Hegel, though in a strange costume” (CP 1.42). Hegelianism, according to the “Evolutionary Love” (c. 1893) essays, is “anancasticism” – that is, one of two degenerate forms of agapasm (CP 6.303, 6.305). Hegelian dialectic, or anancasticism, explains – I want to suggest – why Peirce thinks that “the principle of continuity is the idea of fallibilism objectified” (CP 1.171, 1.172). For the fallibilist, general ideas are not absolute laws to be discovered, they are instead “living feeling spread out” (CP 6.143). Perhaps it is here, more than anywhere else, that we draw closest to the Hegelian secret – as Peirce understood it – in Peirce’s thought.

Peirce, like Hegel, if not to a greater degree, believed that genera were real.37 Rather than a metaphysical doctrine, continuity is “a regulative principle of logie” (CP 6.173); stated differently, society “cannot but be helped by regarding [continuity] as the really possible eternal order of things to which we are trying to make our arbitrariness conform” (NEM 4:346). In 1896, Peirce defines logic as the science of the evolution of thought because it “conveys the correct idea that it is like Hegel’s logic.” At the same time, for there is always a caveat, Peirce claims to “give to objective logic a waking life which was absent from Hegel’s dream land” (NEM 4:330). In 1902, in an unpublished introduction to “Reason’s Rules” (MS 596), Peirce describes his own method by comparing and contrasting it with the general method of Hegel’s dialectic. He says:

The author will not promise altogether to abstain from the use of the general method of Hegel’s dialectic; but he will not rely much upon that. That method consists in the critical examination of the initial state of belief of the reader, leading to a conviction that it is self-contradictory. If the reader then seems to be driven into a contrary belief, that also, by similar development of it, is shown to involve contradictions; and thus the / 5 / reader is finally led to a view which involves a recognition of continuity, which third opinion upon examination appears sufficiently satisfactory, although it may probably lead at once into a further difficulty concerning a nearly related matter. The author admits that it is

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36 Peirce claims that mathematicians and physicists had been working on the notion of continuity for three centuries – and that the differential calculus had been in working order for a century and a half – prior to Hegel's alleged discovery.

37 See, e.g., Peirce’s “On Nominalism and Realism” (MS 860, c. 1896): “Realism, in the proper sense of the word, sanctioned by continual usage of nigh on a thousand years, is the doctrine that reality and idea are not contrary, but that ideas are sometimes real; that the highest realities are laws and types and characters and personalities and that these are living ideas. The real thing is that which forces us sooner or later to acknowledge it ... The real is a thought but it is a thought that is alive and has persistence.” For Hegel’s doctrine of universals I would suggest Royce’s Appendix C, pp. 492-506, in The Spirit of Modern Philosophy.
very apt to happen that the conceptions elicited by this process are very apt to approximate the truth. The reason is that it forces the reader to introduce the element of continuity into his conceptions, which, in the early stages of thinking is very apt to be wrongly excluded. The method thus happens very often to work pretty well. But there is no reason to expect that it will always do so; and when its true character is seen through, it becomes extremely unconvincing; and the more so because the reductions of the different opinions to absurdity are in [6] almost all cases of the flimsiest texture, and permit a mind of any subtlety to escape by every mesh. It would be far better to begin by facing the question whether it would not be advantageous to introduce continuity into a given conception. Truth is, in general, not to be ascertained by brain-spinning but by experiment and fact. Certain evolutions of thought are, no doubt, necessary; but they are not of the kind which the Hegelian dialectic employs; and their results have in the end to be tested by comparison with facts. Another objection to the Hegelian method is that if the reader puts any faith in it he is led to imagine that his initial opinions were entirely wrong. Now as far as his initial opinions about reasoning are concerned, this is not so. In the main, they are mostly well-founded. The principle fault of them is that they are vague, and incomplete, and erroneous in certain details.

This paragraph, ostensibly a short description of the general method of Hegelian dialectic, is Peirce's clearest and most comprehensive reading of Hegel. It not only includes references to Hegel's method, his three stages of thought and the doctrine of continuity, it suggests also the way in which the parts are fitted together into a whole. And while it is true that the arch of Peirce's thought can be distinguished sharply from Hegel's, something valuable is gained — I suggest — by playing the association-disassociation game here.

According to Peirce, his three categories lead to synechism. Once again, I want to focus attention on several letters written to James between late 1902 and early 1904, a time when Peirce was attempting to put his categories "in a much clearer light and more convincingly." The central piece of evidence is a letter, the publication of which is forthcoming, dated 25 November 1902 (CP 8.257):

These three normative sciences [i.e. Logic, Ethics, and Aesthetics] correspond to my three categories, which in their psychological aspect, appear as Feeling, Reaction, Thought. I have advanced in my understanding of these categories much since Cambridge days; and can now put them in much clearer light and more convincingly. The true nature of pragmatism cannot be understood without them. It does not, as I seem to have thought at first, take Reaction as the be-all, but it takes the end-all as the be-all, and the End is something that gives its sanction to action. It is of the third category. Only one must not take a nominalistic view of thought as if it were something that a man had in his consciousness. Consciousness may mean any one of the three categories. But if it is to mean thought it is more without us than within. It is we that are in it, rather than it in any of us. Of course I can't explain myself in a few words, but I think it would do the psychologists a great service to explain to them my conception of the nature of thought.

This then leads to synechism, which is the keystone of the arch.
This throws some light on "the way the parts are fitted together [in Peirce's system], which is not the most obvious of things"; and if that escapes notices, writes Peirce, "the principle thing would wholly escape notice" (01 December 1902).

Conclusion:

Those acquainted with Peirce's thought know all too well the danger of losing sight of the arch's trajectory because, sometimes for good reasons, one has allowed oneself to be drawn too close to a particular stone. Indeed, Peirce himself suffered from this all-too-human proclivity. And yet, Peirce believed that the "principle thing" was the way the parts were fitted together. I have tried to indicate how Hegel's "secret" might shed some light on Peirce's mature and largely unpublished "guess at the riddle." This suggestion will strike those familiar with Peirce's published "Guess" (1887-88) as prima facie preposterous, since Peirce rejects in that very essay the Hegelian philosophy "in toto." But if Peirce took his own objection to the Hegelian method seriously, Hegel's opinions should not be viewed as entirely wrong, but rather as "vague, and incomplete, and erroneous in certain details." Whether Hegel was right or wrong is not, however, terribly important to the critical point of the present essay. Because I want to appreciate Peirce's thought correctly, referring once again to the citation from Parry with which this essay began, I am invested in "rediscovering the varied information and complexes of ideas which the author assumed to be the natural property of his or her audience." And I will be the first to admit that this task is so hopelessly complex that it is for all intents and purposes impossible. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the alternative is worse than impossible.

At the beginning of the 20th century, almost 100 years after Hegel's Phenomenology, Dilthey suggested that the progress of Hegel scholarship depended largely on clarifying the contours of his architectonics; similarly, at the beginning of the 21st century, almost 100 years after Peirce, we might suggest that the progress -- i.e. recovering from what Weiss considered to be the sluggishness of Peirce scholarship -- will depend on clarifying still further the architectonics inherent in his universal categories. If this were the case, Peirce's use of Hegel to explain his own position is nothing short of a gift -- the sort of gift typical of a teacher to a student. Like most philosophical sages, Peirce wrote to a distant prodigy: "Sometime or other, Reason whispers in my ear."

But Peirce also wanted, sometimes desperately, to be understood by his contemporaries. Though stubborn to a fault, Peirce followed James's advice as far as he could. Peirce's references to Hegel are primarily, I conclude, intended to make his own thought more accessible to his would-be auditors; in short, Peirce was trying to establish a connection "with things already in the air." But alas, the Hegelisms indigenous to the golden age of classical American pragmatism are now a thing of the past. Nevertheless, I recognize the value of these comparisons in my own case; Peirce's
sustained association and disassociation with Hegel, vis-à-vis the categories or continuity or dialectic, has led me to a richer understanding of the Peircean arch. (It has led me also, it is worth mentioning, to a better understanding of Hegel.) If the interpretative hypothesis of this essay is correct, that Peirce’s references to Hegel have less to do with indebtedness or influence, as the secondary literature seems to suggest, and more to do with a pedagogical decision by Peirce, I am convinced that he chose well. Indeed, I would like to suggest that Peirce chose to compare and contrast his system with Hegel’s not only because it was in the air at the time, but also because he was convinced that it would serve the distant prodigy to whom he wrote equally well. And if this is true in the case of Peirce’s references to Hegel, it may well be true also of his references to Leibniz, Aristotle, Berkeley, Kant, Boole, Cantor, et cetera, et cetera. But like all hypotheses, this is not something to be brained-over, but much rather something to be put to the test.