

General Idea as the Mark of Habit in the C. S. Peirce'S Work

ANA MARIA GUIMARÃES JORGE

Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado, São Paulo (Brasil)

Abstract

In the article *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*, published in 1878 by Popular Science Monthly, Peirce presents his classical pragmatic maximum «Consider whatever effects, which could conceivably have practical consequences, we imagine inherent to the purpose of our conception». The conception of such effects establishes the whole of our conception of the object, pointing to a sense of intellectual meaning and differs from the idea of pragmatism in the current utilitarian sense at that time. Peirce did not mean that actions could be the purpose or the proper and adequate interpretation of any symbol (CP 5.402) provided that he was not in favor of life under the sole objective of the action detached from a rational thought or purpose (CP 5.429). Subsequently, between 1892 and 1893, his manuscripts *The Law of Mind* (1892), and *Evolutionary Love* (1893) provide the foundation in 1898, for the structure of the *Habit*, presented at the sixth and seventh Cambridge Conferences. In *Habit*, in 1898, Peirce argues about the one and the multiple, and the real character of the universal, pointing to the question that the principle of retroduction leads in the sense of pursuing the unity between the physical and the mental as much as possible. Consequently, establishing the conceptual link among concept, general idea, concept and habit for the constitution of the embodiment process of habits by the repetition of the general idea, or the composite idea, or the quality brought to consciousness. This article will bring the research in the cognitive scope of habit as a result of he repeated occurrence from the general idea brought to consciousness, introducing the terms «conception» and «concept» to achieve a rereading of the embodiment process of the habits by general ideas from one hand, and understand the general idea as the mark of habit (CP 7.498 1898).

Keywords: habit, general idea, cognition.

In *Habit Association* (1898), C.S. Peirce (1839-1914) reflects on the process of generation of a composite idea, or a general idea, distinguishing it from the meaning of the term conception, that would not be an idea, but a habit, according to Peirce: «... *the repeated occurrence of a general idea and the experience of its utility, results in the formation or strengthening of that habit which is the conception; or if the conception is already a habit thoroughly compacted, the general idea is the mark of the habit*» (CP 7.498 1898).

This article intends to emphasize three questions presented in that text. The first question concerns the movement of uniformity in the formation of qualities, the second one refers to the attraction of ideas in the formation of general ideas as a mark of habit. The last question, on one side, as the general idea is linked to the suggestion of the conjecture and, on the other one, as the term conception, or habit, is linked to the hypothesis.

Since 1868, in *Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man*, Peirce defines the concept of general idea as a mental action, still not specialized in the human mind (JORGE 2004:112), understanding «*cognition itself is an intuition of its objective element, which may therefore be called, also, the immediate object*». What can be dreamed, thought, imagined is a subjective element of all cognition (see immediate object: CP 5,238 1868; apud PEIRCE, 1995:250). In the same year, in *Some Consequences of Four Incapacities, Thought-Signs*, Peirce affirms that all cognitions contain general and vacant terms, allowing full interpretative self-generation of the sign in another sign (CP 5,287 1868). There are characteristics of vagueness^[1] and generality in the Thirdness, after all, the percipient fact involves continuity^[2] and generality: the «*generality of the Thirdness is representation of particular and will mediate the future action - action that will be given in a clipping of time and of space that characterizes the universe of individual of the Secondness*» (IBRI, 1992:15). Peirce based on the Aristotelian definition of generality, that is: «*is naturally apt to be predicate of many*» (or «*Quod aptum natum est praedicari of pluribus*», CP 5,151 1903). In *Three Kinds of Goodness*, stretch *Logical Goodness*

[1] Hookway emphasizes that (2000, 137: 149) Peirce laments the fact of the logicians to ignore the vagueness (5.446). The reality itself is irreducible vacant in general, base in the categorical analysis of the medieval ones, in specific, of Duns Scotus, points with respect to the direction of objective property of the vagueness concept. The vagueness is one of the three terms that are produced by means of the categorical analysis, or phaneroscopic, emphasizing the presence of three categories: Firstness or quality, spontaneity, vacant possibility, Secondness, or reaction, individual existence, and Thirdness, the category of intelligence, mediation, generality and intentionality. Vagueness is «the antithetical analogue of generality» (see 5.505). Claudine Tiercelin (2004: 12) says that the central idea of the logic of the vagueness in the Peircean workmanship is the fact of that no term is absolutely indeterminate; no term is absolutely determined. In the realistic scientific metaphysics of Peirce, there is emphasis in the irreducible indetermination of the Real: tendency to generalize and to acquire habits, the vagueness (Firstness), the «element of the spontaneity that inhabits in the base of the habit, and that we cannot verify, also is real (*tichism*, in the cosmology of Peirce)» (TIERCELIN, 2004: 16).

[2] On the process of continuous forms of time and space, Parker (1998: 121) complements saying that: aspects of the continuity are in everywhere. Any quality, any individual one appears in the way of a continuous process occurring in continuous forms of time and space. Peirce suggests that the process himself is understood by the mathematical model of one *continuum* that it makes possible the generation of definitive divisions. The «divisions» are places of the relative discontinuity, them «are marked» not by dimensional interruptions, but for it continues of reduced dimensionality (see CP 7.523 1898).

(1903), Peirce will reiterate that the process of mediation is based upon the logical origin of a percipient fact, involving continuity and «not-relative generality»^[3] (CP 5.149 1903).

In *Architecture of Theories, First, Second, and Third* and also in *The Law of Habit*, (1891), Peirce contends that the movement of the law of habit sets out from disformity towards uniformity, i.e., diversity sprouts from a generalizing tendency, or a feeling generalization. according to author:

The one primary and fundamental law of mental action consists in a tendency to generalization. Feeling tends to spread; connections between feelings awaken feelings; neighboring feelings become assimilated; ideas are apt to reproduce themselves. These are so many formulations of the one law of the growth of mind. When a disturbance of feeling takes place, we have a consciousness of gain, the gain of experience; and a new disturbance will be apt to assimilate itself to the one that preceded it. Feelings, by being excited, become more easily excited, especially in the ways in which they have previously been excited. The consciousness of such a habit constitutes a general conception (CP 6.21 1891).

Thus, Thirdness^[4] is the mediation that implies first the relation between quality itself, and second, the material universe (CP 6.32 1891). The association comes about as a natural disposal of mind and an acquired habit of the mind, the ideas are approached and associated in the experience (CP 7.498-499 1898).

In *Objective Logic, Quale-Consciousness* stretch (1898), in order to establish daily precognitive basis for the relations between subjective and objective up to dated in a system, human or not, Peirce had already developed the idea of unity^[5] as *quale*^[6]. Unity is an updated potentiality that generates quality from the nature of unawakened consciousness or quale-consciousness (CP 6.236-37 1898).

[3] The idea of continuity and discontinuity goes through conceptual changes in four phases of Peirce's work, but it is relevant to stress that Peirce directs this question for the one of the infinitesimal ones on the *continuum* and the *analytical true*: Potter and Shields (1997) distinguish the stages of the idea of *continuum* in Peirce's work: (1) up to 1884: based on the daily pre-Cantorian; (2) 1884 to 1894: based on the cantorian; (3) 1894 to 1908: based on the Kantian; (4) 1908 1911: based on one after-cantorian. Parker (1998: 241) remembers that Peirce, in his last two years of life, still writes on continuity.

[4] In the Thirdness there is a formal organizational principle, working as a law, i.e., a Peircean distinction would call Type, the formal principle that will generate some Replicas, or presentness, that allow retracing to the general principles.

[5] On the question of the reality of the universal ones, or the indetermination of *ens reale*, Peirce is based in Duns Scotus when admitting certain Metaphysical realities or formalities, which is not reduced nor the physical parts nor the conventional names, a time that its real unity, if in fact is discovered by the intellect, is not produced by it (CP. 8.18; 5.312), or an «absolutely indeterminate sign would designate a property which would have to be shared by *all* things. Hence we can form no conception of such a property» (CP. 1.548; L. 224). About uniformity: «*The substances carrying their habits with them in their motions through space will tend to render the different parts of space alike. Thus, the dimensionality of space will tend gradually to uniformity; and multiple connections, except at infinity, where substances never go, will be obliterated*» (CP. 1.416, 1890).

[6] The entitative, nomical generality (or subjective), divided by Ransdell (Santaella, 1995), is understood as a positive species and pertaining to the conditional necessity, peculiar to the category of law (CP 1.427 1896), while the qualitative is one of negative species, pertaining to the category of quality.

Thus, «the element *quale*, that it appears inside as unity, which appears upon the inside as unity, when viewed from the outside is seen as variety» (CP 6.236 1898). According to Ibri (2001: 73): the «internal Secondness becomes categorically the correlate of the external phenomenon reaction against consciousness similar to the correspondence between internal unity and external diversity, both under the first category».

In this text, *Thirdness* appears as a mediation between Firstness and Secondness, forming temporal synthetical consciousness, or experience of synthesis (CP 1.381 1890; see CP 7,536 c.1908). The unity of quality is an idea and involves duality (CP 6,374-75 1901). In 1908, Peirce conceives the concept of continuity with the idea of uniformity, making a indelible and congenital bond between psychical and physical, or subjective and objective, since the idea of continuity is the idea of homogeneity, or uniformity which is a regularity:

... in the same way a continuous line provides place for any multitude of points, [...] all regularity affords scope for any multitude of variant particulars; so that the idea [of] continuity is an extension of the idea of regularity (CP 7.535 c. 1908).

In the seventh lecture of a series of *Cambridge Conferences* (1898), specifically in *Habit, Law of Mind* (1892) (CP 6.102 and 163), Peirce had already said that the spreading of ideas occurs continuously, increasing its generalities for the formation of a *continuum* of consciousness, and in so far as these ideas are fed, allowing creative evolution. The principle of continuity regulates cognitive process in which the consciousness is a continuous and «the self is a sign in a continuous semiotics flow» (CP 6.173 1901; KETNER, 1992: 37).

It can be emphasizes that assembling the already presented ideas, that unity in the scope of duality or Secondness brings up to date a generalizing tendency, movement of disformity towards uniformity, embodied by connections between feelings in the habits updating. The conception ability, to give birth (DIB, 2008:94 and 98), inherent to that tendency to grow while a nonabsolute evolutionary law of habit taking infers the uniformity which existed in that general absence of a particular law (CP 6.132 1891). Concerning the unity of consciousness, Peirce says that if there is any continuity of feelings it is from the metaphysical nature of feeling to have a unity (CP 6.229 1898), also due to the action of habit for habit taking (CP 6,613 1891). Unity of consciousness is a metaphysical and non physiological principle which occurs through the approach of ideas distributed by fortuitous actions, assembled in general ideas to make mental associations. It is the growth of *Thirdness* (CP 6,229 1898), that means the formation of hypotheses from the unity of percipient consciousness of an object, in the time (see JORGE, 2004: 208).

In another relevant point, Peirce says: ideas are attracted and approached by ideas, but they lose intensity and they gain generality, of some kind, what suggests a loss of intensity of that vagueness in potential, that is, «when one quality is brought vividly to consciousness, others will at once have their vividness increased, some more, some less» (CP 7.498 1898). Peirce suggests that the self generative process tends to reproduce in an inverse prism: there is a new gain of intensity, in some arising degree from that original vagueness that generates a field of attraction between similar ideas, after all, an idea can only be affected by an idea in continuous connection with it (CP 6.158 1892).

In accordance with Hume, Peirce states that habits evolve from vagueness, originating an inference. Both authors define that habit implies repetition and propensity, it is an effect of the habit. Thus, whenever a repetition of some act or particular operation brings about a propensity to renew the same act or operation without any reasoning or process of understating, we say that this propensity is an effect of the habit (see JORGE, 2004: 208). If the general idea is the mark of habit, then, the propensity is the effect of a habit. This relation reminds us, for example, the Peircean definition about the present concept in *The Law of Mind*:

...what is present to the mind at any ordinary instant is what is present during a moment in which that instant occurs. Thus, the present is half past and half to come (CP 6.126 1891).

The law of the action of the ideas is the great law of the mind, the generalizing tendency, the law of association, acquisition of habits and the formation of the concept, in its intellectual meaning:

A concept is not a mere jumble of particulars, [...] is the living influence upon us of a diagram, or icon, with whose several parts are connected in thought an equal number of feelings or ideas. The law of mind is that feelings and ideas attach themselves in thought so as to form systems (CP 7.467 1893).

According to the meaning of general idea (JORGE, 2004:127), all symbol needs a special icon, or general idea, linked to a symbolic ingredient to mean (CP 7.498 1898). The function of the indicial ingredient of a symbol is to connect thought and general sign to a particular experience which has no power of meaning itself. Santaella affirms that «*concept or meaning is a nonupdated habit and the general idea or icon is what updates the habit, engendering a signification. That is why Peirce often repeated that the symbol indicates by means of a habit or an association of ideas*», and added: «*the general idea would be gestalt, an immediately perceived form or unity*» (SANTAELLA, 1995: 174-175).

Peirce emphasizes the principle of inferential suggestion and, later the retrodution^[7], to distinguish between material form and logical form (CP 5.194 1903), saying that inference must

[7] At the beginning of its works, Peirce considered that all the inference forms could be reduced to the Barbarous silogism (CP 2.620), but the Peircean notion of inference are evolved for three distinct and irreducible types of the arguments or reasoning (CP 1.65). Peirce used the term retrodution as synonymous of abduction. According to it, retrodution, or «*apagoge*» for Aristotle, was wrong translated as abduction (CP1.65). Peirce defines retrodution as: «*the provisional adoption of a hypothesis, because every possible consequence of it is capable of experimental verification, so that the persevering application of the same method may be expected to reveal its disagreement with facts, if it does so disagree*» (CP 1.68). Peirce emphasizes this characteristic of the abduction using expressions, such as: «*to fair guess*», one «*insight*» extremely fallible, «*not enough strong so that it is with more certain frequency wrong*». Thus, retrodution does not propitiate security: a «*with examination of hypothesis, and a muster of all sorts of conditional experiential consequences which would follow from its truth*» (CP 6.470). Rescher distinguishes abduction from retrodution, the hypothetical-inductive research of the inquiry is divided in two phases: abduction as elaboration of provisory hypotheses of possible explanations for the solution of scientific problems, that is, in the retrodution there is a constriction of the possible alternatives and that one that in fact is correct it appears as efficient candidate, consists of the elimination of hypotheses on the observe basis given.

be thought as an inference in its first suggestion after all «*when an inference is thought of as an inference, the conception of inference becomes a part of the matter of thought. Therefore, the same argument which we used in regard to matter, in general, is applied to the conception of inference*» (CP 5.194 1903, *apud* PEIRCE 1990: 231-232). In *The Varieties and Validity of Induction* (1905) about the link between suggestion and experience, Peirce says:

... the stimulus to guessing, the hint of the conjecture, was derived from experience. The order of the march of suggestion in retroduction is from experience to hypothesis (CP 2.755).

If the example of abduction^[8] is considered, we can understand that it shows the vocation to dispose itself, according to Santaella, as «*the tips of the inferences as mental actions, conceived as its opposition to the cartesian intuition...*» (SANTAELLA 1993: 85). Therefore, in 1897, Peirce said:

...pragmatism is correct doctrine only in so far as it is recognized that material action is the mere husk of ideas... But the end of thought is action only in so far as the end of action is another thought (CP 8.272).

This sense of conception had already been mentioned in *The Pragmatic Maxim* (1893), when Peirce uses the expression «object of some conception», pointing to its characteristic of *esse in futuro* and he often uses the term *concupere* (CP 5.402, 1905; see CP. 5.2, 1901 and CP. 5.438, 1905).

In the ratio between final results and general ideas, in *Wilhelm Wundt, Principles of Physiological Psychology* (CP. 8.201), (1905), Peirce affirms that every action requires an end as a spirit of the principle:

...which is that we must look to the upshot of our concepts in order rightly to apprehend them, would direct us towards something different from practical facts, namely, to general ideas, as the true interpreters of our thought (CP. 5.3, 1901-6).

In *Neglected Argument for the Reality of God* (1910), and previously in *The Continuum*, (1905), Peirce emphasizes that law is a live force and it is the mind that provides extensive thoughts in the time, by the possibility of mind junction of habits (CP. 6.490) that establishes genuine triadic combinations, after every thought is synthetic (CP. 6.174). Habits are formed under final causation and «*that connection between feelings is determined by the general rule*», allowing man the awareness of being governed by a general habit, or mental junctions, thus, the «*intellectual power is nothing but facility in taking habits and in following them...*» (CP. 6.20, 1891).

[8] Santaella (1992: 90) says: «There are at least two articles that argue specifically on abduction, the apparent contradiction between logic and instinct» M. Ayim (1974) e L. Santaella Braga (1991).

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