Some Convergences and Divergences in the Realism of Charles Peirce and Ayn Rand

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This essay considers selected aspects of the thought of two steadily rising American philosophers, the "Objectivist" and novelist Ayn Rand[1] and the "Pragmaticist" and semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce.[2] Using Peirce's three-fold categorical scheme as an anchor, our aim will be to explore how these thinkers have espoused broadly convergent *realist* metaphysics while bringing out the divergent routes each has taken to reach his or her stance.

The term "realism" obviously admits of many philosophical uses. Peirce, as contributor (from 1889 to 1905) to the *Century Dictionary*, provided the following entry on the subject:

> Realist: 1. A logician who holds that the essences of natural classes have some mode of being in the real things; in this sense distinguished as a scholastic realist; opposed to nominalist. 2. A philosopher who believes in the real existence of the external world as independent of all thought about it, or, at least, of the thought of any number of individuals. (Peirce 1992, xxiv)

These definitions speak to two very different contexts. The first pertains to the ontological status of "universals" (or more aptly, generals) and opposes realism to *nominalism*; while the other pertains more straightforwardly to metaphysics as such and opposes realism to *idealism*. While the ontology of generals will obliquely be touched upon in the first section (albeit under a rather *sui generis* nomenclature),

this article will concern itself only with this last form of metaphysical realism.

Our discussion will be structured around what we identify as Peirce's three principal arguments for realism. While we caution against attributing to Peirce *any* straightforward tenets, we believe one can nonetheless fruitfully distinguish three main lines of argument on the topic, each appealing more dominantly to one of his three categories of Firstness (quality), Secondness (relation) and Thirdness (representation). That the Peircean corpus can be so carved should come as no surprise. Indeed, much more so than his better-known doctrine of pragmatism, Peirce's categories are his most important contribution and form the central core of his philosophic system.[3]

The fruit of an abstract logical derivation, these "phaneroscopic" categories seek to identify those things that must be minimally present if anything is to be cognized (or just *be*) in any way. A Peircean brand of phenomenological enquiry, phaneroscopy takes as its primitive starting point that which is present regardless of anything else, an object which Peirce called the phaneron.

> What I term *phaneroscopy* is that study which, supported by the direct observation of phanerons and generalizing its observations, signalizes several very broad classes of phanerons; describes the features of each; shows that although they are so inextricably mixed together that no one can be isolated, yet it is manifest that their characters are quite disparate; then proves, beyond question, that a certain very short list comprises all of these broadest categories of phanerons there are; and finally proceeds to the laborious and difficult task of enumerating the principal subdivisions of those categories. (Peirce 1931–1958, 1.285–86)[4]

If any reductionist program be carried to its furthest extreme, Peirce argued, it would find that there are three basic ingredients without which one cannot account for all things operative in the universe. According to Peirce, they are *qualitative possibility*, brute or *actual relation* and *general representation*, which he christened Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness respectively. Similarly, Rand held there are only three irreducible "axiomatic concepts" (sometimes held to be propositional

in form) each of which is a "primary fact of reality, which cannot be analyzed, i.e., reduced to other facts or broken into component parts. It is implicit in all facts and in all knowledge. It is the fundamentally given and directly perceived or experienced, which requires no proof or explanation, but on which all proofs and explanations rest" (Rand [1967] 1990, 55). According to Rand, these three irreducible ingredients are *Existence*, *Identity*, and *Consciousness* (we shall employ capitals when referring to categories).

In what follows, we shall endeavor to show how Rand's realism diverges with the Peircean argument from Thirdness (or asymptotic representation) but converges with his arguments from Secondness (brute relation) and Firstness (neutral category).

Realism, via Asymptotic Representation

Let us begin by examining the Peircean argument for realism which Rand does not share, namely that corresponding to Thirdness. Perhaps the better known of the three, this "Third" road to metaphysical realism can be described as a macroscopic or top-down argument building on the notion of *representation*. A hint of its tenor can be found in the dictionary definition quoted earlier, when Peirce adds the caveat that the external world is independent of its thinking subjects, "or, at least, of the thought of any number of individuals." This last stipulation points to Peirce's understanding of the real as that "which, at a time sufficiently future, the community will always continue to re-affirm" (Peirce 1992, 52). We shall return to this asymptotic thesis in due time. But to fully appreciate the philosophic underpinnings which motivate it, let us first take a closer look at the categorical role of Thirdness and its consequences on the very notion of an apprehending agent.

Peirce the mathematician described his categories as organized in a *genuine triadic relation*. A triad is said to be genuine when "its three members are bound together by it in a way that does not consist in any complexus of dyadic relations" (Peirce 1931–1958, 2.274). As their names suggest, the categories follow an ordinal structure such that a First can logically be without a Second (i.e., a quality need not react against another), but a Second cannot be without a First (i.e., a relation is a relation between two distinct qualities); and a Second can be without a Third (i.e., a relation need not be represented), but a

Third cannot be without a Second and, in turn, a First (i.e., a representation necessarily involves a relation between qualities). This kind of ordinal division Peirce called prescission, which "consists in supposing a state of things in which one element is present without the other, the one being logically possible without the other" (Peirce 1998, 270). However, while one can prescind one category from another *in abstracto*, one can never do so *de facto*; to hold one category is *ipso facto* to hold the others. "Not only does Thirdness suppose and involve the ideas of Secondness and Firstness, but never will it be possible to find any Secondness or Firstness in the phenomenon that is not accompanied by Thirdness" (177). This triadic binding finds its echo in Rand's insistence that to recognize her axiom of Existence is *ipso facto* to hold that it has Identity and that one is Conscious of this (Rand [1961] 1984, 124–25).

While it is strictly speaking the last of the three basic metaphysical ingredients, Thirdness is *not* the end product of the universe *per se*. If one were to postulate that the basic categories of all things are Up, Down, Left and Right, this would not mean that the universe is populated with scattered ups, downs, lefts, and rights. Similarly, to be Third is to play a certain logical role. The crucial point that Peirce emphasized, and that gave his system its dynamism, is that whatever Third mediates a relation must in turn be *something*—it must have a quality in its own right. "There is . . . such a thing as the Firstness of Thirdness. . . . To express the Firstness of Thirdness, the peculiar flavor or color of mediation, we have no really good word" (Peirce 1931–1958, 1.530, 1.533). As First, a Third can thus form the basis of yet another triad (Peirce 1998, 273); and since Peirce conceived of any elementary triad as a sign, this building up of triads from triads he called *semiosis* or the action of signs (411).

If we pause at this level of analysis, the Peircean mechanism of reintegrating the *products* of representation into the *process* of representation finds its parallel in the Randian theoretical account of concepts. Rand proposes a theory of "measurement omission" (*cf.* Boydstun, 2004) in which a general abstractive function of sorts is applied recursively to any set of objects—ideational or material—that share common characteristics. Describing this process of "abstraction from abstractions," Rand ([1967] 1990, 21–22) writes:

> In this process [of integrating concepts into wider concepts], concepts serve as units and are treated *epistemologically* as if each were a single (mental) concrete—always remembering that *metaphysically* (i.e., in reality) each unit stands for an unlimited number of actual concretes of a certain kind. . . . In relation to the new concept, these distinguishing characteristics are now regarded in the same manner as the measurements of individual table-shapes were regarded in forming the concept "table": they are omitted.

The schema proposed seems to follow a recursivity of a type-theoretic sort: second-order abstraction does not take cognizance of the abstractive degree (if any) of its first-order objects. Much like in the Peircean account of semiosis, where representation (i.e., Thirdness) is subsequently apprehended or "grounded" only in its own quality (Firstness), in the Randian account, "[t]he distinguishing characteristic of the new concept is determined by the nature of the objects from which its constituent units are being differentiated, i.e., by their 'Conceptual Common Denominator'" (22). A concept can therefore stand for perceptual concretes or other concepts, but in the latter case, the chain must always be capable of an atomistic reduction of sorts. As such, while Rand describes higher-order concepts as "further removed from perceptual reality" than their "constituent concepts," growing "progressively more complex as the level of concept-formation grows farther away from perceptual concretes" (22–23), they constitute an advance in knowledge of those denumerable concretes denoted.

Nonetheless, it is on account of such recursive representation that Peirce and Rand's realisms eventually part ways. The crucial point here lies in the fact that whereas for Rand abstraction from abstractions is strictly a *mental* affair, for Peirce thought is but *one* species of semiosis among others. Thirdness is simply the third element—whatever it may be—that acts as a medium between two others and in virtue of which one can intelligibly speak of those two as being in relation. Any such triad Peirce called a *sign*, ascribing to each category a role in signification: "A Sign, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its *Object*, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant*, to

assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object" (Peirce 1931–1958, 2.274). While the nomenclature of representamen, object, and interpretant seeks to underscore the fact that these are abstract poles of an abstract logical relation, on a more intuitive macroscopic scale they could nonetheless correspond to what would commonly be called a sign, its referent, and the idea or person that binds them.

Yet such a characterization, while correct, is incomplete and should be resisted. Indeed, though it requires an imaginative and sustained effort along lines of vision that are not habitual to our eyes, it must be remembered that the Third or interpretant of a semiotic triad or sign is not necessarily a psychological idea as we commonly understand it. For Peirce, a person is not a sovereign semiotic agent, but only one triad in a semiosic series—one more developed than rudimentary sense-perception but less developed than the discursive community into which she is inexorably immersed. Having taken great care to eviscerate any and all psychologism from his abstract model of the sign, Peirce seeks to account for all scales of signification through a single logical structure. In fact, only towards the end of his life did he reluctantly agree to incorporate the notion of a "person" in his semiotic theory and speak of an "interpreter" instead of his logicist notion of interpretant.[5]

This denial of the individual mind's sovereignty[6] in favor of a more encompassing conception of agency forms the crux of Peirce's argument for realism via Thirdness. Just as in semiosis Thirds are relegated to more primitive poles in subsequent triads, so too is an individual consciousness but a building block in the extended series of collective thought. It is well known that Peirce distinguished between words as general *types* and as particular *token* utterances (*cf.* Armstrong 1989, 1). On a strong realist reading (as opposed to nominalist), the type regulating the tokens is held to have a reality of its own. In his late thought, Peirce posited the outright existence of "collectives," which he conceived as class-attractors of sorts (e.g., "Mankind") greater than the sum of their "concretive" members (e.g., "Charlemagne") (Peirce 1998, 489; *cf.* Savan 1987, 28). Similarly, if each individual man is understood as a token, Peirce held, then there is a real type-like common mind or "commind" (Peirce 1998, 478) governing these individuals' nomological conduct. To illustrate how

this realist construal of generals plays into the "Third" argument from asymptotic representation, let us borrow from historian Louis Menand's example of astronomy, where multiple observers of the same star only collectively come to locate its position.

> You can think of the act of measuring on the analogy of shooting arrows at a target. Some shots will be above the bull's-eye, some to the right or left, some below. But if you shoot enough arrows, always aiming at the center of the target, the misses will sort themselves out like the throws of a dice. . . . [A]lthough the differences in the results are produced by chance (since none of the errors is deliberate), they nevertheless distribute themselves more or less symmetrically around a mean, and this mean can be taken as the likeliest position of the star. (Menand 2002, 179–80)

Prima facie, this sketch seems to allude to a social-metaphysical thesis of an idealist bend; if it is realism, it does appear to be realism via a reification of idealism. Indeed, it is difficult to reconcile this thesis with Peirce's insistence that "That is real which has such and such characters, whether anybody thinks it to have those characters or not" (Peirce 1998, 342). Just as is the case with Rand's ambiguous and/or unclear stance on the ontological status of universals,[7] Peircean scholars disagree on how to classify Peirce's general metaphysics on this count. For example, Savan (1983) argues that Peirce is a "semiotic idealist," while Short (1986) describes him as a "semiotic realist." No doubt recognizing the presence of the three Peircean roads to realism here identified, Houser points out that "[t]he decision to label Peirce one way or the other seems to reflect the relative importance one attaches to the different elements of the sign relation" (in Peirce 1998, xxxv). Nevertheless, an idealist reading of the argument from Thirdness would make Peirce one-third idealist (the other two roads being more overtly realist, as we shall soon see). However, the point that Peirce sought to emphasize in his top-down argument for realism is that the mean identified in this process of averaging out is real.

And what do we mean by the real? It is a conception which

we must first have had when we discovered that there was an unreal, an illusion; that is, when we first corrected ourselves. Now the distinction for which alone this fact logically called, was between an *ens* relative to private inward determinations, to the negations belonging to idiosyncrasy, and an *ens* such as would stand in the long run. The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase of knowledge. *And so those two series of cognition—the real and the unreal—consist of those which, at a time sufficiently future, the community will always continue to re-affirm; and of those which, under the same conditions, will ever after be denied.* (Peirce 1992, 52; capitals in text, final emphasis added)

It is on account of this asymptotic thesis that Rand parts ways with Peirce. In contrast with Peirce's overtly realist stance, Rand's position *vis-à-vis* the ontological status of universals remains the object of scholarly debate. Yet it is abundantly clear from her writings that she did not share Peirce's view on the role of communal representation. For Rand, "the mind is an attribute of the individual. There is no such thing as a collective brain. There is no such thing as a collective thought. An agreement reached by a group of men is only a compromise or an average drawn upon many individual thoughts. It is a secondary consequence" (Rand [1961] 1984, 78–79). The suggestion of the real as the horizon of an averaging out of observations would, for Rand, be a blatant case of collective subjectivism. There is no reason, Rand argued, why consensus would *have to* lead to progress—on the contrary, she saw consensus as the principal *enemy* of progress.[8] Much as Peirce insisted on the logical primacy of certain notions over others via his notion of prescission, Rand's work insists that, in keeping with the astronomical analogy offered earlier, it is not the mean that pins the star position, but the individual astronomer; for astronomers must first look at the sky for there to be a mean. As Sciabarra (1995, 134) writes, "as philosophical realist, Rand emphasized the primary axiom of existence. . . . *In a sense, existence and*

consciousness are internally, but asymmetrically related" (emphasis added).

Realism, via Brute Relation

Let us now examine the two other roads taken by Peirce to reach metaphysical realism. In contrast with the previous argument from the asymptotic reproduction of interpretants or Thirds, these somewhat less problematic arguments admit of a greater convergence with the Randian account.

The realist argument from Secondness is perhaps the most straightforward of the three addressed in this study. If the argument from Thirdness was described as macroscopic or top-down, then this one can be thought of as the mesoscopic or sideways approach. It consists in highlighting the fact that we frequently have brute encounters with what Peirce called the "non-ego." If one can refute idealism (i.e., the thesis that all is mind-dependent) by arguing that there is something external to thought, then the proof of such an external thing lies in the unmediated fact of Secondness:

> The actuality of the event seems to lie in its relations to the universe of existents. A court may issue *injunctions* and *judgments* against me and I not care a snap of my finger for them. I may think them idle vapor. But when I feel the sheriff's hand on my shoulder, I shall begin to have a sense of actuality. Actuality is something *brute*. There is no reason in it. I instance putting your shoulder against a door and trying to force it open against an unseen, silent, and unknown resistance. (Peirce 1931–1958, 1.24)

So formulated, it seems untendentious that Rand would agree with this account: "Let him try to claim, when there are no victims to pay for it, that a rock is a house, that sand is clothing, that food will drop into his mouth without cause or effort, that he will collect a harvest tomorrow by devouring his stock seed today—and reality will wipe him out" (Rand [1961] 1984, 127).

However, a potential point of divergence between Rand and Peirce could arise from the latter's description of such dyadic encounters with the "universe of existents" as involving a "two-sided consciousness" (Peirce 1931–1958, 1.24). For Peirce, the object in

Secondness is like a mask with a concave and a convex side, one "dynamic" (roughly, noumenal) and the other "immediate" (again roughly, phenomenal or intentional). These objects are *always co-present*, one motivating the other in a dyadic relation. As Savan (1987, 30–31) explains: "The dynamic object acts upon the sign, and the sign re-acts or resists the action of the dynamic object. . . . In his early presentation of semiotic in 1867 Peirce spoke of this twinning of objects as that of *correlate* with *relate*." Of this isomorphic two-sided consciousness, Peirce writes: "Viewing a thing from the outside, considering its relation of action and reaction with other things, it appears as matter. Viewing it from the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness" (Peirce 1931–1958, 6.268).

Since the dynamic object exterior to the ego is for all intents and purposes that thing *in rerum natura* that pushes the mask of phenomenon and gives it its shape, one would be tempted to reduce the dyadic relation to one of agent and patient, cause and effect. In such a case, postulating the independence of an *a*semiotic exterior world would seem unproblematic. But since all apprehension of the dynamic object passes through the immediate object, this is a move some Peircean commentators see as invalid:

> As the distinction between the dynamical object and the immediate object is also methodological, a distinction of reason, it does not require an external reality. External to what, in any case, if one rejects idealism? There is only one continuous reality in which each of the two objects plays a particular part . . . . (Deledalle 2000, 46)

Peirce himself opted for a "pansemiotic" metaphysics according to which all is sign (Noth 1995, 41, 81). As with the argument from Thirdness, this move might be construed as a concession to some form of idealism. Indeed, a pansemiotic view seems *prima facie* irreconcilable with realism, inasmuch as Peirce (1998, 1) defined idealism as "the doctrine that ideas are everything." Yet it is this same philosopher who argues that "[t]he one intelligible theory of the universe is that of objective idealism, that matter is effete mind . . ." (1992, 293). To make sense of these motley statements, one must

abandon many an accepted philosophic assumption and enter Peirce's own idiosyncratic conception of the real. Indeed, the rationale at work here lies once again with the triadic architecture of the Peircean categories. Just as one can prescind one category from another only *in abstracto* but never *de facto*, any given category implying the others, so the realist argument from Secondness or relation leads us necessarily to the argument from Thirdness or representation. Brute relation, if it were truly brute, could not be intelligible, "[f]or reality is compulsive. But the compulsiveness is absolutely *hic et nunc*. It is for an instant and it is gone. . . . The reality only exists as an element of the regularity. And the regularity is the symbol"—in other words, a Third (Peirce 1998, 323). Yet, in virtue of the ordinal structure of prescission, there is no contradiction in holding this dependence on representation and recognizing that brute relation can occur without our knowledge. In fact, criticizing Berkeley's famous thesis that "to be is to be perceived," Peirce (1992, 99) writes: "That *an object's independence of our thought about it* is constituted by its connection with experience in general, he has never conceived" (emphasis in text). If one makes this reading of Secondness' "two-sided consciousness," then there is better ground to think Rand would agree with this account. Randian philosopher Leonard Peikoff (1993, 149) emphasizes that the axioms of Existence, Identity and Consciousness "cannot be sundered. There is no consciousness without existence and no knowledge of existence without consciousness."

Realism, via Neutral Category

The final road to metaphysical realism we shall examine builds on the notion of Firstness. If the argument from representation was macroscopic or top-down and the argument from relation mesoscopic or sideways, then the argument from quality can be described as microscopic or bottom-up. Even more so than was the case with Secondness, we find here a profound philosophic convergence between the thought of Rand and Peirce. Like its two sister species, the realist argument from neutral category seeks to reconsider its metaphysical repertoire so as to uproot traditional "external world" problematics. In order to understand how Rand and Peirce undertake this task, we must examine the rationale that leads both thinkers to see in their most primitive categories the very foundations of logic

and thought.

Peirce and Rand both appeal to a disinterested form of investigation in grounding their respective categories. We already saw how Peirce's phaneroscopy "religiously abstains from all speculation as to any relations between its categories and physiological facts, cerebral or other. . . . It simply scrutinizes the direct appearances, and endeavors to combine minute accuracy with the broadest possible generalization" (Peirce 1931–1958, 1.287). Similarly, Rand held that "ontology must begin with much more basic, prescientific, fundamental propositions about existence" (Sciabarra 1995, 134). Yet Robert Hollinger (1986, 46) has challenged the Randian axioms resulting from this kind of foundational inquiry as "philosophically banal" mainly because, "they are so vague that just about anything can be made consistent with them" and also because "no one in their right mind would reject [them]." Philosopher John Hospers raised a similar objection, to which Rand (1997, 527) replied in a 1961 letter:

> You say that "A is A" does not "provide a validation for any particular arguments," but "All A is B, all B is C, therefore all A is C" *does*. I will answer by telling you a story I heard years ago. Two men were arguing about which is more useful to men, the sun or the moon, and the argument was decided in favor of the moon, because, they declared, the moon shines at night, when it's dark—while the sun shines in the daytime, when it's light anyway. *What*, if not "A is A," gives any validity to "All A is B, all B is C, therefore all A is C"? What is the latter but one of the concrete applications or derivatives of "A is A"?

Hollinger and Hospers's criticisms underscore the importance of recognizing the triadic linkage that unites the Randian axioms. Indeed, to bear the weight Rand assigns it, the axiom that Existence exists must unfold the axiom of Identity, namely that "To exist is to be something. . . . it is to be an entity of a specific nature made of specific attributes" (Rand [1961] 1984, 125). Furthermore, this Identity must be apprehended in some fashion, for "a consciousness with nothing to be conscious of is a contradiction in terms" (124). Only then can the three Randian axioms be said to provide an

apodictic base to logic, which she described as "the art of non-contradictory identification" ([1967] 1990, 36)—the word "identification" strategically binding in one semantic stroke both (a nondescript) subject and (equally broad) object.[9] Thomist and Peircean scholar John Deely (2001, 355–56) explains most eloquently such a foundational architecture, which goes from raw existence to identity to logic:

> For "being as first known" is also the richest of all objectifications, embracing every particular intelligible object in amplitude of analogy. . . . Out of this primitive awareness, which is bound up with and transformative of perception as well as sensation from within, there arises, in the course of changes experienced (movements, etc.), and by way of opposition to being, the idea of *non-being*. . . . The polarity from experience of "what is" and "what is not" provides the understanding with the first materials for a judgment: that "being is not non-being". . . . This new grasp . . . provides the ground of endless further judgments of a logical kind. . . . Understanding, unable, on the inward side, to affirm and deny the same thing under the same respect, has manifested to it by the senses likewise that entities are one way or another but not both in a given respect. . . . At this stage, finally, tautological judgment (a judgment true by virtue of logical form alone) and the recognition of *identity* ("every being is what it is") becomes possible. . . .

As a point of divergence with Rand, it is important to note that for Peirce the "being as first known" (i.e., Firstness) is construed as a *qualitative possibility*. In keeping with the Peircean categories, the most primitive sign that underlies more developed forms in his mature semiotic declensions is the "rhematic iconic qualisign,"[10] a quality that stands for an object with which it shares a same quality so as to evoke a qualitative interpretation. Thus all signs (which on a pansemiotist reading means everything), from the "effete mind" of matter to the end-of-time horizon of cosmic entelechy, build on quality—from all angles one can consider, general representation (or Thirdness) is impossible without recourse to the concrete actuality of

thisness (Secondness) and thisness refers to suchness (Firstness). Quality and possibility thus become interchangeable notions: if a quality is considered before its actual manifestation, then it is *any* quality.[11] But whereas for Peirce the suchness of potential quality categorically *precedes* the thisness of its actual existence, in the Randian schema the reverse holds true: "'Existence' is the wider concept, because even at an infant's stage of sensory chaos, he can grasp that something exists. When he gets the concept 'identity,' it is a further step—a clearer, more specific perspective on the concept 'existence'" (Rand [1967] 1990, 240).

To posit quality or existence as the ground floor of one's ontology may not have much philosophic import, insofar as we are dealing in either case with a primitive notion William James once described properly as a "bloomin' buzzin' confusion." Rand herself was unclear whether the issue was trivial or not, affirming that "[t]he distinction between these two [i.e., Existence and Identity] is really an issue of perspective" yet maintaining in the same breath that "even though it is the same concept, the whole disaster of philosophy is that philosophers try to separate the two" (240–41).

Whatever the case may be, what is of interest here is the fact that that which forms the basis of all things—be it a pre-actual quality or a pre-qualitative existent—is *logically prior* to any distinction between subject and object. Nevertheless, it is to the givenness of this peculiar categorical bedrock that all subsequent logical inferences—including most emphatically those which claim to dismiss the reality of their underpinning—must in the end appeal. With regard to the simple quale at the root of his system, Peirce argues that "the very fact that it is so difficult to express this meaning without tautology is a mark of its veraciousness" (Peirce 1931–1958, 6.231). Similarly, Sciabarra (1995, 137) notes that although "Rand rejected the vicious circularity of the stolen concept fallacy, she grasps that circularity per se is not necessarily wrong." Despite their speculative divergence as to what ontological facet of their triads admits of ordinal priority, Rand and Peirce see this self-confirming circularity as robust ground for justifying metaphysical realism.

Yet a proposition like "Existence exists" is an inkblot of sorts to which we can attribute either an axiomatic or paradoxical spin. Recognition of reality, in this sense, is in the eye of the beholder.[12] As

such, Rand and Peirce's optimism or generosity *vis-à-vis* the axiomatic spin of their respective tautological foundations reveals a shared desire to reconsider the very notion of the *real* as it is traditionally contrasted with the *ideal.* Just as one can dissipate the philosophic force of Anselm's "ontological argument" for the existence of God by not entertaining the idea stipulated in the first place, so Rand and Peirce seek to fundamentally pre-empt the opposition of idealism and realism by consistently forgoing *any* thought of Descartes's cunning devil.[13] As a result, their respective metaphysics begin (and end?) in an ontologically neutral common ground between the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans.* This policy and the radical paradigm it entails have led Houser to suggest that perhaps the best way to describe Peirce's philosophy is to label it *ideal-realism* (in Peirce 1992, xxxv).[14] In much the same way, Peikoff (1993, 36), recognizing Rand's thorough rejection of dualism, argues: "The best name for the Objectivist position is 'Objectivism'."

Conclusion

When seen through a more conventional lens, Charles S. Peirce and Ayn Rand sometimes seem to dance amongst various ontological stances according to the aspect under scrutiny. However, when taken on their own terms, their commitment to metaphysical realism reveals itself much deeper than any straightforward opposition to idealism. On the three roads to realism discussed, we find radical construals of what it means to be *real.*

In the first section, we saw how, despite sharing with Peirce a recursive theory of representation, Rand diverges with the more extreme conception deployed in the former's realist argument from asymptotic Thirds. Rand would likely not accept Peirce's peculiar intra-systemic logic. As a result, she would no doubt see his advocacy of pansemiotism as a species of idealism.

In the second section, we examined how, in G. E. Moore fashion, Rand and Peirce both recognize brute compulsion as providing compelling testimony for the existence of an exterior world. Once again, Peirce's account of reaction as involving a two-sided consciousness went farther than Rand's. Yet it was seen how, owing to the triadic nature of their categories or axioms, both agree that an uninterpreted *hic et nunc* encounter with reality would be properly

unintelligible—thereby linking the argument from Secondness with the previous one from Thirdness.

In the final section, dealing with Firstness, we traced Rand's claim that philosophy and logical inference rest on the broad recognition that Existence exists. Similarly, we looked at how Peirce conceives all representations as ultimately appealing to an ontologically neutral qualitative potentiality. In each case, we were confronted with foundationalist accounts whose respective irreducible bases, despite being established via the circularity of undeniable thought experiments, were adduced to lead *out* of idealism.

In a sense, the realist attitude adopted at the primitive limit-case of Firstness percolates upwards through the other two categorical levels. For example, while Rand clearly rejected Peirce's realist construal of community consensus, at the level of the individual, her stance shares the pragmaticist's rejection of mediated apprehension as somehow inherently "ideal" or less real.

> None of these schools regards concepts as *objective*, i.e., as neither revealed nor invented, but as produced by man's consciousness in accordance with the facts of reality, as mental integrations of factual data computed by man—as the products of a cognitive method of classification whose processes must be performed by man, but whose content is dictated by reality. (Rand [1967] 1990, 54)

Compare this with Peirce, who writes of "the genius of the mind, that takes up all these hints of sense, adds immensely to them, makes them precise, and shows them in intelligible form in the intuitions of space and time. . . . Very shallow is the prevalent notion that this is something to be avoided. . . . The true precept is not to abstain from hypostatization, but to do it intelligently. . . ." (Peirce 1931–1958, 1.383).

In so attempting to redefine the issues, aims, and methods of philosophical inquiry, Rand and Peirce's works manifest a common programmatic desire to circumvent some of the more notorious pitfalls bequeathed by modernity (whether or not they succeed in this task is another question). John Deely's extensive survey of metaphysics (2001), for example, sees Peirce's inclusive conception of represen-

tation as a historical turning point ushering in a truly *post*-modern "age of understanding." From the standpoint of exegesis, it would be interesting to clarify Rand's place in such a historiographical scheme, particularly in light of the fact that we saw her as parting ways with the realist argument from asymptotic representation yet sharing a triadic commitment to binding existence and mind.[15]

To many, Peirce and Rand no doubt make very strange bedfellows. Yet despite their marked divergence on many other philosophic matters, from truth theory to ethics, it must be acknowledged that their metaphysics are by and large convergent, both in terms of their triadic structures and their realist stances. It is to be hoped that the convergences here brought to the fore will lend added support to the theses in question, while the divergences will point to problems in need of solution. In either case, the call is for further study.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. An iconoclastic intellectual who defended her ideas "with messianic passion and authority" (Brown, Collinson and Wilkinson [1996] 2002, 650), Rand is now slowly being brought "into dialogue with other thinkers, the way Marx or Jung were brought out of their narrow circle of devotees" (Stanford G. Thatcher, director of Penn State Press, quoted in Sharlet 1999, A17). As for Peirce, who shared with Rand an intense and difficult personality (*cf.* Brent [1993] 1998), it is instructive to note that serious study of his work followed the same belated path reserved for Rand's. Indeed, while a 40-year or so lead might obscure the fact, the two thinkers have had to endure similar posthumous academic plights, as Peircean scholar Joe Ransdell's oddly familiar recollections attest: "What justification is there for wasting one's time in trying to learn from somebody whose views are known *a priori* to be hopelessly confused? . . . To mention Peirce at all [in U.S. Academia in the sixties] was to run something of a risk for his professional reputation. . . . Peirce was an especially risky person to champion because of his reputation as a would-be system builder and as a metaphysician" (quoted in Deledalle 2001, 219–20).

2. A previous rapprochement between Peirce and Rand was put forth by Neil DeRosa (1997) in a hard-to-obtain nonacademic periodical. In what is ostensibly an attempt to introduce Peirce to an unsympathetic Randian readership, this short article sought to counter dogmatic claims to the effect that Peirce was somehow "a

Kantian" (an offense in some circles). Overall, despite the limited scale and exegesis of the endeavor, the text is well-intentioned and at times quite insightful. Most notable are the parallels drawn between Rand and Peirce's rejection of Cartesian skepticism, mechanism, mind/matter dualism, as well as their common belief in a fundamentally benevolent cosmos. Patently absent, however, are the many points of divergence between the two thinkers, whether generally or as nuances within the convergences cited. What's more, contrary to the informal study presented by DeRosa, we do not suggest that one thinker's thought can be assimilated under the other's banner; Peirce is no more an Objectivist than Rand is a Pragmaticist (obviously, as the current study attests, neither do we hold the two to be completely incommensurable).

    3. "In Peirce's maturity, he said it was his discovery 'of the theory of the categories which is (if anything is) the gift I make to the world. That is my child. In it I shall live when oblivion has me—my body'" (Brent [1993] 1998, 70; quoted from Peirce 1982, xxvi). *Cf.* also a 10 July 1908 letter to Francis C. Russell where Peirce writes of his "central achievement, the paper of May 14th of that year [1867], 'On a New List of Categories' " (quoted in Brent [1993] 1998, 327).

    4. References to the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Peirce 1931–1958) will employ the standard format of Peircean scholarship, indicating the volume and paragraph number.

    5. A concession he described in a 1908 letter as a "sop to Cerberus" motivated by a tiring despair at being understood by a larger audience (Peirce 1998, 478).

    6. Quoting Shakespeare, Peirce writes: "The individual man, . . . so far as he is anything apart from his fellows, and from what he and they are to be, is only a negation" (1992, 55).

    7. Rand ([1967] 1990, 2–3) saw herself as presenting a novel *Objectivist* alternative to the traditional schools on the issue. However, owing to the idiosyncratic nature of her position and/or her style of exposition, there is ongoing disagreement as to where the Randian position actually falls, the result being that her work has thus far been placed across the full canonical spectrum (save perhaps nihilism). For example, Den Uyl and Rasmussen (1986, 9) argue that, with respect to the attribution of class-membership, Rand "never forgets that concepts are derived from concretes, that thought is a tool, and that the natural world of existing individuals is ultimate"—thus aligning her in one sense with nominalism. In contrast, O'Neill (1980, 513) sees the Randian position as a special version of naive realism or again as traditional essentialist realism (O'Neill [1971] 1977, 83). For Register (2000, 212), "Rand is a nominalist about universals, but she retains realism's stress on the importance of epistemic norms and objectivity," whereas for Ryan (2003, 30), "Rand sets out to be a nominalist and falls into realism only by accident." We also find Saint-Andre (2002) arguing (by our lights quite convincingly) that Rand espoused a concerted conceptualism having much in common with that of Peter Abelard. As O'Neill remarks: "It is difficult to label Miss Rand's epistemological position in terms of the usual philosophical categories. No small part of this difficulty stems from her tendency to present caricatured definitions of rival positions and then to disdain any sort of identification with the implausible ideas which she has misrepresented" ([1971] 1977, 83). Furthermore, as Ryan (2003, 21) observes, "Rand departs from standard philosophical usage in using 'universal' as a synonym for

'concept' and 'abstraction' . . . although she never quite gets around to offering us a definition of 'universal'." In our opinion, Rand's work on concepts is best understood as a treatise on the norms of semantic hyponymy; thus explaining why, as Den Uyl and Rasmussen point out, she "approaches the metaphysical question of whether there are universals as primarily a pseudoissue" (1986, 18).

8. In her short novel, *Anthem*, Rand describes an arrested primitive society where, after a prosperous industrial age, the notion of the individual has long been erased (people refer to themselves as "we") and in which a collective "World Council of Scholars" had centuries ago invented the candle, with no progress made since (Rand [1938] 1999, 68–77). Nevertheless, the heroic protagonist of the tale challenges the *consensus omnium* and ends up rediscovering the light bulb. As DeRosa (1997, 7) points out, "Rand nevertheless believed in a 'benevolent universe,' much the same as Peirce believed in 'Agapasticism' or 'universal love'." However, while for Peirce this amicability to human progress intervenes at the (non-monotonic) level of abduction or guessing, for Rand it is most manifest in the deliberate (monotonic) exercise of reason by the individual.

9. Consistent with their commitment to a triadic integration of subject and object, both Rand and Peirce emphasize the normative character of the rules of logic as rules of *conduct*. Peirce (1998, 48) held that the first rule of logic is that "in order to learn you must desire to learn." Similarly, Rand ([1961] 1984, 120–21) held that "to think is an act of choice. . . . *Man is a being of volitional consciousness*" (emphasis in text).

10. Our discussion refers to Peirce's mature ten-fold semiotic classification (articulated around three trichotomies), first introduced in a 1903 text entitled "Nomenclature and Divisions of Triadic Relations, as Far as They Are Determined" (Peirce 1998, 289–99).

11. Since Peirce (1998, 268–69) considers existence to be reactionary and representation to be nomological, the categorical triad of quality-relation-representation is thus synonymous with the modal concatenation of possible-actual-general.

12. Whereas Rand ([1961] 1984, 78) postulated a selfish "Prime Mover" as the ultimate source of conation, Peirce (1998, 200–1, 272) proposed a tripartite classification of normative sciences in which aesthetics—what is desirable in itself—drives ethics, which in turn drives logic.

13. Kelley ([1986] 1988) explores the ramifications of the Randian rejection of idealist solipsism (i.e., her thesis of the Primacy of Existence) on the issue of perception.

14. This is a position whose main thrust Peirce traced back to his father, Benjamin, a noted Harvard mathematician (Brent [1993] 1998, 205). Interestingly, "ideal-realism" was the label used by N. O. Lossky—Rand's philosophy professor at the University of Petrograd—to describe his own philosophic system. See Sciabarra 1995, 48–49.

15. According to Deely (2001, 483): "If we put [John] Poinsot's [seventeenth century] claim that the doctrine of signs transcends in its starting point the division of being into *ens reale* and *ens rationis* into contemporary terms, what is being asserted is that semiotic transcends the opposition of *realism* to *idealism*. Not until Heidegger in the contemporary period do we encounter such a claim among the philosophers" —"the philosophers" here intended to exclude Peirce the semiotician. Interestingly

enough, Hollinger (1986, 41) believes that "there are actually very close parallels between the views of Rand and [Husserl and Heidegger]. . . . Both Husserl and Heidegger believe that European culture is in a crisis period, largely owing to the impact of western philosophy. For Heidegger, the history of metaphysics from Plato onward represents a continuous falling away from Being. . . . Thus, for Heidegger as for Rand, western philosophy is thoroughly subjectivistic, although their 'solutions' to this predicament are, of course, vastly different. . . . There can be little doubt that Rand's view of the tradition, its historical mission, its falling away, and its negative cultural impact are of a piece with the views of Heidegger and Husserl."

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