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Teaching Peirce in Spain

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As is well known, the European University system differs substantially from the American one. In most countries of Continental Europe, undergraduate students take from four to five years to obtain their Licenciate, a degree roughly corresponding to a Bachelor's in the American system, but requiring approximately 20% more coursework, and involving a greater focus on core classes, with correspondingly lesser time available for electives. The Licentiate was, until recently, sufficient preparation for entering the student's chosen profession, whether in science or the humanities (Philosophy, History, Law, Medicine, etc.). In recent years, Master's degrees have become popular for many students wishing to enter their professions with a more specialized preparation.

In Spain, Peirce's thought has generally remained almost unknown throughout the syllabi of the various Licentiate programs offered. The only exceptions are the degrees of Linguistic, Communication Studies, and Philosophy, in which Peirce's semiotics is normally only alluded to or cursorily presented. As José Vericat has written, Peirce's reception in the Hispanic world has been somewhat shadowy, in the sense that his importance is openly acknowledged, but little is known about what he actually wrote.[i] Much the same could be said of Latin America.

There is evidence, however, that this situation is beginning to change: translations into Spanish are now appearing, particularly in the web (http://www.unav.es/gep/Peirce-esp.html), which make a notable amount of Peirce's vast production accessible to the Spanish-speaking readership. Interest in Peirce's work is clearly growing in the Hispanic world,[ii] probably due to the general resurgence of pragmatism, and to the gradual approximation of Hispanic philosophers to American academic philosophy.

Since 1990 I have been teaching Peirce in undergraduate courses of Logic and of Philosophy of Language, within the degree program in Philosophy. In the courses of Logic, one of the standard introductory textbooks was used (Copi, Sanguinetti, Garrido, etc.) I always introduced three classes on abduction, a topic which is completely neglected in the standard handbooks. As a basic text for the students, I recommended my paper on Peirce's logic of surprise, and for students of logic in the School of Theology I also recommended a paper on "*Il lume naturale*: Abduction and God."[iii] Both papers include long quotations from Peirce that enable the student to become familiar with Peirce's train of thought on the key issue of abduction, which is —at least to me— Peirce's main contribution to contemporary philosophy of science.

In the courses of Philosophy of Language that I have been teaching regularly to undergraduates of Philosophy and Linguistics over the last fifteen years, I have slowly shifted from a canonical history of analytical philosophy (starting with Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein, and ending with Quine, Putnam and Kripke) towards a more pragmatistic understanding of the evolution of philosophy in the past century. American pragmatism has

commonly been seen by European philosophers as something parochial and outside the mainstream of philosophy. As Rorty noted, while philosophers in Europe study Quine and Davidson, "they tend to shrug off the suggestion that these contemporary philosophers share their basic outlook with American philosophers who wrote prior to the so-called linguistic turn."[iv] It has become more and more apparent to me that there has been a continuous development of thought from Peirce up through Quine, Sellars, Putnam and so on, and that this tradition of thought —as Bernstein suggested— "not only challenges the characteristic Cartesian appeal to foundations, but adumbrates an alternative understanding of scientific knowledge without such foundations."[v]

In this framework, I am convinced that nowadays the history of twentieth century philosophy of language should be taught in a way that integrates Charles Peirce and pragmatism into the main picture. At present, the central element and real corner stone of my course on Philosophy of Language is the pragmatist shift of Wittgenstein in the thirties, thanks to the influence of the young Frank P. Ramsey.[vi] Since my course covers two terms, with three hours of lecturing each week, it is possible to arrange the program so as to dedicate the first month to a general introduction of the subject, and after that the main points related to language in the work of Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Carnap and the Vienna Circle, using standard texts by these authors. At this point, by which high analytical philosophy has been already covered, the first semester ends. The second semester starts by going backwards, since Peirce is covered in two weeks, introducing his biography, and giving his conception of signs, his theory of pragmatic meaning, and providing an account of abduction as the motor of our communicative practices. A very useful text for illustrating to undergraduate students the relevance of Peirce for contemporary philosophy of language is Walker Percy's lecture "The Divided Creature."[vii]

After this introduction to Peirce's thought, the pragmatist evolution of Wittgenstein's views on language is explained with detail, paying primary attention to the influence of Peirce through Ramsey, and also to the influence of William James.[viii] After a good acquaintance with Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, it is not difficult to teach most of the issues related to language in the works of John L. Austin, W. V. Quine, H. Putnam and Saul Kripke as if they were —as I think they are— embedded within a common, broadly pragmatist tradition.

This is a very personal approach on how to teach Philosophy of Language to undergraduates in Spain, but I am convinced of its soundness, both from a historical point of view and from a didactic one. Moreover, since students understand that the professor is personally engaged in the way he or she is teaching, they truly become more interested in the subject, as has been stressed by Ken Bain in his suggestive book *What the Best College Teachers Do*.[ix] Finally, I involve the students personally in the experience of “abduction” by requiring them to write several papers on the philosophers they read, a practice that is not common in Spain, where the education system focuses primarily on learning via lecture and reading.

To complete this report about teaching Peirce to undergraduates in the Spanish-speaking world, it may be useful to register here that there is an important experience of teaching Peirce in Buenos Aires.[x] In the huge University of Buenos Aires there is a general introductory year called "Ciclo Básico Común," which enrolls around 15,000 students annually. This “Basic Cycle” includes a course on "Elements of Semiotics and Analysis of Speech", which is compulsory for the students planning to get certain degrees

(Communication, Social Sciences, Humanities, etc.) and optional for others. Peirce's theories are studied with some attention; in particular, his concept of sign and abduction, following the book of Umberto Eco entitled *Semiotics and Philosophy of Language* and that by Magariños de Morentín, *El signo: Las fuentes teóricas de la semiología: Saussure, Peirce, Morris* (Buenos Aires, Hachette, 1983). Later, in the individual degree programs, the presence of Peirce is more sparse, but evident, particularly in Communication Studies, thanks to the work of Eliseo Verón and Juan Magariños de Morentín.

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[i] . José Vericat, "Introducción", in C. S. Peirce, *El hombre, un signo: (El pragmatismo de Peirce)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1988), p. 15.

[ii] . Jaime Nubiola and Fernando Zalamea, *Peirce y el mundo hispánico. Lo que C. S. Peirce dijo sobre España y lo que el mundo hispánico ha dicho sobre Peirce* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2006).

[iii] Jaime Nubiola, "The Logic of Surprise", *Semiotica* 153, 1/4 (2005), 117-130, available at <http://www.unav.es/users/AbductionLogicSurprise.pdf>; Jaime Nubiola, "Il lume naturale: Abduction and God", *Semiotiche* I/2, (2004) 91-102, available at http://www.unav.es/users/LumeNaturale.html.

[iv] Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism as Anti-Representationalism", in J. P. Murphy, *Pragmatism from Peirce to Davidson*, (Boulder, CO: Westview: 1990), p. 1.

[v] Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, (Oxford: Blackwell: 1983), pp. 71-72.

[vi] Perhaps it is interesting to notice that was Richard Rorty the first in pointing out the similarities between Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) and the philosophical framework of Charles S. Peirce. The view put forward by Rorty was that Peirce had envisaged and repudiated positivist empiricism fifty years earlier, and had developed a set of insights and a philosophical mood very similar to those of contemporary philosophers working under the influence of the later Wittgenstein. (R. Rorty, "Pragmatism, Categories, and Language", *Philosophical Review* 70 (1961), 197-223). For a study of the relations between Peirce and Wittgenstein see J. Nubiola, "Scholarship on the Relations between Ludwig Wittgenstein and Charles S. Peirce", in I. Angelelli y M. Cerezo, eds., *Studies on the History of Logic.* (Berlin: Gruyter: 1996), pp. 281-294, available at http://www.cspeirce.com/menu/library/aboutcsp/nubiola/scholar.htm

[vii] Walker Percy, "The Divided Creature", *The Wilson Quarterly* 13, 1989, 77-87. My paper on this issue "Walker Percy and Charles S. Peirce: Abduction and Language" is available at <http://user.uni-frankfurt.de/~wirth/texte/nubiola.html>

[viii] Russell Goodman, *Wittgenstein and William James*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2002).

[ix] K. Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2004).

[x] I am very grateful to Prof. Damián Fernández Pedemonte, of the Universidad Austral, for this information.