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### Note and Call for Information\*

"News from Abroad" first appeared in the original *Journal* launched in 1867 by W. T. Harris. The founding editors of the new series revived "News from Abroad." and it has appeared here in the first issue of each volume. However, "News from Abroad" will instead be published on the journal website (<http://www.la.psu.edu/philol/jsp/>), where it can be updated. The only way such a plan can succeed is if those having news of interests of the journal, or knowing of persons having access to information, will contribute their observations. As the above news section the journal is interested in any information on foreign activities in the American philosophical tradition. It need not be sent in polished form; a few quickly written brief sentences can be of great help. If you are unsure whether some news you have is relevant to the interests of the journal, please send it along for possible inclusion. If you can furnish the names of individuals who may be able to provide information, the inclusion of their mailing addresses would be helpful, but if this is not possible, just send along the names. *Please send relevant information about your own activities.* All contributions to "News from Abroad" should be sent to

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\*Please note: Last year's "Call for Information" listed an incorrect E-mail address. The one above is correct.

## Kenneth Laine Ketner on Charles Sanders Peirce

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*His Glassy Essence: An Autobiography of Charles Sanders Peirce.* Vol. 1. Kenneth Laine Ketner. Nashville, TN, and London: Vanderbilt UP, 1998. Pp. xiii + 418. \$39.95 h.c. 0-8265-1313-1.

Charles Sanders Santiago Peirce. How to deal with this incredibly brilliant, multisided, quirky genius? The trackers of the Peircean labyrinth are numerous and various, and many have either engaged the Minotaur and been slain, or sighted him, bolted, broken Ariadne's thread, never to be seen again. Some are just stunned by the sight of him.

We think, for example, of the fine scholar, Max Fisch, who worked for forty years collecting and collating Peirce materials from hither, thither, and yon. Entrusted with these to write an intellectual biography, he never did produce the book (though some important articles did materialize). Or we call up a vivid memory: forty years ago in a seminar on American philosophy taught by Sidney Hook, the professor introduced an advanced, well-qualified graduate student, just returned from abroad, who discoursed briefly on the dissertation he was about to write on Peirce. Forty years later, no dissertation, no Ph.D. I, myself, have published for thirty-seven years on American thought, been strongly influenced by Peirce (particularly his realistic view on universals and his scorching attack on Descartes's psycho/physical dualism, introspectionism, nominalism), but this review is my first attempt at an essay exclusively on him.

Why so many scholars hors de combat? In my case, it was surely dread, in Søren Kierkegaard's precise sense of simultaneous attraction and repulsion. I wanted badly to say something, but was afraid that I

wouldn't get it right, particularly, that, if I made a critical remark, I would be proved wrong by the *n*th Peirce article I should read, but never had or would.

Kenneth Laine Ketner has found a way. I think most thoughtful readers will find *His Glassy Essence: An Autobiography of Charles Sanders Peirce* as quirky and brilliantly creative as Peirce himself. Right off the bat, following his mentor, Ketner offends the conventional mind. How can there be an autobiography written by somebody other than Peirce himself? Getting into the book, the reader sees how it can be. Ketner fabricates an elaborate conceit: There is supposedly a marvelous recently discovered treasure chest of autobiographical materials from Peirce's own hand (in fact, there are boxes of Peirce materials, which include scattered autobiographical notes, all of which scholars have been trying to get a handle on for eight decades or more). Then Ketner invents three fictional characters: Okie Ike, transplanted (to Boston) Oklahoman Ike, an amateur detective vastly intrigued by Peirce's odyssey; Ike's wife, a level-headed nurse; and a mysterious old philosopher, Doctor LeRoi Wyttnyns (clearly, a cryptogram: the three ys suggesting thirdness and interpretation and also the idea of witness). As a young man, the old fellow had supposedly known Peirce himself.

This conceit affords Ketner leverage from multiple angles on Peirce's voluminous and scattered writings that works his thought into a shape never before seen, I think. This is hermeneutical phenomenology in action. Okie Ike's love of sleuthing excites the reader to persist in threading the labyrinth of Peirce's thought when exhaustion might otherwise set in. Ike's nurse wife reminds us of the all-too-human man himself who thought these thoughts, so that we neither forget his many-sided humanity nor overly pity or praise him. Dr. Wyttnyns allows Ketner to amalgamate distinctly philosophical analyses of Peirce, to combine in one commentator some of the most mordant and revealing views on Peirce that have cumulated over the decades (we think, for example, of Morris Cohen, Max Fisch, Carolyn Eisele, Walker Percy, Hilary Putnam, and Ketner himself—though there is a bit of grass roots Oklahoman Ketner in Okie Ike too).

Now, all this appalls academic pietism. Joseph Brent (1999), for example, author of a recent Peirce biography, a man who has virtually given his life to doing justice to Peirce, complains of Ketner's "crude characters": Ike and his woman, depicted falling into bed whenever the urge strikes them. And he's probably also complaining of Wyttnyns, a pastiche character far too old to have actually bridged Peirce and Okie Ike—whose tongue is loosened by bottles of beer, "steamers," that Ike and Wyttnyns particularly favor—and who, though described clearly as a fictional character, is supposedly shown in a photograph, one of an actual man (Brent says it is Walker Percy). What a violation of scholarly gravity! What an insolent defiance of the law of identity! Ketner might have subtitled his book, "Peirce's Revenge on the Academic Mind." But that would have been far too distancing, far too much a defusing of Peirce the bombshell.

There's method in what Ketner does. He succeeds in placing Peirce within the human context: the experienceable world that holds us all. So we are not

overly shocked by Peirce's peccadilloes, so we do not avert our gaze when he can show us overarching connections in our lives, in our universe, that had never before been spotted. To give an example of Ketner's mode of presentation that shows us Peirce, does not just talk about him: As a young man, his clever seduction of a Miss Carrie Badger intensifies without shattering our attention. Or—as I imagine Ketner will present in his expected next two volumes—Peirce's sometimes desperate acts, such as cadging food at Century Club receptions in Manhattan and sleeping on the streets or in Central Park—these will not fill us with such pity that we lose touch with the man as thinker: his pluck and mettle, his incredibly pertinacious and zestful development of his thought in his last very difficult years—his influence on Josiah Royce, for instance.

I should add that I dropped Brent's biography (1993) with a shudder and a tear, twenty pages still to go. I imagine I will complete that book now that I've finished Ketner's first volume. As Nietzsche pointed out, pity can be a constricting and destructive emotion.

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"Form" is inextricably fused with "content" in Ketner's book. As I intimated, he gives us not merely true statements about Peirce, for thereby, ineluctably, a certain distance would insinuate itself between us and the philosopher. Objectification and matter-of-fact precision is so automatic today, so completely taken for granted, that the context in which we might really meet Peirce is sliced through and overlooked—like a hot knife through butter.

As I said, Ketner shows us Peirce. He invokes a mode of truth older than the correspondence sense in which truth is exclusively a matter of statements that correspond accurately to something "out there." In truth as showing, things are true because, as they show themselves, so they are.

And as they are, in their fullness of being, they involve us intimately in themselves. Ketner shows us Peirce, first from this point of view or angle and in this context of his relationships, then from that angle and in that context. It is very much like how we get to know persons in actual life: in one of their roles and situations, then in another and another, so that over time we really get to know them. So we get Peirce in his own autobiographical snippets, then in the nurse's level-headed observations, then in the old philosopher's perspectives. Ketner's is a phenomenology or phaneroscopy worthy of the master.

We might say, yet again, the medium is the message. But I turn now to what many might consider the "content" side of the two imaginary boxes, "form" and "content," twin progeny of an abstraction and objectification that forgets itself, a boxing-in that insulates, isolates, impedes the flow of insight.

To try to comprehend Peirce is to try to comprehend what could never totally comprehend itself. His theory of signs—indexes, icons, symbols—had a life of its own, as did his triune categories. (Just what are we to make in the end of the

firstness of thirdness, say? I deal with this a bit more in due course.) As Ketner has the old philosopher, LeRoi Wyttynys, put it, Peirce wanted to produce in his semeiotic "the glue that would re-cement the broken soul of Western Civilization" (306). This would require the most dazzling intellectual creativity allied with the greatest humility and natural piety. Intellect is the functioning of an organism in over its head in Nature. Intellect emerges within a matrix of instinct that can never be left behind. Peirce had to tame his own great powers as a logician. He said that at first he had thought that the law of parsimony meant that we are to take the logically simplest of otherwise equally plausible hypotheses. He modified this to read, the most natural, the one that best aligns us within the grain of Nature, the one that generates predictions and consequences most fruitfully, as far as we can tell.

Peirce's devastating critique of Descartes generated consequences that took time to reveal themselves, even to Peirce himself. Ketner's account of how Peirce's thought developed from his precocious beginnings as a high school and college student is essential for understanding what finally emerged. The most important aspect of intellect for Peirce is not deduction, but abduction, hypothesis formation. Actually, what slowly emerges is a hypothesis about hypothesis formation itself. And we can see what's emerging only when Ketner directs our glance ahead to what emerged quite late—in *The Nation* article of 1907, for example (306 ff.).

So, no strictly chronological exposition of his thought will do the job. Already in volume 1 of the projected trilogy, we must jump ahead to discern the spiraling developments of Peirce's thought—turning back upon itself, salvaging, moving ahead. Here the conceit of the old retrospective Wyttynys comes into play, elucidating the "content" of his thought (306–13). The standpoint of eternity, so to speak. Form and content emerge together.

Peirce is ahead of our classifications. He is an existentialist—long before the name—and a logician, scientist, and theoretician's theoretician. He notes that no reason can be given for being reasonable. There is, inevitably, an initial leap of faith in being reasonable. Yes, being reasonable often seems the best policy—the sciences often progress—but (1) many consequences of what we do build up unintentionally behind our backs, (2) progress is only as far as we can see, so far, and (3), most disturbing, we cannot see and form a hypothesis about what we cannot yet imagine to be a problem.

We are in the world over our heads, have been formed over our heads, and, to best use our heads, we must acknowledge this fact of facts. Only thus can we begin to explain both Peirce's intellectual daring and brilliance and his piety and humility, in other words, his "critical commonsensism." Descartes can pretend to generate a universal doubt, but actually we can really and effectively doubt matter A only by holding all our other beliefs (at least the formulatable ones) constant. Without this, there is no platform upon which to seriously doubt A.

Ketner's elaborate conceit helps us grasp all this. How early certain basic insights occurred to Peirce—and yet they are always developing! He writes, "It

is almost impossible to conceive how truth can be other than absolute; yet man's truth is never absolute because the basis of fact is hypothesis" (132). That is, we can never be more than practically certain of anything because even when hypothesis *H* predicts and apparently explains events *M-1*, *M-2*, *M-3*, there may be another hypothesis not yet imagined that predicts these events and others that *H* does not predict. Thus, this other hypothesis, if found, would expose *H*'s limitations. Ironically, in predicting the events it does predict, *H* tends to prevent us from imagining better hypotheses. So, though a point can be made by the formal logician—"If *H* then *M-1*, *M-2*, *M-3*, but from these events occurring, *H* does not follow, for to think so is the fallacy of affirming the consequent"—that point alone cannot grasp our existential predicament as thinkers.

Note also how some of Peirce's youthful ideas are dropped or radically modified. Early he writes that universals (as well as negatives) are only in the mind (170). This seemed perfectly reasonable to him at the time. But the idea's clinging nominalism and subjectivism took time to be stripped away and it also took time for his thoroughgoing and utterly essential realism with respect to universals to emerge. It took quite a while for his great "The Law of Mind" to evolve. I imagine that Ketner—allied with Ike, and the nurse, and Dr. Wyttynys—will allow Peirce's "Mind" to slowly and intriguingly show itself in the next two volumes of *His Glassy Essence*.

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Joseph Brent complains that Ketner wastes space and taxes the reader's energies unnecessarily with his voluminous citations from Peirce's personal and family life, for example, his father's apparently outrageous correspondence with John LeConte's wife, Josephine.

I totally disagree.<sup>1</sup> Without beginning to understand Peirce the person, we cannot understand Peirce the thinker. And nothing is more essential here than trying to grasp his relation to his father, the scintillating and eminent mathematician and scientist at Harvard who nearly burst with nervous energy—Benjamin. I myself have a hypothesis about this father and son that I will develop a little bit later. The gist is this: If there is a sizeable weakness in Peirce's thought (I'm far from sure I'm right), it is his view of the human body. And I think that perhaps this weakness owes to a viscerally deep and painful identification with his father, one never fully worked through and identified by Charles himself.

As a young man, Benjamin writes his parents, "I never allow myself any relaxation" (76). His later life seems to bear this out. The man suffers from terrible neuralgia headaches, sometimes incapacitating, the prescribed remedy for which is morphine. He early recognizes his son's great intellectual gifts and both coddles and pressures Charles (e.g., playing difficult intellectual games with him well into the night). Charles, too, suffers from terrible neuralgia headaches, sometimes incapacitating, for which the remedy later applied is mor-

phine. Benjamin writes to LeConte's wife, "Charley is sometimes in considerable suffering and groans at night in a way that greatly distresses us" (122). Benjamin operates in the most powerful intellectual circles, and he sees to it that Charles gets a job in the Coast and Geodetic Survey as a physicist.

I won't draw this matter out, but sketching it is important both in itself and for assessing Ketner's book. Charles (probably influenced by Emerson) supposed that our idea of personal identity is a hypothesis we form to account for our deviation from the group, for our ignorance and errors. This is very interesting. But there is more to the sense of individual self than this! There is the self-moving, self-interrupting, and self-energizing body that feels immediately its own processes and urges. (If all thinking is in signs, as Peirce writes in 1868, and immediate sense-perceptions are not signs [309], how are we to think of the body?) How do Peirce's semeiology and categories deal with this? This has never been clear to me. Ketner's book suggests a hypothesis: that Peirce's sense of body is occluded or repressed by painful associations with his overbearing but also coddling father's bodily being, an unresolved mimetic engulfment. Even if this is not true, an important horizon for inquiry is opened. I await instruction.

Another word about the father, this time concerning his apparently outrageous letters to Josephine LeConte: "To the Queen of Sciences, Josephine LeConte," "All Hail! Proud Queen of Science! Haughty Josephine," "My Dearest Friend on Earth," "To the Darling Queen" (113-22). Of course, a sexual attraction suggests itself. And that may be part of it. But leaving it at that obscures a horizon of inquiry (Charles's *bête noir*—anything that blocks the road of inquiry). Going on as well is probably something erotic in Plato's elevated sense: a love of the all-matrixing universe of Forms that prompts all specific inquiries. Stately and beautiful Josephine LeConte functions as a muse to mediate between mortals and the divine, I think. She is the muse for the "Florentine Academy," the tightly knit group of powerful intellectuals—including the Chief of the Coast and Geodetic Survey—in which Benjamin is a mover and shaker. The father's lectures are a kind of theology or theodicy, an elucidation and justification of the divine through science, "a life of scientific philosophy in a religious spirit" (88). All this helps us take seriously Charles's later "agapasticism," "evolutionary love," and "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God." The data on the man are relevant to disclosure of the thinker.

Another matter upon which I await instruction: I once asked Ketner to comment on my linking of William James and the native American Black Elk's shamanic healing (2000). The gist of James: A "pure experience" or "specific nature" is anterior to, and more fundamental than, the distinction between subject and object, or self and other. Such a property—hardness, say—resident in the evolving world at large is numerically identical(!) to the property resident in the history of the percipient-sensate organism (though here it needn't remain locked into other such properties as it is in the non-sensient world as grasped by Newton; in a percipient's life history it can float, so to speak, in remembering

and fancying, say). The implication for curing diseases is clear: A creature of marked regenerative properties, such as a snake or a bear, presented in a ceremonial setting irradiates the diseased percipient organism and can activate what we call the immune system.

Ketner's response was exciting: "The patient is given an injection of semeiosis." This suggests that the Peircean and Jamesian approaches complement each other. For Peirce, only indexical signs connect to, and mean, the signified because the two are causally involved directly and immediately. But all signs are the work of whole organisms causally involved in environments. Even symbols called conventional do not function "in the mind" in isolation from the signified "out there." Signs and signifieds immediately experienced participate in each other's reality through the interpreting organism. Paul Tillich asserted that certain symbols participate in, and contribute to, the very reality of the thing symbolized—such as a nation's flag. But we should not limit this insight to spectacular examples. For instance, the simple word *sparkle* does itself tend to sparkle for English speakers, whereas *funkeln* seems to sparkle for German speakers, not English. (I owe the example to Walker Percy in "A Triadic Theory of Meaning," in *The Message in the Bottle*.)

Certain alternative physicians instruct their cancer patients to vividly image their white cells as sharks eating up the cancer cells. "How can a picture in the mind possibly affect the body?" But this Cartesian posing of the question hopelessly prejudices inquiry. No dyadic relation—a picture in the mind acting on the body—will grasp the reality, which is: a picturing by an organism of a process of cell-consumption-pictured, all within an engulfing context of an organism's interpretation in an environment. Why shouldn't it go as deep as the functioning of the immune system? Or, why shouldn't pictures of water falling rivet the attention of patients with urinary flow problems? Why shouldn't the pictured affect the organism picturing as deeply as the urinary system itself?

"A takes B to mean C"—that irreducibly triadic schema must be fleshed out—pun intended. And it is not limited to indexes or icons, but can include symbols commonly called conventional. We say they mean by convention, but this must not be distorted by Cartesianism, that is, "something fabricated or stipulated in the mind," personal or corporate. Whole organisms learn to assimilate and adapt in certain ways in environments through the habitual use of symbols, and they pass on this interpretation-adaptation. A wrangler in the Sierras told of learning to overcome a thirty-year smoking habit by telling himself at each touch of the craving, "I am a non-smoker." He created a *scotiasm*, as he said (from *scotto*, L., meaning darkness?). Apparently he covered the craving with darkness by his "conventional" words, and in time his wording went as deep as his life.

Immediately experienced, sign and signified interfuse, for example, the signing of cancer cells and the cells themselves interfuse. This, of course, is the "magical participation" so dreaded and shunned since the "scientific" detachment and subject/object split promulgated by the Enlightenment of the seven-

teenth and later centuries. To attempt to rule it out, however, is to commence to hollow out our lives. It makes us sick, obviously or subtly. We are realized as whole organisms because we can be bonded as whole organisms with, and in, the world. Now, do we bond with regenerative or degenerative things? Natural or "spontaneous" healing is a mystery or a fluke only for thinkers who cut us up into mind and body and miss the "mysterious sensorial life" (James)—or firstness (Peirce)—as it vivifies and harmonizes our whole bodies. Because the relation of sign to signified is not a grossly observable one, crude behaviorisms regard it as a merely "imputed" relation. These are childish empiricisms not developed ones. Brain scientists should be trying to track down the brain activity necessary for the interpreting of sign as sign-of-signified.

And, related, employing Peirce's triune categories, what might this tell us about the optimally healthful proportioning of firstness, secondness, thirdness in our lives? What is the immediately felt sensuous quality (firstness predominating) of various events of thinking (thirding predominating)? Of religious interpreting, say, of occurrences in contrast to scientific, technological, or commercial; of a shaman's ministering to a patient within the context of a people's ceremonial life in contrast to behavioral modification techniques employed today; of sacrificial giving, say, in contrast to other sorts, and so on? What about the optimal degree of secondness, of shock and resistance, for humans who can get too much and be traumatized, or who can get too little and wither from boredom?

Might we expect Ketner to explore such urgent questions in a consummating section of his third volume, say, in which his triple methodological conceit is kept at work?

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Joseph Brent judges Ketner's book "a valuable failure." To me, this is like asserting that circles are square. If the book is valuable, it is not a failure.

Ketner's book is very valuable, mainly because of its unique format, which allows Peirce—chiefly in his own words—to disclose himself in the actual times and places of his life. We are not left to the devices of secondary thinkers' watery commentaries. It will be interesting to see how Ketner focuses on the very last years of Peirce's life. What enabled him to surmount his misery, to keep thinking close to the end?

There is a virtue in Brent's approach: the pathos is made vivid. But the liability of the approach was suggested above: pity tends to blind us in certain ways. We will probably not feel the excitement of exploration and discovery that enabled Peirce to endure his misery and to keep thinking into his seventh decade. What must it have been like to be living within the cauldron of that brain-mind-body engaged so passionately in exploration? My God, think of it! As James loved to quote, "[T]o miss the joy is to miss all."

There are fundamental lessons to be learned from Peirce's life. Among these are ways of evaluating our "best" graduate schools of philosophy today. Since we are dealing with the master of hypothesis formation himself, could it be—just maybe?—that a necessary condition for his genius was that he remained an outsider to academe for most of his life? Peirce reacted scornfully to Charles Eliot's supposed reform of education at Harvard, his "factory approach to education," his "regularization" of studies to replace the personalized approach favored by Benjamin Peirce and his colleagues (258). The regularized approach is precisely what stifles most individual talents. Isn't this what happens too often in our "best" graduate schools of philosophy today? It was this belief that, for example, led John Wild and H. D. Aiken in fairly recent memory to leave the Parnassus of Harvard as full professors. Only by this move, apparently, did they believe they could escape the influence of the latest intellectual fads in philosophy and nourish the flame of their individual persons.

Emerson noted long ago in "The American Scholar" that creative thinkers should not expect to be understood by "educated people" (see Wilshire 1990, 88, 126). Another hypothesis: that many of these people enframe and rigidify their intellects to defend against an abyss of ontological insecurity they dare not acknowledge. But don't philosophers who do historically momentous work confront this in some way and renovate our basic beliefs about reality and the preciousness of life, our fundamental springs of thought and action?

I eagerly await Kenneth Ketner's remaining two volumes on Charles Peirce.

#### Note

1. Brent's biography of Peirce (1993) is not mentioned in Ketner's. However, Ike's words—"I take to heart the three pieces of advice from Sherlock Holmes, which are most often violated by biographers, especially biographers of Peirce"—probably refer invidiously to Brent's book (255–56). Reader, do you blame me for fighting shy of the Peirce wars for so long?

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