Michael Polanyi and Charles Sanders Peirce: An Introduction and an Historiographical Note

Phil Mullins

ABSTRACT Key Words: Michael Polanyi, Charles Sanders Peirce, Harry Prosch, David Agler, Vincent Colapietro, Robert Innis.
This brief essay introduces David Agler, Vincent Colapietro, and Robert Innis, who provide the major essays in this special issue of Tradition and Discovery *devoted to putting together Michael Polanyi and Charles Sanders Peirce. It also provides an historiographical comment, suggesting that the two references to Peirce in Polanyi's writing are quite puzzling and likely imply that Polanyi's collaborators, rather than Polanyi, took an interest in similarities between the thought of Peirce and Polanyi.*

I. An Introduction to the Topic and the Contributors

For some time, I have thought it would be interesting to have a thematic issue of *TAD* that focused on intersections in the thought of Michael Polanyi and Charles Sanders Peirce. Not many scholars, other than the three writers included in this issue, have brought together Peirce and Polanyi.[1] Polanyians have frequently suggested to me that Peirce is an odd and difficult thinker, a charge to which I have more than once responded that the same is levied against Polanyi. I am delighted that David Agler, Vincent Colapietro and Robert Innis, all figures extraordinarily well prepared for the topic, agreed to contribute to this issue's discussion.

Vincent Colapietro and Robert Innis are seasoned scholars, some of whose writing has earlier been included in *TAD*. There was a provocative review, published more than 15 years ago in *TAD* 22:3, written by the late Robin Hodgkin, treating Innis' book *Consciousness and the Play of Signs*. Hodgkin suggested that Innis interestingly linked Peirce, Polanyi, Cassirer, Langer and several other thinkers. In 2008, Jim Tiles wrote a review article focused around Innis' 2002 book *Pragmatism and the Forms of Sense: Language, Perception, Technics* and Innis responded to Tiles in *TAD* 34:2. More recently, Innis' essay "Between Articulation and Symbolization: Framing Polanyi and Langer" appeared in *TAD* 36:1. This was an essay that grew out of a paper given at a Polanyi Society gathering held in conjunction with the December 2008 American Philosophical Association's meeting in Philadelphia. In last summer's *TAD* 37:3, Walter Gulick reviewed Innis' 2009 book *Susanne Langer in Focus: The Symbolic Mind*. Innis' creative essay in this issue uses resources in Peirce and Polanyi to reflect upon the problem of the aesthetic intelligibility of the world in connection with an aesthetic approach to religious naturalism.

On November 17, 1990, Vincent Colapietro gave a paper at a Polanyi Society meeting in New Orleans titled "Lonergan and Polanyi: The Critical Appropriation of Intellectual Traditions." The essay was, in 1991, included in *TAD* 17:1 & 2, the first issue of *TAD* that I edited. The *TAD* 17:1 & 2 write-up about the essay says, "Colapietro examined the 'delicate' way that Polanyi and Lonergan treat 'the precarious authority of any particular tradition' as it plays its role in critical human inquiry," noting that the original paper evoked a lively discussion in New Orleans as the author "explored the problem of critical openness in 'the dialectic of fidelity and truth'" (4). Some years later in 2002, Colapietro also was a respondent for another Polanyi Society annual meeting paper by Richard W. Moodey titled "Moral Passion and Moral Judgment: Polanyi and Lonergan on Ethics." In 2008, Colapietro responded to the APA papers of Innis and Walter Gulick on Polanyi and Langer,

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and that response was later in the 2009 *TAD* 36: 1 which included the Innis and Gulick essays. Colapietro's insightful essay in this issue argues that a primary preoccupation of both Peirce and Polanyi was to undertake (in the words of Peirce) an inquiry into inquiry; their accounts emphasize heuristic practices and show how theoretical pursuits are intimately bound to other shared practices.

David Agler, the author of "Peirce and Polanyi on Critical Method," is a promising young scholar. The first draft of his paper was presented at the Atlanta Polanyi Society meeting in 2009. This was a meeting devoted to papers by graduate students; the society issued a call for papers by graduate students interested in Polanyi, and Agler's proposal was one of six chosen. He subsequently revised and expanded his paper in light of discussions in Atlanta and comments from several readers, including Innis and Colapietro. Although he is young, David Agler is a seasoned Peirce reader who has become very interested in Polanyi. Before beginning his doctoral work, he worked at the Peirce Project and he has published an article in *Transaction of the Peirce Society*. Since presenting in Atlanta, Agler has finished his Ph.D (Colapietro was one of his mentors), and he will be teaching logic next year at Pennsylvania State University. As the title of his article in this issue suggests, this is a very careful and thorough essay which documents the parallel criticisms made by Charles Peirce and Polanyi against the "method of doubt" or "critical method" celebrated in much modern philosophy.

II. An Historiographical Note

At the same time that I became curious about possible links between Peirce and Polanyi's philosophical ideas, I became curious about whether Michael Polanyi might ever have taken any serious interest in Peirce. Peirce was another scientist philosopher about two generations older than Polanyi and an American, but certainly a figure deeply influenced by scientific practice and committed to the prosperity of science. I have read the archival correspondence between Polanyi and Marjorie Grene who is perhaps the figure Polanyi most relied upon for suggestions about what to study more carefully in Western philosophy. There is ample, forthrightly expressed direction from Grene—and some blunt Grene criticisms, if Polanyi resisted her advice—about many interesting thinkers, including Descartes, Merleau-Ponty, and Langer, but Peirce is never mentioned. There was a collection of Peirce essays and a book on Peirce and pragmatism among Polanyi's library books.[2] However, I have found only two places in Polanyi's writing where Peirce is cited, one in the important late essay "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading" and the other in *Meaning*. As I briefly note below, looking closely at these references only made me more puzzled. I suspect that these references imply that not Polanyi but his collaborators had some interest and knowledge of Peirce.

A. The Reference in "Sense-Giving and Sense Reading"

At the beginning of the section titled "The Triad of Tacit Knowledge" which immediately follows the introduction in Polanyi's "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading," there follows this paragraph:

> Tacit knowing joins together three co-efficients. This triad is akin to the triad of Peirce: 'A stands for B to C'. But I shall prefer to write instead: A person A may make the word B mean the object C. Or else: The person A can integrate the word B into bearing on C.

This at least is what is in the version of this essay published in *Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy* (vol. XLII, no. 162 [October 1967]: 301). But "Sense-Giving and "Sense-Reading" is actually published several times in different places in this period. The essay appears in Grene's 1969 collection of

Polanyi essays titled *Knowing and Being* (hereafter KB) and it has the same paragraph quoted above; the copy included in KB is identified as the 1967 essay first published in *Philosophy*.

This Polanyi essay was also published at some point in 1967 in German as "Sinngebung und Sinndeutung" in *Das Problem Der Sprach,* Herausgeber Hans-Georg Gadamer (Munchen: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967: 249-260). There is no indication that this German version is a translation of an English version. The German version does not cite Peirce at all in this paragraph but links the three coefficients of tacit knowing to Stoic logic:

> Unausdrückliche Erkenntnis verknüpft drei Koeffizienten: eine Trias. Diese Trias ist der Trias der stoischen Logik verwandt: Für die Person A bedeutet das Ding B ein Object C. Anders gesagt: Eine person A gibt dem Wort B die Bedeutung des objektes C, oder auch: Die person A vermag das Wort B in einen Zussammenhang mit Beziehung auf C zu integrieren (249).

The essay is also included in Thomas A. Langford and William H. Poteat's 1968 *Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1968: 402-431) but this English version follows the German version:

> Tacit knowing joins together three coefficients. This triad is akin to the triad of Stoic logic: "A means B to C." But I shall prefer to write instead: A person A may make the word B mean the object C. Or else: The person A can integrate the word B into a bearing on C (402).

Despite following the German publication, the Acknowledgements of *Intellect and Hope* thank *Philosophy* for permission to reprint "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading" which it identifies as first having "appeared in the pages of this journal"(v). The early Gelwick Polanyi bibliography is also included in *Intellect and Hope* ("A Bibliography of Michael Polanyi's Social and Philosophical Writings," 432-446) and Gelwick identifies "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading" as an essay published in *Philosophy* (443). Finally, there is also a later German publication in *Seminar: Die Hermeneutic und die Wissenschaften,* Herausgegeben von Hans-Georg Gadamer und Gottfried Boehm (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 238, 1978) and the section in question follows the earlier Geman text and the essay is identified as a reprint of the earlier German publication (486).

Scott and Moleski (265-266) report that "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading" was originally a presentation prepared for the October, 1966 Eighth German Congress for Philosophy at Heidelberg which focused on language. Polanyi's presentation was an effort to extend his ideas about human use of language treated in *Personal Knowledge* and to address some questions raised by Chomsky.[3] Polanyi's presentation was later given again in English in the spring of 1967 at Cornell University and was used as a radio broadcast (presumably in German) by Hessian Radio in August, 1967.

In sum, in one version of "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading," Polanyi's triad of tacit knowing is linked to Peirce's semiotic triad (object, sign, interpretant) but in another version which is published in the same year in German (not to mention a later American version) the link is with what is identified as the triad of Stoic logic. Perhaps Polanyi, given late stage advice by someone like Marjorie Grene (who frequently did edit Polanyi materials), changed the reference in the English publication, presumably because the comparison with Peirce seemed more appropriate. But this only raises the large question about how familiar whoever made the change was with Peirce and Peircean semiotics.

That is, one might question how "akin" Polanyi's triad of tacit knowing is to the semiotic triad of Peirce. I suspect that Peirceans might identify Polanyi's triad as describing what is sometimes called anthroposemiosis but is too narrow to describe the broader sort of semiosis (or sign process) that Peirce believed was at work in the cosmos.[4] Peirce certainly regarded human beings as knowers or interpreters—he even identified a person as a sign—but he saw human beings as in thought because they were immersed in the broader ongoing sign process of nature. Although I suspect Polanyi (or perhaps a well-intentioned editor) was not thoroughly familiar with Peirce's semiotics, if he/she had been, he/she might have been intrigued by Peirce's effort to situate human knowing in a larger, changing cosmic context with his semiotic framework; Polanyi's own broader philosophical vision—as seen, for example, in Part IV of PK or the end of TD—moves in just this direction.

B. The Reference to Peirce in *Meaning*

The second reference to Peirce comes in the eleventh chapter of *Meaning* whose title is "Order." At the beginning of "Order," Polanyi and Prosch point out that human beings today generally think the world is orderly but pointless. There is no meaning in the world except subjective meanings that human beings import into the world. Such subjective meaning-making is regarded as like building sand castles at the edge of the sea. Polanyi and Prosch conclude that "Intellectual assent to the reduction of the world to its atomic elements acting blindly in terms of equilibrations of forces, an assent that has gradually come to prevail since the birth of modern science, has made any sort of teleological view of the cosmos seem unscientific and woolgathering to us" (M 162). They note the abhorrence of teleology in even non-scientific existentialist thought and assert that particularly strong today is the rejection of any sort of tightly deterministic account of the universe in terms of structuring by an overriding cosmic purpose. But then Polanyi and Prosch turn briefly to some thinkers who they suggest successfully argue for a "looser view of teleology":

> However, since at least the time of Charles Saunders Peirce and William James a looser view of teleology has been offered to us—one that would make it possible for us to suppose that some sort of intelligible directional tendencies may be operative in the world without our having to suppose that they *determine* things (M 162).

There is a footnote following this sentence and it cites four specific sets of paragraphs in the eight volume *Collected Papers* edition of Peirce materials (the standard definitive texts at the time) as well as three different specific sections from James' *A Pluralistic Universe*![5] I have looked at the cited paragraphs in Peirce's *Collected Papers* and it is easy enough to see why these passages were construed as suggesting a "looser view of teleology." This is rich set of references sketching Peirce's ideas about habit, the evolution of the laws of nature, the nature and importance of chance (or spontaneity) and continuity in the universe, Peirce's analysis of Darwian, Lamarckian, and Spencerian views, (as well as what we today would call punctuated evolution), and Peirce's metaphysical categories and the way they can be used to fashion a cosmogonic philosophy. I conclude that the content of this footnote to Peirce implies a rather sophisticated understanding of Peirce's thought and the recognition that Peirce's effort to recover teleology is akin to some of the ideas developed in Polanyi's thought and particularly in *Meaning*. But I also think that this footnote does not reflect that Polanyi deeply appreciated Peirce but that Harry Prosch did and saw connections with ideas Polanyi was struggling to articulate.[6]

According to Prosch (see the Bibliographical Note, 288), Chapter 11, "Order," is based upon Polanyi's unpublished lecture "Expanding the Range" given at the University of Texas in 1971 (Box 41, Folder 9). Clearly, some of the material in this chapter does come from this Polanyi lecture (I have traced it, paragraph by paragraph) but the majority of what is in the chapter does not.[7] The first seven paragraphs (a bit over 3 pages) is material I regard as what Prosch classifies (see his comments in both Preface, ix-xi and Acknowledgements, xiii-xiv) as text that he is "largely responsible for" in order to provide for "the development of its [the book's] continuity through the writing of various summary, supplementary and bridging sections. . ." (Preface x). The reference to Peirce appears here in this bridging section of the chapter.

Endnotes

[1]Scott and Moleski (271, note 71) point out that an early review of PK in *Philosophy of Science* by Edward C. Moore, an early Peirce scholar, connected Polanyi and Peirce. As the final section of this introduction suggests, I think references in *Meaning* suggest that Harry Prosch very likely was familiar with Peirce's ideas and saw similarities between Polanyi and Peirce. Andy Sanders some years ago in his *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology: A Reconstruction of Some Aspects of Tacit Knowing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988) makes some suggestions about similarities between Polanyi and Peirce (see especially 16-18); I wrote a more recent article that makes some comparisons between these figures ("Peirce's Abduction and Polanyi's Tacit Knowing," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2002: 198-224).

[2]The title pages of Polanyi's library are in volumes in Boxes 57 and 58 in the Polanyi Papers in the Special Collections Research Center of the University of Chicago Library (cited hereafter only by box and folder). The two books possibly indicating Polanyi's interest in Peirce are *Charles S. Peirce. Essays in the Philosophy of Science*, edited and with an introduction by Vincent Thomas (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957) and W. B. Gallie, *Peirce and Pragmatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1952).

[3]There is a three-page German document dated 1966 and titled "Sinngebung and Verständnis (Sinndeutung)" in Bill Scott's files about this meeting. This appears to be an early draft and diagram for the 1966 presentation. There is no mention of either Stoic logic or Peirce's semiotic triad in connection with Polanyi's triad in this document. I am indebted to Marty Moleski for digging out this material and discussing it with me (Mullins and Moleski e-mail exchanges of 4/17/12).

[4]See Cornelis de Waal's lucid and brief discussion of Peirce's "semeiotic" (Peirce's spelling) in *On Peirce* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001): 67-84 as well as Vincent Colapietro's discussion of the scope of Peirce's account of the sign process in *Peirce's Approach to the Self: A Semiotic Perspective on Human Subjectivity* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1989): 1-27.

[5]See footnote 1 in "Notes to Chapter Eleven" on M 223. The note, unfortunately, seems to be scrambled, although it uses the standard way of referencing the *Collected Papers* by volume and paragraph (e.g., 6.13-24). There is a specifically cited Peirce paragraph and then a longer passage cited following in parentheses and these double citations (there are four pairs) are separated by commas. In some cases, the first citation in a pair is simply a subsection of the longer passage cited in the parenthesis. But in two cases the first citation is not a subsection of the section cited in parenthesis. It is also almost certainly the case that there is a typographical error in the first citation—which cites the volume—of a specific passage because the reference is to the seventh rather than the sixth volume of the *Collected Papers*. Tracking what is going on in the footnote is very challenging. On the assumption that this might not be a typographical error, I have looked at the passages in the seventh volume (as well as those in the sixth, if the citation should have been to the sixth) and the sections in the seventh volume treat topics like Peirce's pendulum research and a psychological experiment. It does not make much sense to me to cite these numbered paragraphs in volume 7 and thus

I assume (correcting the typographical error) that all citations should be to the sixth volume and that they are paired to identify very specific paragraphs and larger relevant sections. With my corrections (i.e., assuming the citation should have been to volume 6), the relevance of the material in the footnote makes good sense insofar as it provides a set of references that shows Peircean thought incorporates teleology. It also is clear that whoever provided these citations was a serious enough Peirce student to have understood both Peirce's criticisms of a purely materialistic and mechanistic, non-teleological philosophy and Peirce's alternative constructive philosophical vision emphasizing chance, continuity and habit.

[6]See the discussion of Prosch's role in putting together *Meaning* in the essay Marty Moleski, S. J. and I put together just after Prosch's death ("Harry Prosch: A Memorial Re-Appraisal of the *Meaning* Controversy," *TAD* 32:2 (2005-06): 8-24. In a word, I think Michael Polanyi was far too fragile by the time the final manuscript of *Meaning* was shown to him to have had much to say about such interesting matters as the ambience of Chapter 11. As David Agler pointed out in a recent e-mail (Agler to Mullins 4/11/12), the *Meaning,* 162 mention of Peirce uses a deviant spelling of his middle name ("Saunders" rather than the more common "Sanders") and that Prosch uses this deviant spelling in a comment on Peirce in *Michael Polanyi: A Critical Exposition* (Albany SUNY, 1986)—see p. 29. Prosch makes but two comments about Peirce in this book (see p. 29 and p. 32) but these two also suggest that he knows something about Peirce's thought. Thanks also go to Agler for reviewing my analysis of the very odd and I think scrambled references to the *Collected Papers* on M 162 which appear in the Notes section on M 223.

[7]The material after about the fifth page of "Order" (i.e., the next approximately fourteen pages) does not appear to be drawn from Polanyi's 1971 lecture "Expanding the Range." It may be adapted from other sections of some of the several series of Polanyi's Meaning lectures or other places; some of the material in these pages bears close resemblance to essays from the late sixties such as "Life's Irreducible Structure" (first published in *Science* 160 [1968]: 1308-12) and "Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry" (first published in *Chemical and Engineering News*, August 21, 1967: 54-66).

Electronic Discussion List

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group that explores implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. Anyone interested can join. To join yourself, go to the following address: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/polanyi_list/join. If you have difficulty, send an e-mail to Doug Masini (Douglas.Masini@armstrong.edu) and someone will see that you are added to the list.

WWW Polanyi Resources

The Polanyi Society web site (http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi or polanyisociety.org/ or polanyisociety.com/) provides information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings. The site also contains the following: (1) digital archives containing all issues of *Tradition and Discovery* and its predecessor publications of the Polanyi Society going back to 1972; (2) indices listing *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) the history of Polanyi Society publications; (4) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Michael Polanyi's thought; (5) a link to the "Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi," which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Special Collections Research Center of the University of Chicago Library, Chicago, IL 60637; (6) photographs of Polanyi; (7) links to a number of Polanyi essays (available on the Polanyi Society web site and other sites), Polanyi's Duke Lectures (1964), as well as audio files for Polanyi's McEnerney Lectures (1962), and Polanyi's conversation with Carl Rogers (1966).