

The Philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce
Lecture 3
“Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man”
and “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities”

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This lecture discusses Peirce ([1992b](#)) and Peirce ([1992c](#)).

1 Background

1. Peirce uses the conclusions of Peirce ([1992a](#)) to address 7 fundamental questions of moral psychology and epistemology; correlatively, he also here will implicitly defend his method-

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ological dismissal of introspection (*contra* Descartes) in Peirce (1992a) as an appropriate tool for this (or indeed any) philosophical investigation

2. his aim is manifestly to oppose the Cartesianism that insidiously and ubiquitously infected philosophy from the early 17th Century to his time (even that of those who expressly tried to oppose or at least conceived of themselves as opposing Cartesianism), which, alas, continues to this day
3. I approve of this: nothing has done more harm in the history of and still in contemporary philosophy than Descartes' phobically neurotic and abusive insistence on "certainty" as the ground and criterion of knowledge and, his concomitant pathological, desperate and pitiable reliance on the immediate intuition of "clarity and distinctness" of thought as the criterion of certainty

2 Faculties

1. the central object of study is the traditional philosophical idea of an "intuition", dating back, in the relevant form, at least to Descartes and Locke (arguably to Hobbes and F. Bacon): "*intuition* will be taken as signifying a cognition not determined by a previous cognition of the same object, and therefore so determined by something out of the consciousness"—whence "therefore" given qualification "of the same object"? [*** but see the clearer, more decisive characterization he gives shortly thereafter, which shows that this one I quoted is merely sloppy; thank Jonas Hertel for help clarifying this ***]
2. 7 questions:
 - a.
 - b. Question 1: an abductive argument (though Peirce had not yet characterized the logical form) from a collection of facts apparently given by empirical psychology, *i.e.*, the facts are "most readily" explained by the conclusion—"we have no intuitive faculty of distinguishing intuitive from mediate cognitions"
 - c. Question 2: an argument, also apparently abductive in form, against standard philosophical presumptions and arguments, based on the invocation of the conclusion to Q. 1 and further facts presented by empirical psychology; the explicit conclusion leaves open the possibility to deny the traditional position, which denial Peirce advocates by abduction—"there is no necessity of supposing an intuitive self-consciousness, since self-consciousness may easily be the result of inference"
 - d. Question 3: another abductive argument, this one consisting of a funny combination of something like "conceptual analysis", a Kantian transcendental method, and facts drawn from empirical psychology—"the presumption is against [the] hypothesis" that "we have an intuitive power of distinguishing between the subjective elements of different kinds of cognitions"
 - e. Question 4: another abductive argument, similar in combination to that of Q. 3—"there is no reason for supposing" that "we have any power of introspection, [but rather] our whole knowledge of the internal world is derived from the observation of external facts"

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- f. Question 5: a subtle and highly elliptical argument, a funny hybrid of cnoceptual analysis and Kantian transcendentalism, that concludes that we cannot think “without signs” because of the continuity of time and the fact that thoughts occur in, and so take finite periods of, time; this is the root and origin of Peirce’s infamous dictum that “a human being is a sign”; also possibly the first substantive appearance of the Peircean idea of “continuity”, which later plays a fundamental role in his metaphysics
 - g. Question 6: an argument similar in style and form to that of Q. 5, concluding that “cognizability (in its widest sense) and being are not merely metaphysically the same, but are synonymous terms”, which is taken to answer whether a sign can have meaning (*i.e.*, be a sign at all) if it purportedly is a sign of “something absolutely incognizable”
 - h. Question 7: follows more or less from the conclusions to the previous 2 Questions, though he goes around his ass to get to his elbow (where he finds the answer): “every cognition is determined by a previous cognition”

3 Consequences of Incapacities

[*** discussion of signs segues naturally into next lecture topic and set of reading ***]

4 Invitation to a Short Essay

As I did last week, I invite you to write me a short discussion (no more than 2 pages, *i.e.*, no more than 1000 words) on some narrowly focused question you identify in Peirce (1992c), related to the way that that paper follows from Peirce (1992a) and Peirce (1992b). You can raise further questions, propose answers or interpretations, or whatever seems of most interest to you. If you get it to me by the start of next lecture (17. May), then I will return it to you with my comments the following week.

References

- Peirce, C. S. 1992a. “On a New List of Categories”. In Peirce 1992d, chapter 1.
- . 1992b. “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man”. In Peirce 1992d, chapter 2.
- . 1992c. “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities”. In Peirce 1992d, chapter 3.
- . 1992d. *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Edited by N. Houser and C. Kloesel. Volume 1 (1867–1893). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.