PEIRCE’S PRAGMATISM AND ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY:  
SOME CONTINUITIES

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Abstract

The history of analytic philosophy is far from settled but on many accounts it was philosophy’s linguistic turn that marked the beginning of the analytic movement. Although Frege and a few other 19th century philosophers made linguistic turns that distinguish them as important precursors of analytic philosophy, it was the marriage of logical positivism and pragmatism in the Unity of Science Movement of the 1930’s that is increasingly believed to mark the effective beginning of analytic philosophy as a widespread movement. The claim of this paper is that a key product of the marriage of logical positivism and pragmatism was the semiotic theory of Rudolf Carnap and Charles Morris which helped set the course for analytic philosophy for the rest of the 20th century. Although it is common to suppose that analytic philosophy in the United States is discontinuous with earlier American thought, there is good reason to regard Charles Peirce as an important ancestor of the analytic movement. Peirce, like Frege, took the linguistic (or, in Peirce’s case, semiotic) turn long before it became widely accepted, but in Peirce’s case there was a continuous chain of influence leading up to the Carnap-Morris collaboration. It is suggested that a look back at some of Peirce’s neglected work might help move thought forward now.

Keywords: analytic philosophy, linguistic turn, Unity of Science Movement, pragmatism, pragmatics, semiotics, Charles S. Peirce, Charles Morris, Rudolf Carnap.

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When the history of analytic philosophy is settled, will the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, be included as an important progenitor? It is not uncommon for Peirce to receive honorable mention, and he is occasionally, though not often, cast in a leading role for his critical contributions to mathematical logic; even the late Willard Van Orman Quine came, in his later years, to recognize that it was with Peirce's quantifiers that mathematical logic attained its full power (Quine 1999, p. 19). Nearly all historians agree that there are interesting conceptual resonances between analytic philosophy and Peirce's thought and that at least one thin ancestral root of the family tree for analytic philosophy extends to Peirce's logic. But, for now, any assertion that Peirce played a crucial role in the development of analytic philosophy will likely be received skeptically and cannot be expected to stand, even as a viable hypothesis, without a great deal of supporting evidence.

The argument of this paper is not intended to address this issue comprehensively, nor to settle any large disagreements, but will merely consider the generally neglected question of what pragmatism may have contributed to the early development of analytical philosophy and whether, through his semiotic pragmatism, Peirce may have supplied the nutrients for a second root in analytic philosophy's family tree. In addressing this issue, some attention will be given to the obscure kinship between pragmatism and pragmatics, that branch of semiotics that was born of philosophy but was quickly handed over to linguistics. In particular, evidence will be put forward to support the hypothesis that through Charles Morris some key ideas from Peirce's pragmatism and semiotic made their way into scientific empiricism and, ultimately, into analytic philosophy.

In claiming that Charles Morris served as a link between Peirce's pragmatism and analytic philosophy, I am taking a special though common view of analytic philosophy: namely, that it is an outgrowth of the so-called linguistic turn of the mid-1930s. This is a common view; Michael Dummett puts it this way:

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2 For example, see Stroll 2000, p. 9.
3 See, especially, Brady 2000.
4 It is important to bear in mind that the issues I will be considering constitute only one chapter, and perhaps a thin one, in the larger story of the connections between Peirce and analytic philosophy. Christopher Hookway has probably done more than anyone else to reveal the conceptual continuities between Peirce's thought and key ideas from the analytic tradition; see, especially, Hookway 1985 and Hookway 2000. Also see Nubiola 1996.
What distinguishes analytical philosophy, in its diverse manifestations, from other schools is the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained. (Dummett 1996, p. 4.)

Dummett then proclaims that, based on this characterization, “analytical philosophy was born when the ‘linguistic turn’ was taken.”

So far so good. But Dummett goes on to announce that Frege, in his Grundlagen of 1884, was really the first one to take the turn and, therefore, is the true father of analytical philosophy. Dummett has to wiggle and squirm to support this claim. Frege’s “context principle,” which says that a word can only be meaningful in the context of a sentence, is basic for Dummett’s argument, and of crucial importance is the fact that Frege formulated the context principle with respect to language, not thought. “An epistemological enquiry . . . is to be answered by a linguistic investigation” (Dummett 1996, p. 5). Unfortunately, almost as soon as Frege put forward this principle he appears to have given it up, as Dummett has to admit.

Well, if this is how we are going to assign paternity for analytic philosophy, we might be better off going with Peirce—that is if we are willing to accept that a semiotic turn which substitutes signs for ideas and which holds that an epistemological enquiry is to be answered by a semiotic investigation is essentially what we praise as the linguistic turn. Not only did Peirce take that turn, he took it no later than 1868, and he stuck to it for the remainder of his days. Indeed, it was Peirce’s semiotic turn that opened the way for American pragmatism. One might even argue that the so-called linguistic turn, as defined by Dummett, was only a short-sighted version of Peirce’s semiotic turn.

But I am getting ahead of myself. I’ll come back to Peirce’s semiotic turn a little later; for now I’d like to suggest that we can accept the common view that the linguistic turn was made in the mid-30s, in a way that had far reaching impact on the course of philosophy in the last half of the 20th century, without denying that Frege and Peirce, and many others, were very influential in the turn being taken—and, if the evidence will support it, I see no reason why we shouldn’t say that someone could have taken the turn years before it found its proper place in history.

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5 The recognition that Peirce’s “semiotic turn” is an earlier and more comprehensive form of the “linguistic turn” may have been first made by Klaus Oehler; see, for example, Oehler 1999, p. 28.
A caveat needs to be made here for the sake of readers who do not accept Dummett’s view of the origins of analytic philosophy. A divergent, though not altogether antithetical, view is that analytic philosophy began with the conceptual and linguistic analysis of Moore and Russell or with the use of mathematical logic for the analysis of propositions. Certainly analytic philosophy is partly an outgrowth of these philosophical programs, both through their influence on the Unity of Science group of philosophers and in other ways (see the “Early Analytic Philosophy” chart). But of all the currents that helped form analytic philosophy, it seems clear that there is none more crucial than the one usually said to have originated with the so-called “linguistic turn”.

Without further beating around the bush, let me begin making my case, preliminary though it certainly is, that in fact Peirce’s pragmatism did, both directly and indirectly, influence the course of thought that resulted in the linguistic turn and analytic philosophy. I will suggest that a significant component of Peirce’s influence was brought to bear through the agency of Charles Morris, especially through Morris’s success in convincing Rudolf Carnap to admit pragmatics as a third branch of semiotic.

Pragmatics, by that name, originated with Morris. It is generally agreed that the world first learned of Morris’s pragmatics in 1938 with the publication of his monograph, Foundations of the Theory of Signs. Morris’s monograph was the second number of the International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, a work conceived by Otto Neurath rather in the style of Diderot and D’Alembert’s famous Encyclopédie and intended by Neurath to promote the positivist inspired goals of the American émigrés of the Vienna Circle.

Morris opened his 1938 monograph with the sentence: “Men are the dominant sign-using animals,” and then he listed some of the kinds of human signs he had in mind: “human speech, writing, art, testing devices, medical diagnosis, and signaling instruments.” He finished his first paragraph boldly by speculating that mind should be identified with sign func-

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6 There are some who think it is just plain wrong to regard logical positivism and the Unity of Science program as belonging to or “including” analytic philosophy. On this view, analytic philosophy and ordinary language philosophy are thought to be strictly confined to programs developed at Cambridge and Oxford. See, for example, Passmore 1967, p. 52.

7 See Neurath 1938, pp. 2–3, for some discussion of his aims for the Encyclopédie. Unity of Science historian, George Reisch, in a private communication, has urged me to emphasize that Neurath was especially interested in making his encyclopedia “a tool of communication for the ongoing (and most likely endless) process of unifying the sciences” and not “a repository for achieved and final knowledge.”
tioning. Morris pointed out that investigation of sign activity by “linguists, logicians, philosophers, psychologists, biologists, anthropologists, psychopathologists, aestheticians, and sociologists” was hampered by the lack of “a theoretical structure simple in outline and yet comprehensive enough to embrace the results obtained” from so many “different points of view.” He recommended semiotic as what was needed to unify all of these sign-centered sciences.

Morris put forward semiotic as “both a science among the sciences and an instrument of the sciences.” He gave the name “semiosis” to the process in which “something functions as a sign,” going back to a word used by the Greeks. He claimed that semiosis involves three factors: “that which acts as a sign [the sign vehicle], that which the sign refers to [the designatum], and [the] effect on some interpreter [the interpretant].”

Morris then explained that even though semiosis consists in a triadic relation involving all three of these factors, it would be useful to abstract from the semiotic process three dyadic relations for special study. These three special studies would together provide the unifying foundation for the sciences in general. Here is how he technically introduced the three branches of semiotic:

One may study the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable. This relation will be called the semantical dimension of semiosis, symbolized by the sign ‘\(D_{sem}\) ’; the study of this dimension will be called semantics. Or the subject of study may be the relation of signs to interpreters. This relation will be called the pragmatical dimension of semiosis, symbolized by ‘\(D_{pr}\) ’, and the study of this dimension will be named pragmatics.

And then Morris introduced the branch of semiotic that we usually give first:

Since most signs are clearly related to other signs, since many apparent cases of isolated signs prove on analysis not to be such, and since all signs are potentially if not actually related to other signs, it is well to make a third dimension of semiosis co-ordinate with the other two . . . . This third dimension will be called the syntactical dimension of semiosis, symbolized by ‘\(D_{syn}\) ’, and the study of this dimension will be named syntactics. (Morris 1938, p. 7.)

As I have indicated, this was Morris’s technical introduction of pragmatics as the third branch of semiotic. But a little earlier that same year in the first number of the Encyclopedia, he had published a paper entitled “Scientific Empiricism” where he gave the same divisions of semiotic and where he claimed that “[t]he elaboration of the syntactics, semantics, and
pragmatics of science may rightly be regarded as the natural extension and completion of the scientific enterprise itself.” There is a suggestion in that slightly earlier paper that Morris took the names “syntactics” and “semantics” for the first and second branches of semiotic from Carnap.

In fact, the paper immediately preceding Morris’s in the first number of the Encyclopedia, was Carnap’s “Logical Foundations of the Unity of Science,” and in it Carnap distinguished two branches of the logic of science:

[1]Investigation may be restricted to the forms of the linguistic expressions involved, i.e., to the way in which they are constructed out of elementary parts (e.g., words) without referring to anything outside of language.

Carnap called this field “formal logic” or “logical syntax.” On the other hand, he noted that:

[1]Investigation [may go] beyond this boundary and [study] linguistic expressions in their relation to objects outside of language. (Carnap 1938, p. 43.)

Carnap called this branch of the logic of science “semantics.”

So it appears that the names “syntactics” and “semantics” came from Carnap, “syntactics” being a variation of Carnap’s “syntax,” but I have not found any indication that, prior to Morris’s almost simultaneous work, Carnap had distinctly conceived of pragmatics as a third branch of what he called “the logic of science.” Carnap did recognize that any statement “is a kind of sequence of spoken sounds, written marks, or the like, produced by human beings for specific purposes” and he understood the need to take “psychological and sociological conditions” into account, so he was not unaware of the importance of the relation of meaningful expressions to their users and the conditions of their use. Apparently, though, it took Morris to convince him that pragmatics ought to be included as a third branch of his logic of science.

By 1939, one year after the publication of Morris’s treatment of semiotic as a tripartite science that included pragmatics, Carnap published a monograph entitled Foundations of Logic and Mathematics. This was the third number of the Encyclopedia and here again Carnap pointed out that the “material on which the scientist works,” whether “reports of observations, scientific laws and theories, [or] predictions,” are all “formulations in language which describe certain features of facts.” It followed from this, he said, that “an analysis of theoretical procedures in science must concern itself with language and its applications,” and he went on to outline an
“analysis of language” that distinguished three points of view and “accordingly” broke down into three disciplines: pragmatics, semantics, and syntax. He acknowledged that an investigation of language had to take all three factors into account and he referred to Morris’s account of semiotic from the previous year. So by 1939 Carnap too had become a semiotician of sorts—he wrote that “The elements [of language] are signs, e.g., sounds or written marks, produced by members of [a language group] in order to be perceived by other members and to influence their behavior”— and he had also become a convert to Morris’s pragmatics.

This seems to me to be how pragmatics, by that name, entered the scene. If we consider the intellectual influences on Morris, I will suggest that it was the American pragmatists and, ultimately Peirce, who were mainly responsible for his insistence on adding pragmatics to Carnap’s syntax and semantics to emulate the triadic division of semiotic that was so prominent in Peirce’s theory. Moreover, it was not only Morris, but also other members of the Unity of Science group, including Philipp Frank and Carnap, who considered their program to be a sort of synthesis of the achievements of the Vienna Circle positivists and the American pragmatists. I will come back to this in a few minutes. But first it may be useful to look forward from 1938 to see what became of Morris’s and Carnap’s pragmatics.

When we consider pragmatics today what becomes quickly obvious is that in its most important form it belongs to linguistics. The most recent comprehensive dictionary of the English language to appear in the United States, the 1999 *Encarta*, gives the following definition of “pragmatics” based on current usage:

> [T]he branch of linguistics that studies language use rather than language structure. Pragmatics studies how people choose what to say from the range of possibilities their language allows them, and the effect their choices have on those to whom they are speaking.

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics—end of story as far as the *Encarta* editors are concerned. Even philosophical dictionaries tend to credit linguists for the progress that has been made in pragmatics over the past three or four decades—although care is usually taken in these dictionaries to give philosophers credit for the birth of pragmatics and for its early development. For example, in François Recanti’s entry for “pragmatics” in the *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, we find the following:
[The work of the ordinary language philosophers] (especially that of Austin, Strawson, Grice and the later Wittgenstein) gave rise to contemporary pragmatics, a discipline which (like formal semantics) has developed successfully within linguistics in the past thirty years.

But while there have indeed been many advances in pragmatics due to the diligent and far reaching research efforts of linguists, the field of pragmatics has become more and more amorphous. Deirdre Wilson, in her recent entry on "Pragmatics" for the supplement to Edwards' *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, says that, in practice pragmatics is often "treated as a repository for any aspect of utterance meaning beyond the scope of existing semantic machinery, as in the slogan: Pragmatics = meaning minus truth conditions" [from Gazdar 1979]. And in Paul Coblentz's * Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*, Jef Verschueren calls pragmatics "a waste basket to which problems [are] referred that [can] not be dealt with in syntax and semantics."

I certainly do not mean to cast doubt on the importance of the work in pragmatics that has been and is being done in linguistics, nor do I mean to suggest that linguists somehow abducted pragmatics or, more generally, semiotic from philosophy, its proper home. On the contrary, I believe it would be far closer to the truth to say that philosophers abandoned semiotic, their very own flesh and blood, so to speak, because they came to believe that linguistics was its more natural home. That is why Recanti could say so dispassionately that even though contemporary pragmatics had grown out of the philosophical work of Austin, Strawson, Grice, and the later Wittgenstein, its successful development during the last thirty years has been due to linguistics. The crucial point is that Austin, Strawson, Grice and the later Wittgenstein were ordinary language philosophers and that much of their work, and that of their followers, became indistinguishable from linguistics.

Why did certain philosophers become linguists, in effect, and as a result turn some areas of philosophy into linguistic programs? The simple answer is that the same *linguistic turn* that brought us analytic philosophy also turned some philosophers into linguists and some areas of philosophy into linguistics. It is well known that there was a widespread turn away from cognitivism and mentalism due, it is usually supposed, mainly to the impact of positivism and its first cousin, or perhaps its offspring, behaviorism. By shifting the object of philosophical inquiry from ideas and mental states to language structure and use, ordinary language philosophers, in particular, seemed to have taken a giant step toward becoming less meta-
physical and more scientific—though in fact it might be argued that they had taken a step to the borderlands between philosophy and linguistics. As their focus became more exclusively language behavior, they moved across the border into linguistics.

Although it is true that ordinary language philosophy helped establish pragmatics, and semiotic more generally, as a linguistic study, we have seen that the Unity of Science philosophers, led by Morris and Carnap, had already set that process in motion. Carnap, in particular, made it clear that semiotic dealt in different ways with linguistic expressions and behavior.

Another big push in that direction came from another member of the Unity of Science group, American linguist Leonard Bloomfield. Bloomfield was given the fourth number of the Encyclopedia of Unified Science for his monograph entitled Linguistic Aspects of Science. It came out in 1939, the same year as Carnap’s monograph and just one year after Morris’s. Bloomfield identified what he called “two types of scientific discourse” which he distinguished as the informal and the formal. He identified informal scientific discourse with ordinary language and formal scientific discourse with mathematics and symbolic logic, both of which could only be carried out in writing. Interestingly, since Bloomfield agreed that the subject matter of linguistics is human speech, formal scientific discourse is relegated to derivative status “as representations of phonemes or speech-forms.” Bloomfield claimed that linguistics “is the chief contributor to semiotic” and he stated unequivocally that “[s]ince mathematics is a verbal activity and logic a study of verbal activities, both of these disciplines presuppose linguistics.”

The history of the linguistic turn is a complicated matter as I have indicated. While died in the wool analytic philosophers, like Dummett, and historians of analytic philosophy, are inclined to see the linguistic turn as a high point in intellectual history that may well have its roots in the achievements of Frege, Moore, and Russell, as a widespread movement I think it is more likely to be due, first, to the shift of focus to semiotic that occurred in 1938 and ’39 with Morris and Carnap, and then, also in ’39, to the linguistic interpretation Bloomfield gave to semiotic that proved to be so congenial to the Unity of Science philosophers and to linguists.

Richard Rorty also seems to attribute the linguistic turn to the Unity of Science émigrés. He claims that American philosophers were tired of pragmatism and of Dewey in particular and were looking for something new: “something they could get their philosophical teeth into” (Rorty 1995,
p. 70). “What showed up,” Rorty says, “thanks to Hitler and various other historical contingencies, was logical empiricism.” Clearly he has in mind the Unity of Science émigrés. Rorty believes that the logical empiricists, or logical positivists, brought with them the idea “that language was a more fruitful topic for philosophical reflection than experience” and that this set the stage for the linguistic turn. I believe it was the dynamical interplay of pragmatism with logical positivism, and in particular the birth of linguistic semiotic in ’38 and ’39 that set the stage for the linguistic turn. But the players are mostly the same.

To sum up, I believe that the linguistic turn, as a vital movement, grew from the aftermath of the introduction of the Morris-Carnap semiotic. I say Morris-Carnap even though I think it was Morris who advocated the triadic theory of semiosis and who made Carnap see that pragmatics should be included along with syntax and semantics. But I believe that syntax and semantics were very much shaped by Carnap, and that he had a definite influence on the way pragmatics came to be spelled out. So I attribute the Unity of Science semiotic to both Morris and Carnap.

Partly as a result of Morris’s behaviorist tendencies, but possibly due to Carnap’s logical empiricism, Unity of Science semiotic tended from the beginning toward linguistics. Bloomfield gave it a great additional push in that direction. Once semiotic was understood to be the study of linguistic behavior, it was drawn in different directions. Carnap and his followers developed formal semantics that dealt with the specialized languages of mathematics and symbolic logic. Ordinary language philosophy was stimulated by pragmatics. But semiotic itself, as a complete theory, could not find a home in the analytic philosophy that had spawned it and moved to linguistics. A separate discipline of semiotic did grow out of Morris’s teaching in Chicago with Thomas Sebeok as its greatest theorist and promoter, but it has always refused to fully identify itself with either philosophy or linguistics, or with any other discipline, and so it remains independent and without any larger disciplinary home.

It seems clear that the benefits and lines of influence resulting from the linguistic turn worked in both directions between philosophy and linguistics. This fact led to the historical oddity that the Morris-Carnap semiotic, which I will show in my final section to have been mainly inspired by Peirce, received its principal interpretation and development from the semiological tradition inspired by Ferdinand Saussure. That is because Saussure was a linguist who had from the beginning developed his semiology as a branch
of linguistics. Once semiotic was also identified with linguistics, it was natural to try to fit it into the already established Saussurean theory of signs.⁸

Having looked forward briefly and very sketchedly at the aftermath of the linguistic turn, I want to look at one more characterization of the turn itself before looking back to what I believe to be one of its vital roots. In her very readable little book on contemporary American philosophy, *The American Philosopher*, Giovanna Borradori characterizes the analytic turn this way (rather similar to Rorty’s characterization):

> Because of the Nazi racial and political persecutions, an entire sector of *mitteldeutsche* philosophers emigrated to the United States around the time of the Second World War, and permanently established themselves overseas [of course Borradori is writing from a European perspective]. The term “analytic philosophy” defines an area of study, with a spectrum of logical and linguistic interests, that arose in the shadow of this wave of migration. It includes such authors as Rudolf Carnap, Hans Reichenbach, Carl Hempel, Otto Neurath, and Herbert Feigl. More particularly, it refers to a neo-positivist direction of research that arose after the ideas of the Vienna Circle thinkers were planted on American soil. (Borradori 1994, pp. 5-6.)

Nothing especially new here. However, Borradori entitles the section of her book where she discusses the linguistic turn, “The Analytic Fracture,” and she introduces this section by saying that “[t]he analytic ‘adventure,’ begun in the mid-thirties, gave rise to an epistemological fracture in the body of American philosophy, a clean break that divided its history into two parts.” Here Borradori states boldly what I suppose many believe, but I think she is dead wrong except insofar as history is only an imaginative story we tell ourselves purportedly about the past. It may be true that we have tended to forget American philosophy before the time of the Unity of Science Movement, and even to discount its value relative to analytic philosophy, but that may only mean there is a fracture in our local historical memory but not in history more realistically construed. This is what I will suggest in the remainder of my paper.

The remainder of this paper is a first try at showing that far from being fractured, there is a deep continuity running right through the linguistic turn.

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⁸ An account of the tensions between semiology and semiotic and of the ongoing efforts of work out a rapprochement, if not a synthesis, is a topic of interest, but not one we need to consider for our present purposes. For an excellent discussion of this topic see Gérard Deledalle’s recent book, *Charles S. Peirce’s Philosophy of Signs: Essays in Comparative Semiotics* (Deledalle 2000).
My reasons are partly historical and partly theoretically but they are also rather impressionistic and are based only on my recent and preliminary investigations into this subject. Even so, I hope to reveal some new historical and theoretical relationships that show promise for further investigation.

Historically, Peirce looms large in the background of Morris’s achievements. Perhaps the first point to make is that the pragmatics bears a close relationship to pragmatism—this is first of all made pretty obvious by Morris’s choice of the name “pragmatics” for the third branch of semiotic. But more importantly, pragmatism associates meaning with consequences and with effects on interpreters and with interpretative communities, so there is little doubt that this set the context for Morris’s development of pragmatics.

I do not mean to imply that Morris’s understanding of pragmatism was derived initially from Peirce; in fact it is pretty clear that it was not. Morris’s Ph.D. dissertation on “Symbolism and Reality,” completed in 1925, was written under the guidance of George Herbert Mead and reveals how much Morris was influenced by Mead’s social behaviorism. Morris refers throughout to James, Dewey, and C. I. Lewis, but never to Peirce. When he mentions pragmatism specifically in his dissertation, it is the pragmatism of Dewey (Morris 1925, p. 21). So I suppose that Morris’s initial understanding of pragmatism came not from Peirce directly, but from Mead, Dewey, James, and C. I. Lewis.

Nevertheless, it is pretty clear that the pragmatics of James and Dewey originated in and were much influenced by Peirce’s own pragmatism, however divergent they may have become. And, however different they may be, all of the pragmatics retained Peirce’s key insight that intelligence involves something like a plan of action that situates and prepares an organism (or the intelligent actor) for possible future experiences. As for Mead and Lewis, I suppose they learned their pragmatics also partly from James and Dewey, but probably more directly from Josiah Royce, their most influential professor.

Bear in mind that Royce, especially in his later years, was a dedicated follower of Peirce. One can get some idea of Royce’s intellectual debt to Peirce, and of the probability that Peirce’s ideas filtered through Royce to Royce’s students, by reading the notes from Royce’s philosophy courses at Harvard. In a recently published set of Royce’s lectures for his 1915-16 course in metaphysics, taken from the lecture notes of Ralph W. Brown and Bryon E. Enderwood (Hocking and Oppenheim, eds. 1998), we find Royce starting out with what he called a “social approach” to metaphysics.
Soon he got to Peirce. Here is what Royce told his students on November 4th, 1915:

The theory of knowledge has been dominated in the past by the notion that perception and conception are the two sorts of knowledge. These are a rather dangerous pair, and consequently many of the various problems of epistemology have arisen. I follow Charles Peirce in proposing a third mode of knowledge, interpretation, which has the character of a triadic form of knowledge and requires distinctly a social relation to make it such. Wherever there is an interpretation, there is a community of interpretation. (Hocking and Oppenheim, eds. 1998, p. 33.)

Later in the course Royce dealt more technically with Peirce’s theory of signs, pointing out that:

Peirce was fond of his threefold division of signs; he tried a good many other divisions of signs which all turned out to be triadic. His favorite is that of index, icon, symbol. The index is the sign whose object (to which the sign relates) is connected with it by some kind of contiguity. . . The icon is the sign which indicates that which it resembles. . . The symbol is the sort of sign whose connection with the object is entirely conventional. These three types of signs differ in the ways of their use and in their usefulness. (Hocking and Oppenheim, eds. 1998, pp. 94–95.)

This is just a little sample of the large dose of Peirce that Royce delivered to his students. So when one considers the continuity of ideas that runs from Peirce, through Royce, to students of Royce’s such as Lewis and Mead, it seems unlikely that the seeds for Lewis’s and Mead’s pragmatisms, and for Morris’s semiotic, did not come from Peirce.

But this is not the main argument I want to make for Morris having been influenced substantially by Peirce and, more importantly, for Peirce having had a significant influence on the Morris-Carnap semiotic theory. What is more telling, I believe, is that in Morris’s 1925 dissertation, even though it is all about symbolic processes, the words “semiotic,” “semiosis,” and “interpretant” never occur. Even the word “pragmatism” is absent, although Morris does use the word “pragmatist” in reference to Dewey and he uses the expression “pragmatic movement” twice. The word “sign” only occurs three times. Yet by 1938, thirteen years later, Morris’s monograph for the Encyclopedia of the Unified Science is filled with these expressions. Where did the words come from and where did the idea for three semiotic dimensions come from?

I believe the likely source is Peirce, and I believe that the influence was direct. I am not yet certain of this, but it is telling that between 1931 and 1935 the first six volumes of the Harvard edition of Peirce’s writings were
published, and in those volumes we find Peirce articulating his pragmatism and his theory of signs in ways that could have had a significant impact on Morris. For example, Peirce says of pragmatism that it "does not undertake to say in what the meanings of all signs consist, but merely to lay down a method of determining the meanings of intellectual concepts" (CP 5.8). Thus we find Peirce associating pragmatism with only one part of his semiotic, the part that deals with the more developed signs that Royce had noted are only significant within a social context or "a community of interpretation." This might well have influenced Morris to choose "pragmatics" for the third branch of his semiotic.

What else of note for our present purposes do we find in Peirce's *Collected Papers*? Well, we find this:

"For the proper significate outcome of a sign, I propose the name, the interpretant of the sign." (CP 5.473)

And this:

"[B]y 'semiosis' I mean . . . an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a coöperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs." (CP 5.484)

And, finally, we find Peirce saying that:

"In consequence of every representamen [or sign] being thus connected with three things, the ground, the object, and the interpretant, the science of semiotic has three branches." (CP 2.229)

If you read the first six volumes of Peirce's *Collected Papers*, keeping in mind Morris's intellectual development between the completion of his dissertation with Mead and his 1939 introduction of pragmatics as the third branch of a tripartite semiotic science, many things fall into place. That Morris had read Peirce before he wrote his monograph is not in doubt: there are numerous significant references to Peirce throughout. He noted, in fact, that the term "pragmatics" had "been coined with reference to the term 'pragmatism'," and he added that "[t]he term 'pragmatics' helps to signalize the significance of the achievements of Peirce, James, Dewey, and

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9 References to the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Peirce 1931–58) are standardly made in this fashion, indicating the volume and paragraph number, separated by a decimal point.
Mead within the field of semiotic” (Morris 1938, p. 30). Not only was Peirce now on the list of those who had influenced Morris, he was at the head of the list. Peirce’s work, Morris acknowledged, “is second to none in the history of semiotic” (Morris 1938, p. 31). In his monograph, and also in his paper for the first number of the Encyclopedia, Morris referred specifically to the second volume of Peirce’s Collected Papers, which is the volume that deals most fully with Peirce’s theory of signs.

Morris’s references to Peirce in these 1938 writings seem to confirm that he had by that time read significant parts of the Harvard edition of Peirce’s writings. I can personally confirm that Morris’s copy of Peirce’s Collected Papers, which for a number of years was kept on a bookshelf in my own office at the Peirce Edition Project, was diligently and thoroughly studied by Morris, something that is evident from his extensive annotations throughout.

I will indicate below why I think it is important to get these historical and contextual issues straightened out. But let me first add a little more evidence to support my claim that there is a stronger link between Peirce’s semiotic and pragmatism and the Unity of Science’s semiotic and logical empiricism than is usually represented in contemporary historical scholarship.

Consider, for example, Otto Neurath’s own testimony in the opening article for the Encyclopedia:

The connection between modern logic and empiricism did not arise instantly... A few of the modern logicians, such as Peirce and, later on, Bertrand Russell, combined the interest in logic with an interest in empiricism... The fact that Peirce was a logician and simultaneously interested in empiricism was... important for the preparation of modern scientific empiricism in the United States. (Neurath 1938, p. 17.)

And also consider Carnap’s account of the relations between pragmatism and “scientific empiricism” from his reply to Morris in the volume of The Library of Living Philosophers devoted to Carnap’s philosophy:

Logical empiricists from Berlin and from the Vienna Circle came into closer contact with pragmatism chiefly after they had come to the United States. A mutual understanding between the two schools was mainly fostered by Charles Morris and Ernest Nagel. Both attended the International Congress of Philosophy in Prague in 1934, where I became acquainted with them... Morris had the explicit aim of merging the two philosophical movements into one to which he sometimes applied the term “scientific empiricism.” (Schilpp 1963, p. 860.)
Carnap continued by acknowledging that his own philosophical views had been influenced by “pragmatist ideas” and then in a reply to Philipp Frank and V. Brushtinsky he wrote that:

[The movement of pragmatism, which logical empiricists regard as an ally in their fight against traditional metaphysics, has stressed the importance of a sociological analysis of metaphysics, and has devoted much more detailed work to it, in particular, in connection with investigations concerning the pragmatic component in language. This work began with Charles S. Peirce, and is especially prominent in the work of John Dewey. I agree with both Frank and Morris that the pragmatic component has so far not been sufficiently investigated by our movement, although its importance has been acknowledged theoretically by me and by empiricists in general. (Schilpp 1963, p. 868.)

Hopefully it is now pretty clear that when pragmatics was introduced in 1938 it fit nicely into a program of investigation that was a synthesis of logical positivism and pragmatism. I hope it is also clear that the basic structure of the Morris-Carnap semiotic, and many of its key conceptions, owe a great deal to the pioneering work of Charles Peirce.

But I want to emphasize that my point is not to argue that what Morris brought to the new semiotic is simply a recapitulation of Peirce’s own views, nor that in introducing pragmatics Morris was merely repeating something Peirce had already done. On the contrary, there was a lot of originality in Morris’s thought which was heavily influenced by Mead and the other pragmatists and also by the independent ideas of Carnap and logical empiricism. Furthermore, where Morris’s views differed from Peirce’s he may well have been on the wrong track, as Dewey and Arthur Bentley were so keen to point out (Dewey and Bentley 1949), so I would not want to claim Morris’s semiotic for Peirce. What I do want to claim for Peirce is his rightful place in the historical and intellectual development of thought that led to the Morris-Carnap semiotic and thus to pragmatics.

But why do I care? Is it just a question of fairness—of giving Peirce his due? I suppose I am partly motivated by such considerations, but I believe there is more at stake. The loss of history can cheat us out of hard won insights and narrow the possibilities for our future achievements.

But has there really been a loss of history in this case? To a certain extent I think we can say there has been. How many of us remember that Charles Peirce and American pragmatism played any role at all in the Unity of Science Movement and, therefore, in the development of analytic philosophy? If this is news to you it is because some history has been lost or at least greatly distorted. Let me illustrate this further by quoting the first
paragraph of the definition of “Semiotic” from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

Originally, the word “semiotic” meant the medical theory of symptoms; however, an empiricist, John Locke, used the term in the 17th century for a science of signs and significations. The current usage was recommended especially by Rudolf Carnap—see his *Introduction to Semantics* (1942) and his reference there to Charles William Morris, who suggested a threefold distinction. According to this usage, semiotic is the general science of signs and languages, consisting of three parts: (1) pragmatics . . ., (2) semantics . . ., and (3) syntax . . .

So according to this account, from a very respected source, the principal history of semiotic jumps from John Locke to Rudolf Carnap with only one intermediate step worth noting: a fruitful suggestion by Morris that semiotic be divided into three branches. This totally cuts out the crucial development of semiotic in Peirce’s work and, also all of the history from Peirce through Morris. It is not satisfactory to say that this unspoken history is somehow implicit in the reference to Morris’s fruitful suggestion.

Would it, or could it, make any difference for pragmatics if Peirce were brought back into the picture? I have already noted that pragmatics, as a field of linguistics, has become a sort of wastebasket for anything that doesn’t seem to fall into syntax or semantics. The formal or logical framework of pragmatics needs a lot of work. Both Morris and Carnap came to understand that the pragmatics they had spawned and, in particular, the pragmatics that had migrated to linguistics, was descriptive for the most part. By the early 1960’s they were declaring “an urgent need to develop pure pragmatics” to “supply a framework for descriptive pragmatics” (Schilpp 1963, p. 861). This was tantamount to calling for a new formal field of philosophy but, to my knowledge, not much has been achieved subsequently in that direction, at least not within philosophy proper.

Ironically, Peirce had already made great advances toward a pure pragmatics under the name of “universal” or “speculative rhetoric,” the third branch of his general theory of signs. It is true that he never wrote a complete treatise on the subject nor, perhaps, did he even manage to produce a thoroughly consistent and systematic theory. Indeed, his thoughts on this subject are scattered throughout his voluminous writings. But as James Liszka has shown in his *General Introduction to the Semeiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Liszka 1996), Peirce’s “universal rhetoric” is a far more fully developed branch of semiotic than has generally been understood.
Why, given the respect shown for Peirce by Charles Morris, Rudolf Carnap, and the other members of the Unity of Science Movement, were his achievements not more fully appreciated and made use of, particularly with respect to pragmatics? This is another complicated issue, and one I cannot pursue here, but it ought to be fully investigated. (And let me note here that quite a few intrepid scholars have worked hard to fully understand, articulate, and make use of Peirce’s semiotic theory both within philosophy and even in linguistics, and especially in the interdisciplinary field of semiotics due to Sebeok; however even among these Peirceans “universal rhetoric” has been neglected.)

I believe the failure of the Unity of Science philosophers to fully appreciate Peirce’s semiotic, and the reason for its continued neglect within linguistics and the philosophy of language, has a lot to do with the fact that it does not fit very well into the narrow demands of the linguistic turn. Peirce did not believe that semiotic was a study of language behavior and neither did he accept that language, made up of words and truth-functional expressions, was the single object of semiotic study. Peirce believed, for example, that feelings and reactions could also have semiotic value or significance. It is a matter of historical importance that by 1868, as I mentioned at the beginning of this talk, seventy years before Morris’s monograph, Peirce had already taken a semiotic turn that achieved many of the goals of the linguistic turn. Peirce substituted signs for ideas as the objects of investigation for questions concerning meaning and thought. Peirce rejected intuition and private language and, as Royce pointed out to his students, Peirce insisted that the communication of symbolic meaning could only occur within communities of interpretation. The motivation for Peirce’s semiotic turn was principally to achieve a more scientific epistemology—a logic of science that could clean up metaphysics. This is remarkably close to the motivation for the linguistic turn, as I understand it.

Let me conclude with one brief example of what has been missed in Peirce that could have given us a head start in advancing pragmatics. Going back to the definition of “semiotic” from the Encyclopedia Britannica, I’ll now quote the second paragraph:

Considerable effort since the 1970s has gone into the attempt to formalize some of the pragmatics of natural languages. The use of indexical expressions to

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10 The largest deposit of Peirce manuscripts is the collection at the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Reference to these manuscripts is made using numbers assigned by Richard Robin in his Annotated Catalogue (available on line: www.iupui.edu/~peirce/web/robin/robin.htm).
incorporate reference to the speaker, his or her location, or the time of either the 
utterance or the events mentioned was of little importance to earlier logicians, who 
were primarily interested in universal truths of mathematics. With the increased 
interest in linguistics there has come an increased effort to formalize pragmatics.

Of little importance to earlier logicians? Really? Here is a little dialog 
that Peirce wrote in the mid–1890’s for the book Peirce scholars call “The 
Grand Logic” (MS 404):\(^{10}\)

Two men, A and B, meet on a country road, when the following conversa-
sation ensues.

B. The owner of that house is the richest man in these parts. 
A. What house[?] 
B. Why do you not see a house to your right about 7 kilometres 
distant, on a hill? 
A. Yes, I think I descrie it. 
B. Very well; that is the house.

Thus, A has acquired information. But [says Peirce,] if he walks to a 
distant village and says “the owner of [that] house is the richest man in 
these parts,” the remark will refer to nothing, unless he explains to his inter-
locutor how to proceed from where he is in order to find that district and 
that house. Without that, he does not indicate what he is talking about. 
To identify an object, we generally state its place at a stated time; and in 
every case must show how an experience of it can be connected with the 
previous experience of the hearer.

Peirce never published the book this little dialog was written for, but 
a similar story was told in a paper published in the 2\(^\text{nd}\) volume of the 
Harvard Edition –and, in any case, such considerations are frequent in 
Peirce’s work. Already in the 1880’s, Peirce, with his student O. H. Mitchell, 
had invented his quantifiers for symbolic logic, and he was motivated by 
indexical questions. A few years later, with his Existential Graphs, he in-
vented his line of identity to represent the existential continuities that must 
run throughout successful discourses or cognitive processes. Peirce’s publis-
hed logical writings are full of discussion and analysis of the iconic and 
indexical requirements for communication. Perhaps it is time for philoso-
phers to look backwards in time in order to move forward.
EARLY ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY
With Some Lines of Ancestry

Symbolic Logic
Boole • Jevons • Peirce • Schröder

Logicism
Russell • Whitehead • Frege

Pragmatism
Peirce

SEMIOTIC TURN

Common Sense Realism
Moore • Wittgenstein

Logical Atomism
Russell • Wittgenstein

Vienna Circle
(Logical Positivism)
Schlick • Neurath • Carnap

EARLY ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY
LINGUISTIC TURN

Unity of Science
(Scientific Empiricism)
Neurath • Carnap • Morris

Formal Semantics
Carnap • Quine

Ordinary Language Philosophy
Austin • Ryle

OUTSIDE PHILOSOPHY PROPER

Linguistics
Bloomfield • Semiotics
Sebeok

Note: The philosophers and logicians named in the chart are key contributors to the early development of analytic philosophy but they are included only as principal examples. Clearly this chart is not comprehensive and many notable contributors are not listed.
References


