Charles Sanders Peirce
A Life
REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION

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Contents

INTRODUCTION: Facets of the Puzzle 1

1. Father, Son, and Melusina: 1839–1871 26

2. “Our Hour of Triumph Is What Brings the Void”: 1871–1882 82

3. Expulsion from the Academy and the Search for a New Eden: 1883–1891 136

4. Paradise Lost: 1890–1900 203

5. Endgame: 1900–1914 270

6. The Wasp in the Bottle 323

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms
As Used by Peirce 349

Appendix 2: Chronology 363

Notes 375

Bibliography 396

Index 403
Charles Peirce has been a constant companion in my thinking life since I discovered him in 1957 in Perry Miller's perceptive anthology, *American Thought: Civil War to World War I*. The first book I bought containing significant work by Peirce was a secondhand first edition of Morris Raphael Cohen's collection (published in 1923, nine years after Peirce's death) called *Chance, Love and Logic*, and subtitled *philosophical essays by the late Charles S. Peirce, the founder of pragmatism*. The idea that it was Peirce rather than William James who originated pragmatism denied what was then the accepted attribution, and I decided to pursue the earlier Cohen version in the face of Ralph Barton Perry's well-known 1935 biography of James. Three years of research in various manuscript and document collections produced over three thousand pages of notes, which were the basis of a dissertation biography in History at UCLA in 1960. It was my intention to revise it for publication over five years, but this proved impossible. The Harvard University Department of Philosophy, which owned the Peirce papers, while it granted me access to all but four boxes of biographical material restricted from consultation, declined to allow me to quote its large collection of letters and other material essential for a Peirce biography. I am very grateful to Israel Scheffler and the other members of the present department who gave me the permission I desired in late 1991, with the consequence that this study appears—at long last—thirty-two years after the dissertation from which it derives.

The reader will find that I have included lengthy Peirce quotations. My purpose has been to give a strong sense of Peirce's presence. Contrary to the usual scholarly practice, I have often used these passages as part of an argument, rather than as support for it. On occasion, I have included relevant material that I have not commented on in the text, leaving it to the reader to follow out Peirce's thinking about the subject. Because knowledge of the chronological development of Peirce's ideas is so important for understanding his thought, I have included at many points in the narrative my and, wherever possible, Peirce's description of what he was working on at the time.
Peirce wrote more than one version of almost everything he believed important. This was as much true of his correspondence as of his philosophical and scientific writings. It was often impossible to decide which version of a letter (and sometimes there are many) he sent, or if he sent it at all. I have used any version I judged useful in illuminating his life and thought, regardless of its disposition. Indeed, it is often in unsent versions, or in letters he merely considered sending, that the most useful information appears, especially in touches and nuances of intent and feeling which fill out the larger elements of his life and thinking. There is a risk in this practice of giving improper weight to statements which Peirce put forward tentatively. To reduce the danger, I have been careful to use the test of consistency with other evidence bearing on the matter at issue.

Peirce was a polymath, at home in the physical sciences, especially chemistry, geodesy, metrology, and astronomy. He was the first experimental psychologist in the United States, a mathematical economist, a master of logic and mathematics, an inventor of the field of semeiotics, a dramatist, actor, and book reviewer. In philosophy he was one of the most original thinkers and system builders of any time, and certainly the greatest philosopher the United States has ever seen. I have been forced, both because of the limits of my knowledge and because of the sheer breadth and depth of Peirce's competence, to concentrate on a few of Peirce's interests, only mentioning the rest along the way. My greatest interest (and it is more than enough in itself) is his architectonic—his unparalleled system of philosophy—which, from his middle twenties, he was convinced had the power to include all knowledge within its vantage. My main purpose in this study has been to present the outline of the chronological development of this system along with the major developments of his life as interrelated and interdependent facets of a complex and fascinating man.

Much of what I have written about Peirce is controversial, because much of Peirce's life was itself controversial in the extreme. He was profoundly confused about himself, a fact which makes understanding him particularly difficult. I have done my best to be true to Peirce, for whom I have a deep affection, and this has led me to propose a number of hypotheses about his life and thought for which the evidence I have is not incontestable. I point out in the text where I do so. My reason for proceeding in this way is appropriately contained in Peirce's description of the logic of inquiry, which requires that the risk of hypothetic inference or guessing (which he called abduction) be the first step toward knowledge, a step always subject to inductive test by the community of inquirers. I present my findings in the spirit of what Peirce called "contrite fallibilism."