

Peirce's Approach to the Self
A Semiotic Perspective on Human Subjectivity

Vincent Michael Colapietro

State University of New York Press

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix	
System of Citation	xi	
Introduction	xiii	
Chapter One	Is Peirce's Theory of Signs Truly General?	1
Chapter Two	Semiosis and Subjectivity	27
Chapter Three	The Relevance of Peirce's Semiotics to Psychology	49
Chapter Four	Peirce's Account of the Self: A Developmental Perspective	61
Chapter Five	Inwardness and Autonomy	99
Notes	119	
References	125	
	137	

Introduction

In the words of Charles Sanders Peirce, “The man who puts pen to paper to produce anything like a treatise should, for his readers’ sake, and for his own, begin by defining what his book is intended to tell” (CN, vol. 2, 277; 1900). Indeed, it is nothing less than “the primary rule of the ethics of rhetoric that every prose composition should begin by informing the reader what its aim is, with sufficient precision to enable him to decide whether to read it or not. If the title can do this, all the better” (CN, vol. 2, 276). My hope is that the title of this study sufficiently conveys my intention. If not, let me add here that my aim is to present the innovative approach to the self that is implied by Peirce’s general theory of signs. To some extent, Peirce himself articulated the view of the self implied in this theory; however, to a significant degree, he left this view implicit. Even so, what he has written points out the direction in which he would have developed his portrait of the person. In addition, there has been some effort on the part of several commentators to trace the direction of Peirce’s thought in this context.

Nonetheless, the exposition of Peirce’s views regarding the self is no easy task. Part of the difficulty here stems from Peirce’s style, taking this term in a broad sense to include both the way he wrote and the way he thought (including, of course, the way he philosophized). Yet, this is only part of the difficulty; for what Peirce specifically said about the self has appeared even to deeply sympathetic commentators as a largely unsatisfactory account. Hence, while the writings of Peirce, in general, pose a number of challenges for any expositor of his thought, his view of the self, in particular, presents difficulties of its own. Let me comment on both sources of difficulty, beginning with the more general ones.

