

## **HOOKWAY ON PEIRCE: AN OVERVIEW.**

Hookway follows Feibleman in seeing Peirce's work as a system of thought (but nowhere does he refer to Feibleman). He finds that Peirce's semiotics, logic and metaphysics are mutually supportive. Always he struggles from lack of knowledge of the Heider/Gibson work establishing the thirdness of perception. He orients himself from Peirce's last period. There is some justification for this but one has to wonder whether Peirce could, at that distance in time, recapture the clear and revolutionary vision that he had in his first phase. We do know, from his own writings, that he entered the last phase heavily burdened with evidence of his rejection by the intellectual community, to the point of denying him access to a reasonable livelihood. (Interestingly, there is no evidence that his well-to-do family made any effort to lighten his economic burden). It is possible that in this last phase he was too much concerned with proving to the intellectual world, as it was then, that he had something important to say. That is, his writing might have been geared to the audience he thought he might have in the early 1900's than to what he was thinking in the mid nineteenth century.

I do not know what to conclude on this matter. It is troublesome and, for my part, I prefer to orient my approach to Peirce's work from his first phase. Admittedly, at that point in time he was still very close to his studies of Kant and was ignorant of Hegel's rebuttal of Kant. Nevertheless, I think it likely that the mid- nineteenth century happened to be a time when the curtains parted and all sorts of people could directly perceive what had been denied to the eyes of humans for many centuries. Probably since Plato's time. The curtains had well an truly dropped back again before Peirce's last phase.

The background for Peirce's first phase was a revolution in our conception of the world that had no precedent other than that brief phase between Anaximander and Plato. The wave of social revolutions throughout Europe in 1848 manifested a change in world perceptions. Suddenly, nothing seemed to be unthinkable. Darwin, Faraday and a host of chemists were seen to be turning over what had been unchallengeable truths about the nature of the physical and biological world; Lobachevsky had desecrated the Holy Grail of Eucledianism. For a short decade or so it was open slather for those who wanted to think outrageous thoughts. The informal Metaphysical Club at Boston was a response to this change in intellectual climate. Its leading members responded handsomely to the challenge. Peirce was slow to respond.

To judge from his early papers he was seeking a response at a rather deeper level. He appears to have been asking what was wrong with how we went about gaining knowledge. If fundamental truths were being toppled we had to ask how we came to believe so unquestionably in such falsities. We had the very serious problem of finding ways to find the truth that would not lead us to similar errors in the future. Unlike the other members of the Metaphysical Club Peirce was directly engaged in the practice of science. He was responsible for designing, making and calculating accurate measures for the US Survey. He could not have been unaware that there was in science no philosophy guiding their practice.

Certainly no guidelines such as the post hoc guidelines that Kant had laid down for an intellectual world that was, as it were, disappearing from under the feet of Peirce and his Clubmen.