This dynamic rhetoric of inquiry and discovery certainly reflects a dominant concern in classical American Pragmatism. This volume generally does a good job of distinguishing the democratic and practical concerns of these thinkers from the more recent "neopragmatists." However, several writers promote the resurrection of the Sophists' reputation by means of continuing the Platonists' literal and uninspired reading of the highly rhetorical Plato which strikes one as strange in a volume devoted to the power of rhetoric. Plato recognized the potential of rhetoric for both benefit and harm and therefore, like the Pragmatists, developed communication as a central philosophic issue. Following the history of rhetoric as a constant companion of philosophy, rather than an episodic one, might provide even more light on our current situation than the use of just these two historical examples. Yet debates over interpretation is exactly what should encourage one to read these provocative essays. They provide a stimulating appropriation of philosophy by what purports to be a separate discipline.

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A General Introduction to the Semeiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce, Jakób Liszka.

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. 151pp. $27.95 cloth.

This definitive text is the single best work on Peirce's semeiotic (as Peirce would have spelled it) allowing scholars to extrapolate beyond Peirce or to apply him to new areas by simply beginning: “As presented in Liszka...” The comprehensive explication of Peirce's theory is succinct, readable, and accurate; it is well documented (excepting for fewer references to The Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition, than expected), providing an excellent organization of all aspects of the semeiotic. It is an introduction, but also a reference for understanding the vocabulary used and coined by Peirce.

The book is divided into four parts, the first, "The Discipline of Semeiotic," is the shortest and describes what Peirce's semiotic was as a formal, normative science and how it fit into the larger corpus of his theories. Liszka offers (p. 14): “Semeiotic, as a branch of philosophy, is a formal, normative science that is specifically concerned with the question of truth as it can be expressed and known through the medium of signs, and serves to establish leading principles for any other science which is concerned with signs in some capacity.” The last part of the final phrase is a catch-all that could include fields of science which might, some day, come to recognize the role of signs within the dynamics of their discipline.

The second chapter, "Semeiotic Grammar," defines signs, the component parts of signs, how signs are divided into categories or types (typology), and the classification of the sign types. The chapter concludes with the most useful explication of the ten classes of Peirce's signs. The third chapter, "Critical Logic," "is concerned with those types of signs, such as legisigns, symbols, dicents, and arguments, that are capable of expressing and inferring information" (p.53). The final chapter, "Universal Rhetoric," "is the least
developed branch of Peirce’s general semiotic theory.” Universal rhetoric or speculative rhetoric addresses the relationships between signs and interpretants, or (p. 79) it “can be thought of as the formal conditions for attainment of truth.” While chapters on grammar and logic outline the details of sign, object, interpretant, deduction, induction, and abduction, and a plethora of other terms (including a couple of pages on existential graphs) as have appeared in other texts, Liszka’s development is systematic and more clear than any other. Additionally, the final chapter develops the semiotic concepts of “sense,” “meaning,” and “significance” (using Lady Welby’s terms for Peirce’s divisions) and tying them to the interpretant as “process, product, and effect.” Briefly put, such a discussion unifies Peircean philosophy, culminating in Peirce’s ideas of communication within a community of scientists, which seeks the ultimate logical interpretant.

The book’s organization provides for a general sense of the evolution of signs, from simple intrasemiotic dynamics in the second chapter, to intersemiotic dynamic sign interaction within propositions and the development of logic, to the final chapter’s articulation of Peirce’s concepts of generals. Notions from vagueness to methods of inquiry are woven into the universal rhetoric showing how ethics, and aesthetics derive from the basic semiotic. There is no speculation beyond the teleological conclusions of the ethics and aesthetics, but Liszka nicely unites Peirce’s lofty goals into one complete (and short) systematic philosophy.

The only concerns with this monumental work, which Peirce was not able to produce within his life-time, are one minor point and one more far-reaching philosophical and scientific point. First, Liszka mentions Louis Agassiz as a geologist and while Agassiz contributed significantly to that field and to ichthyology, it seems that he should be more generally known as a naturalist.

The larger issue is one informed by Peirce’s “Guess at the Riddle” among other writings, which address his general evolutionary perspective. Liszka explains Peirce’s concepts of the “quasi-sign” and mechanics (p. 34), but seems to suggest that mechanics (and perhaps other forms of energy) operate at a pre-semeiotic or hyposemiotic level. The general nature of the semiotic within the universe, coupled with Peirce’s idea, “three elements are active in the world, first, chance; second, law; and third, habit-taking” (from “Guess”) would yield a cosmic evolution which is semiotic and would include a semiotic dynamic within what physics and chemistry studies. Then, one could find all aspects of the grammar, logic, and rhetoric defining energy and matter, after all, “matter is effete mind” (from “The Architecture of Theories”).

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