

*Proper Names  
and Persons:  
Peirce's  
Semiotic  
Consideration  
of Proper  
Names*

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***Abstract***

Charles S. Peirce's theory of proper names bears helpful insights for how we might think about his understanding of persons. Persons, on his view, are continuities, not static objects. I argue that Peirce's notion of the legisign, particularly proper names, sheds light on the habitual and conventional elements of what it means to be a person. In this paper, I begin with an account of what philosophers of language have said about proper names in order to distinguish Peirce's theory of proper names from them. Then, I present Peirce's semiotic theory of proper names, followed by some ways in which his theory can be applied to practical concerns, such as first impressions, name changing, identity, and temporary insanity.

*Keywords: C. S. Peirce, Semiotics, Proper Names, Persons, Personhood, Legisign, Ship of Theseus, Name Changing, Temporary Insanity.*

In this paper I will address Peirce's semiotic consideration of proper names. Vincent Colapietro has offered an extensive examination of human subjectivity according to Peirce's semiotics.<sup>1</sup> What I hope to contribute to this subject is a careful rendering of what specifically Peirce's theory of proper names implies for his understanding of personhood. There are three areas in which Peirce's theory can contribute to contemporary concerns. The first has to do with the social practice of name changing, the second with the issue of identity, and the third with legal pleas of temporary insanity. According to Peirce's categorizations of signs, he would call proper names "rhematic indexical legisigns." In what follows, I will first discuss the work a number of philoso-

phers have offered on proper names. Second, I will explain Peirce's semiotic categorization of proper names, particularly the rhematic indexical legisign.<sup>2</sup> In this process, I will show how Peirce's semiosis complements his ontology of persons, and will offer preliminary ways in which Peirce's theory applies to the practical concerns I have mentioned. Third, I will focus on concrete examples of applying Peirce's theory of proper names.

### *Theories about Proper Names*

It is important to note some scholarship on proper names to situate Peirce's work amongst alternate views, as well as to distinguish my efforts in this paper from those of other Peirce scholars. First, authors David Boersema, Helmut Pape, and Peirre Thibaud have already distinguished Peirce's theories from those of Kripke, Donnellan, Devitt, Putnam, Eco, Russell, and Mill.<sup>3</sup> I will briefly summarize with Boersema's help the different ways these authors have addressed proper names. Second, Jarrett Brock and Jeffrey DiLeo have dealt strictly with Peirce's notion of the "Rhematic indexical legisign," without special focus on comparison with other authors. In addressing these two scholars, I will defend Peirce from Brock's critique, and show how I will add to DiLeo's exposition of Peirce's theory.

While several authors have compared Peirce's theory of proper names and reference to alternate views, David Boersema most succinctly relates the dominant views that philosophers of language have offered. In his article, "Eco on Names and Reference," Boersema presents Eco's work on semiotics in critique of "standard treatments of reference and names."<sup>4</sup> The central theories of reference advanced in the philosophy of language tradition have been the descriptivist and the causal views.

Boersema explains that the descriptivist view holds that "names refer to objects in virtue of the descriptions that speakers associate with the names. Names refer to objects basically because, and only because, speakers use names to refer to objects."<sup>5</sup> Among adherents to this view were Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell.

Boersema explains that Saul Kripke argued, by contrast, that "it might well be that none of the descriptions that a speaker associates with a given name in fact uniquely pick out the object whose name it is." Thus, according to Boersema,

... if it turned out to be the case that all of the things a speaker associates with Aristotle, but—unbeknownst to the speaker—turned out to be true of someone else (say, Plato), it would still be the case that the name "Aristotle" refers to Aristotle and not to Plato.<sup>6</sup>

Given this challenge to the descriptivist theory of reference, the causal theory was formed.

The causal theory, influenced by Kripke and advanced by Michael Devitt, holds that there is a causal chain of designation that begins with the first “grounding” of the name. Thus, each subsequent use of the name is causally linked to the first. One advantage of the causal theory of reference is its recognition of the importance of the initial act of naming. Emphasis on this originating moment is also important for Peirce. But, in contrast to the descriptivist and causal theories, Boersema explains Eco’s view that “Speakers, not expressions, refer.”<sup>7</sup> With Eco, we see an important shift, which we also see in Peirce, to attend to what Peirce calls the “interpretant.” For now, Boersema’s summary of these central theories of reference should suffice to help me distinguish Peirce’s theory of proper names from the philosophy of language tradition.

Jarrett Brock and Jeffrey DiLeo have examined Peirce’s claims about the rhematic indexical legisign.<sup>8</sup> The trouble I see in Brock’s analysis is that he assumes that Peirce believed proper names only to be rhematic indexical legisigns—but this is not right. Reading Peirce closely, and this element will become clear in the present paper, the indexicality of proper names for Peirce becomes iconic after first encounters with the object and its naming. Thus, Brock’s scathing criticisms of Peirce appear to be founded upon an insufficient and oversimplified reading. I emphasize the way in which a proper name changes in quality in reference to the first impressions we have in meeting someone for the first time. There is good reason why first impressions are important, for they are the first indexical way we encounter the person named. In subsequent uses of the proper name, it serves as an icon and as a symbol. Brock, while speaking of Peirce’s “failure[s],” claims that Peirce held problematic assumptions, and ran counter to common sense. But, Brock himself offers countless problematic assumptions that he does not justify. For example, he writes, “For, contra Peirce, man is not a collection.”<sup>9</sup> He offers no justification for this claim<sup>10</sup> and moves on to his next criticism of Peirce.

By contrast to Brock’s, DiLeo’s examination of Peirce is excellent. Its goal, however, is more specifically to outline the meaning of each term in the category of “rhematic indexical legisign.” While I offer a similar analysis early on in the present paper, our explanations differ in emphasis (such as on the legisignic quality of proper names that I take to be central), and mine is intended to introduce what I believe to be the implications for notions of personhood that we can unpack out of Peirce’s semiotic consideration of proper names.

### *Proper Names as Rhematic Indexical Legisigns*

In this section, I will outline the basic implications for a theory of personhood that develop out of Peirce’s understanding of the kind of sign that is a person’s name. I will argue that Peirce’s epistemological claims

regarding persons rest upon the implications of each of his three semiotic terms—rheme, index, and legisign. The most revealing term of the three is the legisign. For Peirce, in other words, what one means by referring to a person's name pertains to a "general type," a law, a habit of action. I will take each of Peirce's three kinds of sign one by one, and will address the implications for his views regarding persons. Though it is no great surprise, it should become clear that Peirce's claims regarding proper names, and the implications I will draw regarding his views on personhood, are particularly congruous with the theory of evolution and the abandonment of the fixed essences that the theory denies.

In his book, *Peirce's Approach to the Self*, Vincent Colapietro reminds us of a particular passage in Peirce's writings, "familiar to all students of Peirce: [from Peirce's essay, "On the Foundations of Mathematics,"] 'All that we know or think we know is known or thought by signs, and our knowledge itself is a sign.'<sup>11</sup> So, given my present purpose, I will take as an example my knowledge of a person, such as Annie Weber. The proper name "Annie Weber" is certainly an important part of my experience of the person I know by that name.

As I have said, according to Peirce, a proper name is a rhematic indexical legisign, though not all of these are proper names. The word "this" can be the same sort of sign. To properly describe what Peirce means by such a sign, an overview of the way that each of these terms fits into an understanding of signs will be helpful.

As is well known, Peirce is notorious for his triads. His study of semiotic contrasts with dyadic ones, such as Ferdinand de Saussure's, which involve fundamentally the relation between signifier and signified.<sup>12</sup> For Peirce, semiosis is triadic in that it involves a representamen, an object, and an interpretant.<sup>13</sup> As such, when Peirce categorizes signs, the terms he uses generally pertain to one of these aspects of signs. When he describes a proper name as a rhematic indexical legisign, therefore, we encounter terms that deal with the sign's relation to one of the three basic, triadic features—representamen, object, interpretant. It is important to note in what follows that although Peirce refers to his taxonomy with the term "trichotomies," he often explains that one kind of sign involves other signs as well—there is a layering of categories. As such, the following descriptions of Peirce's semiotic will involve overlap. And, such overlap is not confused, but instead is an accurate depiction of an inherently complex subject matter.

In his descriptions of the basic triad of signs, we find Peirce's organizational scheme. He claims that signs can be categorized first "according as the sign in itself [1] is a mere quality, [2] is an actual existent, or [3] is a general law."<sup>14</sup> To understand Peirce, we must remember that signs are pervasive. And, his trichotomy here recalls his categories of firsts, seconds and thirds. The names he gives to the three categories of signs are qualisigns, sinsigns, and legisigns. To focus on the task at

hand, we can note that the sign of a proper name itself, as Peirce would put it, is a “general law,” and therefore a legisign. And for Peirce, a legisign is,

... usually made by men. Every conventional sign is a legisign, [but not conversely]. It is not a single object, but a general type which, it has been agreed, shall be significant. Every legisign signifies through an instance of its application, which may be termed a Replica of it . . . The Replica is a Sinsign. Thus every Legisign requires sinsigns.<sup>15</sup>

So, a legisign, with which we categorize proper names, is made by human beings, is conventional, and is not a single object, but refers to a generality. The idea of traditional metaphysical or realist claims about persons would distinguish what the name of a person can tell us from what is *metaphysically* the case about persons. This is to say that, on this view, the person is independent from what we say or think about him or her. As we were reminded by Colapietro, however, on Peirce’s account thought is understood in terms of signs. The signs we employ are indeed fundamentally important, therefore, to the analysis of persons and thinkers. For, if we are to ask *what* something is, the answer will always consist in signs. For Peirce, therefore, persons are not mind-independent individuals. They are not metaphysical in the traditional sense of the term.<sup>16</sup> A person at any given time will be a replica of a general type or habit of action.

Another issue is worth noting in the passage just cited. It has to do with Replicas and sinsigns. If a proper name is a legisign, then it is a general type, and general types have to do with generalities *of* particulars. A sinsign is the second of the three categories of signs as they are in themselves. The sinsign refers to actual existents.<sup>17</sup> According to Peirce, a sinsign is “an actual existent thing or event which is a sign. It can only be so through its qualities; so that it involves a qualisign, or rather, several qualisigns. But these qualisigns are of a peculiar kind and only form a sign through being actually embodied.”<sup>18</sup> As we noted above, a Replica is a sinsign. By just analyzing the notion of a legisign for Peirce, we find that a proper name qua legisign involves both sinsigns and qualisigns.

Let us return to the example of my lovely wife, Annie Weber. The sense in which this proper name is a legisign, then, involves an actual existent or event, such as at least one or many instances of Annie as existent or event (such as tired Annie or excited Annie),<sup>19</sup> involving the many wonderful qualisigns so embodied. The legisignic quality of her name, as Peirce would claim, implies that her name is conventional (as are yours and mine). Annie and I witnessed this fact when she changed her name in marriage to me. There are various conventions regarding name changes in marriage, and this only serves to support Peirce’s claim.

Proper names are also indexical, in terms of Peirce's next trichotomy of signs. An index, according to Peirce is,

... a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object. It cannot, therefore, be a Qualisign, because qualities are whatever they are independently of anything else. In so far as the Index is affected by the Object, it necessarily has some Quality in common with the Object, and it is in respect to these that it refers to the Object.<sup>20</sup>

An index is involved in denotation of all types. We can see easily the way an index can be affected by its object with the example of an index finger. If I point at an object and the object moves away, either the index needs to follow the object, and therefore change, or it otherwise misses its intended target. As such, the index points. In contrast to an index, Peirce first introduces the category of the icon, which refers to its object through some quality of the icon's own. An example might be the word "quack," which resembles on its own the sound to which it refers. The index, by contrast, can point to the meaning "location" of an object without in itself sharing a resemblance to the object. I will skip a description of Peirce's third category of trichotomy here, symbol, since it is less easy to confuse than are icon and index.<sup>21</sup>

So, although this is not too surprising, the name Annie Weber does not in virtue of its own qualities resemble its object—perhaps you see why I have chosen my forgiving wife as my example for this paper (in hopes that she can forgive me for this objectification). But, her original name, Annie Davis, has been affected by its object, which has changed, and now is conventionally referred to by Annie Weber.<sup>22</sup> Annie Davis can tell us about a former status of Annie Weber, or more likely, an alternate or secondary way to distinguish the person I love now from the woman I met at first. While the woman I married is not a new person as a result of changing her name,<sup>23</sup> something important about her has changed.

Elsewhere in his writings, Peirce describes indexical words, such as proper nouns as having "force to draw the attention of the listener to some haecceity common to the experience of speaker and listener." By "haecceity," Peirce continues,

I mean, some element of existence which, not merely by the likeness between its different apparitions, but by an inward force of identity, manifesting itself in the continuity of its apparitions throughout time and in space, is distinct from everything else, and is thus fit (as it can in no other way be) to receive a proper name or to be indicated as this or that.<sup>24</sup>

We find here a way of thinking about the problem of the ship of Theseus. For those who are unfamiliar, this is the problem that Plutarch

calls our attention to regarding identity.<sup>25</sup> If the parts of the ship of Theseus were replaced one by one, until all of them were removed, and the old parts were all reassembled, it seems that we have a problem. Which is the ship of Theseus?<sup>26</sup>

Today, people ask this same question regarding human bodies. We now believe that the matter of one's body is replaced entirely every 7 years. If this is so, and if one could recover all one's past matter and rebuild it part by part, then *which would be me?* Peirce's implicit answer seems to be that each party to the duplication has an "inward force of identity." In this sense, what changes is not "ship of Theseus," but the sign "the," which now has to be more precise. We could refer to *the ship of Theseus made of its original parts*, and *the ship of Theseus made of all new parts*, if we believe there to be significant merit to Peirce's idea of "inward force of identity," which does not pertain to any particular outward appearances. And, Peirce would have no problem with the fact that the change in the word "the" occurs gradually.

For Peirce, ideas too are live and developmental—things which can change and grow in continuous fashion. So, even after seven years of marriage to Annie Weber, I will not be surprised to believe that she retains her inward force of identity, independent of any of her wonderful constituent parts. For Peirce, a person is not simply a body. A person itself is a history. An important part of that history, at least conventionally speaking, is the name by which he or she is picked out. A boy named Tiny changes as much as the meaning of his name when he grows large beyond expectations. While names do not define a person, their histories and meanings are co-dependent. Insofar as there would be two ships or two bodies from the original, the histories would be different from the outset and would develop differently thereafter. When a baby is born, severed from its mother, we do not wonder whether it bears its mother's name. We name it. Names are important for identifying things. As such, were two ships to come into being from the process we know by the story of the Ship of Theseus, we would simply either name one of the ships by another name, call them one and two, old and new, or we would cease using the singular "the" to describe *Ships* of Theseus. Both Kripke and Peirce can acknowledge here the importance of what happens when we find the new ship. We need a new grounding, baptism, or indexing.

It would certainly seem strange to say that identical twins are the same person, for example. Peirce's insights avoid such problems. The "inward force of identity" would be different for the old ship and the new. And, just as Philip of Macedon, one of Peirce's favorite examples, can be drunk or sober, logically we could have two Philips, even if not metaphysically. As such, it is even less problematic to say that two distinct bodies, the old and the new ship of Theseus, are distinct. Their inward forces of identity may involve the activities of fighting for the

new ship, and those of serving as a museum for the old ship. What we see here emerging in Peirce's work is what Kelly Parker has dubbed the "continuity" in Peirce's thought. I will say more about Parker's and Peirce's insights on personhood after first discussing what Peirce means by categorizing proper names as rhematic.

To sum up, we might say that the relation we witness between the proper *names* and the persons at issue is one of habit. Being legisigns, proper names are laws we ascribe by convention as helpful tools for behavior. At least we can see similarity between the legisign and that which the legisign depicts in the use of proper names. This renders, therefore, an iconic quality to the rhematic indexical legisign. As I have said, it is not strange in Peirce's theory to see overlap of semiotic characteristics.

Peirce's third trichotomy of signs distinguishes between rhemes, dicent signs, and arguments. This trichotomy refers to the way in which the sign relates to the interpretant. Peirce explains that a "Rheme is a Sign which, for its Interpretant, is a Sign of qualitative Possibility, that is, is understood as representing such and such a kind of possible Object. Any Rheme, perhaps, will afford some information; but it is not interpreted as doing so."<sup>27</sup> Put another way, Peirce describes this trichotomy as follows:

. . . we may say that a Rheme is a sign which is understood to represent its object in its characters merely; that a Dicisign [or a dicent sign] is a sign which is understood to represent its object in respect to actual existence; and that an Argument is a Sign which is understood to represent its Object in its character as Sign.<sup>28</sup>

The rhematic quality of the proper name, Annie Weber, refers to the characters of its object in a roughly non-propositional sense of firstness.<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, Peirce calls a rheme a "sign of essence."<sup>30</sup> If we keep the latter in mind, along with the sense in which the rheme is not interpreted as affording information, as Peirce puts it, a proper name is something which invokes in the interpretant a knowledge that is not propositional. And, this is important for those interested in following Dewey in his rejection of the sentenced world.<sup>31</sup> The point is made clearer in Peirce's letter to Lady Welby, "On Signs and the Categories," where Peirce explains that "A rheme is any sign that is not true nor false, like almost any single word except 'yes' and 'no,' which are almost peculiar to modern languages."<sup>32</sup> As an example, a rheme could be a term, such as "blue," "hot," or "car." Although I have said that a rheme is not sentenced, this does not mean a rheme cannot *look* like a sentence. A sentence in which a term has been removed, as in the transition from "Socrates is wise" to "\_\_\_ is wise" (or "*x* is wise"), creates a rheme in the latter. What we have in the latter is a rheme insofar as it is neither true nor false, and insofar as it is a sign of qualitative possibility.<sup>33</sup>

So, given this sketch of Peirce's individual semiotic descriptions of proper names, his explanation of the totality of a rhematic indexical legisign can be better understood. Peirce explains,

A proper name, when one meets with it for the first time, is existentially connected with some percept or other equivalent individual knowledge of the individual it names. It is then, and then only, a genuine Index. The next time one meets with it, one regards it as an Icon of that Index. The habitual acquaintance with it having been acquired, it becomes a Symbol whose Interpretant represents it as an Icon of an Index of the Individual named.<sup>34</sup>

It seems we have here in this passage an implicit explanation for why it is that first impressions of persons are so incredibly important. For, the indexicality from which all further references to the proper name will be drawn is later referred to by an icon. So, if one makes a poor first impression, one may always remain "Scott, the guy who spilled mustard on my shirt." A first impression is not necessarily something that becomes a permanent fixture, for Peirce, since people can forget the names of others, and the process can start over. We can see, nonetheless, semiotic reasons for everyday behaviors and conditions of human interaction.

### *Practical Implications of Peirce's Theory*

So, what can we say is the payout of studying a semiotic consideration of the person in terms of proper names? There are two main results. The first offers a way of thinking about Peirce's epistemology, especially regarding personal identity and agency. The second involves phenomenological insight into the everyday goings on of addressing persons habitually and for the first time by proper names, as I have discussed. I will focus hereafter on the first of these concerns.

The proper name, epistemologically speaking, refers to something or someone we know, but not propositionally. In his article, "Logical Atomism in Plato's *Theaetetus*," Gilbert Ryle offers one of the early accounts of the difference between certain kinds of knowledge that are distinguished in European languages. For Ryle, the difference I have in mind is between knowing-that and knowing-as, or, put another way, propositional knowledge and acquaintance knowledge. In the French, these terms are *savoir* and *connaître*. I know-savoir that I am thinking, but I know-connaître my wife, my friends, this or that song. The important point that Ryle gathers from this distinction is that its lack was a cause of confusion in Plato's *Theaetetus*. But, it further reminds us, therefore, that the term "theory of knowledge," commonly known as epistemology, is ambiguous. Is it the theory of *all* knowledge, or is it the theory of knowledge-savoir? In terms of the import of a theory of

knowledge, it seems that knowledge by acquaintance, knowing-connaître, should be of great concern to us, given that so many of our problems come from poorly judging people.<sup>35</sup> And, anything we know-savoir, any knowledge characterized as *episteme*, is knowledge *about* things that we know-connaître. Connaître, as such, is the prior sort of knowledge, conceptually. Consider, for example, Merleau-Ponty's claim that "for the child the thing is not known until it is named."<sup>36</sup> In sum, the study of epistemology, if it is a focus on *episteme* as knowing-savoir, must attend carefully to the ways in which we know-connaître those things that we know about. And, Peirce's theory of naming as a sort of baptism is particularly helpful in this sense.

As I have said, I believe the characteristic of being a legisign is perhaps the most revealing regarding proper names. I will return to the legal implications of this fact after examining what we can say about Peirce's theory of personhood.

Kelly Parker's *The Continuity of Peirce's Thought* offers a concise description of what Peirce means by "person." Parker explains that

In the 'Law of Mind,' Peirce used the word *personality* to identify the general idea, the element of Thirdness, which directs the self's action in the immediate field of the present and determines which among infinite possible associations will be actualized (CP 6.155). Personality is the connection among ideas; it is a developmental teleology, the general principle of which determines that some possibilities will be actualized and others avoided or neglected.<sup>37</sup>

Parker emphasizes the importance for Peirce of noting the infinite possibilities of what we could choose to do. And, there is no doubt that persons tend toward certain activities over others, and actualize only some of their possible associations. Although people's tendencies and habits can change, we can also often see a pattern in the ways in which people tend toward certain associations. Some are physically inclined to appreciate sports more than others, for example. Parker explains that the "difference among personalities lies in the general rules [(habits)] that shape the significance of the present phenomenon." Parker continues, "In the broadest sense, personality may be characterized as the patterns by which ideas are associated, the set of good or bad rules of inference that govern one's thought."<sup>38</sup> What we have here then is a theory which explains the similarities and differences among persons in terms of the associations of ideas that they employ. Thus, if we have two ships that go fight in sea battles, one the old ship of Theseus and the other the new ship, clearly they cannot perform the *exact* same associations. They cannot both serve *exactly* the same function. They will be similar in the way that twins are, save of course that ships do not associate ideas in the ways that persons do.

So why is the sign we use to speak about a person revealing? The legisignic character of the proper name, recall, refers to the importance of the interpretant of the sign. That is, how I know Annie Weber is essential for how I will speak of her. Thus, the legisign is the appropriate sign for considering a thing whose character is a general type. My point is not that the sign determines the character of its object causally. Rather, it is telling of Peirce's understanding of the object, the person, that we use a legisign to pick him or her out. I hope to show, furthermore, that Peirce's theories of the person are especially helpful when we look at practical problems, such as the case of pleas for temporary insanity.

In criminal court cases, defendants often plead temporary insanity. In such cases, there is not a denial that the body of the defendant was the body that carried out the action in question. Rather, what is most often at issue is the general character of the person involved in the action. When people experience great shock or stress that brings out behavior so different from their normal behaviors, we say that the action in question was committed while the defendant was temporarily insane. And, such a person is *highly* unlikely, while not under extreme circumstances to have ever performed the said action. In such cases, the behavior exhibited is *so* different from the norm or general law or general type, that we are willing, in everyday life, to say that this or that person *was not in control of his or her actions*. This idea appears to be congruous with the notion of the legisign as a general type, as a law or as a habit of action.

It will be helpful to look at a specific case of a plea of temporary insanity. Kristian Gaime, the so-called "Land O'Lakes mother" was "accused of killing one of her children" in 1999.<sup>39</sup> According to Chase Squires of the *St. Petersburg Times*, "Authorities say Gaime drugged the boys and put them in the family's minivan, then directed the exhaust into the cabin with the three of them inside." Only Gaime and her son Adam survived. In Gaime's case, the plea of temporary insanity was not accompanied by an admission that she committed the act. Squires writes, "while Gaime provides notice that she will claim insanity, Van Allen [the prosecuting attorney] said the notice does not necessarily mean she or her attorneys will admit that she was the one responsible for her son's death." A final detail about this case relevant to my present purpose pertains to Gaime's father's comments. He claimed that Gaime "wasn't coherent . . . She wasn't my daughter . . . She said something about an airplane. And she had this little smirk on her face, (when) she just lost her baby. It wasn't right. And then she said something about how to hookup VCR's."

What we have in this case is an example of someone who at a certain point in time began behaving in a way utterly inconsistent with her historical habits. Indeed, her "normal" self, in terms of her habitual self,

would likely have found the deeds done to be abhorrent. The question can arise, however, as to whether or not what we deem abnormalities are themselves habitual. It may be the case that a person has never had such episodes before. It may also be the case that the person may have had many, or may induce them with the use of drugs, for example. In other words, the fact that certain behavior does not seem continuous does not mean that it is not. This is precisely the challenge of the plea of temporary insanity. It clearly differs from the general “insanity” plea.

Regarding the temporary insanity plea, Peirce has the following to contribute. Peirce's notion of individuality and personhood can be understood in terms of reactions on the one hand, and self-control on the other. An individual, Peirce claims, “is something which reacts.”<sup>40</sup> And, Colapietro explains that “to say I am the same person as the individual who was born on such and such a date is to assert that there is an unbroken series of actual reactions that link who I am now with who I was then. In short, I as an individual *am* a continuity of reactions.”<sup>41</sup> This depiction of personhood for Peirce does not render court cases easy to solve in terms of pleas of temporary insanity. But, it does offer a conceptual explanation for what is at issue in such cases. Is what we are dealing with in this or that specific case an instance of a true *break* in the continuity of reactions that make the person responsible for his or her actions? And, if there was such a break, was he or she responsible for it? If so, then the person, let us imagine her to be voluntarily on drugs, *should* be held responsible for her actions. Imagine a drugged baby-sitter who lets your child drown, for example. By contrast, a person who witnesses a horrible event may not be able to behave as usual. We do not have a final formula for deciding all cases of temporary insanity given Peirce's insights. But, understanding the limitations of how we can know people can nevertheless contribute to the resolution of such cases.

When we choose a person or group of persons to engage in the policing or protection of others, or, for instance, in the guarding of ports, a simple fact is evident in Peirce's understanding of persons as I have briefly sketched it in terms of proper names. We do not know-savoir the people, for this is not a kind of knowledge available to us. Our knowledge by acquaintance of people is not propositional. It is not in this sense true or false. We can only know them in the fashion of *connaître*. Were a greater knowledge of persons available, such knowledge would be extremely helpful. We could use it to make sure we have chosen the best political leaders, police men and women, and so forth. But, as Jeremy Bentham put it in *Nonsense upon Stilts*, “hunger is not bread.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, our desires are not themselves constitutive of the world as we want it to be. Rather, Peirce's account of the terminology we would employ to know a person, such as is involved in learning a person's proper name, is clearly instructive of the limitations we must accept in knowing persons.

This limitation, furthermore, is not necessarily a problem. Indeed, one of the greatest features of a loving and healthy relationship is only possible given the lack of our exact knowledge of other persons—and that is trust. One cannot trust people without a certain faith in them, which must always exceed the knowledge or skepticism one has regarding their future behavior.

According to Colapietro,

Peirce's account of the self assumes his theory of the individual as such. In addition, it presupposes his notions of substance and organism. Finally, this account is grounded in his theory of mind, since (for Peirce) "A Person is [primarily] a mind whose parts are coordinated in a particular way." (MS 954)<sup>43</sup>

Given this summary of some of the important points involved in Peirce's theory of the self, we can see the way insights from what we find in proper names can contribute to Peirce's notion of the person. Peirce's sense of an "inward force of identity," as cited earlier, does indeed seem to assume a theory of the individual. But, the individual for Peirce is not a static and straightforward metaphysical entity about which we can say that there is a singular correct description. Also, for Peirce, proper names are conventional and of a general type, not propositional, not particular, not so simple. Peirce's notion of the person, therefore, lends itself to the popular evolutionary notions of continuity and change. As Parker notes, there was an "'immense sensation' that the theory [of evolution] created among [Peirce's] circle."<sup>44</sup> The person is something or someone we know by acquaintance, and through a multitude of complex and diverse signs which then come to be habituated on second and further meetings. While a great deal more can be said for Peirce's notion of the person, I hope at least to have shown some elements of what can be gleaned regarding this notion in his semiotic categorizations of proper names.

### *Conclusion*

With this essay, I have attempted to show that Peirce's theory of proper names can help us to think anew about problems passed down from the history of philosophy, as well as contemporary social and political concerns we have come to face. Peirce's theory is more complex than Brock's account reveals. And, we can draw out implications of his semiotic categorizations of proper names in a variety of ways. As such, Peirce's theory is fertile for further examination.

Proper names change, as do persons. Both are conventional, based on habits of action and of operational utility. The regular patterns of behavior to which proper names point require a sign that suits the continuity which a person exhibits. Given this examination of Peirce's semiotic consideration of proper names, we see that persons, like

proper names, are changing, conventional objects which we know, in part, non-propositionally through their law-like, habitual behavior.

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## NOTES

1. Colapietro (1989).
2. I add this last clause because a sign can be of several sorts, since classes of them often overlap.

3. Boersema (2002) and (2005), Pape (1982), and Thibaud (1987).
4. Boersema (2005), p. 167.
5. Ibid, p. 168.
6. Ibid, p. 170.
7. Ibid, p. 171. Boersema explains that Eco accepts this view as P.F. Strawson advanced it.
8. Brock (1997) and DiLeo (1997).
9. Brock (1997), p. 569.
10. Why must a person not be a collection of habits, of tendencies of behavior? The case of the plea of temporary insanity appears to be based on just such a view, given that the troubling behavior is such an extreme aberration from the norm we identify with the person in question.
11. Colapietro (1989), p. 12. I am indebted to Colapietro for pointing me to a number of relevant passages in Peirce's corpus which focus on my present topic.
12. Colapietro (1989), p. 5.
13. CP 2.242.
14. CP 2.243.
15. CP 2.246. I am grateful to a reviewer for pointing out that the Legisign—Replica distinction is equivalent to the Type–Token distinction that Peirce introduces elsewhere.
16. Referring to the Aristotelian notion of substance, or to Kant's noumenal realm.
17. CP 2.243.
18. CP 2.245.
19. Peirce refers to Phillip of Macedon as drunk and as sober, meaning two different Phillips. See CP 1.494.
20. CP 2.248.
21. See CP 2.249 where Peirce makes this claim.
22. The subject of name changing and conventions regarding gender are not my focus here, but they are deeply important ones.
23. See Thibaud (1987), which offers an in-depth examination of Peirce's theory of "Proper Names and Individuation" for more on this subject.
24. CP 3.460.
25. See Plutarch's *Theseus*.
26. More exactly, Plutarch mentions the philosophers' debate over the identity of a ship whose parts change. Is it the same ship when we replace parts? In time, philosophers have also come to focus on the question of what would happen if we were to replace *all* the parts of a ship, and then put all the old parts back together. Then, we have two ships made of parts that all have been elements of what we called the one ship of Theseus.
27. CP 2.250.
28. CP 2.252.
29. I am grateful to a reviewer for pointing out that if we say that the characters of the object which a Rheme represents are propositional, they are extremely thin, and that in pure cases, Rhemes are signs of non-propositional quality only.
30. CP 2.254.
31. This is a phrase that William James used in reference to what Dewey debunked, on James's account. See Skrupleki and Berkeley (1998–2001). The passage I have in mind is in volume 11, 1905–1908, p. 197.

32. CP 2.337.

33. On this matter, DiLeo (1997) correctly distinguishes Peirce's account here from what Bertrand Russell would say. According to Russell, DiLeo claims, the sentence "*x* is wise" is true in some cases and false in others, depending upon the substitution value of *x*. I believe Peirce would reply that precisely because a substitution would be needed, the sentence on its own, "*x* is wise" is neither true nor false. Only once *filled in* would the subsequent, non-equivalent sentence be true or false. DiLeo makes this point on page 581.

34. CP 2.329. It is here that Brock missed an important insight. Peirce does not claim that proper names are always the same kind of sign—rhematic indexical legisigns. They can be icons and symbols as well when referred to apart from the percepts of meeting the individual and on second and subsequent meetings.

35. Ryle (1990), pp. 21–46.

36. Merleau-Ponty (1962), p. 177–178. I am indebted to Mark Tschaepe (2003) for pointing out this passage in his article, p. 73.

37. Parker (1998), p. 126.

38. Ibid.

39. Squires (2000), p. 1.

40. CP 3.613.

41. Colapietro (1989), p. 81.

42. Bentham (1987), p. 53.

43. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this paper for the clarification that for Peirce a person is *primarily* a mind. Without this added clarification, this passage could be misleading. Peirce would surely associate a body with a person, but not reductively. As the reviewer pointed out, a person is *more* than a body, more than a thing.

44. Parker (1998), p. 15.