

## The Peculiar Place of Virtue in Peirce's Philosophy

To erect a philosophical edifice that shall outlast the vicissitudes of time, my care must be, not so much to set each brick with nicest accuracy, as to lay the foundations deep and massive. Aristotle builded upon a few deliberately chosen concepts -- such as matter and form, act and power -- very broad, and in their outlines vague and rough, but solid, unshakable, and not easily undermined...  
(CP 1.1)

The undertaking which this volume inaugurates is to make a philosophy like that of Aristotle, that is to say, to outline a theory so comprehensive that, for a long time to come, the entire work of human reason, in philosophy of every school and kind, in mathematics, in psychology, in physical science, in history, in sociology, and in whatever other department there may be, shall appear as the filling up of its details. The first step toward this is to find simple concepts applicable to every subject.  
(CP 1.1)

I stand before you an Aristotelian and a scientific man...  
(CP 1.618)<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In this project, I investigate a sense in which Peirce seems like a rather lousy Aristotelian – that is, with respect to his engagement with virtue. *Habit* is everywhere in Peirce's philosophy; by comparison, *virtue* appears to hold a peculiar place – that is, practically no place at all. While my approach here is largely exploratory – and quite open to expert redirection – I offer the following two suggestions:

The sense in which Peirce is an Aristotelian shines through in the methodology and manner of his ethics.

The apparent absence of virtue in Peirce's writings is an appearance that belies the reality.

### Plan

Consider those remarks that Peirce actually does make about virtue.

Consider how they fit with what Peirce has to say about ethics.

Consider candidates for virtue, drawing on Peirce's thought along with the interpretations and extensions of Peirce scholars.

### The "Data Set"

Available at my website – dianaheney.com – under "Conferences &c." Tab.

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<sup>1</sup> The Peirce scholar, of course, knows the rest: "condemning with the whole strength of conviction the Hellenic tendency to mingle philosophy and practice". I shall let that part rest aside for now.

### Virtue in the *Collected Papers*

- i. Invocation of "higher virtues", a "true elevation of soul", "we can perceive that good reason and good morals are closely aligned"(CP 1.576)
- ii. Reference to "such virtues as intellectual honesty and sincerity and a real love of truth", and the "higher moral conceptions" (CP 2.82)
- iii. "[V]irtue and an orange have nothing in common"(CP 2.518)
- iv. Discussion of heroism, wider interests, possibility of self-sacrifice, logicity, in some cases "we can only imitate the virtue"(CP 2.654)
- v. In discussion of William James: "...and with him this was but one of a whole diadem of virtues". (CP 6.184)
- vi. Discussion of comprehension as a virtue and of virtue as something that can be taught. (CP 7.250-251)
- vii. "The greatness of the human mind lies in its ability to discover truth notwithstanding its not having Instincts strong enough to exempt it from error"; described as a virtue. (CP 7.380)
- viii. Exemplifying a virtue: "truth is truth, whether it is opposed to the interests of society to admit it or not", adds "I must confess that I belong to the class of scallawags who purpose, with God's help, to look the truth in the face, whether doing so be conducive to the interests of society or not." (CP 8.143)
- ix. "[M]oral virtue", attributed to Wundt - the virtue in question is the "genuine anxiety to correct the opinions which he at times entertains, and to cast away the most brilliant theories the instant the dicta of experience seem to be against them", contrasts against the vice of "littleness". (CP 8.200-201)

### Candidates for Virtue

#### Self-Control:

Atkins (2016), Bergman (2012), Colapietro (1989), de Waal (2012), Lane (2009), Liszka (2012), Liszka (2021), Masecar (2016), Olesky (2012), Pape (2012), Pietarinen (2012), Redondo (2013), Howat (2018)

#### Concrete Reasonableness:

Atkins (2016), Aydin (2009), Bergman (2012), Colapietro (2012), Liszka (2012), Liszka (2021), Masecar (2016), Mayorga (2012), Redondo (2012)