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Recensione

R. K. Atkins, *Charles S. Peirce's Phenomenology: Analysis and Consciousness*

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Widely known among philosophers as one of the most important founding fathers of pragmatism, C. S. Peirce is not equally known as an intellectual whose work was permeated by phenomenological reflections. In other words, compared to his profound contributions in other areas – logic, semiotics and epistemology, to name but a few –, the phenomenological dimension of Peirce's thought has not actually received all the attention it deserves; indeed, only one monograph has appeared on the topic – William L. Rosensohn's *The Phenomenology of Charles S. Peirce: From the Doctrine of Categories to Phaneroscopy*, edited by B. R. Grüner – and that appeared in 1974.

What explanations can be given of this neglect? Firstly, there has been a tendency among some Peirce scholars to take a simplistic view of his phenomenology, one that minimizes the scope and the significance of such investigations in favor of his work in semiotics. Secondly, as a result of this, Peirce's phenomenology has been mostly used as a stepping stone to his considerations on semiotics, pragmatism and metaphysics, to grasp the evolutionary nature of which the phenomenological categories can be of great use. In fact, this lack of interest has proved itself to be very unfortunate because, though what Peirce wrote about logic, semiotics and metaphysics is intricately linked to his phenomenological ideas, he developed phenomenology as a distinct science to «unravel the tangled skein [of] all that in any sense appears and wind it into distinct forms» (Peirce, 1902: CP 1.280). In this regard, Richard K. Atkins' new book – *Charles S. Peirce's phenomenology: Analysis and Consciousness*, edited by Oxford University Press – sheds light on Peirce's phenomenological thinking and undoubtedly ameliorates the above-mentioned situation by focusing exclusively on phenomenology insofar as Peirce himself was able to develop it during his life.

The book consists of seven authoritative, well argued chapters written in a very understandable style; in fact, Atkins has the clarity of thought that comes from a flawless expertise in Peirce's work and this allows him to offer crystal-clear explanations of the philosopher's account. The first three chapters present those developments in Peirce's logic and philosophy that led him to his distinctive work in phenomenology, while the remaining four explain Peirce's mature phenomenology with respect to the aim and object of the science, the method of investigation and the results obtained, and show how his work can be used to develop an anti-Lockean objective phenomenological vocabulary that is also relevant for present issues.

More precisely, the story Atkins tells us begins with the description of the crucial philosophical influence that Kant had on the young Peirce; indeed, from his earliest work to his recognition of phenomenology as a distinct science, Peirce embraced the Kantian view that the metaphysical categories somehow correspond to the forms of propositions or judgments. Nonetheless, being a devout student of logic, he found that Kant's table was inadequate for several reasons. In this respect, Chapter 1 shows why Peirce «is sharply critical of Kant's table of judgments and of Kant's treatment of the table as a table of judgments rather than of propositions» (p. 9). But the examination of Kant's influence is just the beginning of Atkins' intriguing story. In Chapter 2, the author turns to Peirce's renowned article "On a New List of Categories" – first delivered as a lecture in 1867 –, which several Peirce scholars have regarded as the keystone to his mature phenomenology. In that early essay, «Aristotle's analysis of the proposition and Peirce's discovery of three specific functions of the copula result in his identification of quality, relation and representation as the three categories» (p. 28). Nevertheless, as Atkins convincingly argues, Peirce's mature theory of propositions required him to abandon the argument of the above-mentioned article. Consequently, Chapter 3 illustrates Peirce's diagrammatic logic, which is at the hearth of his proof that any *n*-adic propositional forms – where *n* is a natural number greater than three – can be reduced to sets of triadic propositional forms; actually, he takes this line of thought to establish a new table of the most basic sorts of propositional forms as being monadic, dyadic, or triadic, and these become the formal, logical categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness. In wider terms, because of Atkins' didactic approach, the first three chapters can be considered potentially helpful to introduce Peirce's complex logic system.

Having laid the groundwork for it in the previous chapters, Chapter 4 deals with Peirce's mature phenomenology. What Atkins tells us is that Peirce first recognized a science of phenomenology in 1902, but then in 1904 changed its name to phaneroscopy motivated by a desire for terminological exactness. Therefore, after «rejecting "phenomena", "pure experience", and "idea" as appropriate words for the object of phenomenological investigation, Peirce [settled] on "phaneron"» (p. 73), also changing the suffix from "-logy" to "-scopy" to indicate that such a science is primarily observational. In other words, the aim of this chapter is to trace why Peirce rejected his earlier terminology. Then, in

Chapter 5, Atkins thoroughly examines Peirce's account of phenomenological investigation, arguing that the analysis of the "phaneron" involves observing the "phaneron" itself and describing it in judgments. Furthermore, he adds that such an analysis involves both logical analysis and inspective analysis, and he endeavors to give an account of both of these and the roles they play in Peirce's phenomenological isolation of the categories. As Atkins himself puts it, «of particular importance to Peirce's phenomenology is analysis, especially the varieties of analysis, what they involve, and how they bear on the isolation of the phenomenological categories» (p. 106). In relation to this matter, after hinting at much with respect to the phenomenological correspondents of Peirce's formal and logical categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness in the previous chapter, Chapter 6 first provides an overview of the categories and then chronologically presents the developments in Peirce's thinking about these categories.

Although it may seem that Peirce's work is merely an arcane philosophical exercise, Chapter 7 denies such an unsophisticated hypothesis and «can help us develop an objective phenomenological vocabulary as an aid to philosophical and scientific investigation» (p. 204); indeed, Atkins puts Peirce's analysis of firstness and secondness to work by showing that they enable us to develop an objective phenomenological vocabulary to describe how seeing a scarlet red is like hearing a trumpet's blare. To put it otherwise, what is the payoff of Peirce's phenomenology, which has been explained, developed, and defended in detail by Atkins throughout this fascinating book? In this regard, to truly and fully appreciate the value of Peirce's work, it is precisely necessary to think about whether seeing a scarlet red is like hearing the blare of a trumpet or not. Such a question, as Atkins writes, «is typically met with derisive and mocking replies» (p. 1). In his 1974 celebrated paper "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?", Thomas Nagel complains that «loose intermodal analogies – for example, "Red is like the sound of a trumpet" – […] are of little use» (Nagel, 1974: p. 449) to describe the subjective character of experiences in a form comprehensible to beings incapable having those experiences. Curiously, Nagel's attitude echoes that of John Locke's criticism of a man born blind who claims that scarlet is like the sound of a trumpet. In fact, if Locke is correct that sensations are simple ideas, unanalyzable and completely determinate, then his derisiveness toward the above-mentioned claim is fully warranted.

But Locke, in Peirce's opinion, is not correct; indeed, taking the view opposite to Locke and arguing for that in his 1868 essay titled "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities", Peirce maintains that no ideas whatsoever are both unanalyzable and completely determinate. As he puts it in a lecture from 1877, «we have no pure sensations, but only sensational elements of thought, [and the difference between two sensations] cannot be fully represented by any general description» (Peirce, 1877: W 3: 235). So it follows that there must be, for example, some relation between blue and red, and some general respect in which they differ. As Peirce continues, drawing his audience's attention to

a sampling of colored ribbons, «a red and green can be compared in intensity with a considerable degree of accuracy [and] you can all see that red is darker than the blue and that the blue is darker than the red» (Peirce, 1877: W 3: 236). Therefore, according to Peirce, it is not true that there are ultimate sensations without any general relations between them, although he is totally aware that the differences between different sensations can never be completely covered by a general description. In other words, while it is not possible to fully represent sensations with a general description, it is possible to describe respects in which they are similar and different. As Atkins says, «the sound of a canon is more intense than the brightness six magnitude star, and the light of the sun is more intense than the sound of a falling pin» (p. 205).

Finally, thinking again of Locke's criticism of a man born blind who claims that scarlet is like the sound of a trumpet, Atkins asks whether we can describe to a man born blind what it is like to see color. In this regard, if Peirce's phenomenological work is correct, we can develop a vocabulary that describes the similar characteristics between auditory and visual perceptual experiences. Obviously, we will never impart the total qualitative character of a visual experience to a person born blind; as Atkins puts it, «it should be clear […] that a description of the structural isomorphism between seeing a scarlet red and hearing a trumpet's blare will not amount to the reddyness of red or to the trumpetyness of a trumpet» (p. 206). To put it otherwhise, the present task is to identify how these two experiences are alike in their form or structure. The book concludes with Atkins' discussion on how contemporary studies on synaesthesia provide an incentive to adopt Peirce's account of consciousness.

In summary, this book is certainly a much-needed compendium of Peirce's phenomenological reflections, a dimension of his systematic thought which has unfortunately received little scholarly attention. Furthermore, Atkins' meticulously researched work is a detailed and critical account of Peirce's phenomenology and its decades-long development, and this certainly makes it one of the most important contributions to Peirce scolarship this decade. In conclusion, one of the greatest merits of Atkins' book is that it offers us a very deep vision of Peirce's phenomenology – a vision that anyone seeking insight into the development of his phenomenological reflections should have to attend.

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