

SEMIOTICS: PEIRCE AND THE MODERN SPIRIT

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

[FALL 2022]



DESCRIPTION

Beginning with the early papers of his “Cognition Series” (1868-1869) attacking the spirit of Cartesianism, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) remained a severe critic of modern philosophy throughout his life. His critique was a radical one, reaching to fundamental categories of being and experience and heavily informed by his reading of the history of philosophy and the Latin scholastics. Peirce was not only a philosopher but also a working scientist of note, a unique figure whose thought brings together pre-modern metaphysical insights, the progress of the positive sciences freed from the narrowness of modern presuppositions, and the promise of a new, postmodern age of human understanding founded upon treasures both old and new, including the re-founded discipline of semiotics, the “science of signs”.



This seminar is intended as a (partial!) introduction to the figure and thought of Peirce for those who are unfamiliar with him. It will be organized largely around the connected pillars of modern thought that Peirce criticized and to which his own thought is a reply.

METHOD

The seminar is 8 weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion session each week. Each discussion session is structured around a reading from Peirce, occasionally supplemented by brief readings from other sources. Participants are expected to have read the assigned reading and listened to the lecture (in whichever order they prefer) prior to the session, so that they may engage in a semi-structured discussion directed and moderated by the instructor.

Though introductory as regards the figure of Peirce, it is of the nature of this type of seminar that one *cannot* participate well without a *deep engagement* with the assigned reading. Moreover, *continual discussion* will foster that participation and engagement throughout the week. Participants will be expected to partake in these discussions on a regular basis and will be challenged to do so directly.

READING

The assigned readings from Peirce for this seminar are all to be found in *The Essential Peirce*, Volume 1, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel; and *The Essential Peirce*, Volume 2, ed. The Peirce Edition Project. Seminar participants are expected to purchase the two paperback volumes, which are inexpensive and available from Amazon and other online sellers. Any other supplemental readings will be supplied by the instructor. Note also that **particular reading assignments are subject to change**.

LECTURE

Each week there will also be a 20-40+ minute audio lecture, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also stray into related topics, or may use the reading as a launching point for addressing some related issue (perhaps one more general, or perhaps one more specific). The primary (but not sole) purpose of these lectures is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments contained within the reading, as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions.

There *may* be accompanying visual aids (not necessarily) in order to provide some clarity as to textual points, but one *should* be able, in most cases, to simply listen to the lecture (and perhaps consult the visual aids later). This should allow more flexibility: making the lectures suitable accompaniment for a commute, while doing chores, going for a run, etc.

DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (**Saturdays at 10:00-11:00am ET**): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going conversations in the Teams channel—are brought into explicit conversation. This allows us to attempt a concerted effort at bringing resolution to our difficulties, and—failing such a resolution—to direct our inquiry further.

Each discussion session will begin with a brief synopsis of the week’s material and a focusing on whichever aspects of that material seem most pressing. Beyond the direction provided by the instructor, participants are encouraged to bring their own concerns explicitly into view and to engage with the instructor and one another in civil debate and collective inquiry.

AUDITS OR COMPLETES

Beginning in 2022, all Lyceum Institute seminar participants will be able to either *audit* the seminar or *complete* the seminar. To complete the seminar, the participant **must** submit an essay of 2000+ words pertaining to the subject. This essay may be evaluated for publication in *Reality* and will be included in each Lyceum Institute member’s profile, along with the mark of auditing or completing.

SESSION SCHEDULE

September 24	Introduction Lecture: “Descartes and the Modern Spirit” Required Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renee Descartes, <i>Discourse on Method</i> (selection)• Renee Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> (selection)• Walker Percy, “The Fateful Rift: The San Andreas Fault in the Modern Mind” Recommended Listening:
-----------------	---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kanzelberger, K., “Mending the Cartesian Rift: Walker Percy on Being Human” (2020 Lyceum Institute Colloquium lecture audio recording)
October 1	<p>“All Thought is in Signs” Lecture: From Intuitionism to Semiosis Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man (EP vol. 1, item 2) • Some Consequences of Four Incapacities (EP vol. 1, item 2) (selections TBD)
October 7	<p>“Beliefs... Caused by Nothing Human” Lecture: From Rationalism to the Pragmatic Maxim Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Fixation of Belief (EP vol. 1, item 7) • How to Make Our Ideas Clear (EP vol. 1, item 8)
October 14	<p>“Tychism” Lecture: Guessing the Riddle (Part I) Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Architecture of Theories (EP vol. 1, item 21) • The Doctrine of Necessity Examined (EP vol. 1, item 22) <p>Optional Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A Reply to the Necessitarians” (<i>Collected Papers</i>, vol. 6, 588-618)
	BREAK
October 28	<p>“Synechism; Agapism” Lecture: Guessing the Riddle (Part II) Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Law of Mind (EP vol. 1, item 23) • Man’s Glassy Essence (EP vol. 1, item 24) • Evolutionary Love (EP vol. 1, item 25)
November 5	<p>“If There is Any Goddess of Nonsense, This Must Be Her Haunt” Lecture: Peirce on the Denial of Final Causality Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Science and Natural Classes (EP vol. 2, item 9)
November 12	<p>“Signs and States of Mind” Lecture: The Science of Signs (Part I) Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Is a Sign? (EP vol. 2, item 2) • Of Reasoning in General (EP vol. 2, item 3)
November 19	<p>“Signs and the Three Universal Categories” Lecture: The Science of Signs (Part II) Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sundry Logical Conceptions (EP vol. 2, item 20) • Excerpts from Letters to William James (EP vol. 2, item 33)