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Charles S. Peirce and the Philosophy of Science: Papers from the Harvard Sesquicentennial Congress

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Interest in Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) is today worldwide. Ernest Nagel of Columbia University wrote in 1959 that "there is a fair consensus among historians of ideas that Charles Sanders Peirce remains the most original, versatile, and comprehensive philosophical mind this country has yet produced." The breadth of topics discussed in the present volume suggests that this is as true today as it was in 1959.

Papers concerning Peirce's philosophy of science were given at the Harvard Congress by representatives from Italy, France, Sweden, Finland, Korea, India, Denmark, Greece, Brazil, Belgium, Spain, Germany, and the United States. The Charles S. Peirce Sesquicentennial International Congress opened at Harvard University on September 5, 1989, and concluded on the 10th—Peirce's birthday. The Congress was host to approximately 450 scholars from 26 different nations. The present volume is a compilation of selected papers presented at that Congress.

The philosophy of science and its logic are themes in the work of Charles Peirce that have been of greatest interest to scholars. Peirce was himself a physical scientist. He worked as an assistant at the Harvard Astronomical Observatory from 1869 to 1872 and made a series of astronomical observations there from 1872 to 1875. Solon I. Bailey says of these observations, "The first attempt at the Harvard Observatory to determine the form of the Milky Way, or the galactic system, was made by Charles S. Peirce....The investigation was of a pioneer nature, founded on scant data."

Peirce also made major contributions in fields as diverse as mathematical logic and psychology. C. I. Lewis has remarked that "the head and font of mathematical logic are found in the calculus of propositional functions as developed by Peirce and Schroeder." Peirce subsequently invented, almost from whole cloth, semiotics - the science of the meaning of signs. Ogden and Richards, the British critics, say that "by far the most elaborate and determined attempt to give an account of signs and their meanings is that of the American logician C. S. Peirce, from whom William James took the idea and the term Pragmatism, and whose Algebra of Dyadic Relations was developed by Schroeder."

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