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- Abstract:** The aim of this article is to address the problem of what is usually called “self-consciousness” by studying Charles S. Peirce’s semeiotic treatment of self-referential statements. Peirce believes that an adequate study of the mind requires “to reduce all mental action,” including “self-consciousness,” “to the formula of valid reasoning” (W 2:214, EP 1:30, 5:267, 1868) and its semeiotic nature. While Peirce makes frequent use of the notion of “consciousness,” he is at the same time distant from the understanding of the “conscious mind” that Descartes invented and made canonical (e.g., W 1:491, 1866), and which from the modern epoch stretches out to the contemporary discussion on, as David Chalmers put it, the “hard problem” of the mind. In what follows, I argue that Peirce puts forth a powerful theory of self-consciousness based on his semeiotic understanding of self-reference and indexicality. To the question, “How can we elucidate the phenomenon of self-consciousness?”, we should answer, with Peirce, “What we call self-consciousness corresponds to the practice of narratives and descriptions ultimately based on indexical self-referential statements, which are in turn rooted in very specific dimensions of human experience.” It is also important to underscore from the outset that the problem of indexical self-reference cannot be separated from Peirce’s concept of experience, which is one of the most interesting insights of Peirce’s philosophy and classical American pragmatism. In particular, it will be essential to see what are the experiential-perceptual conditions under which indexical self-referential statements can work as such.
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