Research Articles

Truth and Semiotic Phenomenology

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Abstract

Truth is the core issue of any theory of meaning, and the pursuit of truth is the fundamental driving force of human consciousness. Is the appearance of truth true? In what sense is it truth? How do we obtain truth? Can a final truth be obtained? These are among the most difficult questions to answer in the theory of meaning and the best divergence points in various meaning theories. Peirce's semiotic phenomenology puts forward a view of truth that can be grasped clearly but is nevertheless complex and different from pragmatism. First, meaning activity is the pursuit of truth. Second, no semiotic representation can be totally untrue or completely true. Third, to access truth there must be an accumulation of semiotic activities until the consensus of a community is reached, called a 'communitarian truth'. Fourth, since the community has no boundaries, the infinite derivative of symbolic text can gradually approach the ideal truth.

Keywords

truth – theory of meaning – community – semiotics

1 The Status of Peirce's View of Truth

Any theory of meaning must have truth as its core proposition. It is impossible for a person pursuing the intentionality of meaning to accept a meaning that is knowingly false. Consciousness only accepts the meaning given to it where it 'appears to be true'; otherwise the meaning process cannot be completed.

Gadamer (1986) discusses Schleiermacher's so-called 'putting himself in the author's heart' to explain Schleiermacher's cycle of understanding objects. This kind of self-insertion does not really put our own views into the object of understanding, but puts ourselves into the opinions of the understanding object; that is, the self disappears into the opinions of the understanding object. That is to say, we try to admit the truth of what others say.

Whether this manifestation of 'truth' is true or not, in what sense it is true, how we obtain the truth and, ultimately, whether absolute truth can be obtained at all are the most difficult problems in the theory of meaning. This is why the theory of meaning is so complicated. Once these questions are asked, the consciousness of pursuing meaning becomes self-conscious, and then becomes the consciousness of inquiry. It is for this reason that the issue of truth discussed in this article is implemented on the consciousness of 'the community of inquiry'.

Husserl believes that philosophy should be an 'eidetic science', which yields knowledge that has 'eidetic necessity'; that is, knowledge that is universally and apodictically true (Husserl, 1998: 14). Peirce believes that confirming the truth is the goal that people must pursue. Although the truth may not be achievable, it must be understood as the principle of penetrating meaning activities. The inquiry should be guided by the hope that there is a correct answer to every question. If anyone denies the existence of truth, 'reasoning and thought would be without a purpose' (CP 2.135).¹ 'Human opinion universally tends in the long run to a definite form, which is the truth. There is, then, to every question a true answer, a final conclusion, to which the opinion of every man is constantly gravitating' (CP 8.12). This position should be self-evident because if the exploration of meaning does not consider the truth at all, or thinks that this issue cannot be discussed, true and false are essentially indistinguishable; that is, the most basic standpoint of meaning is cancelled, and the connection between subjective and objective is severed. Meaning is the fundamental link that determines the subjective and objective relationship:

1 Here 'CP' in the citation (CP:2.135) refers to *Collective Papers* (Peirce, 1931–1958), '2' stands for volume 2 and '135' refers to paragraph 135. All the materials from *Collective Papers* will be cited in this way (CP: Volume, Paragraph), which is a standard way of the Peircian academia.

'Meaning is constructed from the object by the activity of gaining the meaning of consciousness, which in turn enables the subject of consciousness exist in the world. Therefore, meaning is the relationship between the subjective and the objective' (Y. Zhao, 2015: 129).² If meaning cannot discuss what is true and what is false, meaning cannot find a foothold; at the same time, the subjective and the objective lose their form. The entire world of meaning will then collapse.

Before going further, we must first clarify our terms. Although truth or verity in Western languages can be translated as 'truth' (*zhen li*) or 'true face' (*zhen xiang*), in most cases the objects discussed by thinkers in the theory of meaning are not actually 'truth',³ nor 'truth face',⁴ nor even 'fact'.⁵ This semantic entanglement is at least part of the reason for the entanglement of various theories. Thus, this article must be cautious with terminology. In the discussion and translation of Chinese scholars, most people use the word 'truth', which is too serious. The reason may be that the meaning of truth (or the adjective true) in Western languages is originally too complicated, and carries with it concepts of 'truth', 'true face', and 'fact', which are discussed separately in Chinese. However, the separate discussion does not give a clear explanation to truth. On the contrary, it makes it more complicated. Perhaps it is most appropriate for Chinese to translate 'truth' with only one word: 真 *zhen*, but modern Chinese has to use a two-syllable word.

We believe that, at least when discussing the meaning theory of semiotic phenomenology, we are basically talking about 'truth' ('true cognition', i.e. the meaning acquired by consciousness or the accepted cognition is true). This article uses 真知 *zhen zhi* as the translation of 'truth' – not to exclude 'truth', 'true face', 'fact', and other meanings of truth, but to focus on the 'truth' character of cognition or expression. This character can lead to a further truth (objective law) or true face (thing's essence). But truth itself is limited to describing the cognitive character acquired by consciousness.

The possibility of truth, the definition of truth, and the way to obtain it become the main distinguishing marks of various schools of thought. Many people think that what is discussed in logic or semiotics is only the way to obtain truth, and that it is an epistemological issue, rather than discussing the 'truth view' itself, that is, the ontology itself. This is, for example, how Russell

2 All translations are the authors unless otherwise stated.

3 The *Ancient and Modern Chinese Dictionary* (AMCD) refers to 'truth' as 'the reflection of the laws of objective things in the human mind'.

4 The AMCD refers to 'true face' as 'the original or true face of things'.

5 In this way 'truth' is equated with objective reality.

criticized Peirce. But only by knowing what is 'truth' can we find a way to gain truth. Truth is not only a problem of epistemology (a problem of cognition); it is also a problem of ontology: non-real existence and non-real concepts are contradictory. Peirce makes a clear statement on this: 'It is the requirement that that which is necessarily true (if there be any truth) shall be a part of the existential fact, and not merely of thought' (CP 1.489).

Since antiquity many schools have denied the possibility of acquiring or expressing truth; in modern times, by contrast, there are many such claims. Doubt is a good starting point to explore meaning, but excessive suspicion, excessive relative opposition, and completely denying the possibility of approaching truth will cause the pursuit of meaning to lose its purpose and fail from the off, thereby making meaning itself fail. On the other hand, since Descartes and others had full confidence in truth, they believed that reason cannot be wrong. Descartes (1998: 83) pointed out: 'No error is to be found in the intellect when properly viewed in this manner.' Recognizing the difficulty of the issue of truth, but not completely denying the possibility of approaching truth, may be a more appropriate view, because this route has the possibility of obtaining truth, while allowing the complexity and uncertainty of truth itself.

Charles Sanders Peirce, the founder of semiotic phenomenology, pursued the possibility of truth along this line. Peirce explored various issues of truth throughout his life, and his view of truth can be called the convergence theory of truth. The kind of truth he discussed can be called communitarian truth. Many people have translated the word 'community' as 共同体 *gong tong ti*, which may be too political. In fact, Peirce says that the 'community' is a social group, and he means that the truth is the result of the 'unanimous consent of the community'. Peirce is often regarded as one of the three founders of pragmatism. The issue of truth is the core issue of pragmatism. But Peirce's view of truth is very different from that of his friend William James or his student John Dewey. The latter two, perhaps out of respect for this lifelong and obscure predecessor or perhaps just out of politeness, seized every opportunity to describe Peirce as the founder of pragmatism. However, many philosophical historians, for example Nicholas Rescher, believe that James is the true founder of pragmatism (Rescher, 2012: 12).

Indeed, James's and Dewey's pragmatism on truth is very clear: James (1909: 32) insists that 'The true, to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as the right is only the expedient in the way of our behaving'. Truth is needed only because this 'expedient' is useful. Dewey insists on the instrumentalist position, and believes that the validity of use is truth, so the truth is only 'validity' and is a means, not a goal. All three advocate plural truth or pluralism of truth. They understand truth as a convenient tool for

dealing with the environment and the world, and thus their theories are all genuinely pragmatic.

Admittedly, Peirce's view of truth, like his other theories, is quite confusing. Peirce's academic career spanned more than half a century, but he only published a book on optical measurement. A large number of his theoretical explorations only exist, in a rather disordered manner, in notes, letters, drafts, and individual articles. Inconsistencies are thus inevitable. At times he seemed to think that truth is an insignificant concept; for example, 'The very opinion entertained by those who deny that there is any Truth, in the sense defined, is cognition' (CP 2.138). He even quipped that this was not necessarily a discussion of philosophy, but of English lexicology. Moreover, 'satisfaction' comes from a belief that, once acquired, 'we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true or false' (CP 5.375). Since belief can be equated with truth, the view that a belief is correct is merely a trick of homonym.

If this is Peirce's consistent thought, he is more pragmatic than James with his expediency theory. But his other extensive discussions about truth suggest that this is just him teasing us and is in fact not his view of truth at all. The truth advocated by Peirce is ambiguous, and some of his remarks suggest an approval of instrumentalism. After careful sorting, we find that Peirce has long insisted on the correspondence theory of truth and advocates 'community consensus', which is quite different from James's pragmatism and should not be confused with it. At least one thing must be admitted: Peirce's view of truth is far more complicated than the two real pioneers of pragmatism.

2 Semiotics and Truth

Peirce's attention to truth is a clear feature of his semiotic phenomenology. 'The purpose of signs – which is the purpose of thought – is to bring truth to expression' (CP 2.444). Although he believes that semiotics is not sure which is truth, semiotics focuses on the formal conditions for distinguishing truth. Peirce's semiotics and logic are closely integrated. Some theorists believe that his entire semiotic system is developed from logic, and it is a formalization of the way to infer truth (Zhang, 2014: 33). Although 'empirical science' such as physics and psychology can 'reveal' or 'verify' a truth in various ways, semiotics as a formal science does not pay much attention to what is true. This is the work of empirical science because formal science is concerned with determining the conditions of truth.

Semiotics focuses on the relationship between phenomena and truth. Since all thoughts and knowledge can only appear in symbols, the question of truth

actually focuses on the various formal conditions of symbols, including the means of communication and interpretation. Peirce proposes that a general semiotics treats 'not merely of truth, but also of the general conditions of signs being signs' (CP 1.444).

Therefore, the important feature of Peirce's semiotic system is to take truth as the solemn research goal. People who hold a superficial view think that formalism is incapable and unwilling to discuss the relationship between form and the real world and only cares about the self-justification of the text itself; that is, the so-called theory of coherence of truth. It is obvious that the truth cannot be entirely in form. The source of truth must go beyond the text. In forms of reasoning such as syllogism and other logical laws, when the major premise is wrong, the deductive conclusion is not good, and it can only be said that the process of logical deduction is not wrong. Heidegger carries out a deep study on the relationship between the two. He emphasizes the importance of conformity in the process of identifying truth. The real item, whether it is a real thing or a real proposition, is something that is matched and consistent. Here, the real thing and the truth mean conformity, and this conformity is correspondence in a dual sense: on the one hand, it is the conformity between the matter and the prior meaning of the matter; on the other hand, it is the conformity between the stated meaning and the matter. This so-called 'double conformity' means that the logic in the text is consistent, and the outside of the text is consistent with 'things'.

We should admit that most formalists try as much as possible not to discuss truth. For example, Umberto Eco (1976: 58–59) repeatedly and patiently emphasizes that semiotics is 'a theory of the lie'. He believes that the characteristic of symbolic representation is that symbols can be used to lie. Therefore, semiotics is the study of all things that can be used to lie. And 'the definition of lying theory should be regarded as a fairly complete procedure of general semiotics' (Eco, 1976: 58–59). Eco (*ibid.*) continues, 'Every time there is possibility of lying, there is a sign-function: which is to signify (and then to communicate) something to which no real state of things corresponds. A theory of codes must study everything that can be used in order to lie'. 'The possibility of lying is the proprium of semiosis just as (for the Schoolmen) the possibility of laughing was the proprium of Man as animal rationale'.

Eco has repeatedly emphasized this, and the sheer number of repetitions makes us pay attention to the fact that the symbol's ideology comprises a huge possibility of falsehood. In fact, Eco is not saying that symbols must lie but that it is unknowable whether symbols reflect truth. The reason is that 'If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth:

it cannot in fact be used “to tell” at all’ (Eco, 1976: 7). In fact, Eco’s proposition is that exploring truth is not the task of semiotics.

Similar to Eco’s lying theory is the concept of the ‘floating signifier’ proposed by the French symbolic anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1950, which means that the connotation of the signifier is empty and the designatum uncertain. It can make any interpretation of symbolic text. French scholar Jean Baudrillard, in his book *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, argues that the floating signifier concept has come to control all symbolic representation in modern consumer society: the signifier breaks away from the ancient obligation of referencing ‘to combine and replace other symbols’ with ‘arbitrary and uncertain’ (Baudrillard, 1988:166) and gets rid of the fetters of truth.

Heidegger’s definition of truth is more complicated. To say that an assertion ‘is true’ signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself. Such an assertion ‘lets’ the entity ‘be seen’ in its uncoveredness (Heidegger, 2008: 259). This is of course correct. But from this, he moves towards relativism, and asserts that ‘[t]ruth, i.e., true being, i.e., what is constant and fixed, because it is the petrifying of any single given perspective, is always only an apparentness that has come to prevail, which is to say, it is always error’ (Heidegger, 1991: 214). This may be the most mysterious relativism. It should be said that this view has a direct impact on the nihilism that pervades various forms of postmodernism. For example, in Foucault’s view of discourse power truth is nothing but the language of power. And let us recall Baudrillard’s famous sentence: “truth is just concealing the absence of truth” (1988: 166).

Peirce categorically believes that the most basic motivation for the unfolding of symbols is not a game of expression, but the closeness between the mind and the truth. After all, symbols are used to express meaning, and meaning must be true or false, although the meaning expressed by symbols may be false, and it can even be said that truth cannot be expressed. However, the original purpose of consciousness’s pursuit of meaning is to find truth and that the attainment of truth is a prerequisite for the human pursuit of meaning itself. It is a contradiction to say that consciousness intentionally seeks untruth in its pursuit of meaning.

Peirce’s description of the truth of symbols is almost poetic praise: the purpose of symbols is to express facts. They connect themselves with other symbols, doing their best to bring the item of explanation approximate to the complete truth or absolute truth; that is, every field is close to truth. The ‘entelchy’ of the existing world means that every part of the world is made up of symbols (X. Zhao, 2014: 56). This obsession with truth makes Peirce’s semiotics look very different from the denial of truth of various so-called postmodern

theories (including postmodern semiotics). There is a huge difference between them. This is the reason why we must insist on returning to Peirce's theory today. After all, we cannot do without the pursuit of truth, and it is impossible for a theory of meaning to refuse to discuss ways of seeking truth.

Among the various views of truth, Peirce's view of truth belongs to the theory of correspondence. In other words, the fundamental character of truth is consistent with the facts. This view is often referred to as the 'Platonic view of truth'. Radical modern thinkers including Heidegger surely disagree with this theory of correspondence. It seems that there are many arguments about truth, among which the theory of correspondence argues that if a cognizant statement is truth, it should be consistent with the facts. It can get rid of personal prejudice and social prejudice, which should be a natural starting point for thinking.

In this regard, Peirce is very different from both pragmatism and even 'new pragmatism'. Richard Rorty sharply points out that pragmatism does not require truth. He advocates the use of the 'usefulness-uselessness' distinction of the pragmatic truth view to replace the old 'phenomenon-reality' distinction of the 'theory of correspondence'. In terms of the tide of intellectual history (including pragmatism) in the early twentieth century, Peirce's theory of truth is quite out of date, but it does demonstrate his courage in sticking to his position.

3 Truth is the Basic Structure of Symbols

Peirce's theory of correspondence is much more complicated than the traditional common-sense view of theory of correspondence. Peirce defines reality as the object of the correct view to avoid the loop trap that the theory of correspondence usually steps into. Therefore, the question becomes: what is the right way to pursue truth? Peirce emphasized that the answer is the community and the scientific method. As a result, he steered clear of Descartes's personal intuition and came to a pragmatic position very different from James and Dewey.

In Peirce's view, true essence is consistent with the object, so the symbol can point to the object by relying on truth. In the simplest icon symbol, the 'icon' itself is true, and Peirce even points out repeatedly that there is no falsehood in iconicity, and there can be no 'false' iconicity, because iconicity is not the identity, and true identity is not iconicity. Besides, iconicity is true because it is one-sided. In this way, Peirce summarizes the situation comprehensively: it does not mean that the symbol will necessarily reflect the truth of the

object, but that the acquisition of the 'motivatedness' quality of the relationship between the symbol and the object is the process of pursuing truth. This sounds mysterious, but it's actually easy to understand with an example: when a child draws an apple, it is impossible to say that the painting expresses the 'truth' of apples, but since this portrait resembles an apple, then this similarity will not be false.

Peirce (1976: 82) explains that resemblance consists in a likeness, which is a sameness of predicates. Carried to the highest point, it would destroy itself by becoming identity. All real resemblance, therefore, has a limit. Once it is beyond the limit, there is no resemblance. Hence, resemblance is always partial truth. Again, Peirce's statement seems a bit mysterious, but it's actually quite accurate: a specific person can be represented by iconic symbols such as portraits, photos, wax figures, stuntmen, and so forth. The iconic part of these symbols is true, and whether the rest parts of these symbols are true is irrelevant to this question. But once 'iconicity rises to the highest point', the iconic symbol becomes the person themselves and no longer an icon symbol. Thus, if iconicity can become truth, it must be only partial truth.

If the situation is reversed, a symbol does not have an object, such as design, art, literature, music and so on. Does the icon symbol create the object (or objects)? If so, at what point? What is true in this case? Peirce explains: 'A recurrence is consistent with its object in the absence of essential iconicity; this recurrence is a symbol. I call the truth of this symbol veracity' (qtd. in X. Zhao, 2014: 133). For example, when a piece of furniture is designed using drawings or models, the symbol creates the object, because the object only needs to be designed with partial truth; the rest can be supplemented by imagination. Where the model is completely similar to the furniture – that is, identity – there is no iconicity and no truth.

Peirce's view applies to all symbolic texts. They are 'truth' because they are only and should only be 'partial truth'. Truth and falsehood are just two aspects of a proposition, not the absolute antithesis. The apple drawn by the child is both truth and falsehood. In Peirce's view, 'falsehood also claims to be a representation, it is an imperfect facsimile symbol of the truth' (qtd. in X. Zhao, 2014: 134).

Therefore, the core issue of Peirce's view of truth is that truth and falsehood are just the difference in the character of the symbolic text and the difference in the degree of correspondence with the facts. This is not a relativist position that regards truth and falsehood as the same, but rather that both are one-sided to varying degrees. Peirce gives a wonderful explanation of the proposition that 'there is truth in falsehood': 'All symbols – even random symbols like /304/ – are sufficiently complete for their various real objects. And all

these objects, even the crazy actions of Hamlet we are discussing, are part of the same universe of existence (that is, “truth”).... No matter how the symbols refer to their objects, they can fully demonstrate their signified character or signified quality.... All these characters are an integral part of “truth”, and each symbol means “truth”; but it is only a form of the domain it refers to’ (qtd. in X. Zhao, 2014: 38).

As long as the symbol reappears, it can never be comprehensive truth, nor can it be comprehensive falsehood. Even Hamlet’s crazy actions can be truth because truth is incomplete at a definitional level. Peirce points out that it makes no sense to say that dreams are false: ‘The proverb “Dream is always the opposite of reality” ... is an absurd view, because reality has no opposite. A false facsimile symbol will claim that it resembles something that does not resemble it. But this situation can’t happen completely.... There is no absolute truth nor absolute falseness in the facsimile symbols’ (qtd. in X. Zhao, 2014: 72).

As a result, Peirce accepts the basic position of the theory of correspondence and believes that ‘the truth is the correspondence of a representation with its object’ (CP 5.553). He also rules out attempts to pass over the object or reality – ‘this is a more mysterious and difficult concept to clarify the concept of truth’ (ibid.) – because this will inevitably fall into a circular definition. But he makes a major modification to this; he points out that the theory of correspondence is severely limited: ‘That truth is the correspondence of a representation with its object is, as Kant says, merely the nominal definition of it’ (ibid.). In Peirce’s view, the concept of reality must be clarified through the concept of truth, and ‘reality’ is actually the object of truth. It is far from enough to define truth as an idea that corresponds to reality. There must be some substantive standards to define the specific meaning of correspondence. Therefore, truth is never perfect, asymptotic, incomplete, and one-sided. There is no absolute truth. The important question is only how to make further cognition run on the right path.

In one of his rare and meticulously written articles – the entry ‘Truth, Fake, Error’ in Baldwin’s *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* published in 1901 – Peirce offers a wonderful definition of ‘truth’: ‘Truth is that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief, which concordance the abstract statement may possess by virtue of the confession of its inaccuracy and one-sidedness, and this confession is an essential ingredient of truth’ (CP 5.565). That is to say, the reason why truth is true lies in admitting that it is ‘not true’ but it is proved by ‘endless exploration’, that it can become true. We can further infer that in its own form, falsehood may not be true or false, which is why Peirce says that

‘there is no falsehood in the concept’ – on the face of it, an incredible statement (X. Zhao, 2014: 134). Hypothesis is false because group exploration does not give it extra points and cannot provide more ‘belief’.

As a result, Peirce has obtained an understanding of truth that might seem to paradoxical but actually reveal the essence of truth: ‘The perfect truth cannot be stated, except in the sense that it confesses its imperfection’ (CP 5.567). In other words, the only absolute truth is that there is no absolute truth. But the path to truth can be right or wrong. The concepts of truth and falsehood, in their full development, are only related to the empirical method of handling opinions.

4 Explore the Community and Truth

The correct path to truth is to accumulate with other symbols, and to accumulate with one’s own or other people’s cognitive activities. When a symbol connects itself with other symbols, it will manage to make the interpretant close to perfect truth or absolute truth; in other words, close to every field of truth. In this way, symbols achieve the essential purpose: to express the truth, which is also the essential motivating force for people to pursue meaning. Since symbols can express truth, the so-called ‘truth’ is actually the ‘final interpretant’ of such symbols. It should be pointed out that what decides truth is not the individual but the community. Peirce believes that truth is the result of group exploration and the community consensus that people will eventually reach when they use scientific methods to explore. Everyone who arbitrarily chooses the proposition he is willing to adopt can only use the word ‘truth’ to emphatically express his determination to stick to his choice, but this is only his personal choice. We pursue beliefs that we believe to be true, and if people in a community tend towards the same beliefs, the degree of truth is different. As long as there is enough continuity in people’s research, and as long as the research is carried out long enough, they will provide a definite answer to every question they study. They can always achieve their belief of reality and form the same conclusions.

Therefore, Peirce insists on the communitarian truth of the theory of correspondence. ‘The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and object represented in this opinion is the real’ (CP 5.407). The final point of scientific inquiry into the consensus of the community is scientific truth. At this time, the object of the symbolic text is reality. In other words, truth is the consensus of scientific investigators. It is

in this sense that Peirce holds the view that unified approval constructs truth. He points out that 'wherever universal agreement prevails, the realist will not be the one to disturb the general belief by idle and fictitious doubts' (CP 8.16). In this way, when we say that there is truth, its meaning is nothing more than an opinion that universal agreement is bound to be reached.

This view is very close to Habermas's so-called 'consensus theory'. That is to say, truth is something that people agree upon. This crowd can comprise all human beings, or just some of them, especially the community that discusses this issue, such as the scientific community. Peirce points out that communities can be large and small, short term and long term; communitarian truth is not eternal, but a community that lasts forever can achieve absolute truth: 'For every question, there is a true answer and but one' (CP 3.432). Therefore, truth is the consistency of an abstract statement, an ideal limit for infinite research, and tends to bring scientific beliefs. This abstract statement has consistency because it frankly admits its errors and one-sidedness. Therefore, this kind of recognition is the essential element of truth.

Peirce's view of truth thus sounds like an ode of confidence in the community and in society. Since 'an individual inference must be either true or false' (CP 2.652), we must move towards collaboration with others and society, especially when 'death makes the number of our risks, of our inferences, finite, and so makes their mean result uncertain ... that logicity inexorably requires that our interests shall not be limited. They must not stop at our own fate but must embrace the whole community' (CP 2.654). Moreover, there are not a small number of people in this kind of community. Truth has a character shared by all mankind. 'This community, again, must not be limited, but must extend to all races of beings with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation. It must reach, however vaguely, beyond this geological epoch, beyond all bounds. He who would not sacrifice his own soul to save the whole world, is, as it seems to me, illogical in all his inferences, collectively. Logic is rooted in the social principle' (CP 2.654).

However, the limited community is subject to the larger community. At this time, the truth agreed by the community will also be subjected to the torture of future symbolic behaviour. The determination of truth is actually pushed into an uncertain future. Therefore, we cannot reach a final consensus. This means that not only will we never get the truth, but there may be no truth at all. In this way, the convergence of opinion, or the truth in Peirce's sense, is just an 'ideal limit' that cannot be verified. The greatest role of communitarian truth is to allow the meaning activities of individuals and communities to move in the direction of truth. This is the final form of truth. The truth is a truth process that advances towards a perfect goal.

Peirce does not think that meaning belongs only to the individual. He understands semiotics as a social theory that promotes interpersonal relationships. The dominant issue that Peirce's theory never forgets is the interpretation of symbolic meaning, and this interpretation is not just about personal behaviour. He believes that once people pursue meaning, they must enter into interpersonal social relations, and symbolic meaning must be an interpersonal relationship: 'Whenever we think, we have present to the consciousness some feeling, image, conception, or other representation which serves as a sign.... When we think, then, we ourselves, as we are at that moment, appear as a sign' (CP 5.283). This kind of dialogue finally forms the exploring community, which is Peirce's convergence theory of truth: even if the truth is difficult to obtain, people's pursuit of truth is the survival value of human society. It does not belong to individual behaviour but is inextricably linked to society.

It should be said that Peirce's confidence in the community has become his principled belief, which is very rare for an independent writer who lived alone in the late nineteenth century.

Sometimes his view of truth becomes a social belief: 'It may seem strange that I should put forward three sentiments, namely, interest in an indefinite community, recognition of the possibility of this interest being made supreme, and hope in the unlimited continuance of intellectual activity' (CP 2.655). Here, he is not talking about truth but interests, and the community has become an unlimited community.

Therefore, we can see that Peirce's discussion of meaning ultimately boils down to a wonderful community utopia: 'Aristotle once explored the concept of "perfection" or "entelechy", but he never clarified this concept. I'm going to use this term to express the fact that the ideal symbol must be extremely perfect, and it must also be extremely uniform ... The so-called *qua* fact of the world are the "truth of being" of existence. The "truth" is actually not abstract but perfect, which is the final interpretation of each symbol' (qtd. in X. Zhao, 2014: 39). The process of symbols chasing the truth forms infinite derivatives, each interpretation item becomes a new symbol, and the new symbol leads to a new interpretation item. The last unreachable top is the truth.

Peirce uses 'knowledge of the real' instead of 'the noblest good', and 'community' instead of 'personality', and puts forward the same argument, which also develops from the view of communitarian truth. The original conception of reality indicates that it in essence contains the idea of 'community', which has no clear boundary and can definitely lead to the increase of knowledge. Peirce's semiotic phenomenology theory, especially the theory of pragmatics (which he calls 'universal rhetoric') revolves around how to obtain communitarian truth. This is why one of the authors of the current paper published

'Return to Peirce' a few years ago (Y. Zhao, 2014: 9). Peirce's semiotic phenomenology theory is indeed worthy of our careful review, and his communitarian truth theory is unexpectedly superb.

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