

Postprandial Peirce: A Final Talk

A Special Séance with Peirce: His Spirit Summoned for an Entertaining Interview

- A. Set up the table while hidden behind a screen: easel, portrait, cloth to hide them, yellow collar, candles, LC hat.
- B. Welcome the audience. Explain how the idea for this special event came about.

Nathan Houser can vouch for the fact that I am no stranger to encounters with Peirce's ghost. In fact, Peirce's ghost helped me write a crucial passage of my dissertation twenty-nine years ago. One could even argue that Nathan would never have lobbied for my getting hired to work at the Peirce Project had it not been for that spiritual intervention.

C. *Explanation of proceedings*

1. We will begin by summoning Charles's spirit to appear before us. This will require collective concentration. If he fails to appear, then that will be the end of this talk. I have good reason to believe that our collective effort will succeed, especially in the evening of a day when we have been celebrating the erection of the new monument, which I think must have had a positive impact on Charles and Juliette's current metaphysical state.
2. Once he has appeared, and we are sure that the spirit is that of the right Charles, we will make sure communication gets securely established and we will reach some sort of understanding with him in that regard.
3. I will then proceed to converse with him, asking him questions, some of which I have prepared, and some of which may be impromptu follow-ups to whatever he might tell us. Important to realize is that much of the conversation depends on Charles's current physical/metaphysical state of being, which we must assume to have significantly evolved over the last 105 years. We would be very naïve if we thought we were going to meet an old bearded man. Let's make it clear that the Charles we will be speaking to is at most in some sort of distant continuity with the frail man whose deathbed picture continues to haunt us.
4. My role is that of a medium communicating the forms emitted by Charles. Although I will speak in English, do not assume that he will be speaking to me in plain English. I do not expect to hear his voice at all. I expect him to simply fill my brain with thoughts in highly compressed form—a little like binaries if you will—and my task will be to let those thoughts decompress themselves through the process of uttered interpretance. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of those interpretations or translations. I hope the spirit will correct me should I make any egregious mistake. Please do not shoot the communicator of his forms.

5. At some point I will stop asking him questions and will invite you to ask him your own questions to him directly. Please phrase your questions with appropriate deference, concisely, and clearly, keeping in mind that this entire psychical experience (or experiment) is meant to entertain not only ourselves, but also Charles's own spirit.
6. Are there any questions before we begin this séance?
7. Before we proceed, let us remind ourselves of Peirce's following words, taken from the end of his 1893 essay on "Immortality in the Light of Synechism."

"Synechism refuses to believe that when death comes, even the **carnal consciousness** ceases quickly. . . . [S]ynechism recognizes that the **carnal consciousness** is but a small part of the man. There is, [besides], the **social consciousness**, by which a man's spirit is embodied in others, and which continues to live and breathe and have its being very much longer than superficial observers think. . . . Nor is this, by any means, all. A man is capable of a **spiritual consciousness**, which constitutes him one of the eternal verities, which is embodied in the universe as a whole. This as an archetypal idea can never fail; and in the world to come is destined to a special spiritual embodiment. . . . When the **carnal consciousness** passes away in death, we shall at once perceive that we have had all along a **lively spiritual consciousness** which we have been confusing with something different." (EP2: 3, 1893)¹

Summoning Peirce's spirit is therefore an act through which, we who are assembled in this room in his name and thus we who in this moment constitute his own social consciousness, will solicit, in full continuity of being, his very spiritual consciousness, in whatever lively state it may have reached by now.

D. Summoning Charles

We are now going to summon Charles in all solemnity. You need to understand that this is actually an exercise in applied semiotics. Tom, here, wrote a whole book on *Peirce's Theory of Signs*. But summoning Peirce is no theoretical exercise. It has to be efficacious.

The challenge here is to target the right Charles! Many a "Charles Peirce" has died before and after our own Charles Peirce did, and we must make sure to summon him unambiguously. Most curiously, I have been led to infer that no summoning can work if the summoinee's last name is pronounced. The reason is that the indexical power attached to the last name disappears shortly after death. We are thus forced to use the first name only. This would seem to

¹ Peirce shared the following evolving opinion in 1908: ". . . I fully agree with what the *Nation* informs me is [someone's (James Hervey Hyslop, Ph.D, LL.D, [August 18, 1854 – June 17, 1920])] disdain for the unscientific hypothesis of Telepathy; and though I long held | that the psychical research business was unwise, because I knew those men must waste their lives in an investigation they could not know how to conduct in a really scientific way, yet now I say *peccavi*. In taking that ground I was virtually proposing to bar an avenue of inquiry, which is in science the sin against the Holy Ghost. I now utterly deny the *Nation's* idea that the whole thing may prove unreal. [Reports given to me by friends I know to be unbiased] completed my belief that there is *something* in the spiritist theory. There is *some* life after death, at least for some people, though it may be a brief butterfly life. All I have ever seen of manifestations was odious beyond words." (RL 408 ISP 16–17, letter to William Benjamin Smith, 25 July 1908)

compound the difficulty. But that is not really the case. What we are compelled to do is to summon Charles so unambiguously that only his spirit will respond to our call. We cannot allow ourselves to sow confusion in the spiritual world. If more than one particular spirit feels called upon, either none will appear out of an abundance of caution, or the wrong one will appear, and that would be unfortunate to everyone concerned, either in this world or in the after-world.

I shall now proceed with summoning Charles's spirit in the right way. I need the entire room to concentrate so that our collective power of thought reaches him successfully. Please raise your hands cupped open toward the altar and close your eyes to avoid any possible blinding effect. DO NOT OPEN YOUR EYES UNTIL I SAY SO! And do remain completely silent.

CAROLUS, CAROLUS, CAROLUS!
CHARLES! CHARLES! CHARLES!

Placere manifestaturus phaneraliter es te ipsum!
PLEASE PHANERALIZE YOURSELF!

Icon te fias, Index te fias, Symbolum te fias!
PLEASE ICONIFY, INDEXIFY, AND SYMBOLIFY YOURSELF!

CHARLES, CHARLES, CHARLES!

[Turn on the yellow collar's lights and remove the hiding cloth.]

—You may now open your eyes. Wherever two or three or more gather in his name, as we are presently doing, There the spirit of Charles is with them, and so is he with us, right at this moment in this place. (after Matthew 8:20)

E. Conversation with Charles

—CHARLES! We thank you for coming and visiting us this auspicious evening, in this room at the old Hotel Fauchère so familiar to your historical past. Here all of us are gathered in your name. Many of us are longtime students of your manuscripts and members of the Charles S. Peirce Society. Others represent the Pinchot family whose older abode, Grey Towers, you and Juliette often visited. Others are the current inhabitants of your former home, beloved Arisbe, where scientific environmental work has long been conducted under the aegis of the U.S. National Park Service. This very morning, we gathered at the Milford Cemetery to inaugurate the brand-new monument that now adorns the plot where Juliette's remains and yours have long rested together inside a shared coffin. CHARLES! We hope you and Juliette are satisfied with the transformation of your tombstone into a monument that will draw visitors to your grave far more efficiently than it managed to do over the last 85 years.

—Charles: Thank you very much for your warm welcoming words, MEDIUM! We salute tonight's honorable company and thank you for the privilege of coming into your midst. We are indeed grateful for the splendid monument you have erected to our memory. We were very

much aware of it, because suddenly the ground became very shaky, and then turned into something much denser and heavier than before. Our shared coffin began creaking most frightfully on all sides, and that was as unsettling as the dirt all around was unsettled. But peace has now returned, and our souls are now back to complete serenity. . . . Ahem, well, MEDIUM, please understand this correctly. This is just a manner of speaking. Hahaha! We are kidding of course. It is not as though we were down there in the ground in any sort of way, physical, metaphysical, or otherwise! But thank you all for having anchored such a magnificent index that screams “HERE!”: it has been noticed and much appreciated all around, with great personal benefit.

—CHARLES! You are so very welcome! And I am grateful for the important caveat you have just expressed, because some of us here have questions to ask you about your current metaphysical state. Before we proceed, however, I would like to ask you, Charles, what is the most appropriate way for us to address you?

—Charles: Thank you for asking such a question! It is not often that we are solicited for a conversation from a former earthly home. From what we hear, most mediums don’t bother asking about proper etiquette, which is unpleasant and leads to communication failure. But since you ask, we are this quasi-instant receiving permission to ask you that you address us as “LUMINOUS CHARLES”.

—“LUMINOUS CHARLES!” We certainly do not wish to jeopardize our conversation with you and shall comply with your request. Allow me two quick questions. Why this title, “Luminous Charles”? Also, I have noticed that you are referring to yourself in the plural. Is that a plural of majesty, a plural that encompasses the pair “Luminous Charles and Juliette”, or a plurality of beings that are with you? Are you one, two, or many?

—LC: *Medium Interpretans*, we shall address your questions, but please do us a favor. We have difficulty hearing you, so to speak. We have just pushed into existence a special headset just behind the easel onto which you placed an obsolete icon of a formerly bearded self. Please wear that headset on your head. It will vastly improve the clarity of communication between our worlds.

—Oh, Luminous Charles, what a surprise. The headset looks like a fancy baseball cap. And it is emblazoned with the letters “LC” on the front! Does that stand for “Luminous Charles”?

— LC: Yes, but only coincidentally so. Those two letters really stand for “Luminous Choir.”

—Luminous Charles, are you implying that you have become a member of an Angelic Choir of some kind?

— LC: Yes, clever Medium, that’s a fair abduction on your part. But please don’t get ahead of yourself. We understand that you think you are asking simple questions. But you have little idea of how the celestial metaphysics behind their answers is extremely complicated, far more so

than the scholastic thinkers ever imagined. Let's postpone the answer to the question about the Choir for the moment and please proceed with a question less theoretical and more vitally important.

—Luminous Charles, it has been, in earthly terms, more than a century since you passed away, and 85 years since your devoted wife Juliette did so. What were you doing during the twenty years she remained alive? Have you managed to reunite with the greatest love of your earthly past?

— LC: My dear Medium, you are continuing to ask earthly questions about matters that are barely if at all earthly anymore. Do understand the basics of our condition. Once you cross the gate of the afterlife, you transition into a reality that becomes at once timeless and spaceless, although not without a certain kind of consciousness. That is because we are no longer in time and space, but it is more like time and space are in us. Duration is no longer endured. Space is no longer traversed. Everything becomes Spirit.

—Luminous Charles, I feel a little blinded by your luminosity. Can you at least tell us whether or not, while Juliette was alive, you helped her endure the great misery she fell into? Reports from reliable witnesses testify that upon certain occasions of great distress, you would make your commanding presence felt in the heart of visitors, urging them to enter your home, directing them to Juliette who in her illness had lost consciousness, and making sure there were still hot ashes in the fireplace to start a fire that would warm her back to life.

— LC: Well, Medium, you appear to be more informed than we thought. Yes, let us recognize the obvious truth. We were always there but not quite there with her. When you love someone as much as we did each other, caring never goes away. She was alone, but never alone, and she knew it and felt it, always. On the other hand, we never were a ghost in our former home. We were a spirit. Our spiritual consciousness was hovering constantly between her slowly decreasing determinacy and our own increasing vagueness. That explains the visitors' testimony to the full.

—Luminous Charles, is Juliette with you in this present encounter? Can she enter the conversation?

— LC: The Luminous Choir forbids us to answer you either yes or no. Neither answer would be true anyway. It is complicated.

—Luminous Charles, do you mean that your relationship with mysterious Juliette has become complicated?

— LC: Your question is exceedingly indiscreet, Medium! The entire Choir is shuddering with reprobation. Listen carefully. We can see now that our privileged conversation is not going to get anywhere if we don't reveal a few post-vitally important metaphysical lessons.

—Please forgive my indiscretion, Luminous Charles! We are listening to you intently.

— LC: Good. Do know that after our former self passed away, it did not disappear into nothingness just as had been predicted in our essay on “Immortality in the Light of Synechism.” That seemingly dying self began transitioning into the Reality of Transience.

—Forgive a quick interruption, Luminous Charles. Are you alluding to the so-called Purgatory?

— LC: AHAHAHA! The entire Luminous Choir is singing laughingly! The so-called purgatory is an infantile invention of earthly theologians who lost their ways vying for power over their credulous flock instead of applying the rules of sound reasoning and dutiful inquiry. What the Reality of Transience implies is the passing from the habitual perception of a finite and discrete reality to the habitual perception of an infinite and continuous reality. This transition “gives rise to a conception of gradation” from an experience focused on the merely existent to an experience anchored forever in universal evolutionary ideas. We remember writing extensively on this matter in a sapient manuscript that was unfortunately destroyed by some enraged nominalistic pseudo-intellectual who visited Arisbe at one time.

—How unfortunate, Luminous Charles!

— LC: In any case, do explain to your admirable company that the transition to the continuum of spaceless and timeless transience takes a while. Getting out of time so that time can enter your spirit is not instantaneous. It requires achieving a state utterly frictionless. Lots of asperities need to be shed away through cotary meditations. Not everyone makes it through, though, not by a long shot. Some selves get through it faster than others. Some fail to do so seemingly forever. Poor Sisyphus! So many come to share his fate.

As to our own self, transition was pretty fast. It only took a little more than a century in earthly years. As a matter of fact, our transition to a full-blown spiritual consciousness happened in early August of your preceding year. It coincided with the final cleanup of our new gravestone in the Milford cemetery. No doubt that event drew the attention of realities in the upper pleroma.² The realization sunk in that our earthly labor of old had made tremendously positive and lasting impression onto worthy human beings, and also that the stone that marked our ultimate abode had utterly failed to make us forgotten in spite of its tininess! That precipitated our promotion to the Luminous Choir. But that was not the only factor. It was also found that our synechistic tychism, buttressed by our scholastic realism and by all the work we had done in categoriology, in the logic of relations, and multiple other subject-matters, had turned our spirit into perfect consonance with the general spirit that animates the Luminous Choir.

Now, for you all assembled in this room, what matters most for a proper understanding of who we have become is a brief statement we wrote in 1902. You will find it expressed and developed page 124 in the second volume of *The Essential Peirce*. It is key to everything. Listen!

² Gnosticism: the pleroma is the spiritual universe as the abode of God and of the totality of the divine powers and emanations.

“A MAN IS A WAVE, NOT A VORTEX!” Oh boy! When we wrote this, we didn’t know how right we were.

—Luminous Charles! How incredible! You have read the second volume of *The Essential Peirce*?

— LC: What a thoughtless question, Medium! We did not need to read EP2! Don’t you realize this? WE ARE EP2! We are everything you and others have been publishing for decades, especially when it is well done in a proper critical edition, as we have always advocated needed be done for high-caliber thinkers. In fact, every time you and others have repaired our work through careful editing, we instantly feel it, and do feel better for it, for it does create a positive feeling that reverberates effectively throughout the entire Choir. And so we are all grateful to you and others for so enhancing our posterity.

To return to what we were saying, do understand this, Medium: Every man and woman is a wave!³ We all are, BUT we don’t see it while alive because as existents we reduce ourselves to being a moving collection of particles, a mere vortex. But really none of us can be reduced to a mere vortex even if a vortex is already more than a collection of particles. That is something that becomes especially apparent, and most vividly so, during our post-vital transition to the Reality of Transience, and forever thereafter.

—Luminous Charles! Are you saying that at this very moment all of us here are communicating with a wave? Could you elaborate a little more about your wavy condition?

— LC: Well, Medium Interpretans, is your brain not being filled in at this very moment with a flow of thoughtful undulations that propagate through it and then out of you through vocalizations that transform them into audible waves?

—Yes, Luminous Charles, that is exactly what I am experiencing.

— LC: This happens because our wavy condition is that of a conditioning wave. All of us here in the Luminous Choir share that same condition, and so it is with the members of every other Choir, every other Hierarchy, every other Sphere, that define the structure of the post-upperworld. To put it more simply, all of us “up here” [Understand, “up here” is a mere idle metaphor used only for effective communication] all of us “up here” have turned ourselves into rippling final causes, undulating ideas that keep breathing themselves out into instantiations through their spiritual expressions.

—Luminous Charles, are there many members in the Luminous Choir you belong to?

³ The whole point of this vortex vs wave distinction is that a wave is a third not beholden to the seconds it influences as it traverses them, while a vortex is a collection beholden to its particles. Categorially, a vortex would be an unreplicated 3-2-2, while a wave would be a replicated 3-3-2. A collection of interweaving co-resonant waves has a 3-3-3 categorial structure subject to a quasi-natural classification yielding a hierarchy reflecting distinct orders of generality (such as a Bench, a Choir, etc.). [This phanero-semiotic footnote was implanted into the Medium’s brain by Luminous Charles with the express command not to share it with the audience.]

— LC: As we said before, the transition to the Reality of Transience is not instantaneous. We have joined the Choir only recently and we have yet to learn a great deal more about its Reality. The first thing we experienced was the need to get rid of certain preconceptions that acted like obstacles on the road of inquiry. For instance, we used to think as an ego, and would use the pronoun “I” in all of our conversations. Our initial understanding of the Choir was too individualistic. From the standpoint of someone speaking under the guise of “I,” I had first thought that I was joining a society of spirits akin to the Pythagorean Brotherhood. That was extremely thrilling, especially because I was led to believe, in my naiveté, that I was entering it as its 300th member, and therefore as its ultimate member. This was a most pleasant thought to my exceedingly conceited frame of mind. I soon began to understand that this was a dreadful error. The Luminous Choir is not restricted to 300 members but is composed of 300 indefinite collections of waves, all of them in sympathetic co-resonance. What happened is that I had joined the 300th collection of waves. As soon as you join such a collection, which some call a “Bench”, you are undulating in unison with the entire Bench. The Bench becomes you, and your ego disappears into the Bench. You become indistinguishable from every other wave in the collection. In fact, there is no way to distinguish one wave from another, so dense is the interweaving of our undulations. And that is why the I becomes We, and we speak to you in the form of a collective plural, in unison with the entire Bench, which is itself in unison with all other 299 Benches within the Choir.

—Good Lord, Luminous Charles! Should we then abduce that this entire flow of thought that is traversing me thanks to your intercession is actually coming from your entire Bench as governed by the whole Luminous Choir?

— LC: Yes, Medium, except that your current inference is not an abduction but a deduction.

—And yet, Luminous Charles, it appears to me, through the way you have been speaking, that we are really communicating with what used to be the old Charles of Arisbe. How is that possible?

— LC: Ascribe this effect to the filtering power of your own collateral experience, Medium. We have composed enough texts on semeiotic and especially symbology for you to make sense of it all.

—I believe you, Luminous Charles. But pray do tell me: what is the particular mission of the Luminous Choir?

— LC: Our mission is to provide to the upper realms of our Governing Reality the Light they need to follow in order to guide the Creation into a path of Optimal Evolution. In some way, we are akin to the Natural Light, *Il Lume Naturale*, except that the Intellect we seek to illuminate is not that of earthlings but that of the divine. Our mission is thus better captured in terms of *Il Lume Divinum*, the Divine Light that helps Devine the Optimal Path. In essence our role is to

adapt final causes to possibilities of actualization that succeed in recommending themselves to our critical attention.

—Luminous Charles! I am surprised that the Luminous Choir is letting you reveal to our humble selves such heaven-breaking metaphysics!

— LC: Well, Medium, our Bench has been nudging our waves continuously to prevent any unwelcome leak from occurring. The Choir itself is fine with it, being assured that what is being told to you is such an infinitesimal part of the Reality of Transience that the upper realm need not worry about what you might do with such revelations. None of us in the Choir is an accredited Prophet, in any case. Only Prophets, who belong to a higher hierarchy, have the power to communicate messages of greater pragmatic consequences.

—Luminous Charles, before I let the charming audience around me ask you their own questions, I am curious to know whether there are other great human thinkers who have joined the Luminous Choir that you know of. Did Plato, Aristotle, John Duns, Immanuel, Josiah, to name but a few, join the Luminous Family?

— LC: That is truly difficult to reveal, Medium. Difficult not because revealing such things is forbidden, but because some of those minds transitioned so long ago that their individuality has utterly disappeared into the ambient generality and vagueness. Still in principle one ought to somehow recognize their irreducible firstnesses, but since they are no longer indexically anchored,⁴ that makes them hard to recognize. Ohohoh, the Bench and the rest of the Choir is sending in our direction a flow of undulations vibrant enough to make us think that none of those great minds made it to the Luminous Choir. In fact, it may well be that we are the only Choir member of earthly human origin. We forgot to mention this, but the Choir is truly Universal: spirits that transition to it come from every corner of the Universe. By no means is any Celestial Choir restricted to the tiny planet we originated from.

—That is truly fantastic revelation, Luminous Charles. I am speechless. That's a good reason to let others here speak to you now and address their own questions to you. I will now limit myself to be a mere conduit of your Choral responses.

[Questions were asked by a few members of the audience, including Nathan Houser, Richard Evans, and Jim Wible.]

⁴ As Charles said in the initial quotation, a spiritual consciousness is “embodied in the universe as a whole.” That is therefore a kind of embodiment that is not indexicalized nor even indexicalizable. It is tantamount to what makes a third different from another third: their irreducible firstness, distinct from any other not by comparison or contrast (which condition recognizability), but by their own regardlessness. It follows that spiritual consciousnesses are ideal continuous phanera. [The theoretical substance of this footnote was again whispered to the Medium by Luminous Charles with the command not to utter it aloud.]

F. Parting Words

Thank you all for contributing to this special conversation with Luminous Charles through your questions and attentive listening. The time has now come to end our encounter with his collective Spirit.

—Luminous Charles, we are all so grateful to you and, through you to the Bench that I am sure you are making especially luminous, and to the entire Luminous Choir. It sounds like the Choir is really the metaphysical realization of the indefinite community of inquiry you so often talked about in your earthly philosophical writings. The Choir would appear to anchor the hope that guides us all as we keep researching who we are and what ought to be the purposes that guide our life. We thank you for the timeless time you gave us. This was such a memorable encounter, and we hope that you and your Bench have enjoyed it as much as we have.

— LC: The pleasure was felt throughout the Choir, our dear Medium. And as far as the community of inquiry is concerned, you are quite right. The Luminous Choir is indeed the greatest community of inquiry we could have ever hoped for, greater than any Pythagorean Brotherhood. Do you know that the original spelling of the word C-H-O-I-R in English was Q-U-I-R-E and that it was transformed artificially into C-H-O-I-R merely to bring it closer to the Latin CHORUS and the Greek CHOROS? We suggest that you now do the same with the word “inquiry.” From now on and forever, do talk only about the community of INCHOIRY. Good night!

—Good night, Luminous Charles!

[Press the yellow collar button three times to turn the lights from steady to fast blinking to slow blinking to off]

— ONE – TWO – THREE – OUT!