

Gentrain Unit 13 Pragmatism and Charles Sanders Pierce, March 13, 2014, Dr. Cindy Ausec

Charles Sanders Pierce (1839 – 1914) Founder of pragmatism

Pragmatism – a way of thinking about results: a straightforward practical way of thinking about things or dealing with problems, concerned with results rather than with theories and principles

Works

- *Fixation of Belief*
- *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*

*Fixation of Belief*

- Doubt- an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into a state of belief
- Belief - is in the nature of habit, representing a regular association between our circumstances and our actions
- Inquiry – the struggle to overcome the irritation of doubt and to attain belief
- Reasoning - The object is to find out, from the consideration of what we already know, something else which we do not know
- Believing and Doubt
  - The feeling of believing is a more or less sure indication of there being established in our nature some habit which will determine our actions – Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into a state of belief.
  - Inquiry the struggle to attain a state of belief. Sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion
- Four Methods of for the fixation of belief
  - **Method of tenacity** - a matter of reiterating the belief in question and turning away from all contrary evidence. Ineffective because when we are confronted with the contrary beliefs of others, our confidence in our own tenaciously held beliefs is shaken
  - **Method of authority** -- Adoption of tenacity by a whole group, using the group's institutions to enforce the preferred doctrines. More effective than tenacity but still ineffective since no society can regulate all opinion within, nor prevent awareness of contrary opinions without
  - **a priori method** - allowing beliefs to form through the natural inclination to adopt whatever seems "agreeable to reason". Subject to pendulum swings and never reaching a stable agreement
  - **Method of science** -- Settles opinion by reference to external permanencies with properties "independent of our opinions about them." The only method of the four that is self-corrective

*How to Make our Ideas Clear*

- Logicians Definitions
  - A Clear idea is defined as one which is so apprehended that it will be recognized wherever it is met with and so that no other will be mistaken for it
  - A distinct idea is defined as one which contains nothing which is not clear. So that an idea is *distinctly* apprehended, when we can give a precise definition of it, in abstract terms

- Wants to formulate the method of attaining to a more perfect clearness of thought starts from:
  - Descartes – Self-consciousness was to furnish us with our fundamental truths, and to decide what was agreeable to reason. Ideas must be clear and distinct, to have nothing unclear about them
  - Leibniz sought to reduce first principles to formulas which cannot be denied without self-contradiction.
- Doubt and Belief – the starting of a question and the resolution of it
- Belief has three properties
  - It is something that we are aware of
  - it appeases the irritation of doubt
  - it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action – a habit
- Habits --Essence of belief is the establishment of a habit, and different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of actions they give rise to
- **Third grade of clearness of apprehension –Being clear about what we mean. “Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.”**
  - Hardness – what perceptible effects habitually result from various actions upon hard things: Will not be scratched by other “substances”, will make a noise if struck, etc.
    - Our belief in its hardness embodies a conditional prediction of its behavior, testable by the senses
- Logic and Reality
  - Sense familiarity – self evident
  - Definition of reality as Opposed to fiction
    - Phenomena within our own minds, dependent upon our thought, which are at the same time real in the sense that we really think them
    - A dream has a real existence as a mental phenomenon – if someone dreamed it
  - Defines the real as that whose characters are independent of what anybody may think them to be.
  - Applying the effects rule - The only effect which real things have is to cause belief, for all the sensations which they excite emerge into consciousness in the form of beliefs
- Truth belief vs false belief
  - How is a true belief (or belief in the real) distinguished from false belief (or belief in fiction)
  - The ideas of truth and falsehood belong exclusively to the scientific method of settling opinion
  - The reality of that which is real depends on the real fact that investigation is destined to lead to a belief in it