

Aus: Collected Papers of C. S. Peirce, Harvard UP, Band 5

ISSUES OF PRAGMATICISM

SIX CHARACTERS OF CRITICAL COMMON-SENSISM

5.438. Pragmaticism was originally enounced in the form of a maxim, as follows: Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearings you conceive the objects of your conception to have. Then, your conception of those effects is the whole of your conception of the object.

I will restate this in other words, since oftimes one can thus eliminate some unsuspected source of perplexity to the reader. This time it shall be in the indicative mood, as follows: The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally upon all the possible different circumstances and desires, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol.

439. Two doctrines that were defended by the writer about nine years before the formulation of pragmaticism may be treated as consequences of the latter belief. One of these may be called Critical Common-sensism. It is a variety of the Philosophy of Common Sense, but is marked by six distinctive characters, which had better be enumerated at once.

440. Character I. Critical Common-sensism admits that there not only are indubitable propositions but also that there are indubitable inferences. In one sense, anything evident is indubitable; but the propositions and inferences which Critical Common-sensism holds to be original, in the sense one cannot

"go behind" them (as the lawyers say), are indubitable in the sense of being acritical. The term "reasoning" ought to be confined to such fixation of one belief by another as is reasonable, deliberate, self-controlled. A reasoning must be conscious; and this consciousness is not mere "immediate consciousness," which (as I argued in 1868) is simple Feeling viewed from another side, but is in its ultimate nature (meaning in that characteristic element of it that is not reducible to anything simpler), a sense of taking a habit, or disposition to respond to a given kind of stimulus in a given kind of way. As to the nature of that, some *claircissements* will appear below and again in my third paper, on the Basis of Pragmaticism. But the secret of rational consciousness is not so much to be sought in the study of this one peculiar nucleolus, as in the review of the process of self-control in its entirety. The machinery of logical self-control works on the same plan as does moral self-control, in multiform detail. The greatest difference, perhaps, is that the latter serves to inhibit mad puttings forth of energy, while the former most characteristically insures us against the quandary of Buridan's ass. The formation of habits under imaginary action (see the paper of January, 1878) is one of the most essential ingredients of both; but in the logical process the imagination takes far wider flights, proportioned to the generality of the field of inquiry, being bounded in pure mathematics solely by the limits of its own powers, while in the moral process we consider only situations that may be apprehended or anticipated. For in moral life we are chiefly solicitous about our conduct and its inner springs, and the approval of conscience, while in intellectual life there is a tendency to value existence as the vehicle of forms. Certain obvious features of the phenomena of self-control (and especially of habit) can be expressed compactly and without any hypothetical addition, except what we distinctly rate as imagery, by saying that we have an occult nature of which and of its contents we can only judge by the conduct that it determines, and by phenomena of that conduct. All will assent to that (or all

but the extreme nominalist), but anti-synechistic thinkers wind themselves up in a factitious snarl by falsifying the phenomena in representing consciousness to be, as it were, a skin, a separate tissue, overlying an unconscious region of the occult nature, mind, soul, or physiological basis. It appears to me that in the present state of our knowledge a sound methodetic prescribes that, in adhesion to the appearances, the difference is only relative and the demarcation not precise.

441. According to the maxim of Pragmaticism, to say that determination affects our occult nature is to say that it is capable of affecting deliberate conduct; and since we are conscious of what we do deliberately, we are conscious habitualiter of whatever hides in the depths of our nature; and it is presumable (and only presumable, although curious instances are on record), that a sufficiently energetic effort of attention would bring it out. Consequently, to say that an operation of the mind is controlled is to say that it is, in a special sense, a conscious operation; and this no doubt is the consciousness of reasoning. For this theory requires that in reasoning we should be conscious, not only of the conclusion, and of our deliberate approval of it, but also of its being the result of the premiss from which it does result, and furthermore that the inference is one of a possible class of inferences which conform to one guiding principle.

[größere Auslassung]

446. Character IV. By all odds, the most distinctive character of the Critical Common-sensist, in contrast to the old Scotch philosopher, lies in his insistence that the acritically indubitable is invariably vague.

Logicians have been at fault in giving Vagueness the go-by, so far as not even to analyze it. The present writer has done his best to work out the

Stechiology (or Stoicheiology), Critic, and Methodetic of the subject, but can here only give a definition or two with some proposals respecting terminology.

447. Accurate writers have apparently made a distinction between the definite and the determinate.¹ A subject is determinate in respect to any character which inheres in it or is (universally and affirmatively) predicated of it, as well as in respect to the negative of such character, these being the very same respect. In all other respects it is indeterminate. The definite shall be defined presently. A sign (under which designation I place every kind of thought, and not alone external signs), that is in any respect objectively indeterminate (i.e., whose object is undetermined by the sign itself) is objectively general in so far as it extends to the interpreter the privilege of carrying its determination further. Example: "Man is mortal." To the question, What man? the reply is that the proposition explicitly leaves it to you to apply its assertion to what man or men you will. A sign that is objectively indeterminate in any respect is objectively vague in so far as it reserves further determination to be made in some other conceivable sign, or at least does not appoint the interpreter as its deputy in this office. Example: "A man whom I could mention seems to be a little conceited." The suggestion here is that the man in view is the person addressed; but the utterer does not authorize such an interpretation or any other application of what she says. She can still say, if she likes, that she does not mean the person addressed. Every utterance naturally leaves the right of further exposition in the utterer; and therefore, in so far as a

¹Hamilton and a few other logicians understood the subject of a universal proposition in the collective sense; but every person who is well-read in logic is familiar with many passages in which the leading logicians explain with an iteration that would be superfluous if all readers were intelligent, that such a subject is distributively not collectively general. A term denoting a collection is singular, and such a term is an "abstraction" or product of the operation of hypostatic abstraction as truly as is the name of the essence. "Mankind" is quite as much an abstraction and ens rationis as is "humanity." Indeed, every object of a conception is either a signate individual or some kind of indeterminate individual. Nouns in the plural are usually distributive and general; common nouns in the singular are usually indefinite.

sign is indeterminate, it is vague, unless it is expressly or by a well-understood convention rendered general. Usually, an affirmative predication covers generally every essential character of the predicate, while a negative predication vaguely denies some essential character. In another sense, honest people, when not joking, intend to make the meaning of their words determinate, so that there shall be no latitude of interpretation at all. That is to say, the character of their meaning consists in the implications and non-implications of their words; and they intend to fix what is implied and what is not implied. They believe that they succeed in doing so, and if their chat is about the theory of numbers, perhaps they may. But the further their topics are from such precise, or "abstract," subjects, the less possibility is there of such precision of speech. In so far as the implication is not determinate, it is usually left vague; but there are cases where an unwillingness to dwell on disagreeable subjects causes the utterer to leave the determination of the implication to the interpreter; as if one says, "That creature is filthy, in every sense of the term."

448. Perhaps a more scientific pair of definitions would be that anything is general in so far as the principle of excluded middle does not apply to it and is vague in so far as the principle of contradiction does not apply to it. Thus, although it is true that "Any proposition you please, once you have determined its identity, is either true or false"; yet so long as it remains indeterminate and so without identity, it need neither be true that any proposition you please is true, nor that any proposition you please is false. So likewise, while it is false that "A proposition whose identity I have determined is both true and false," yet until it is determinate, it may be true that a proposition is true and that a proposition is false.

----- Ergänzung zu 5.448 aus einer alternativen Manuskriptversion -----

These remarks require supplementation. Determination, in general, is not defined at all; and the attempt at defining the determination of a subject with respect to a character only covers (or seems only to cover) explicit propositional determination. The incidental remark [5.447] to the effect that words whose meaning should be determinate would leave "no latitude of interpretation" is more satisfactory, since the context makes it plain that there must be no such latitude either for the interpreter or for the utterer. The explicitness of the words would leave the utterer no room for explanations of his meaning. This definition has the advantage of being applicable to a command, to a purpose, to a medieval substantial form; in short to anything capable of indeterminacy. (That everything indeterminate is of the nature of a sign can be proved inductively by imagining and analyzing instances of the surdest description. Thus, the indetermination of an event which should happen by pure chance without cause, *sua sponte*, as the Romans mythologically said, *spontanément* in French (as if what was done of one's own motion were sure to be irrational), does not belong to the event -- say, an explosion -- *per se*, or as explosion. Neither is it by virtue of any real relation: it is by virtue of a relation of reason. Now what is true by virtue of a relation of reason is representative, that is, is of the nature of a sign. A similar consideration applies to the indiscriminate shots and blows of a Kentucky free fight.) Even a future event can only be determinate in so far as it is a consequent. Now the concept of a consequent is a logical concept. It is derived from the concept of the conclusion of an argument. But an argument is a sign of the truth of its conclusion; its conclusion is the rational interpretation of the sign. This is in the spirit of the Kantian doctrine that metaphysical concepts are logical concepts applied somewhat differently from their logical application. The difference, however, is not really as great as Kant represents it to be, and as he was obliged to represent it to be, owing to his mistaking the logical and metaphysical correspondents in almost every case.

At the same time, it is tolerably evident that the definition, as it stands, is not sufficiently explicit, and further, that at the present stage of our inquiry cannot be made altogether satisfactory. For what is the interpretation alluded to? To answer that convincingly would be either to establish or to refute the doctrine of pragmatism. Still some explanations may be made. Every sign has a single object, though this single object may be a single set or a single continuum of objects. No general description can identify an object. But the common sense of the interpreter of the sign will assure him that the object must be one of a limited collection of objects. Suppose, for example, two Englishmen to meet in a continental railway carriage. The total number of subjects of which there is any appreciable probability that one will speak to the other perhaps does not exceed a million; and each will have perhaps half that million not far below the surface of consciousness, so that each unit of it is ready to suggest itself. If one mentions Charles the Second, the other need not consider what possible Charles the Second is meant. It is no doubt the English Charles Second. Charles the Second of England was quite a different man on different days; and it might be said that without further specification the subject is not identified. But the two Englishmen have no purpose of splitting hairs in their talk; and the latitude of interpretation which constitutes the indeterminacy of a sign must be understood as a latitude which might affect the achievement of a purpose. For two signs whose meanings are for all possible purposes equivalent are absolutely equivalent. This, to be sure, is rank pragmatism; for a purpose is an affection of action.

What has been said of subjects is as true of predicates. Suppose the chat of our pair of Englishmen had fallen upon the color of Charles II's hair. Now that colors are seen quite differently by different retinas is known. That the chromatic sense is much more varied than it is positively known to be is quite likely. It is very unlikely that either of the travelers is trained to observe colors

or is a master of their nomenclature. But if one says that Charles II had dark auburn hair, the other will understand him quite precisely enough for all their possible purposes; and it will be a determinate predication.

Another advantage of this definition is that it saves us from the blunder of thinking that a sign is indeterminate simply because there is much to which it makes no reference; that, for example, to say, "C.S. Peirce wrote this article," is indeterminate because it does not say what the color of the ink used was, who made the ink, how old the father of the ink-maker [was] when his son was born, nor what the aspect of the planets was when that father was born. By making the definition turn upon the interpretation, all that is cut off. [Cf. 3.93.]

The October remarks [i.e. those in the above paper] made the proper distinction between the two kinds of indeterminacy, viz.: indefiniteness and generality, of which the former consists in the sign's not sufficiently expressing itself to allow of an indubitable determinate interpretation, while the [latter] turns over to the interpreter the right to complete the determination as he please. It seems a strange thing, when one comes to ponder over it, that a sign should leave its interpreter to supply a part of its meaning; but the explanation of the phenomenon lies in the fact that the entire universe -- not merely the universe of existents, but all that wider universe, embracing the universe of existents as a part, the universe which we are all accustomed to refer to as "the truth" -- that all this universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs. Let us note this in passing as having a bearing upon the question of pragmatism. [Cf. 4.539.]

The October remarks, with a view to brevity, omitted to mention that both indefiniteness and generality might primarily affect either the logical breadth or the logical depth of the sign to which it belongs. It now becomes pertinent to notice this. When we speak of the depth, or signification, of a sign we are resorting to hypostatic abstraction, that process whereby we regard a thought as

a thing, make an interpretant sign the object of a sign. It has been a butt of ridicule since Moliere's dying week, and the depth of a writer on philosophy can conveniently be sounded by his disposition to make fun of the basis of voluntary inhibition, which is the chief characteristic of mankind. For cautious thinkers will not be in haste to deride a kind of thinking that is evidently founded upon observation -- namely, upon observation of a sign. At any rate, whenever we speak of a predicate we are representing a thought as a thing, as a substantia, since the concepts of substance and subject are one, its concomitants only being different in the two cases. It is needful to remark this in the present connexion, because, were it not for hypostatic abstraction, there could be no generality of a predicate, since a sign which should make its interpreter its deputy to determine its signification at his pleasure would not signify anything, unless nothing be its significate. -- From "Basis of Pragmaticism," 1906, following somewhat after 554.

----- Ende Ergänzung zu 5.448 -----

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CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMMON-SENSE

5.505. *Doctor Y.* Allow me. You speak of holding a Critical Philosophy of Common-Sense. What meaning would you have me attach to that phrase, seeing that Critical Philosophy and the Philosophy of Common-Sense, the two rival and opposed ways of answering Hume, are at internecine war, impacificable. The Common-Sense philosopher opines that, be Criticism never so indefatigable, it will have to come to a halt somewhere, and leave some belief uncriticized; namely, wherever no stimulus to doubt has ever been experienced. An uncriticized belief must, says the Common-sensist, ipso facto be regarded as

the very truth. That sounds conclusive. Yet it does not satisfy any of the Criticists, at all -- be they Kantians or be they of one of the modern kinds that do not usually go by the name of Criticists. That a belief should be accepted as the bed-rock of truth simply and solely because it has not been criticized -- oh, this is to their minds too monstrous! They insist that first principles be scientifically established. To think otherwise, says the great Wundt, is to ask that philosophy should come into being by equivocal generation. He so resuscitates the phrase which, in the days when men believed in armary unguents, in mummial philtres, and in sigillary medicines, denoted the manner in which they thought that Satan's flies and the vilest of crawling things could be produced, in order to hint how much out of good odor common-sense is in his estimation. Of a principle proposed for the foundation of philosophy, think the Criticists, it must either be proved that the very circumstances and form of human knowledge require its acceptance, or better, that scientific psychology should show that its truth is unavoidable, or still better, that physiology should support it as it supports parallelism, or best of all, that histology should almost bring it within the field of the microscope, as caryocinesis is supposed almost to give ocular demonstration of some high proposition. Now, without asking whether it be Common-Sense or one of the Critical methods that is right, one cannot help seeing that Criticism and Common-sense are so immiscible that to plunge into either is to lose all touch with the other. The Criticist believes in criticizing first principles, while the Common-sensist thinks such criticism is all nonsense. So I can find no meaning in your straddling phrase.

Pragmaticist. The phrase denotes a particular stripe of Common-sensism, which is separated from the old Scotch kind by four distinguishing marks. The mark that I find it convenient to describe first is that the Critical Common-sensist holds that all the veritably indubitable beliefs are vague -- often in some

directions highly so. Logicians have too much neglected the study of vagueness, not suspecting the important part it plays in mathematical thought. It is the antithetical analogue of generality. A sign is objectively general, in so far as, leaving its effective interpretation indeterminate, it surrenders to the interpreter the right of completing the determination for himself. "Man is mortal." "What man?" "Any man you like." A sign is objectively vague, in so far as, leaving its interpretation more or less indeterminate, it reserves for some other possible sign or experience the function of completing the determination. "This month," says the almanac-oracle, "a great event is to happen." "What event?" "Oh, we shall see. The almanac doesn't tell that." The general might be defined as that to which the principle of excluded middle does not apply. A triangle in general is not isosceles nor equilateral; nor is a triangle in general scalene. The vague might be defined as that to which the principle of contradiction does not apply. For it is false neither that an animal (in a vague sense) is male, nor that an animal is female. [... Kürzung: Ein schwer verständliches Mathematik-Beispiel]²

506. Notwithstanding their contrariety, generality and vagueness are, from a formal point of view, seen to be on a par. Evidently no sign can be at once vague and general in the same respect, since insofar as the right of determination is not distinctly extended to the interpreter it remains the right of the utterer. Hence also, a sign can only escape from being either vague or general by not being indeterminate. But that no sign can be absolutely and

²Mr. Kempe's great memoir in the Philosophical Transactions for 1886, the most solid piece of work upon any branch of the stecheology of relations that has ever been done, in addition to its intrinsic value, has that of taking us out of the logician's rut, and showing us how the mathematician conceives of logical objects. Thus, in Section 4, he says that the four angular points of a square "are not distinguishable from" one another. On first reading this, a person [Peirce] who was preoccupied with conceptions derived from logicians, was moved to write to the author and ask whether he did not mean "do not differ" from one another. For if the angles are undistinguished, how do we know there are more than one of them? But though some suggestions of the letter were adopted in a supplement to the memoir, Mr. Kempe stood to "undistinguished" and "undistinguishable"; and in Section 29 he is more explicit, saying of the units of a singular system of units (i.e., a system all whose units are undistinguished from one another), "that no definition can be given of, or remark made about, one which is not equally applicable to each of the others." In Section 73, he goes further in using the expression "undistinguished in dress or other circumstance," showing that he means to exclude distinction by means of relations. All this is utterly paradoxical to the logician, who will say that two vertices of a square are distinguished from each other in not being opposite the same vertex, and in various other ways. But the difficulty disappears as soon as he recognizes that Kempe's units are not supposed to be real objects, but are only vague ideas, to which nobody ever supposed the principle of contradiction to apply.

completely indeterminate is proved in CP 3.93 where Plutarch's anecdote about appealing from Phillip drunk to Phillip sober is put to use. Yet every proposition actually asserted must refer to some non-general subject; for the doctrine that a proposition has but a single subject has to be given up in the light of the Logic of Relations. (See The Open Court, pp. 3416 et seq.) [3.417ff.] Indeed, all propositions refer to one and the same determinately singular subject, well-understood between all utterers and interpreters; namely, to The Truth, which is the universe of all universes, and is assumed on all hands to be real. But besides that, there is some lesser environment of the utterer and interpreter of each proposition that actually gets conveyed, to which that proposition more particularly refers and which is not general. The Open Court paper referred to [above] made this plain, but left unnoticed some truths of the first importance about vagueness. No communication of one person to another can be entirely definite, i.e., non-vague. We may reasonably hope that physiologists will some day find some means of comparing the qualities of one person's feelings with those of another, so that it would not be fair to insist upon their present incomparability as an inevitable source of misunderstanding. Besides, it does not affect the intellectual purport of communications. But wherever degree or any other possibility of continuous variation subsists, absolute precision is impossible. Much else must be vague, because no man's interpretation of words is based on exactly the same experience as any other man's. Even in our most intellectual conceptions, the more we strive to be precise, the more unattainable precision seems. It should never be forgotten that our own thinking is carried on as a dialogue, and though mostly in a lesser degree, is subject to almost every imperfection of language. I have worked out the logic of vagueness with something like completeness, but need not inflict more of it upon you, at present.

507. That veritably indubitable beliefs are especially vague could be proved a priori. But proof not being aimed at today, it will be simpler to say that the Critical Common-sensist's personal experience is that a suitable line of reflexion, accompanied by imaginary experimentation, always excites doubt of any very broad proposition if it be defined with precision. Yet there are beliefs of which such a critical sifting invariably leaves a certain vague residuum unaffected.

508. One ought then to ask oneself, whether, since much of the original belief has disappeared under an attentive dissection, perseverance might not affect the destruction of what remains of it. This question always appears reasonable as long as one stands far enough away from the facts of the case, and views them as one would a painting of Monet.

But the answer that a closer scrutiny dictates in some cases is that it is not because insufficient pains have been taken to precide the residuum, that it is vague: it is that it is vague intrinsically. Take, for example, our belief in the Order of Nature. The criticisms of it in 5.342; 6.395ff; 2.749ff; 6.35ff; 6.613, as well as by various other writers, of whom may be mentioned as long antecedent to the writer, Renouvier, Delboeuf, Fouille, Blood, and James, and no doubt there were others, and since that time Dewey and I know not who else, appear to me to have stripped it of all rational precision. As precisely defined it can hardly be said to be absolutely indubitable considering how many thinkers there are who do not believe it. But who can think that there is no order in nature?

509. Could I be assured that other men candidly and with sufficient deliberation doubt any proposition which I regard as indubitable, that fact would inevitably cause me to doubt it, too. I ought not, however, lightly to admit that they do so doubt a proposition after the most thorough criticism by myself and

anxious consideration of any other criticisms which I have been able to find and understand has left it quite indubitable by me, since there are other states of mind that can easily be mistaken for doubt. If, indeed, the phenomenon in question were at all a common one, instead of being among the rarest of experiences, I should return to a variety of Common-sensism which has always strongly attracted me, namely, that there is no definite and fixed collection of opinions that are indubitable, but that criticism gradually pushes back each individual's indubitables, modifying the list, yet still leaving him beliefs indubitable at the time being. The reason I have of late given up that opinion, attractive as I find it, is that the facts of my experience accord better with the theory of a fixed list, the same for all men. I do not suppose that it is absolutely fixed, (for my synechism would revolt at that) but that it is so nearly so, that for ordinary purposes it may be taken as quite so.