

The Fixation of Belief — Charles S. Peirce

1. History of the Development of Reason, Experience, and Justification

- Servants to Authority
- Experience is Interior Illumination
- Experience is open to verification (although superficial scientific method)
- Modern Science (Kepler, Lavoisier). Reasoning is not internal or uniquely mental.

Peirce writes that Lavoisier gave a new conception to reasoning as something “which was to be done with one’s eyes open, by manipulating real things instead of words and fancies” (EP1:111)

2. The Object of Reasoning

Goal of reasoning is to discover things *we do not know* from things we do.

What determines *how* we reason from *what we do not know* is “some habit of mind” (EP1:112). We want to reason with a *good* habit of mind, one that “produces true conclusions from true premises” (EP1:112). The difficulty then is discerning which habits of mind are good and which ones are not.

3. Distinction between Doubt and Belief: a Preliminary

Three rough differences distinguish *doubt* from *belief*. What are they?

4. Definition of Inquiry

Doubt/Belief Matrix: “The irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle *inquiry*” (EP1:114). Doubt stimulates us to action. We wish to remove the irritation by attain a state of belief. *Inquiry* is the active process by which we remove doubt and attain belief.

The sole (or final) object of inquiry is thus “the settlement of opinion” (an attainment of a fixed belief). Thus, according to Peirce, there is no conceivable practical difference between what is true and an entirely fixed belief.

In this section, we find more criticisms of Cartesianism (see EP1:115).

5. Four Methods of Fixing Belief

1. The Method of Tenacity

1. The settlement of opinion is the sole object of inquiry.
2. Belief is the nature of a habit.
3. Therefore, we should fix belief by tenaciously holding whatever belief we already hold.

Advantages?

Disadvantages?

2. The Method of Authority

1. The settlement of opinion is the sole object of inquiry.
2. Belief is the nature of a habit.
3. Therefore, fix belief by destroying non-believers.

Advantages?

Disadvantages?

3. Method of Pure Reason

1. The settlement of opinion is the sole object of inquiry.
2. Belief is the nature of a habit.
3. Therefore, belief should be fixed by whatever is agreeable to reason.

Advantages?

Disadvantages?

4. The Scientific Method

1. The settlement of opinion is the sole object of inquiry.
2. Belief is the nature of a habit.
3. Therefore, belief should be fixed by the methods of science.

Advantages?

Disadvantages?