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Author: Peirce, Charles Sanders

Title: An Essay toward Improving Our Reasoning in Security and in Uberty

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Abstract / From the Robin Catalogue:

Description: A. MS., n.p., [c.1913], pp. 1-53, with 10 pp. of variants.

Defense of final causes. Ratiocination and instinct. CSP is guided by the following maxim: Define all mental characters as far as possible in terms of their outward manifestations. This maxim is roughly equivalent to the rule of pragmatism. It can be said to aid security but not uberty of reasoning. "Yet the maxim of Pragmatism does not bestow a single smile upon beauty, upon moral virtue, or upon abstract truth, the three things that alone raise Humanity above Animality." The science of psychology is of no help in laying the foundations of a sane philosophy of reasoning, and precisely why CSP believes this to be so.

From The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2:

[This text, composed in September-October 1913, a few months before Peirce's death, belongs to a series of unfinished papers on reasoning.] Written in a retrospective mood, this unfinished work shows Peirce continuing to assess the completeness of his logic and the scope of his pragmatism. We learn that reasoning involves a trade-off between security and uberty (rich suggestiveness), and that, not surprisingly, deductive reasoning provides the most security, but little uberty, while abduction provides much uberty but almost no security. Pragmatism, it seems, falls in on the side of security: "[it] does not bestow a single smile upon beauty, upon moral virtue, or upon abstract truth; - the three things that alone raise Humanity above Animality." Peirce objects strongly to Francis Bacon's pessimistic claim that nature is beyond human understanding and repeats his long-held conviction that psychology can offer no significant aid to logic. The essay ends with a reminder that the connection between words and thought is as intimate as that between body and mind.

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