Belief

We generally know when we wish to ask a question and when we wish to
pronounce a judgment, for there is a dissimilarity between the sensation of
doubting and that of believing.

But this is not all which distinguishes doubt from belief. There is a practical
difference. Our beliefs guide our desires and shape our actions. The Assassins,
or followers of the Old Man of the Mountain, used to rush into death at his least
card, because they believed that obedience to him would insure
everlasting felicity. Had they doubted this, they would not have acted as they
did. So it is with every belief, according to its degree. 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 never has such an effect.

Nor must we overlook a third point of difference. Doubt is an uneasy and
dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the
state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not
wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else. On the contrary, we
cling tenaciously, not merely to believing, but to believing just what we
do believe.

Thus, both doubt and belief have positive effects upon us, though very different
ones. Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition
that we shall behave in some certain way, when the occasion arises. Doubt has
not the least such active effect, but stimulates us to inquiry until it is destroyed.
This reminds us of the irritation of a nerve and the reflex action produced
thereby; while for the analogue of belief, in the nervous system, we must look
to what are called nervous associations – for example, to that habit of the
nerves in consequence of which the smell of a peach will make the
mouth water.

The irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term
this struggle Inquiry, though it must be admitted that this is sometimes not a
very apt designation.

[—] Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy
that this is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a
true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon
as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true
or false. And it is clear that nothing out of the sphere of our knowledge can be
our object, for nothing which does not affect the mind can be the motive for mental effort. The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall think to be true. But we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so.

References: CP 5.370-375
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