

'Assertion' (pub. 19.01.15-12:23). Quote in M. Bergman & S. Paavola (Eds.), *The Commens Dictionary: Peirce's Terms in His Own Words. New Edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.commens.org/dictionary/entry/quote-harvard-lectures-pragmatism-lecture-i-7>.

Term: Assertion

Quote: ...it is a fairly easy problem to analyze the nature of *assertion*. To find an easily dissected example, we shall naturally take a case where the assertive element is magnified, – a very formal assertion, such as an affidavit. Here a man goes before a notary or magistrate and takes such action that if what he says is not true, evil consequences will be visited upon him, and this he does with a view to thus causing other men to be affected just as they would be if the proposition sworn to had presented itself to them as a perceptual fact.

We thus see that the act of assertion is an act of a totally different nature from the act of apprehending the meaning of the proposition and we cannot expect that any analysis of what assertion is (or any analysis of what *judgment* or *belief* is, if that act is at all allied to assertion), should throw any light at all on the widely different question of what the apprehension of the meaning of a proposition is.

What is the difference between making an *assertion* and *laying a wager*? Both are acts whereby the agent deliberately subjects himself to evil consequences if a certain proposition is not true. Only when he offers to bet he hopes the other man will make himself responsible in the same way for the truth of the contrary proposition; while when he makes an *assertion* he always (or almost always) wishes the man to whom he makes it to be led to do what he does. Accordingly in our vernacular “I will bet” so and so, is the phrase expressive of a private opinion which one does not expect others to share, while “You bet” ___ is a form of assertion intended to cause another to follow suit.

Source: Peirce, C. S. (1903). *Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism: Lecture I*. MS [R] 301.

References: PPM 116-117; CP 5.30-31

Date of 1903

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