

'Maxim of Pragmatism' (pub. 07.04.13-13:09). 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-issues-pragmaticism-4>.

Term: Maxim of Pragmatism

Quote: [It appears, then, that the rule for attaining the third grade of clearness of apprehension is as follows: Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.] Note that in these three lines one finds, "conceivably," "conceive," "conception," "conception," "conception." Now I find there are many people who detect the authorship of my unsigned screeds; and I doubt not that one of the marks of my style by which they do so is my inordinate reluctance to repeat a word. This employment five times over of derivatives of *concipere* must then have had a purpose. In point of fact it had two. One was to show that I was speaking of meaning in no other sense than that of *intellectual purport*. The other was to avoid all danger of being understood as attempting to explain a concept by percepts, images, schemata, or by anything but concepts. I did not, therefore, mean to say that acts, which are more strictly singular than anything, could constitute the purport, or adequate proper interpretation, of any symbol. I compared action to the finale of the symphony of thought, belief being a demi-cadence. Nobody conceives that the few bars at the end of a musical movement are the *purpose* of the movement. They may be called its upshot. But the figure obviously would not bear detailed application. I only mention it to show that the suspicion I myself expressed (Baldwin's *Dictionary Article, Pragmatism*) after a too hasty rereading of the forgotten magazine paper, that it expressed a stoic, that is, a nominalistic, materialistic, and utterly philistine state of thought, was quite mistaken.

No doubt, Pragmaticism makes thought ultimately *apply* to action exclusively – to *conceived* action. But between admitting that and either saying that it makes thought, in the sense of the purport of symbols, to consist in acts, or saying that the true ultimate purpose of thinking is action, there is much the same difference as there is between saying that the artist-painter's living art is applied to dabbing paint upon canvas, and saying that that art-life consists in dabbing paint, or that its ultimate aim is dabbing paint. Pragmaticism makes thinking to consist in the living inferential metaboly of symbols whose purport lies in conditional general resolutions to act. As for the ultimate purpose of thought, which must be the purpose of everything, it is beyond human comprehension; but according to the stage of approach which my thought has made to it – with aid from many persons, among whom I may mention Royce (in

his *World and Individual*), Schiller (in his *Riddles of the Sphinx*) as well, by the way, as the famous poet [Friedrich Schiller] (in his *Aesthetische Briefe*), Henry James the elder (in his *Substance and Shadow* and in his conversations), together with Swedenborg himself – it is by the indefinite replication of self-control upon self-control that the *vir* is begotten, and by action, through thought, he grows an esthetic ideal, not for the behoof of his own poor noddle merely, but as the share which God permits him to have in the work of creation.

This ideal, by modifying the rules of self-control modifies action, and so experience too – both the man's own and that of others, and this centrifugal movement thus rebounds in a new centripetal movement, and so on; and the whole is a bit of what has been going on, we may presume, for a time in comparison with which the sum of the geological ages is as the surface of an electron in comparison with that of a planet.

Source: Peirce, C. S. (1905). *Issues of Pragmaticism*. MS [R] 290.

References: CP 5.402n3

Date of 1905

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