Peirce: What Pragmatism Is

1. Every experimental scientist has been influenced by life in the laboratory.
   1. If a given prescription for an experiment ever can be and ever is carried out in act, an experience of a given description will result, or what you say is senseless.
   2. The experimental scientist is against the idea that the physicist seeks something deeper than the laws of possible experience.
2. The author sometimes came to find in Kant, Berkeley and Spinoza ways of thinking that recalled the laboratory.
3. The rational purport of a word lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life. “if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept…”
4. This is pragmatism, which in Kant’s language expresses some relation to some definite human purpose.
5. So the new theory recognizes connection between rational cognition and rational purpose.
6. On philosophical nomenclature.
   1. We should make philosophy like the natural sciences.
   2. Investigators instead of condemning all the others should cooperate, multiply incontestable results, stress repeated observations, each worthy hypothesis getting fair examination, and trusted only when their predictions are borne out [TL: this is fine for science, but for philosophy?]
   3. To become scientific in this sense you need suitable technical nomenclature in which every term has a definite meaning universally accepted (107) and the words aren’t too sweet sounding.
   4. There has to be a rupture with individual habits and preferences.
   5. He who introduces a new conception should invent acceptable terms to express it, and they should not be allowed to lose their original meanings.
   6. No other technical terms denoting the same things should be allowed.
   7. Philosophers in congress should adapt canons, for example, as in chemistry, assigning fixed meanings to certain prefixes: prope- for extension of the meaning of the term, for example.
   8. Also might be best not to go back to scholastic terminology.
7. “pragmatism” has gained general recognition in a generalized sense through James and Schiller, but then the word began to be abused in literary journals.
   1. Peirce then decided to replace it with pragmaticism “ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers.”
   2. There is advantage in the original conception [his own] of the doctrine since every relevant truth can be deduced from it and some errors avoided.
   3. Also it is more unified and compact.
   4. And it connects with its own proof.
   5. This proof is the one contribution I have made to philosophy of most value.
   6. It is also the truth of synechism: principle that continuity prevails in all thought, life and society.
8. Certain preliminary propositions need to be accepted.
   1. They follow the maxim: dismiss make-believes, i.e. that philosophy takes its state from states of mind no one actually has.
   2. Begin by doubting everything is one example.
   3. Another says, begin observing the first impressions of sense, for percepts are the result of cognitive elaboration.
   4. You actually start out with a mind laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed.
   5. It is not sufficient to doubt just to write down on paper that you doubt.
   6. There is much that you do not doubt at all, and you regard that as infallible.
   7. It is not that what a man does not doubt is therefore true (109) but that a man has to regard what he does not doubt as true.
   8. Doubt is only called into being by a certain stimulus. Talk of metaphysical “truth” is just puzzling.
   9. You only have dealings with doubts and beliefs, with new beliefs being forced on you giving you power to doubt old beliefs.
   10. “truth” that to a belief in which belief would tend if it were to tend indefinitely toward absolute fixity.
   11. Truth and falsity not definable in terms of doubt and belief are entities which ought to be eliminated by Ockham’s razor.
   12. Simplify the problem by saying you want belief unassailable by doubt.
9. Belief is not a momentary state but a (mostly unconscious) habit of mind.
   1. Doubt is the contrary, i.e. a privation of a habit, which is erratic and must be superseded.
10. The reader does not doubt that he can exert self-control over his future actions, that self-preparation will impart to action one character i.e. absence of self-reproach.
    1. As action is repeated it tends toward the perfection of that fixed character.
    2. Where no self-control is possible there will be no self-reproach.
11. This is what distinguishes a rational being.
    1. Blame is projection of the feeling of self-reproach [on another]
    2. We never blame anyone where there is no previous self-control.
    3. Thinking is largely subject to self-control, logical self-control mirroring ethical self-control.
    4. So, what you can’t help believing is not wrong belief, for you it is absolute truth, even though you might disbelieve it tomorrow.
    5. Distinguish between things you cannot do.
    6. An experientially based hypothesis cannot be doubted because of the nature of the things themselves.
12. “thought” should be taken to cover all rational life, an experiment being an operation of thought. For thought is the habit of self-control which ultimately tends to is fixed belief.
13. A person is not absolutely an individual: his thoughts are what he says to his other self, coming into life in time. He is trying to persuade this critical self.
    1. All thought is a sign, and most is in language.
    2. One’s society is a loosely compacted person.
    3. These two things allow you to distinguish absolute truth from what you do not doubt.
14. Q: your doctrine is that a conception is to be tested by its practical effects.
15. P: this idea is wrong: [he repeats his definition]: [it appears that he doesn’t think his theory is about testing say the truth of a conception but determining what it means, the conception of the effects being the conception of the object…actually it might be more a theory of an object than a theory of meaning]
16. P: the advantage of the doctrine is that every proposition of ontological metaphysics is meaningless (by way of definitions of definitions) in that no real conception is reached, or absurd.
    1. What remains of philosophy is a series of problems capable of investigation by observational methods.
    2. Truth would be reached without interminable disputes.
    3. In this pragmaticism is a prope-positivism, although, unlike positivism, it retains a purified philosophy, accepts our instinctive beliefs and believes in scholastic realism.
    4. It does not jeer at metaphysics but extracts its essence, giving life and light to cosmology, physics and morality.
17. Q: your doctrine would not only wipe out metaphysics but every proposition of science and conduct of life since the only meaning is that a certain experiment has resulted a certain way.
    1. How can an experiment in itself reveal more than that something happened and then something else?
18. P: But every connected series of experiments constitutes a single collective experiment. The experiment consists of the experimenter, a verifiable hypothesis about the universe about the experimenter, as well as sincere doubt about the hypothesis.
    1. There is the purpose, plan, resolve, and the choice of objects to be operated on.
    2. There is the act that modifies the objects, the reaction of the world in perception, and the experimenter’s recognition of the result.
19. P: it is not in an experiment but in an experimental phenomenon that rational meaning is found. He means it is what surely will happen to everybody in the living future who shall fulfill certain conditions.
    1. The pragmaticist maxim says nothing of single experiments but of general kinds of experimental phenomena
    2. It speaks of general objects as real, since the true, i.e. the laws of nature, represent the real.
20. (114) Many generals are real and may also be physically efficient in that human purposes are physically efficient: if I feel the air to be stuffy, that thought may cause the window to be opened.
    1. The individual event was determined in part by the general fact that stuffy air is unwholesome.
    2. Truths have a greater tendency to get believed than falsities have, otherwise, given that there are many more false propositions about something than true, finding the one truth would be a miracle.
    3. “when my window was opened, because of the truth that stuffy air is malsain, a physical effort was brought into existence by the efficiency of a general and non-existent truth” (114) [Does he mean that truths do not really exist?]
    4. This does not blind us to great facts such as that ideas “justice” and “truth” are the mightiest forces in the world.
    5. Generality is an indispensable ingredient of reality, mere individual existence without it would be nothing, chaos.
21. What any true proposition asserts is real.
    1. The rational meaning of every concept is a real general calculated to influence human conduct.
22. The final good is not action but the process of evolution where the existence embodies more and more the generals. They are destined and are called reasonable.
23. The pragmaticist does not attribute any different essential mode of being to any event in the future from a similar event in the past: the practical attitude only is different.
24. Forms are not the only realities, and the reasonable meaning of a word is not the only kind of meaning.
25. Aristotle’s definition of universal predication: there is nothing among the existence individuals to which the subject belongs but to which the predicate will not also be referred.
    1. Propositions in formal logic go in pairs, e.g. antecedent and consequent.
    2. The mate to As definition is: we call a predication affirmative only when there is nothing among the sensational effects that belong universally to the predicate which will not belong to the subject.
    3. This is pragmatism.
26. You cannot construct a conditional purpose out of action, volition, resolve, actual purpose.
    1. Continuity is indispensable to reality
    2. It is what generality becomes in the logic of relatives.
    3. It is an affair of thought and is the essence of thought.
    4. The third category, the category of thought, representation, triadic relation…is an essential ingredient of reality, but it can have no concrete being without action.
    5. So pragmatism is allied to Hegelian absolute idealism although the third category is not enough to make the world. The first two categories should not be seen with contempt.
    6. Pragmatism belongs to the triadic class of philosophical doctrines, even more than Hegelianism who sees it as mere fashion.