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How Pragmatic are the Examples in Peirce's *Illustrations*?

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Abstract

The “proof” of pragmatism, and in general the idea that the relevance of the pragmatist maxim had to be “proved”, is a vexed question, and one should be cautious, here, before embarking into its treatment: Christopher Hookway has devoted a long series of papers to this very question and they often involve the consideration of minute details in Peirce’s late writings². I will content myself here with a puzzle that comes before, if I’m right: scholars have long taken for granted that Peirce had applied, within a new logical and metaphysical context, Bain’s doctrine that a belief was a preparedness to act and that this application provided the core of Peirce’s first pragmatism. I think that even in the first texts, that is not exactly true and that, contrariwise to what is often held, dispositions to act don’t play such an obvious role in the *Illustrations of the Logic of Science*. To put it in a nutshell, It is not clear whether Peirce’s examples are actually, at that time, pragmatic examples.

The first section provides a tentative roadmap to assess the sundry dimensions of Peirce’s Pragmatism in the 1870s, the second deals with the alleged role of dispositionalism in *How to Make our Ideas Clear*, the third one provides some contextual elements that might account for the “outburst” of dispositionalism in 1878.

KEYWORDS: Dispositions, Inquiry, Belief, Reality, Pragmatism (Proof of), Peirce, Helmholtz, Clifford.

Introduction

One of the well-known puzzles in the Peirce scholarship pertains to the relationship between the sundry papers retrieved in the *Illustrations of the Logic of Science*, and in particular to the articulation between Peirce’s *Fixation of Belief* and *How to Make our Ideas Clear*, that is to say between the theory of inquiry and the pragmatism maxim. The fact that it was a problem also to Peirce’s eyes is evidenced by his numerous late attempts to provide a “proof” of pragmatism³ and to unite the two first *Illustrations* in a single paper.

The “proof” of pragmatism, and in general the idea that the relevance of the pragmatist maxim had to be “proved”, is a vexed question, and one should be cautious, here, before embarking into its treatment: Christopher Hookway has devoted a long series of papers to this very question and they often involve the consideration of minute details in Peirce’s late writings⁴. I will content

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²HOOKWAY(2012).

³ Based on the categories, on the normative sciences, on semeiotics, on the graphs...

⁴ The question I’ll deal with here is related to the attempt to make sense of the notion of Belief Peirce entertained in the seventies, and a fuller analysis would have to take into account at least three groups of writings: (1) the bulk of MSS written in the early 1870s (formerly referred to as the “Logic of 1873”); (2) the second *Illustration of the Logic of science*, which has no clear-cut predecessor in the MSS, and which builds much much more on the dispositional

myself here with a puzzle that comes before, if I'm right: scholars have long taken for granted that Peirce had *applied*, within a new logical and metaphysical context, Bain's doctrine that a belief was a preparedness to act and that this *application* provided the core of Peirce's first pragmatism⁵. I think that even in the first texts, that is not exactly true and that, contrariwise to what is often held, dispositions to act do not play such an obvious role in the *Illustrations of the Logic of Science*. To put it in a nutshell, It is not clear whether Peirce's examples are actually, at that time, *pragmatic* examples.

The first section provides a tentative roadmap to assess the sundry dimensions of Peirce's Pragmatism in the 1870s, the second deals with the alleged role of dispositionalism in *How to Make our Ideas Clear* (Hereafter HMIC), the third one provides some contextual elements that might account for the "outburst" of dispositionalism in 1878.

1 Three claims

It is not the least of paradoxes that the idea of pragmatism itself proved to be so confusing, and for so long; seventy years after Lovejoy⁶, it took nearly fifteen years, according to Joseph Margolis's narrative, to Rorty and Putnam to tell what their main differences over pragmatism actually consisted in⁷. Some scholars provide a list of tenets (Wiener⁸, Thayer⁹, Shusterman¹⁰), some others might try a definition, I will content myself here with delineating three distinctively pragmatist claims, which can be cumulative or independent, and that eventuate in very different kinds of pragmatism indeed. This will help me tracking one of these claims in Peirce's *Illustrations*, but I submit this might also be helpful when we deal with other pragmatists.

1.1 What kind of Pragmatism?

Some confusions arise from the fact that "pragmatism" is often used to refer to at least *three* strands that one can actually find in Peirce's early writings (as well as in James or, later, in Dewey), so that it is often quite difficult to find out what exactly Peirce is trying to prove:

1. ***Inquiry***. First, one would have the idea that there are several modes of fixation of beliefs, but that they have a minimal *homogeneity*; or, for later pragmatists, that inquiry is a general pattern of existence, rooted in the way we face the sting of concrete doubt or again, in Deweyan terms, a discrepancy in the situation. One needs to endorse something like that in order to qualify as a "pragmatist" about the sciences or about inquiry in general. That is what most people have in mind when they use the term. To use Peircian terms, if there was a radical difference, regarding their objects, between the the "fourth mode" of fixation and the three others —and there might be— there would be no pragmatism at all in the first sense. Actually, the *Fixation of Belief* (hereafter: FB) deals with *four* methods of settling beliefs, not three methods for fixing practical beliefs and one last method specific to science and, say, theoretical beliefs. A good point can be made, with the help of the 1898 lectures¹¹, that Peirce conceived growing doubts about that first claim¹², but the standard view of pragmatism is that this view has exploded abstract approaches to

aspect of beliefs than the first one; (3) the last four *Illustrations*, where other important patterns are tackled. I'll deal here only with the two first groups.

⁵FISCH (1954), in the classical paper on this point, already made the point that Saint John Green already "applied" Bain, so that he might have a claim on the title of "grandfather" of Pragmatism.

⁶"The Thirteen Pragmatisms"(1908), retrieved in LOVEJOY (1963).

⁷MARGOLIS (2002).

⁸WIENER (1973).

⁹THAYER (1968).

¹⁰SHUSTERMAN (2010).

¹¹ On the standard view also, James is the main target for these lectures. I have claimed that Royce is another, see GIREL (2011).

¹² For an interesting reading that argues that there is no "tension" between 1878 and 1898, see MIGOTTI (2005),

theories and replaced them with the dynamics of belief-fixation¹³. So, we might say that this first claim is an *epistemological* claim.

2. **Dispositions.** Secondly, one has the idea that beliefs, and maybe other products of the mind as well, can be construed as *dispositions* to act¹⁴; that would be the Bainian thrust¹⁵. If you are not a dispositionalist, chances are that you still consider beliefs as purely intellectual episodes in the life of the mind. A good question to ask to the would-be dispositionalist is whether he or she admits of a sharp distinction between practical and theoretical beliefs. And, in case there are such purely theoretical beliefs, whether they involve a distinct kind of practice or not: are there dispositional beliefs in the fields of mathematics for example? Are there special layers of conduct, when we draw a graph? Are there “gestures”¹⁶ even in the remotest parts of the gamma-graphs? This second claim involves a *philosophy of mind* and also a *philosophy of action*.
3. **Meanings.** Thirdly, we have the idea that the reference to “practical bearings” can be helpful when we have to elucidate the meanings of the objects of our thoughts, whether we have to dismiss sheer nonsense, spurious homonymies or, on the contrary, to ascertain non-obvious synonymies. That insight is encapsulated in the Pragmatist Maxim:

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 object¹⁷.

We have here two interesting questions I have tried to address elsewhere: one can ask whether the pragmatism maxim applies to each and every kind of object (I have proposed to call that the “range” of the maxim¹⁸), one can ask whether it elucidates everything important there is in the object (I have proposed to call that the “comprehensiveness” of the maxim¹⁹). This would be a *semantical*, or, at the very least, a *methodological* claim.

1.2 Weak and strong versions

This first division, of course, does not tell the whole story, because one can endorse a strong or a weak version of each and every of these claims.

1. One can maintain either that there is no substantial difference between science and other matters, or one can argue, without going so far, that there is no sharp dichotomy between facts and values, that there are norms in science *as well as* in other practical matters, and certainly transversal norms (think of Putnam’s examples: simplicity, elegance, Putnam (2002)).
2. Secondly, one can endorse a strong dispositionalist account of mind, by assuming that beliefs are only the psychologically available aspect of deeper dispositions, verbal or not, *or* one can endorse

contra HOOKWAY (2000).

¹³ In addition, it is often overlooked that Peirce’s fourth method is the “scientific method”, not the “method of the sciences” only: Peirce sees very well that you can be a scientist but fix at least some of your beliefs with the method of tenacity or authority (just think of his enemy Newcomb), or that you can be a detective or an historian and fix your beliefs with the scientific method (that is, if you work under the presupposition of reality and that, if your question is correctly framed, you can reasonably expect a convergence among competent inquirers).

¹⁴ There might be some interesting differences between “dispositions” and “capacities”, CHAUVIRÉ (2002).

¹⁵FISCH (1954).

¹⁶MADDALENA (2015).

¹⁷ W3, 266.

¹⁸ Peirce sometimes mentions uses of the maxim concerning natural kinds (“precepts”, CP 2.330), and sometimes restricts it to “intellectual concepts” (CP 5.467: “I understand pragmatism to be a method of ascertaining the meanings, not of all ideas, but only of what I call ‘intellectual concepts’, that is to say, of those upon the structure of which, arguments concerning objective fact may hinge.”).

¹⁹GIREL (2004).

the view that some of our staunchest beliefs, in conjunction with desires, usually and functionally eventuate in lines of conduct²⁰; we know that Bain himself wavered between such a strong and a weak versions of his thesis, and some of his readers think that he has “recanted” from his earlier, too naturalist and too physiological, views²¹.

3. Thirdly, one can understand “practical” as involving practice, *i.e.* as involving conduct, *i.e.* what we do, or one can understand “practical”, as James sometimes did, as involving only a reference to *particulars*, whether they are acts (that we are to prepare) or are of a sensational character (sensations we are to expect)²².

From there, one can build a matrix²³ that is useful to disambiguate some of the most frequent forms of pragmatism but that will not be my main concern here, even if I think that it is important, before we come to characterize a “flavor” of pragmatism, to say where we are with respect to these three claims. For example, some readers refer to James’s “pragmatism” when they in point of fact have the *Will to believe* in mind (and thus something like the first family of claims), sometimes they refer to his way of elucidating meanings, whether this imply a substantive account of action or not²⁴.

1.3 Presuppositions

As we can expect, there can be a more or less compact entanglement between these claims. I am interested here in the “non-entanglement” dimension, since I wish to assess whether the idea that beliefs are dispositions to act *is* a thesis that can be defended without involving the two others, and conversely whether one can be a pragmatist without endorsing it.

1 does *not* presuppose 2.

You can be a pragmatist in the first sense without being pragmatist in the second sense: you can subscribe to the view that the goal of inquiry is to lead to the settlement of doxastic states —to acquire stable beliefs— without endorsing the view that these states are also sequences or action (Hookway 2000, 23). Thinking that the goal of inquiry is to reach settled doxastic states simply does not imply that these states are also, functionally, phases of conduct, or, for that matter, habits. This is so true that, in Peirce’s first drafts about the theory of inquiry, the view that beliefs can also be seen as habits does not play a major role and deserves only passing mention²⁵.

2 presupposes neither 1 nor 3.

The theory we are to adopt about mind is indeed compatible with several theories about knowledge, even though a strong dispositionalist approach can lead us to favor an epistemology where stable states, which have some of the characteristics of habit, play an important role; and of

²⁰ This line of thought is present in James early rephrasing of Peirce’s ideas, and is prominent in the *Talks to Teachers*; I have argued elsewhere that the *Talks to Students* endorsed a more comprehensive account of action. See GIREL (2007b).

²¹ See WERNHAM (1986b) and WERNHAM (1986a).

²² See William James’s definition of Pragmatism, in Baldwin’s *Dictionary* (1901-02), as retrieved in CP 5.2: “The doctrine that the whole “meaning” of a conception expresses itself in practical consequences, consequences either in the shape of conduct to be recommended, or in that of experiences to be expected, if the conception be true.”

²³ As in the 1903 *Harvard Lectures* with the systems of metaphysics, one would have seven kinds of pragmatism, I, II, III, I-II, I-III, I-II-III, II-III (only seven because someone who would not endorse any of the three claims would of course not count as a pragmatist). If we take into account the weak and strong version for each claim, there are of course more positions.

²⁴ For reasons that would be too long to explain to explain here, this is what happened to James when he was introduced in France. I have documented some aspects of this distortion/reception in Girel (2007a), and in another paper still in press: “What Went Wrong? A Confused Reception for James and a Faint One for Royce”, *James and Royce: Pragmatism and Idealism in Dialogue*, D. Lamberth ed, HUP; available from my page on Academia.edu.

²⁵ I would make an exception for W3, 76-77.

course one is free to have different theories about semantics or, in a more modest register, about the methodological rules for elucidating concepts, even though, here again, some theories about meaning will be hard to reconcile with 2²⁶.

3 does not presuppose 2.

It might be the case that in some writings, Peirce had assumed the dispositionalist account as the background of the pragmatist maxim. Forster, already in the papers preparing his book²⁷, strongly made the case that it was not a necessary step and that, if there was a foundation for the pragmatic maxim (that is, for 3), it was to be found in the general theory of symbols, and in a special application of this theory to the consequences we can draw from “A believes X”. Peirce at the end of his life assumed that the ultimate logical interpretant could be phrased in terms of habits, but those who are familiar with the details of MS317-18 know that the “deduction” of habits, there, is a tricky matter indeed. If one has a Sellarsian or a Brandomian, the inferential account of meaning is related to the practice of assertion and to the “game of giving and asking for reasons”, but Brandom is very explicit on the fact that he is in no way committed to the naturalist account of belief that was so important to some pragmatists²⁸.

3 does not presuppose 1 (insofar as 2 does not presuppose 1)

We might want to elucidate beliefs (or, for that matter arguments, propositions, rhemes, etc.) *before* they are fixed, or sometimes beliefs that never had to be fixed in the first place. Peirce later made a distinction between beliefs that have to be fixed and those that have to be elucidated²⁹. It also makes sense to make notions clear even though they are part of a theory that proved to be unsatisfactory (and which does not lead to a stable belief anymore).

1 presupposes 3 in a weak sense

That's in fact the transition between the two papers: pragmatic clarifications might be useful, in addition to the two first grades of clearness to settle unending metaphysical disputes³⁰.

To put it shortly, there are two kinds of “proof” of pragmatism: one broad kind of proof would consist in articulating these three claims, and articulating them is no trivial task indeed since their mutual implication is rather weak. A lot could be said here, but it is clear at least that if you have a strong version of 2, you can build it in such a way that it will fit nicely with 1 (courtesy of the “stability” part), and 3 (courtesy of the intended consequences), which is the decisive step.

Another kind of proof is internal to one of the three claims: you might want to prove that the scientific method does not postpone indefinitely the fixation of belief³¹; or, you might want to prove that beliefs really need to be understood as preparednesses to act³²; or, you might want to prove that there is an ultimate logical interpretant and that this interpretant is of the nature of habits or of conditional practical expectations³³.

²⁶ As we can see in the exchange between Sellars and Chisholm, where Sellars defends his account of intentionality based on his views on verbal behavior and thinking-out-loud, CHISHOLM (1958).

²⁷ See FORSTER (2003) and of course FORSTER (2011), especially Chapters 5 and 6.

²⁸ See for example, BRANDOM (2000), Preface.

²⁹ See MS596, RR22 59600050.

³⁰ MS323, 4-5.

³¹ SHORT (2000).

³² TURRISI and Charles Sanders PEIRCE (1997), Lect 1.

³³ MS318.

Let's stick here with the first (broad) kind of proof and let's see whether the second claim, about beliefs and dispositions, is instrumental or not in 1878.

2 How Pragmatic are the Pragmatic Examples?

In which ways exactly are pragmatic clarifications *pragmatic*? In later texts, Peirce sometimes referred to pragmatism as the idea that a thought is nothing but a habit connected with a sign³⁴. We would then have a neat articulation of the three claims. Things would be pretty clear: we would have a full-blown dispositionalism, easily integrated into Peirce's own mature tri-categorical realism and semiotics, and it is certainly no accident that the most suggestive accounts of conduct in Peirce deal with these later writings.

It is often assumed that Peirce was more of a naturalist in 1878 and already a dispositionalist. What about Peirce's examples in the *Illustrations* then? *In which way do they involve a version of claim 2 and of claim 3?* Or again:

- Is the dispositional account even important in their clarifications?
- Does the elucidated meanings clearly incorporate reference to practical bearings?

In the same way as it is natural to confront the Pragmatists' sundry agendas and their respective achievements, it is natural to look not only at what Peirce *claims* about belief but at what he *makes out of it*.

There are six examples in *How to make our ideas clear* (HMIC), and the three first ones are easily overlooked in the extant scholarship: the musical melody, the "dots", transubstantiation, hardness, force, and, of course, reality. The pragmatist maxim is given as a kind of conclusion of the third example and the end of the paper consists in "illustrations" of it.

2.1 Specious pragmatism?

As we know with the help of the manuscripts, some of Peirce's last examples, in the list I just mentioned, are by no means new in 1878. Some of them were used as early as 1872 in the context of the *realist* —Peirce sometimes says "idealist"³⁵ — argument he was then construing. Peirce had to prove, against the nominalists, that reality could somehow be connected to our chains of reasonings, not at the beginning, in "observations" for example, as classical empiricists or psychological nominalists would have it, but at the other "end", on the side of our conclusions, of the consequences we expect.

Reality is independent not of thought in general but of *my* thought(s) or *your* thought(s). But thoughts as psychical events, as observations for example, are singular in character; so reality is independent of our starting-points in their singularity (that's the gist of the story with the deaf-mute and the blind witnessing the same murder in the 1871 *Fraser Review*). Of course, this account of reality certainly sounded paradoxical enough to Peirce's non-Kantian listeners or readers and he felt he had to give it some flesh: he had to explain how it is that "the object of the final belief, which exists only in consequence of the belief, should itself produce the belief"³⁶. Or, in other words: how the reality of the object of the occurrent belief is contingent upon something that "will" happen, that is to say one having the "final" opinion³⁷. Peirce tries hard to make this

³⁴ NEM, 3, 191 (1911).

³⁵ "Thus we find the physicists, the exactest of thinkers, holding on regard to those things which they have studied most exactly, that their existence depends on their manifestations or rather on their manifestability. We have only to extend this conception to all real existence and to hold these two facts to be identical, namely that they exist and that sufficient investigation would lead to a settled belief in them, to have our Idealist theory of metaphysics." (W3, 59). For a good analysis of the apparent naturalism of the 1872-73 texts, Murphey is still very accurate (MURPHEY (1961), 166-67).

³⁶ W3, 30.

³⁷ Peirce says in 1870 "will" (future tense); for an analysis of the move from philonian conditionals to counterfactual ones, C. Tiercelin, Why Pragmatism implies realism, *Pragmatism and Quantum Mechanics*, M. Bächtold Ed., under

view less paradoxical, to show that it is “already” presupposed in the ordinary ways we talk about reality³⁸, and he sees that the same kind of relation is evidenced in all the common elucidations we give of *properties*, whether physical or mental³⁹. After all, their reality is also dependent on something that will happen (later, he will say, that *would* happen). So, the logic of his examples, in the 1872 drafts, is to make his reality argument “less paradoxical”, less “extraordinary”. For example:

There is *nothing extraordinary* therefore in saying that the existence of external realities depends upon the fact, that opinion will finally settle in the opinion in them. And yet that these realities existed before the belief took rise, and were even the cause of that belief, *just as the force of gravity is the cause of the falling of the inkstand* — although the force of gravity consists merely in the fact that the inkstand and other objects will fall⁴⁰.

Or, again:

Thus the existence of something in the present depends on the future occurrence of a certain event. *This may sound strange but the strangeness will disappear* upon considering the numerous familiar instances of the same sort. A diamond is really hard. Its hardness consists in a quality he possesses all the time. And now what does this hardness consist in? It consists in nothing else but this, that rock crystal will not scratch it⁴¹.

Here is the first role of the examples in 1872: even if we can point to the fact that they rely more on philonian conditionals than on Peirce’s more mature view of counterfactuals, they are here to prove one thing, that the *reality* of hardness, of weight, of force, even of our linguistic capacities, is not confined to actual manifestations or observations, as is clear in the example the example of force:

Every force resident in a body consists only in the fact that certain phenomena will occur under certain conditions⁴².

So much for the clarification of the physical concept of force itself. The examples are instrumental inside an argument about *reality*⁴³, they are here to *elucidate* the notion of reality itself. What is important then is *not* our actions but the future events involved but the fact that any property encapsulates a host of upcoming happenings. The reasoning would be the same if the scratch on this stone was made by some brute dyadic encounter with other stones rather than by manipulation, and that is exactly the way Peirce elucidates hardness (“a rock crystal will not

press.

³⁸ I cannot get into further details here, but it is integral part of Peirce’s method and this is what leads him to give a prominent role to belief and doubt in his early epistemology. See W2, 357: “We wish to ascertain the truth, but what is truth? This is an indispensable inquiry if we so define the function of reason, yet it would plunge us at once into a sea of metaphysics from which we could not hope soon to emerge. Opinions upon this subject are various; and it is therefore uncertain what truth is. It is not likely we could reconcile those opinions when so many greater men have failed, and therefore we could not obtain any certain answer to this question. By such a method, therefore, we could gain no clear and trustworthy conception of the end of reasoning. *Let us then avoid this idea of truth as long as we can and keep in the realm of those everyday and concrete notions about which there can be no mystery nor vagueness*” (emph. mine). See also CP8.112: “We must set out from ideas familiar and complex, as Hegel began his greater masterpiece by considering a man sitting under a tree in a garden in the afternoon. We must not begin by talking of pure ideas, – vagabond thoughts that tramp the public roads without any human habitation, – but must begin with men and their conversation.”

³⁹ On properties and powers, the review of Fraser’s Berkeley is also a good starting-point, see W2, 469 (1871).

⁴⁰ W3, 31, *emph. mine*.

⁴¹ W3, 80, *emph. mine*.

⁴² W3, 81. See also: “The existence of any physical force is nothing but the truth of the fact that if certain conditions shall be complied with, certain accelerations will take place” (W3, 59).

⁴³ This would be an important point in order to qualify Hookway’s 1985 views that naturalism was a permanent pattern in Peirce’s philosophy in the 1870s (HOOKWAY (1985), 52-53).

scratch it”), unless we advance the bolder argument that everything that is expectacious is somehow connected to human action, but that would be another, well, bold move. Just to be clear: the “hardness” example in 1878, as in 1872, does not refer explicitly to the action of the mineralogist (as later texts will do), the “force” example does not refer explicitly to the work of the physicist, but to the fact that forces are only compound partial accelerations.

Space being short, I will thus content myself with saying that I only see minor changes between 1872 and 1878 for those examples⁴⁴, which is not to say that they function exactly the same way. The only major difference is that they are now *introduced* by an account of thought and human action, exactly the one that drew the attention of James first and then of scholars who were looking for the roots of Peirce’s dispositionalism. But what do we mean by saying that “practice” or “dispositions” do not play a key role in those elucidations? Is it to be found elsewhere in HMIC?

2.2 “Harder” pragmatism

Let’s come back to 1878 and to HMIC. I claim that this pragmatism is “harder” because it articulates clearly the idea of that the end of thought is the settlement of belief (claim 1) with the idea that thought eventuates in rules of action (claim 2), which paves the way for interpreting the content of our thoughts in terms of the intended effects of our actions (claim 3), and claim 2 is certainly pivotal in the argument.

The paper is divided into four sections: Section I deals mainly with the two first grades of clearness, Section II introduces the “bold” definition of belief as habit *and* the pragmatist maxim. It appears at the end of the example of transubstantiation. Section III applies this conception to the notions of hardness, weight and force, Section IV to the notion of Reality, with the same arguments we have just underlined. We have already dealt with the last four examples. Commentaries often overlook what happens in section II and the two first examples. Are they more “pragmatic”?

Peirce introduces the topic of thought in section II, and, as Frege but following different lines, he wants to make a distinction between “thinking” and the “thought”. Maybe in recollection of his European trip where he attended several operas, he compares thought to music; there can be many instruments, many ornaments, and a single melody:

We may add that just as a piece of music may be written in parts, each part having its own air, so various systems of relationship of succession subsist together between the same sensations. These different systems are distinguished by having different motives, ideas, or functions. Thought is only one such system, for its sole motive, idea, and function is to produce belief, and whatever does not concern that purpose belongs to some other system of relations⁴⁵.

Not everything that involves the mind (or that involves the infinite transformations of signs) counts as thought. Only what is congruent with the “end” of thought, that is to say reaching stable beliefs, will qualify. All this sounds both like a recapitulation of *Fixation* but what is totally new, compared to the former manuscripts, lies in the analysis of belief and in the idea that the line of action “flowing” out of a belief is actually what *individuates* that belief. The function of thought is to reach stable beliefs, and now these stable beliefs are also described as distinct modes of action:

The essence of belief is the establishment of a habit; and different beliefs are *distinguished* by the different modes of action to which they give rise. If beliefs do not differ in this respect, if they appease the same doubt by producing the same rule of action, then no mere differences in the manner of consciousness of them

⁴⁴ One often has the feeling that the hardness example is more “pragmatic”, because it involves the action of the knife of the mineralogist, but this character appears only in later re-phrasings, see CP 5.467.

⁴⁵W3, 263.

can make them different beliefs, any more than playing a tune in different keys is playing different tunes⁴⁶.

We don't find such claims in the preparatory manuscripts. Peirce's argument is not trivial: he has to account for the identity of habits, and it's at this very point that he makes a weighty choice. There is a well-known side, and a lesser-known side to it.

1) The well-known first: Peirce endorses a definition of habit, that many commentators, starting with Alston back in the 1950s (Alston (1955) have found to involve a very narrow theory of motivation, and sometimes to beg the question⁴⁷.

Now, the identity of a habit depends on how it might lead us to act, not merely under such circumstances as are likely to arise, but under such as might possibly occur, no matter how improbable they may be. What the habit is depends on *when* and *how* it causes us to act. As for the *when*, every stimulus to action is derived from perception; as for the *how*, every purpose of action is to produce some sensible result. Thus, we come down to what is tangible and conceivably practical, as the root of every real distinction of thought, no matter how subtle it may be; and there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice⁴⁸.

What is perplexing is that, even with the proviso that "conceivable" consequences play a part, it totally reduces, or eliminates, action as involving continua, norms, ends. Habit, here, is determined with respect to perception ("every stimulus to action is derived from perception") and leads to percepts (it has to "produce some sensible result"). As a result, the practical, oddly enough, is nearly equivalent to sensations, or, better, to expected sensations (the "difference in practice", at the end, is a difference in the "tangible"). We can see that this first articulation between the three — epistemological, mental, semantical — claims is made at the cost of the richness of practice itself: it is so to say a pragmatism without practice.

Some readers saw very clearly that this last move was weak: every statement about experience can be converted in a statement about practice, provided we describe the experimentation itself as a conduct. If you do Y, you will experience X (Or, if you only did so and so, you would experience X). That is an eternal bone of contention between instrumentalist and realist interpretations of quantum mechanics: the latter interpreters claim that the first ones content themselves with rephrasing actual observations as indications stipulating how you should organize such experiments. You don't become a pragmatist just by changing a bit the terminology. The non-trivial claim is to assess whether it is true that each and every experimental statement, without exception, is a disguised form of practical statement⁴⁹? That would of course be a strong "proof" of pragmatism. Peirce gives in 1878 something that is close to this proof: beliefs are habits, they have a stimulus and lead to new sensations, but practice nearly evaporates in that account.

Fortunately, we have richer accounts of habit, in Peirce and, as regards the scholarship, in Vincent Colapietro's paper on clarification, competence and purpose (Colapietro (2009)⁵⁰), and I can confine myself, here, to what Peirce actually *does* with the approach I have just sketched in 1878. This would be the lesser-known part.

⁴⁶ W3, 263, *emph mine*.

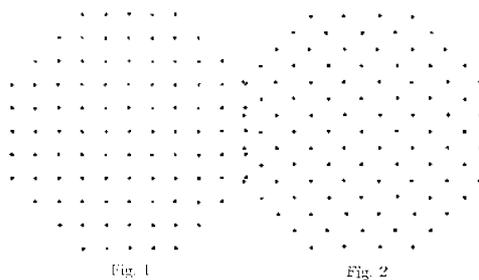
⁴⁷ Peirce himself raised the point, in the Harvard Lectures and in other MSS. "[It] could hardly fail to be based on a begging of the question as it plainly is in that it is entirely built upon the principle that that which a man believes is the proposition upon which he will be satisfied to act." (MS296, 39 (1907-08 according to Robin), as quoted by FISCH (1986), 367).

⁴⁸ W3, 265.

⁴⁹ "Since obviously nothing that might not result from experiment can have any direct bearing upon conduct, 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, and there is absolutely nothing more in it." 5.412.

⁵⁰ I subscribe to most of the points of this excellent paper; still, it is telling that most of the quotes are borrowed from EP2, that from a period when Peirce had overcome some of the limitations of HMIC.

2) The first real example is that of the two graphs, which are a bit different in the English and in the French version⁵¹ (certainly because of different national habits!).



Of course, they are identical in some determinate respects: believing that objects are arranged as in figure 1 is also believing that they are arranged as in Fig 2, but in which ways exactly does this identity involve *habits*? That is not clear in Peirce’s text. Of course, you can imagine that the second grid is the first one modulo a bit of rotation or another symmetry; but is habit so important and even interesting there? That is not obvious. Is it even true that they would involve the same substantial habits? Let me offer just one example: two traffic signs can be identical as regards the mutual relationships of their points but not at all with respect to a real vector space and to the habits of conduct, of driving actually, that they govern. The first sign obtains quite frequently in my neighborhood, the second one, obtained though axial symmetry, nowhere in France (since it implies that one drives on the left side of the road), the third one is not to be confused with the first one of course.



How are we to decide which practical “details” are unimportant here? In addition, saying that his example is already “pragmatic” begs the question if all one has to say is that one can transform the first graph into the second. That would be a very *implicit* pragmatism, compared to the “loud” dispositionalism that introduced this example.

The second example, the one that helps introducing the pragmatist maxim is of course transubstantiation. Peirce’s point is to show that if we have any idea about “wine”, this involves definite sensational consequences, and Catholics and Protestants are supposed to agree on the “accidents”, whether they interpret the substance-change the same way or not. But do Catholics and Protestants have the same habits? That is a bit tricky: of course, they expect the same accidents when they deal with diluted wine and wafers, but will they act the same way? Nothing is less sure. See anyway how action disappears from the consequences Peirce draws:

Our idea of anything is our idea of its sensible effects; and if we fancy that we have any other we deceive ourselves, and mistake a mere sensation accompanying the thought for a part of the thought itself. It is absurd to say that thought has any meaning unrelated to its only function. It is foolish for Catholics and Protestants to fancy themselves in disagreement about the elements of the sacrament, if they agree in regard to all their sensible effects, here and hereafter⁵².

⁵¹ An interesting thing is that in the original version, the two figures, 1 & 2, are actually *different*, as well as in my copy of W3 (1986 edition), but only a few readers noticed. The version given in EPI is corrected.

⁵² CP5.401.

I do not need to repeat that the pragmatist maxim is offered as a sequel to those very lines, so much so that the “practical”, in the “practical bearings” mentioned in the maxim is certainly to be read along just these lines, that is to say as involving sensational particulars. Which, again, is not to say that Peirce did not reconstruct hereafter the same maxim around a much broader account of conduct, but this account is simply not at work in any of Peirce’s examples in 1878.

3 The emergence of dispositionalism?

So we have what seems to be a full-blown dispositionalist account of belief in *How to make our ideas clear*, but this seems to be confined to section II and does not play a major role in the elucidations. We have also said that what makes the pragmatist maxim pragmatist cannot be clearly located in the extant 1872 manuscripts. If the points I’ve raised in the previous section are right, then we would have an “outburst” of dispositionalism that is of no real import at the time, which does not mean that it did not prove to be a major ferment for Peirce’s later thought (I think that is the case). One tempting idea is to think that it was introduced into the *Illustrations* ahead of a fuller treatment because Peirce felt it was something promising in contemporary accounts of science, something that he came to see more clearly when he wrote the new parts of the papers around 1877.

3.1 “Amplifications” and “padding”?

The points I have just made, about the composition of the *Illustrations* and the role of the dispositionalist theme do not rely on Peirce’s later recollections: one just has to read the texts and to compare. The fact is nevertheless that this analysis can be backed by one late account of the *Metaphysical club* period in MS 620 (1909)⁵³:

My Metaphysical Club paper on Pragmatism, almost without alteration other than amplifications and padding, served for my first two articles⁵⁴.

This seems to imply that both papers articulate a clear and consistent account that would already have been crystallized as soon as 1872 (around the realist argument I’ve been sketching). Still, in what follows immediately, Peirce points to some “additions” — in his own words “amplifications and padding” — to the original text. This is important since we can reconstruct nearly all of *Fixation* with the earlier manuscript, but we know that Peirce produced some fresh work when he wrote HMIC. These additions should thus be closer to the line of thought he was then following and they look by no means trivial:

One set of amplifications, in the second article, occupied considerable space and were highly important. [...] My second magazine article, now at last, is explicitly presented, as it was always intended, as the second chapter of an essay, *amplifying the paper read to the Club with illustrations of the maxim of clearness that had not been needed at first*, on account of my having put forth such interpretations at previous meetings, before I had undertaken to formulate their common motive. [...]. *Another amplification of the original paper, first introduced in the Magazine article lies in its [second] section, where the pragmatic interpretation is treated as the highest of three grades of clearness of apprehension*⁵⁵.

We have several claims here:

– One first kind of additions lies with the “illustrations of the maxim of clearness”. It is difficult to see if the illustrations he added are just the “dots” and the example of transubstantiation or *all* the examples but what has been said before clearly show that the real additions are the first examples.

⁵³ Max Fisch published this MS 620 as an appendix to his essay “Was There a Metaphysical Club in Cambridge?” published in MOORE AND ROBIN (1964), pp. 1-32. The appendix is pp. 24-29. This was not included in the 1986 collection. I have worked on the microfilm version.

⁵⁴ Peirce, MS 620, 1909, 16

⁵⁵ Ibid.

– The second kind of addition lies with the “pragmatic interpretation” as “the highest of three grades of clearness of apprehension”, that is, with the pragmatist maxim itself.

The substantial additions to 1872 are thus, as Fisch suggested, nothing less than the pragmatist maxim, the examples, and accordingly the claims on the “end” of belief which introduce the latter. The context is important: around 1875, Peirce is often in Europe and has many encounters with his fellow-scientists. It might be the case that the “additions” convey something of the scientific *Zeitgeist* of the time.

3.2 Berkeley, Helmholtz?

I have long thought that some of nominalist and naturalist strands in the 70s came from both his reading of Berkeley and Helmholtz, who is present as a reference in the Fraser review and, certainly implicitly, in the *Illustrations* as well. Peirce comes very close to his 1878 pragmatism in the Fraser review, when he says that when “things fulfill the same function practically”, they should be “signified by the same word”⁵⁶, but without referring to beliefs as dispositions (he would thus be defending claim 3 without claim 2). Helmholtz, in his *Physiological Optics* and in the same spirit, claims that our ideas are “symbols”, insofar as they are “natural signs for things which we learn how to use in order to regulate our movements and actions”:

In my opinion, therefore, there can be no possible sense in speaking of any other truth of our ideas except of a practical truth. Our ideas of things cannot be anything but symbols, natural signs for things which we learn how to use in order to regulate our movements and actions. Having learned correctly how to read those symbols, we are enabled by their help to adjust our actions so as to bring about the desired result; that is, so that the expected new sensations will arise⁵⁷.

You can make a practical use of ideas, you can use your visual “ideas” as signs for tactile “ideas”, as Berkeley argued in his *New Theory of vision*, but action, here, is subjected to the same kind of reduction to sensations, antecedent of expected, we have witnessed in the *Illustrations*. Is it the case that thinkers, close to Peirce, used more explicitly Bain’s ideas, or an equivalent, to make sense of science, without subscribing to a narrow view of conduct?

3.3 A Cliffordian Strain?

Let’s get a bit hypothetical here, and let’s ground this hypothesis on something that is not too speculative. At the end of *Fixation*, Peirce has an interesting claim about belief-change (by the way, in a paragraph that was not in the manuscripts), where the point is that we should not elude our responsibility regarding our own beliefs. This would be the responsibility account that is of so much interest in Christopher Hookway’s reading. Peirce’s version could be summed up as: *It is wrong, always and everywhere, not to inspect the integrity of one’s beliefs*, or, in more words:

But, above all, let it be considered *that* what is more wholesome than any particular belief is *integrity of belief*, and that to avoid looking into the support of any belief from a fear that it may turn out rotten is quite as immoral as it is disadvantageous. The person who confesses that there is such a thing as truth, which is distinguished from falsehood simply by this, that if acted on it should, on full consideration, carry us to the point we aim at and not astray, and then, though convinced of this, dares not know the truth and seeks to avoid it, is in a sorry state of mind indeed⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ “A better rule for avoiding the deceits of language is this: Do things fulfill the same function practically? Then let them be signified by the same word. Do they not? Then let them be distinguished. If I have learned a formula in gibberish which in any way jogs my memory so as to enable me in each single case to act as though I had a general idea, what possible utility is there in distinguishing between such a gibberish and formula and an idea? Why use the term a general idea in such a sense as to separate things which, for all experiential purposes, are the same? ” (Fraser’s Berkeley Review, EP1, 102, 1871).

⁵⁷ Helmholtz, *Physiological Optics*, [1867-71], tr. HELMHOLTZ AND SOUTHALL (1925), vol 3, 19-20.

⁵⁸ W3, 257.

That is very Cliffordian in tone and the point has sometimes been made⁵⁹. But is it explicitly so? I would be tempted to argue that it is the case. Clifford is Bainian in quite a radical way: there is an ethics of belief because beliefs have consequences. In a paper Clifford read at the Metaphysical Society, exactly at the time he met with Peirce in London in 1875, Clifford has a definition of science that is the closest I know to the Pragmatist maxim. It starts with the idea that science is a kind of refined craft, and offers a general definition.

The important point is that science, though apparently transformed into pure knowledge, has yet never lost its character of being a craft; and that it is not the knowledge itself which can rightly be called science, but a special way of getting and of using knowledge. Namely, science is the getting of knowledge from experience on the assumption of uniformity in nature, and the use of such knowledge to guide the actions of men. And the most abstract statements or propositions in science are to be regarded as bundles of hypothetical maxims packed into a portable shape and size. Every scientific fact is a shorthand expression for a vast number of practical directions: if you want so-and-so, do so-and-so⁶⁰.

We have, here, something that will be typical of pragmatism: a dispositional account of belief, an interpretation of sentences in the indicative mood as confused forms of imperatives, an articulation between the psychological and the physiological, the claim that the nature of “science” is not conveyed in the conclusions or in mere formal relations but in *methods*. It is striking that exactly this idea surfaces in the “amplifications” and “padding” Peirce added just before publishing HMIC, and it is also striking that Clifford offered his own “pragmatist maxim” with presupposing the narrow view of action that was so “unpragmatic” in HMIC.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have claimed that, oddly enough, Peirce’s early papers do not obviously contain pragmatic clarifications, in two senses. They do not necessarily use, in their clarifications, the dispositional account of belief that is forcefully articulated in the second section of *How to make our Ideas Clear*. They do not necessarily interpret “practical” in the “practical bearings” of the objects of our thought, as referring to what we call *practice*, as referring to “conduct”. I submit that one should assess pragmatic clarifications by what they actually *do*, and I also think we have still some ground to cover, as regards the intellectual context of the *Illustrations*. There is already some stimulating work concerning Peirce’s European contacts, and there might be some unexpected fellow-pragmatists.

We tend to read the 1878 texts through the later texts (and in particular the Pragmatism *Monist* series), where the stress on conduct is more prominent, and we might thus be led to overlook a major conceptual move on the notion of the “practical”, in the Pragmatism maxim, in the interval between 1878 and 1905. More and more, Peirce came to consider “practical” as equivalent to “subject to self-controlled conduct”, and this certainly has consequences on the reconstruction of the pragmatist framework he provides.

A last word: Peirce certainly could not be a crude dispositionalist in a reductionist way in the 1870s since the antidote was already in his drafts. Actions flowing out of our beliefs are not mere deeds, they are also signs, and this was something that was already pretty clear to Peirce’s eyes, already in 1872, in lines that unfortunately did not make their way to the *Illustrations*: “Even if a belief is a direct motive to action it still is a belief only because that action is interpretable again. And thus the intellectual character of beliefs at least are dependent upon the capability of the endless translation of sign into sign”⁶¹. It is tempting to think that Peirce glanced at these drafts,

⁵⁹ See for example ANDERSON and Peirce (1995), 94, and ANDERSON (1997), 226; see also POTTER AND COLAPIETRO (1996), 20. Surprisingly, MITOVA (2008) does not mention Peirce.

⁶⁰ W. K. CLIFFORD, “Scientific basis of Morals”, 1875, *Lectures and Essays*, London, 1879, 2, p. 109.

⁶¹ CP 7.357.

at some time during the 1880s, just before his 1885 review of Royce, where the semiotic integration of beliefs is given a fresh start, and this is also tempting to think this would be the real first sequel to the *Illustrations*, but this would be the matter for another paper⁶².

⁶² See nevertheless some elements in GIREL (2011).

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