Pragmatism

1901 | Hume's Argument against Miracles, and the Idea of Natural Law (Hume) | MS [R] 873:5 (var.)

...a quarter of a century ago I was led to the doctrine and maxim of right thinking that, if we search out all the practical consequences of a conception, we have in their aggregate the entire *meaning* of that conception. This doctrine, known as *pragmatism*, has certainly found some redoubtable defenders. Of the immediate utility of the maxim in the study of philosophy, nobody who has had experience in such use of it is ever likely to speak lightly. I believe, too, that it suggests a conception of the nature of intellect, and a theory of the relation of thought to the body, from which psychologists have still something to learn.

1902 [c.] | Peirce's Personal Interleaved Copy of the 'Century Dictionary' [Commens] | CP 5.13 n. 1

Pragmatism is a method in philosophy. Philosophy is that branch of positive science (i.e., an investigating theoretical science which inquires what is the fact, in contradistinction to pure mathematics which merely seeks to know what follows from certain hypotheses) which makes no observations but contents itself with so much of experience as pours in upon every man during every hour of his waking life. The study of philosophy consists, therefore, in reflexion, and *pragmatism* is that method of reflexion which is guided by constantly holding in view its purpose and the purpose of the ideas it analyzes, whether these ends be of the nature and uses of action or of thought.

[—] It will be seen that *pragmatism* is not a *Weltanschauung* but is a method of reflexion having for its purpose to render ideas clear.

1903 | Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism: Lecture I | CP 5.18

Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood.

1903 | Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism: Lecture I | CP 5.33

What the pragmatist has his pragmatism for is to be able to say: here is a definition and it does not differ at all from your confusedly apprehended conception because there is no practical difference. But what is to prevent his opponent from replying that there is a practical difference which consists in his recognizing one as his conception and not the other? That is, one is expressible in a way in which the other is not expressible.

Pragmatism is completely volatilized if you admit that sort of practicality.

1903 | Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism: Lecture II | CP 5.64

What the true definition of Pragmatism may be, I find it very hard to say; but in my nature it is a sort of instinctive attraction for living facts.

1903 | C.S.P.'s Lowell Lectures of 1903 2nd Draught of 3rd Lecture | MS [R] 462:42

There is a logical doctrine called *Pragmatism*. It is the doctrine that what any word or thought means *consists in* what it can contribute to an expectation about future experience, and nothing more.

1903 | Syllabus: Syllabus of a course of Lectures at the Lowell Institute beginning 1903, Nov. 23. On Some Topics of Logic | MS [R] 478:4-5

…one of the most solid principles of common sense is that when we begin any serious undertaking we ought to do so deliberately. Now this deliberation consists in making out as well as we can what the upshot of our efforts is likely to be. I propose to show the Pragmatism is nothing but deliberation so conceived. [—] In the operations of reflection which make the warp and woof of philosophical inquiry, the method of Pragmatism is to consider what thought is *for*, and to take no step in reflection that is not required by that *purpose*. No more definite statement of the distinctive character of Pragmatistic Philosophy is possible until we can examine into Thought and see what it does. That is to say that Pragmatism first of all requires us to begin philosophical reflection with the study of Phenomenology.

1904 | A Brief Intellectual Autobiography by Charles Sanders Peirce | Peirce, 1983, pp. 65-66; MS [R] L107:5-6

…the doctrine he called *Pragmatism*, namely, that every concept (as distinguished from a generalized sensation, such as ‘red’) is equivalent to a conditional purpose, should one have certain desires and certain types of experience, to act in a certain general way.

This quote has been taken from Kenneth Laine Ketner's 1983 reconstruction of Peirce's 'Autobiography'

1904 | A Brief Intellectual Autobiography by Charles Sanders Peirce | Peirce, 1983, p. 76; MS [R] L107(s):3

…the doctrine of *Pragmatism* […] according to which every concept proper (as distinguished from a feeling, image, or percept) is fully interpretable in terms of conceivable conduct…

This quote has been taken from Kenneth Laine Ketner's 1983 reconstruction of Peirce's 'Autobiography'. Ketner identifies the source as "variant pages" of the manuscript.

1904 | A Brief Intellectual Autobiography by Charles Sanders Peirce | Peirce, 1983, p. 75; MS [R] L107(s):4

...the principle [...] called pragmatism, namely that an intellectual concept is nothing but a concept of a purpose that might be entertained under conceivable circumstances.

This quote has been taken from Kenneth Laine Ketner's 1983 reconstruction of Peirce's 'Autobiography'. Ketner identifies the source as "variant pages" of the manuscript.

1904 | A Brief Intellectual Autobiography by Charles Sanders Peirce | Peirce, 1983, p. 66; MS [R] L107:7

...the principle he called *pragmatism*, that is, that every concept (in contrast to qualities of feeling, images, experiences, etc.) is definable in terms of a possible purpose of conduct under hypothetical general conditions, and that from this can be deduced the best rule for rendering ideas clear, namely, “Consider what effects that *might conceivably* have practical bearings we conceive the object of our conception to have: then, our concept of those effects is the *whole* concept in question.”

This quote has been taken from Kenneth Laine Ketner's 1983 reconstruction of Peirce's 'Autobiography'

1904 [c.] | Draft of Nichols Review [C] | MS [R] 1476:6

...when a philosopher speaks of the ‘concept’ of matter, or the ‘concept’ of cause, or any other ‘concept,’ what he means by a ‘concept’ is a *word* or other legisign. Hence it has been justly said that the entire purport of any concept lies in the character of the actions or external effects which it is calculated to produce or bring about. It is just that maxim and nothing else that properly goes by the name of *pragmatism*.

From a likely discarded variant

1904 [c.] | Draft of Nichols Review [C] | CP 8.191

The word *pragmatism* was invented to express a certain maxim of logic, which, as was shown at its first enouncement, involves a whole system of philosophy. The maxim is intended to furnish a method for the analysis of concepts. A concept is something having the mode of being of a general type which is, or may be made, the rational part of the purport of a word. A more precise or fuller definition cannot here be attempted. The method prescribed in the maxim is to trace out in the imagination the conceivable practical consequences, – that is, the consequences for deliberate, self-controlled conduct, – of the affirmation or denial of the concept; and the assertion of the maxim is that herein lies the

whole of the purport of the word, the *entire* concept. The sedulous exclusion from this statement of all reference to sensation is specially to be remarked.

1905 | What Pragmatism Is | EP 2:332-3; CP 5.412

… he [the writer of this article] framed the theory that a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life; so that, 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*. For this doctrine he invented the name *pragmatism*. [—] Now quite the most striking feature of the new theory was its recognition of an inseparable connection between rational cognition and rational purpose; and that consideration it was which determined the preference for the name *pragmatism*.

1905 [c.] | The Basis of Pragmaticism | MS [R] 908:2; EP 2:361

…I have come to think that the common pragmatistic opinion […] is that *every* thought (unless perhaps certain single ideas each quite *sui generis*) has a meaning beyond the immediate content of the thought itself, so that it is as absurd to speak of a thought in itself as it would be to say of a man that he was a husband in himself or a son in himself, and this not merely because thought always refers to a real or fictitious *object*, but also because it supposes itself to be interpretable. If this analysis of the pragmatistic opinion be correct, the logical breadth of the term *pragmatist* is hereby enormously enlarged.

1905 [c.] | Letters to Mario Calderoni | CP 8.205-6

In the April number of the *Monist* ['What Pragmatism Is', 1905] I proposed that the word 'pragmatism' should hereafter be used somewhat loosely to signify affiliation with Schiller, James, Dewey, Royce, and the rest of us, while the particular doctrine which I invented the word to denote, which is your first kind of pragmatism, should be called 'pragmaticism.' The extra syllable will indicate the narrower meaning.

Pragmaticism is not a system of philosophy. It is only a method of thinking…

1907 | Pragmatism | EP 2:400-401

… pragmatism is, in itself, no doctrine of metaphysics, no attempt to determine any truth of things. It is merely a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts. All pragmatists of whatsoever stripe will cordially assent to that statement. As to the ulterior and indirect effects of practising the pragmatistic method, that is quite another affair.

All pragmatists will further agree that their method of ascertaining the meanings of words and concepts is no other than that experimental method by which all the successful sciences (in which number nobody in his senses would include metaphysics) have reached the degrees of certainty that are severally proper to them today; - this experimental method being itself nothing but a particular application of an older logical rule, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'

1907 | Pragmatism | EP 2:401-402

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. [—] My pragmatism, having nothing to do with qualities of feeling, permits me to hold that the predication of such a quality is just what it seems, and has nothing to do with anything else. Hence, could two qualities of feeling everywhere be interchanged, nothing but feelings could be affected. Those qualities have no intrinsic significations beyond themselves. Intellectual concepts, however, - the only sign-burdens that are properly denominated 'concepts,' - essentially carry some implication concerning the general behaviour either of some conscious being or of some inanimate object, and so convey more, not merely than any feeling, but more, too, than any existential fact, namely, the '*would-acts*' of habitual behaviour; and no agglomeration of actual happenings can ever completely fill up the meaning of a 'would-be.' But that the *total* meaning of the predication of an intellectual concept consists in affirming that, under all conceivable circumstances of a given kind, the subject of the predication would (or would not) behave in a certain way, - that is, that it either would, or would not, be true that under given experiential circumstances (or under a given proportion of them, taken *as they would occur* in experience) certain facts would exist, - *that* proposition I take to be the kernel of pragmatism. More simply stated, the whole meaning of an intellectual predicate is that certain kinds of events would happen, once in so often, in the course of experience, under certain kinds of existential circumstances.

1907 | Pragmatism | MS [R] 318:10-1

...pragmatism teaches that the "meaning" of any belief as a mental representation resides in the character of the habit of conduct which it implies. If this be so, it is surely incorrect to say that pragmatism makes the ultimate "meaning" of a concept to consist in any kind of recommendation or other representation. Still less would it suit my way of thinking to say that the meaning of a concept expresses itself in "experience to be expected."

1907 [c.] | Pragmatism | MS [R] 320:5-7

[Pragmatism] says nothing directly as to the truth of things: but is merely a method professing to disclose the *meaning* of any and every abstract concept or general word, phrase, or conception, provided its meaning be of an intellectual nature. [—] I do not understand by pragmatism a method of ascertaining the meanings of all sorts of concepts, but only of "intellectual concepts," or those upon which reasonings may turn. [—] Pragmatism looks upon a concept as a mental sign, or medium between the object to which it is moulded and the "meaning," or effect which the object is enabled by

the concept to produce; and in all general inquiries about signs nothing is of more lively importance than maintaining a clear and sharp distinction between the object, or professed cause of the sign, and the meaning, or intended effect of it.

1907 [c.] | Pragmatism | MS [R] 321:12

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.

1907 [c.] | Prag [R] | MS [R] 322:7-8, 12

[Pragmatism] is no doctrine of the truth of things; it is only a method of finding out the meanings of hard words and hard concepts (for concepts are mental signs;) and this method is, in essence, no other than the method of experiment of the physical sciences.

[—]

I understand it to be a method of ascertaining the meanings, not of all concepts, but only of “intellectual concepts,” that is, those upon which reasonings may turn.

[—]

Pragmatism is […] nothing more than a rule for ascertaining the meanings of words, – a mere rule of methodeutic, or the doctrine of logical method. Consequently, it must be founded exclusively upon our understandings of signs, without drawing support from any principle either of metaphysics or of psychology.

1907 [c.] | (Prag) [R] | CP 5.8

… pragmatism does not undertake to say in what the meanings of all signs consist, but merely to lay down a method of determining the meanings of intellectual concepts, that is, of those upon which reasonings may turn.

1907 [c.] | (Prag) [R] | CP 5.5-6

… Pragmatism was not a theory which special circumstances had led its authors to entertain. It had been designed and constructed, to use the expression of Kant, architectonically. Just as a civil engineer, before erecting a bridge, a ship, or a house, will think of the different properties of all materials, and will use no iron, stone, or cement, that has not been subjected to tests; and will put them together in ways minutely considered, so, in constructing the doctrine of pragmatism the properties of all indecomposable concepts were examined and the ways in which they could be

compounded. Then the purpose of the proposed doctrine having been analyzed, it was constructed out of the appropriate concepts so as to fulfill that purpose. In this way, the truth of it was proved. There are subsidiary confirmations of its truth; but it is believed that there is no other independent way of strictly proving it.

But first, what is its purpose? What is it expected to accomplish? It is expected to bring to an end those prolonged disputes of philosophers which no observations of facts could settle, and yet in which each side claims to prove that the other side is in the wrong. Pragmatism maintains that in those cases the disputants must be at cross-purposes. They either attach different meanings to words, or else one side or the other (or both) uses a word without any definite meaning. What is wanted, therefore, is a method for ascertaining the real meaning of any concept, doctrine, proposition, word, or other sign.

1909 | Essays Toward the Interpretation of our Thoughts. My Pragmatism | MS [R] 620:16; ILS 192-193

…so far as my pragmatism is a doctrine, it is the doctrine that the significance of any intellectual thought consists in the particular manner in which it tends, and will tend, to regulate the thinker's conduct.

1910 [c.] | Additament to the Article A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God | CP 6.490

According to that logical doctrine which the present writer first formulated in 1873 and named Pragmatism, the true meaning of any product of the intellect lies in whatever unitary determination it would impart to practical conduct under any and every conceivable circumstance, supposing such conduct to be guided by reflexion carried to an ultimate limit. It appears to have been virtually the philosophy of Socrates. But although it is "an old way of thinking," in the sense that it was practiced by Spinoza, Berkeley, and Kant, I am not aware of its having been definitely formulated, whether as a maxim of logical analysis or otherwise, by anybody before my publication of it in 1878. [—] It did not, however, shine with its present effulgence until Professor Papini made the discovery that it cannot be defined - a circumstance which, I believe, distinguishes it from all other doctrines, of whatsoever natures they may be, that were ever promulgated. Thereupon I thought it high time to give my method a less distinguished designation; and I rechristened it *pragmaticism*. Pragmaticism, then, is a theory of logical analysis, or true definition; and its merits are greatest in its application to the highest metaphysical conceptions.

1910-07-19 | Letters to Paul Carus | MS [L] 77

…*Pragmatism* or the doctrine of *pragmatic clarification* […] consists in a clear conception of that *Habit of Conduct* in which any given concept would work out its actualization.

1911 | Letter to J. H. Kehler | NEM 3:192; MS [R] 764

I will venture to guess that you will be surprised to learn […] how true it is that a habit can be acquired by imaginary practice. Out of such considerations, which turn, as if upon a pivot, about the idea that a thought is nothing but a habit connected with a sign, one can build up quite a little philosophy which is what I meant by “pragmatism.”