

How to Make Our Signs Clear

C.S. Peirce and Semiotics

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Habits, Purposes and Pragmatism*

Henrik Rydenfelt

1 Introduction

Peircean pragmatism, by the familiar picture of it, is a logical doctrine or maxim based on the contention that beliefs have the nature of habits: they are rules or dispositions of conduct under some conceivable circumstances. Any genuine belief or change of belief would influence one's conduct under certain conditions. If there is no change in conduct that would ensue from the acceptance of a proposition, the proposition is devoid of content or meaningless (in the relevant sense). And if two propositions, despite differences in their verbal manifestations, would have the same influence on our conduct, they are the same proposition.

In MS 318, Peirce defends pragmatism by arguing that ultimate logical interpretants of intellectual signs – such as concepts, propositions and arguments – must be habits. Peirce's argumentation has been much discussed, but it involves an aspect that has not attracted much attention so far: his account of purposes and their role in the development of habits. Peirce points out that the habits which may act as ultimate logical interpretants are not mere dispositions: they are *self-controlled* habits. Self-controlled habits, in turn, have developed in light of purposes by way of exercises in the “inner world”. Such exercises produce feelings, which lead to efforts in reproducing or avoiding them; in turn, such efforts, by way of reiteration, produce habits of action.

This view of self-controlled habits, however, fits uneasily with Peirce's presentations of his notion of habit in the same manuscript (and elsewhere). I will suggest that the habits which can act as ultimate logical interpretants need not be self-controlled in this sense. Moreover, as purposes remain as independent candidates for such interpretants, I will argue that purposes could be understood as the ultimate logical interpretants of *normative* propositions, propositions about what is good, right, preferable and so forth: they fit some central desiderata – both Peircean and otherwise – for what could serve as such interpretants.

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Proceeding even further, I will note that the Peircean point of view can offer a foundation for a broadly speaking empiricist understanding of the revision and development of normative thought (or, more particularly, ethical inquiry). From the Peircean perspective, the development of purposes does not occur solely in the light of some further purposes (as an “instrumentalist” position would have it). Instead, the critical feelings produced by experimentation, both in the “inner” and “outer” realm, provide this development with a footing that is independent of previously existing purposes.

2 Ultimate Logical Interpretants

In MS 318, Peirce lays out one of his many trichotomies of interpretants, the one of emotional, energetic and logical interpretants. Briefly put, emotional interpretants are feelings, energetic interpretants actions, and logical interpretants thoughts that interpret a sign (see Short 2007, 200–6). Peirce points out that “not all signs have logical interpretants, but only intellectual concepts and the like” (EP 2:410).

A definition of a word is a logical interpretant of that word, but the definition itself has further interpretants of this sort. Peirce searches for the *ultimate* logical interpretant, which by itself is not a sign with further interpretants of this kind (although it can stand as a sign in other respects). Thus, the central desideratum for the ultimate logical interpretant is that it is not itself a concept, nor does it involve a concept. For this reason, such an interpretant must be sought outside the realm of language or signs more generally, and Peirce turns to an exploration of “mental effects” or “mental phenomena”.

Peirce maintains that the signs that possess logical interpretants are “either general or closely connected with generals”, although he admits that this which is “not a scientific result, but only a strong impression due to a life-long study of the nature of signs” (EP 2:413). Thus a second desideratum for ultimate logical interpretants is that they are general. Such interpretants must therefore be “mental facts [...] of general reference” (EP 2:412). Peirce lists three such mental phenomena as possible candidates: desires (including fears, hopes and the like), expectations and habits. By way of excluding the other alternatives, he arrives at the conclusion that habits are the ultimate logical interpretants. This is the contention on which Peirce’s pragmatism rests.

There is no space here to consider the merits of this line of argumentation and its connections to Peirce’s various attempts at a “proof” of pragmatism (Pietarinen 2011). What is of interest here is Peirce’s ensuing discussion on purposes and self-control. The rationale for that discussion is that purposes, too, seem to fit the desiderata for ultimate logical interpretants: a

purpose is, in Peirce's view, a general mental phenomenon. However, Peirce excludes purposes as candidates for ultimate logical interpretants. His brief argument for this conclusion comes in two parts. Firstly, Peirce maintains that the habits that serve as ultimate logical interpretants are *self-controlled* habits. Secondly, he maintains that a self-controlled habit has purpose as its "character". Purposes, then, as the "characters" of self-controlled habits, are not ultimate logical interpretants themselves.

But what is a self-controlled habit, and how does purpose enter the picture? What is the connection between habits, purposes and self-control?

Peirce sometimes uses the notion of habit in a very wide sense to cover any disposition that any inanimate object, animal or a human being may have (CP 5.538). In this wide sense, a habit is the disposition to act in some way, A, under some circumstances C. Let us call this a CA-habit. Self-controlled habits appear to be a species of this wider genus. The discussion in MS 318 includes several statements by Peirce on the nature of such self-control. Peirce refers to self-controlled habits as "voluntary"; however, he immediately adds that a self-controlled habit is not something that can be adopted or abandoned as if by choice.

It is to be noted that in calling a habit "self-controlled", I do not mean that it is in the power of the man who has it to cast it off, [...] but what I mean is that it has been developed under the process just described in which critical feelings as to the results of inner or outer exercises stimulate to strong endeavors to repeat or to modify those effects.

EP 2:431

Self-controlled habits thus differ from mere dispositions (or simple CA-habits) in that the former have been developed under the influence of critical feelings stimulating reiteration.

Habits differ from dispositions in having been acquired as a consequence of the principle, virtually well-known even to those whose powers of reflection are insufficient to its formulation, that multiply reiterative behaviour of the same kind, under similar circumstances of percepts and fancies, produces a tendency – the habit – actually to behave in a similar way under similar circumstances in the future. [...] [E]very man exercises more or less control over himself by means of controlling his own habits; and the way in which he goes to work to bring this effect about in those cases in which circumstances will not permit him to practice reiterations of the desired kind of conduct in the outer world shows that he is well acquainted with the important principle that reiteration in the inner

world – fancied reiterations – if well-intensified by direct effort, produce habits, just as do reiterations in the outer world; [...].

EP 2:413

What is the role of purposes in these exercises of reiteration? Peirce elucidates this by discussing an example of a builder who, with the “general purpose to render the decorations of a house he is building beautiful” makes “decorations in his inner world, and on attention to the results, in some cases experienced feelings stimulated him to endeavors to reproduce them, while in others [...] excited efforts to avoid and modify them” (EP 2:431). Feelings – either attractive or repulsive – produced by exercises in achieving a purpose in the inner world lead to efforts in reproducing them by way of similar conduct; in turn, such efforts, by way of reiteration, produce habits of action. Such habits, Peirce maintains, are self-controlled.

Presumably, then, a purpose is the “character” of this or that self-controlled habit *because* the habit has been developed in light of the purpose. The builder’s purpose of devising a beautiful home influences the habits which he develops in considering various alternatives in the “inner” realm, making that purpose more specific, and potentially leading to action in the “outer” realm.

3 Habits and Self-control

This understanding of purpose and its connection to habits and self-control, however, fits uneasily with the way Peirce describes habits in other parts of the same manuscript. Almost surprisingly, Peirce seems to be referring to the builder’s self-controlled *habit* as that of “try[ing] to make his decorations beautiful” (EP 2:431). In the same manuscript, however, he argues that a habit is to be described “by a description of the kind of action to which it gives rise, with the specification of the condition and the motive” (EP 2:418), or as he puts it at another point, “to believe the concept in question is applicable to anything is to be prepared under certain circumstances, and when actuated by given motives, to act in a certain way” (EP 2:432). Saying that the builder attempts to make his decorations beautiful is *not*, in this light, a (full-blown) *description* of a habit such that may act as an ultimate logical interpretant.

This last point accords with the way that Peirce’s pragmatism is commonly understood. If someone accepts the proposition that “diamonds are hard” (or believes that diamonds are hard), we expect her to use a diamond to scratch other materials when scratching is called for, at least under circumstances where no other means are available. However, under circumstances where a diamond at hand may come into contact with other materials, and the

motive is to avoid scratching, we expect her to keep the diamond away, and so forth. The ultimate logical interpretant of a proposition is not the simple habit of performing some action, A, when a certain motive, M, is present, under some conceivable circumstances C. It is rather a *set* of Cs, Ms and As, or a CMA-set.

While Peirce admits that his usage of the notion of habit deviates from the common use of the concept, referring to such *sets* as “habits” may seem too much of a stretch. Perhaps this is the reason why, in one of the variants of MS 318, Peirce refers to the ultimate logical interpretant as a *habit-change*:

It can be proved that the only mental effect that can be so produced and that is not a sign but is of a general application is a *habit-change*; meaning by a habit-change a modification of a person's tendencies toward action, resulting from previous experiences or from previous exertions of his will or acts, or from a complexus of both kinds of cause. It excludes natural dispositions, as the term “habit” does, when it is accurately used; [...].

CP 5.475

In light of this particular passage, habits could be understood as simple CMAs, dispositions to act in a certain fashion under certain circumstances if a certain motive is present. The ultimate logical interpretant, in turn, would be the totality of the modifications to such habits that would ensue of the acceptance of a proposition, or habit-change. For the sake of brevity, however, in what follows I will use the word “habit” to refer to CMA-sets as the Peircean ultimate logical interpretants.

This conclusion also fits with the notion that *propositions* have habits as their ultimate logical interpretants. Consider again the example of the builder. Let us assume that the builder's “habit” of trying to make his decorations beautiful indeed be the ultimate logical interpretant of some proposition, as Peirce's discussion seemingly suggests. (If this “habit” does not seem self-controlled enough, assume that the builder has, upon exercises in the inner world, developed the “habit” of trying to paint his hallway walls blue.) But what proposition? Although this is a complicated question (to which I will presently return), it seems plausible that there is no such (descriptive) proposition available. The reason for this is the one just given: the description of the builder's attempt is not a description of a habit.

This however forces us to revise Peirce's position in MS 318. Peirce claims that the habits that are ultimate logical interpretants are self-controlled. But if – as he elsewhere suggests – the sort of habits that can act as ultimate logical interpretants are CMA-sets, this condition must be relaxed. CMA-sets have not necessarily been developed in the light of some purpose in the manner Peirce

describes, and are not as such sensitive to the aspirations of an agent. They do not, as such, involve any particular motive. Hence CMA-sets are not self-controlled in Peirce's sense.

Purposes, however, may obviously play a role in conduct. Considering Peirce's example, it appears that purposes underwrite motives: the builder's purpose of trying to make his decorations beautiful influences his habitual actions. All the while purposes are self-controlled: they are the products of inner and outer reiterations, and can be adjusted by way of consulting the feelings aroused by further iterations. Purposes are thus productive of motives while under some measure of self-control. Indeed, we could understand purposes simply as self-controlled motives.

Let us refer to the conduct resulting from habits (CMA-sets) combined with a motive that is derived from one's purposes – or a motive that *is* one's purpose – as CPA conduct. When a member of a CMA-set is actualized in conduct so that the motive is a purpose of the agent (or derived from such purpose), and hence under a measure of self-control, we have a case of such CPA conduct. If this is correct, purpose is not (*pace* Peirce's suggestion) the character of this or that self-controlled habit. Instead, it is the character of self-controlled or deliberate *conduct*: such conduct conjoins a habit (a CMA-set) with a purpose, which itself is a motive under some measure of self-control.

This approach helps us to understand cases where conduct appears to take place in accordance with the CMA-sets (or habits) of an agent but nevertheless fails to be completely deliberate: these are cases where the purposes and motives of an agent have fallen out of accord. For example, consider smoking. The motives of a smoker may initially well be the product of pleasant feelings resulting in efforts of reiteration, and thus accord with her purposes. (Indeed, this presumably is the case, unless the smoker has been force-fed nicotine to spur an addiction.) Nevertheless, once a nicotine addiction is established, the smoker's motives and purposes can notoriously drift apart. Despite a change in her purposes, the motives that led to smoking may still remain. This is why a smoker can argue that smoking is bad for her (or that she does not *want* to smoke) and continue smoking nevertheless. Literature on ethical theory is rife with analogous cases concerning moral purposes and the inability in following them sparked by akrasia, depression and the like.

In brief, this is the suggestion presently laid out on Peirce's behalf. The broad class of habits include all kinds of dispositions; these CA-habits may be possessed by inanimate objects. The ultimate logical interpretants of intellectual signs are CMA-sets which Peirce describes in MS 318: these are the habits which are described by referring to circumstances, motives and (ensuing) actions. *Pace* Peirce's suggestion in the same manuscript, I have argued that habits understood as CMA-sets are not necessarily self-controlled in the light

of purposes. Instead, when conjoined with purposes – motives under some measure of self-control – such habits result in CPA (or deliberate) conduct.

4 Purposes as Interpretants

Peirce wished to exclude purposes as candidates for the ultimate logical interpretants of intellectual signs by integrating them into self-controlled habits. As they do not involve reference to concepts while being general, purposes fit the other criteria he sets for such interpretants. We have just seen, however, that by Peirce's own elucidations of the nature of habits (as well as our usual understanding of pragmatism), self-control in the light of such purposes is not necessary for a habit to act as an ultimate logical interpretant.

With this in mind, let us return to the question over whether there is a proposition for which the self-controlled "habit" of the builder (as described by Peirce) could act as an ultimate logical interpretant. Let us assume that the builder now has, upon various exercises in the inner realm, come to the conclusion that blue would be the most suitable color for the hallway. His purpose of decorating a beautiful home has in this manner become more specific: it now entails the purpose of painting the hallway blue. Presumably, this purpose, combined with his habits, would now influence his deliberate conduct were he to commence work on the building: while painting the hallway walls, he would pick up a can of blue paint rather than another color, and so forth. But have any of the builder's beliefs changed, at least in the ordinary sense of the word? Is there a proposition that he now, unlike before this exercise in self-control, is willing to accept?

Obviously enough, there are candidates for such propositions – for example the proposition that blue is the best color for the hallway. Propositions of this sort involve prescriptions or assessments: as it is commonly put, they are *normative* as opposed to descriptive. Such propositions come in various kinds, ranging from unconditional moral propositions ("murder is wrong") and particular moral or conventional prescriptions ("you should not walk that way") to what seem like mere expressions of taste or preference ("ice cream is better than chocolate"). Whether beliefs or propositions of the normative kind really are beliefs or propositions properly so called has sparked a seemingly endless debate. However, it should be clear to both sides that there is *some* difference between a normative "belief" or "proposition" and a belief or proposition concerning the way the world is.

The possibility that immediately suggests itself is that the difference between propositions such as "blue is the best color for the hallway" and

propositions such as “diamonds are hard” is precisely because the (ultimate) logical interpretants of these propositions differ in kind. The ultimate logical interpretants of the former kind of propositions, unlike the latter, are not best described in terms of CMA-sets (or Peircean habits).

Do normative propositions have ultimate logical interpretants at all? Or, if not, should they, for this reason, be called quasi-propositions (as some have suggested) or viewed as the sort of meaningless gibberish that pragmatism was supposed to relieve us of (a view which also has its proponents)? Here another possibility suggests itself: the ultimate logical interpretants of normative propositions are purposes themselves. I have argued that the description Peirce gives of the builder’s “habit”, that of trying to make his house beautiful, is not a full-blown description of a habit. The suggestion at hand is that the descriptions is, rather, a description of the builder’s *purpose*, which when conjoined with various CMA-sets produces deliberate (CPA) conduct.

How could we *show* that purposes are ultimate logical interpretants? The question is on a par with Peirce’s initial question of how to show that habits are the ultimate logical interpretants of intellectual signs. From Peirce’s point of view, as we have already noted, purposes fit the desiderata set for ultimate logical interpretants in that (if Peirce is correct) they do not include concepts as their parts but nevertheless are general. If, as I have argued here, Peirce’s attempt of integrating purposes to habits is not completely successful, purposes – from the Peircean point of view – remain as plausible candidates for such interpretants.

To go beyond Peirce’s discussion, purposes appear as fitting candidates for the ultimate logical interpretants of normative propositions in two respects. Firstly, purposes quite clearly fit the role that normative propositions play in the conduct of those who assent to them, a role that has commonly been connected to the motivations and aims of such conduct. It seems natural that such purposes must be present when someone assents to or (sincerely) asserts a normative proposition. Let us assume that the builder asserts “blue is the best color for the hallway”. When suitable circumstances arise, such as those that the builder is in, including the purpose and the means to decorate a beautiful home, we assume that the builder is *motivated* to paint the hallway blue, and conjoined with various habits (understood as CMA-sets), acts accordingly. If such a motive is lacking, other things being equal, we either suspect the honesty of the builder’s assertion or conclude that his motives have fallen out of accord with his purposes.

Secondly, the development of purposes fits the way we think normative thought (e.g. over moral questions) is revised. To see this, we should revisit Peirce’s idea of the development of purposes.

5 The Development of Purposes

If we limit our notion of a habit which may serve as an ultimate logical interpretant to CMA-sets, as I have suggested, Peirce's example of the builder should be viewed as a description of the development of a *purpose* rather than that of a habit. This development, Peirce notes, proceeds in the light of the (general) purpose of decorating a beautiful house, a purpose which then becomes more specific by way of exercises conducted in the inner world. Feelings of attraction or repulsion inspire effort to repeat or avoid certain kinds of results, respectively. Such effort, when reiterated, in turn results in a purpose. Here, then, there are emotional interpretants (feelings) leading to energetic interpretants (efforts) which, by way of reiteration, bring about a logical interpretant (a purpose).

From Peirce's example, it would easily appear that the development of a purpose occurs in the inner realm, whereas the development of descriptive beliefs would proceed rather by way of outer experimentation. This distinction would fit with the view of many that the development of normative thought, in particular of ethical views, is of an *a priori* nature: we may arrive at (objective) answers to moral questions by consulting our reason and other "inner" faculties rather than by way of "outer" experiment.

However, such a dichotomy between the "inner" and "outer" realms of exercises and experimentation cannot be sustained. It is clear that experience of actual occurrences may result in feelings that excite efforts. For example, the builder may paint his hallway walls blue but the actual results may turn out less than satisfactory after all. Conversely, inner experimentation may result in revisions and specifications of our (descriptive) beliefs. Indeed, limiting "experience" to feelings produced by actual occurrences would not do justice to the broad notion of experience that Peirce elsewhere promotes. That the development of purposes is not limited to inner exercises is suggested by Peirce himself when he notes that the purposes of the builder "has been developed under the process just described in which critical feelings as to the results of inner or outer exercises stimulate to strong endeavors to repeat or to modify those effects" (EP 2:431).

Still, there seems to be a difference of emphasis and scale: purposes, it appears, are more amenable to inner experimentation than beliefs. Why is this? Peirce enlists *feelings* as generating the efforts leading to purposes. Such feelings, it seems, we may relatively easily gain by way of inner experimentation. (An outer experiment may nevertheless prove us wrong, such as when the hallway now painted blue turns out to be less than satisfactory to the builder's eye.) But the revision of habits (understood as CMA-sets) relies on *observations*

rather than feelings. Observations, in turn, are not quite as easily amenable to inner experiment. It is almost impossible for us to picture in the inner realm whether, say, if painted in a particular shade of blue, the hallway would be too dark for anyone to find their way, without artificial light, at 7 pm on the evening of 19 October. To find out, we need to resort to a controlled production of observations – outer experimentation.¹

Mathematics, which is often thrown together with morals in the *a priori* pot, presents a borderline case. In MS 318, Peirce discusses mathematical and geometrical habits and their development by way of counting and devising figures in the imagination.

To say that a collection consists of seventeen single members involves, if thought out to its ultimate meaning, the act of counting in the imagination, and, of course, the action must be generalized into a habit connected with the predication of seventeen. A geometrical idea supposes one goes through the operation of making the figure.

EP 2:432

Mathematical and geometrical observation easily takes place in the imagination (although, of course, counting can occur in the “outer” world as well). Here the revision of mathematical opinion resembles the development of purpose. The two are however different: counting or devising geometrical figures is of the nature of *observation* rather than feeling.

That the development of purposes relies on feelings and such feelings can be excited by exercises in the “inner” realm explains the *a priori* appearance of that development. It nevertheless has the crucial implication that such development is not simply *a priori* precisely because the feelings are aroused by experimentation, whether in the inner or outer world. From this Peircean perspective, the so called thought experiments concerning, say, moral questions, are indeed *experiments*: they are not mere deductions from a set of pre-existing background principles. Feelings supply the *a posteriori* or *empirical* basis of the revision of purposes, just like observation supplies that of the revision of belief.

Importantly, this perspective differs from two competing understandings of practical reasoning. Firstly, although the development of purposes rests on some further purposes, the Peircean perspective should not be confused with views which reduce this revision to the development of means to achieve some ulterior ends, a reduction of practical reasoning to instrumental reasoning. In an instrumentalist view, one has purposes which are so to speak final, such

¹ For a clear discussion on Peirce's account of perception and observation, see Bergman 2007.

purposes that are not dependent on other purposes, and other purposes (the achievement of) which are *means* to such final ends. These latter, instrumental purposes are the result of our final purposes combined with our beliefs as to how to achieve those final purposes, producing potentially endless chains of further purposes dependent on previous purposes. Again, in the Peircean picture, the development of purposes is also dependent on the feelings – feelings which *a fortiori* are not dependent on an original (final) purpose. The revision and specification of purposes described by Peirce is far more than simply the “instrumentalist” dialectic of developing purposes as means to achieve some other (and, at the end, “final”) ends.

A second, popular view maintains that practical reasoning, if appropriate, occurs in light of some ultimate principles or purposes, perhaps the dictates of Reason itself. But in the Peircean picture, the ulterior ends of our revision of purposes are not themselves fixed. While the development of purposes assumes further purposes, all our purposes are (at least potentially) subject to revision. The purpose of the builder – the one that Peirce says he cannot cast away – should not be taken as fixed beyond its role within that example. The builder presumably has other purposes in life, in the light of which his decorating purpose may be revised. Perhaps he has the purpose of enjoying life to the fullest, and at some point with enough decorating done, realizes that the activity of decoration is less than satisfactory in the light of this other purpose and the feelings consequent upon it, eventually turning to other endeavors instead. Does this chain of purposes end somewhere? Perhaps the “final” (albeit largely implicit) purpose of any deliberate conduct is the very vague and general purpose to live a good life, or do the right thing, and our other purposes – self-controlled as they are – are just so many specifications of this purpose.

It is interesting to compare the view here developed to that of Peirce’s notion of ethics in his 1903 lectures on pragmatism. There Peirce divides normative science into three branches, esthetics, ethics and logic, and defines the nature of ethical inquiry by reference to ends or purposes of action: “*Ethics is the study of what ends of action we are deliberately prepared to adopt.* That is right action which is in conformity to ends which we are prepared deliberately to adopt.” (EP 2:200) However, Peirce then points out that such ends that can be deliberately adopted fall into the purview of the first normative science, esthetics:

[...] an ultimate end of action *deliberately* adopted, [...], must be a state of things that *reasonably recommends itself in itself* aside from any ulterior consideration. It must be an *admirable ideal*, having the only kind of goodness that such an ideal *can* have, namely, esthetic goodness. From

this point of view the morally good appears as a particular species of the esthetically good.

EP 2:201

The risk here is that, instead of the study of the purposes of conduct that we may deliberately adopt, ethics is relinquished to a merely “instrumental” role after all: ethical inquiry would concern merely the attainment of ideals which have already been settled by esthetics (Gava 2014, 68–69).

In reaction, one might well argue that such esthetical inquiry falls into the scope of ethical inquiry so that ethics (as commonly understood) largely encompasses both branches of normative science: as Peirce himself states, the morally good is a species of the esthetically good. But *a fortiori* we are now in a position to argue that, if ethical inquiry is understood as the (self-acknowledged) attempt to revise our purposes, such inquiry is not based *solely* on *ultimate* purposes. Even if ethics requires that some further purposes be set – perhaps by a more specifically esthetical inquiry into what is admirable in itself – it is not informed by such purposes solely. The specification of purposes for conduct also relies on the feelings produced by further inner and outer experimentation. Even if the study of the ultimate end or purpose of conduct falls within the scope of esthetical inquiry, our various purposes of conduct, as reviewed by ethics, are not merely the means to such ultimate ends.

6 Purposes and Beliefs

Similar observations can be made concerning the third normative science, logic. The revision of beliefs, too, requires purposes; but although logic, as Peirce argues, rests on an ethical basis, the relevant purposes are not reducible to those of conduct more generally.

The revision of beliefs may occur against observations, which often require outer experimentation. Just like the development of purposes requires purposes, revision against observation requires other beliefs that themselves are placed in that particular context set beyond doubt. As with purposes, none of this implies that there are such beliefs as cannot be doubted given a certain context: even if we are to admit that some propositions are beyond our powers of doubt, we must not admit any specified proposition to be of this nature without severe criticism (EP 2:433). But without purposes against which the success and failure of a belief is evaluated, belief-revision would not get off the ground: it would not be clear, say, which particular answer is preferable to some particular question addressed in the inquiry.

What are these purposes? According to some, pragmatism is the view that, since our conduct always has a motive – and deliberate conduct serves a purpose – beliefs (or habits) can be revised in accordance with their success in achieving our aims, or guiding our behavior. Such a view of the connection between purposes and the revision of habits seems natural enough, if habits are understood as CMA-sets. If the diamond in your ring does not help in achieving your purpose of scratching glass, you either revise your beliefs concerning diamonds – they were not so hard after all – or suspect trickery on part of your fiancé, or the like.

But this identification of our purposes in *revising* beliefs with the commensurability of our beliefs (our habits of action) with our purposes (in conduct) is a major factor in the confusion that has led many to conclude that the pragmatists in general and even Peirce in particular advanced a “success theory of truth”. According to this theory, or at least the most rudimentary versions of it, true beliefs, applied in practice, indeed enable us to achieve our purposes, while false beliefs do not.

This view of truth, as is well-known, is questionable from the Peircean point of view. Firstly, we often do not appear to live by such an account, revising our beliefs in light of how well they guide us in life. To take an obvious example, people continue praying despite major failure of expectations concerning consequences. Secondly, the success theory of truth is notoriously vulnerable to various counterexamples, such as the cases where false beliefs appear successful (e.g. when, due to a false belief concerning schedules, one misses a bus which then ends up involved in a traffic accident) or, conversely, cases where true beliefs fail to be expedient (e.g. when having true beliefs results in being involved in a traffic accident).

The various purposes of conduct – and success and failure in achieving them – must be distinguished from the purposes we may entertain in the more narrow enterprise of revising and producing opinion, which is inquiry. The measurement of action-guiding success and failure may be (and likely is) an aspect of inquiry. But that this is so is dependent on further purposes, which are those of the inquiry itself. Scientific inquiry does not set out to find the most expedient beliefs, at least as its primary goal, but expedience may and does count in favor of an hypothesis.

Again, it could be asked whether the chain of purposes in an inquiry has its end somewhere. If the chain of purposes of deliberate conduct generally ends in the most general purpose in doing the right thing, perhaps the “final” (albeit, again, largely implicit) purpose of deliberate inquiry is to have true beliefs, and the various purposes we set out to achieve in inquiry are just so many specifications of this purpose.

7 Conclusion

In MS 318, Peirce argues that habits are the ultimate intellectual interpretants of intellectual signs. Purposes, Peirce maintains, fit the desiderata he sets for such interpretants: while general, they do not involve a reference to a concept. Peirce attempts to exclude purposes as candidates for such interpretants by arguing that a purpose is merely a “character” of a self-controlled habit: such a habit that has been produced in an (inner) experimentation where feelings of an attractive or repulsive sort result in repetition of efforts.

I have argued that this notion of a self-controlled habit fits poorly with Peirce’s other descriptions of habits as well as our usual understanding of what could act as an ultimate logical interpretant (for a proposition). Instead, I have suggested that the ultimate logical interpretants (of descriptive sentences) should be understood as sets of circumstances, motives and actions, or CMA-sets, and that such sets (*pace* Peirce) are not necessarily self-controlled. It is only when our motives accord with our purposes that our conduct is self-controlled (CPA conduct).

Indeed, Peirce’s description of “habits” and their development in the light of feelings are more viably understood as descriptions of purposes and their development. Such development does not pertain to our view of how the world is, understood in a descriptive sense. Rather, purposes seemingly go together with propositions of the normative sort: moral rules and commands, prescriptions and expressions of preferences. As purposes remain potential candidates for ultimate logical interpretants, I have suggested that they could serve this role for normative propositions. The difference in the ultimate logical interpretant of normative and descriptive propositions – the former understood as purposes, the latter as habits – would explain the seemingly different roles these propositions translate into in the conduct of those who accept them.

Peirce seemingly suggests that purposes are experimented on within the “inner” realm while beliefs (habits, descriptive propositions) are tested in the “outer” world. Critical of the idea of such a dichotomy, I have argued that experimentation of either case may occur in both “realms”, but that as descriptive beliefs are based on observation while purposes develop in the light of feelings, there is a difference of emphasis and scale: observations are often more difficult to produce in the inner world than feelings, with mathematical “observation” standing out as an exception. This explains why the development of normative views and mathematical inquiry have an *a priori* air despite remaining *a posteriori* in their reliance on feelings and observations, respectively.

Peirce maintains that the development of purposes occurs in light of other purposes. However, this should not be taken as a statement of the “instrumentalist” position that the purposes developed are merely means to achieve some (“final”) ends in light of our beliefs. Rather, the feelings which keep this process afloat are not dependent on these background purposes. If this is correct, Peirce’s account of the development of purposes in the light of the feelings that ensue from exercises in the inner and outer realm points towards an *empirical* understanding of the settlement of *normative* opinion: feelings supply the revision of purposes with an *a posteriori* basis.

An analogous case can be made for the settlement of habits (understood as CMA-sets) in light of both purposes and observations. I have argued that our purposes in the development of (non-normative) opinion, or inquiry (as a rather particular type of conduct), should not be confused with our various purposes of conduct and their achievement. The purpose of inquiry is not to find the beliefs that best serve the achievement of our purposes, while such expediency can be a desideratum for hypotheses in various contexts. The development of purposes and beliefs occurs in light of further purposes – ultimately, perhaps, the Right and the Truth. Nevertheless, the experiential part of such development – grounded in observations and feelings – is both independent of such purposes and influencing them in the course of conduct and inquiry.

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