

## Peirce and James on Pragmatism and Purposes

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Since Peirce's and James' formulations of pragmatism appeared, pragmatism has become a recognized philosophical tradition and many philosophers have identified themselves under this label. This variety of perspectives notwithstanding, Peirce's and James' versions of pragmatism have often been used as prototypes to classify a philosophical viewpoint as more "peircean" or "jamesian", where the former adjective implies a position more committed to the pursuit of truth through the sciences, while the latter suggests a standpoint more akin to relativism. Susan Haack, Nicholas Rescher and H.O. Mounce for example have proposed a view of this kind.

In this paper I wish to stress that Peirce's and James' pragmatisms are more similar than one might expect. This is not to say that their views on truth, science, knowledge and human life are on a par. Quite the contrary, with their philosophical investigations Peirce and James wanted to reach very different purposes. Peirce wanted to obtain a formulation on how meaning develops in a scientific framework, while James wanted to find a ground to stress the truth and meaningfulness of concepts developed in non-scientific contexts, like, for example, religion. However, despite their different views on the purposes a philosophical investigation has to pursue, Peirce and James had similar ideas on what a pragmatic approach to philosophy implies.

I will thus show how it cannot be argued that James' presentations of the pragmatic maxim misrepresent Peirce's ideas, thus developing his pragmatism in a totally different way. On the contrary, Peirce's and James' pragmatisms both involve: 1) a conception of belief which equates it to a habit of action, 2) a consequent idea of concept clarification which involves experiential and practical elements.

In this respect, Peirce and James have similar views. Accordingly, as Christopher Hookway has argued, we can assert that the differences between Peirce and James do not lie in their views on the pragmatic method, but on the reasons why they use this method. This can be clearly seen if one considers how their views on pragmatic clarifications relate to human purposes.

Pragmatism is well-known for the importance it places on human purposes. A concept can be meaningful only if it can be related to our purposeful behavior. However, there can be various different ways to interpret this statement. I will argue that this is a privileged point of view to analyze how James and Peirce used the pragmatic method in different ways. As far as Peirce wanted to use his pragmatic clarifications to obtain scientifically meaningful concepts, he didn't consider particular purposes in his clarifications. In fact, scientific concepts distinguish themselves for their generality and for their ability to be used for very different purposes. Their link to practice consist exactly on the possibility to be used so diversely. On the other hand, James wanted to find a ground to stress that religious beliefs are meaningful and true insofar as they make a difference to somebody's life. Thus, James' pragmatic clarifications cannot neglect particular purposes, since they just intend to show how a concept is meaningful and true for the consequences it produces in respect to one's own particular purposes.

This focus on Peirce's and James' pragmatic clarifications and how they relate to human purposes can thus well show how they share a common view on what pragmatism implies. However, they develop their pragmatic clarifications in very different ways according to their philosophical aims.