

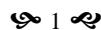
Inquiry and the Fourth Grade of Clearness

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by

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From the 1868 *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* essays until his death in 1914, Peirce continually reworked the issues inherent in his philosophic positions. One steadily developed theme is inquiry. This paper presents the thesis that Peirce decided that inquiry can only be fully understood and productive when subordinate to a fourth grade of clearness.¹



Josiah Royce and Charles Peirce knew of each other through Johns Hopkins University, their writings, and of course through William James. As Frank Oppenheim points out, at the 20 May 1880 meeting of the Johns Hopkins University Metaphysical Club, Peirce was elected President and the club heard Royce's paper entitled "On Purpose in Thought."² Peirce seriously studied Royce's *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, writing a review³ for the *Popular Science Monthly* in 1885 that was never published. While greatly praising Royce, Peirce chided Royce for being too Hegelian. A genuine change in Peirce's thought about Royce came when Peirce read and reviewed Royce's *The World and the Individual: First Series*.⁴

The review opens with Peirce stating that the purpose of the volume "is to say what it is that we aim at when we make any inquiry or investigation – not what our ulterior purpose may be, nor yet what our special effort is in any particular case, but what the direct and common aim of all search for knowledge is."⁵ Peirce saw that "Prof. Royce reaches his conclusion by analyzing the nature of the purpose of an idea."⁶ In a letter to Christine Ladd-Franklin, Peirce states: "Royce's opinions as developed in his 'World and Individual' are extremely near to mine. His insistence on the element of purpose in intellectual concepts is essentially the pragmatistic position...."⁷ This element of purpose comes to the foreground in Peirce's writings, because of Royce's *The World and the Individual*; prior to this time, that element was not prominent.

¹ This paper takes a position similar to that of Manley Thompson, *The Pragmatic Philosophy of C. S. Peirce*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953, but from a different perspective. I thank my colleagues Andre De Tienne and Luis Morton for assistance in making this paper better.

² Oppenheim, Frank M., *Reverence for the Relations of Life*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005, p. 14.

³ Ms. 1369, published in CP 8.39-54 (in part), W 5:221-234, and EP I:229-241. [See end note for explanation of abbreviations.]

⁴ Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual: First Series*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899; Peirce's review is published at CP 8.100-116, which is a compilation of the review and associated manuscripts.

⁵ CP 8.100

⁶ CP 8.105.

⁷ Christine Ladd-Franklin, "Charles S. Peirce at the Johns Hopkins," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 26 (21 December 1916), p. 720.

If the term ‘purpose’⁸ is used as a lens through which to consider ‘application,’ we see how Peirce was refining his pragmatic maxim.

...in my youth I wrote some articles to uphold a doctrine I called Pragmatism, namely, that the meaning and essence of every conception lies in the application that is to be made of it. That is all very well, when properly understood. I do not intend to recant it. But the question arises, *what is* the ultimate application....⁹

A discussion of ultimate application seems very Roycean. Note however that the term ‘application’ carries with it a sense of motion or process. Peirce regularly thought of processes more than results; indeed, results are only stopping points along the way of an ongoing process.

In the entry on Pragmatism in James Mark Baldwin’s *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (published in 1902),¹⁰ Peirce wrote about the same kind of transition in his thinking, this time using the term ‘end.’

If it be admitted, on the contrary, that action wants an end, and that that end must be something of a general description, then the spirit of the maxim itself, which is that that we must look to the upshot of our concepts in order rightly to apprehend them, would direct us towards something different from practical facts, namely, to general ideas, as the true interpreters of our thought.¹¹

The emphasis is more on movement than on an end; the movement leads to general concepts, not specific things or states.

This very brief summary demonstrates that Peirce was influenced by his reading of Royce’s *The World and the Individual*; he changed his thinking about the pragmatic maxim and inquiry.¹² The important question becomes how Peirce’s thought changed.¹³ The beginnings to

⁸ Peirce wrote definitions for *The Century Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: The Century Company, 1889-1891). He supplied some material for ‘applicable’ and ‘application’ (p. 274); wrote several parts of ‘end’ (p. 1917); but did not provide anything for ‘purpose’ (p. 4858). Peirce was quite familiar with the contents of *The Century Dictionary*; so it is fair to assume he knew of these definitions. In ‘application’ is found “The act of applying a general principle;” in ‘end’ Peirce wrote “That for which anything exists or is *done*; a result designed or intended; ultimate object or purpose;” and in ‘purpose’ is “Import; meaning; purport; intent.” Here is a collection of terms with some commonalities and specific shades of meaning. While the resemblances are noted, the differences are significant.

⁹ Review of *Clark University, 1889-1899: Decennial Celebration in Science* (April 20, 1900), pp. 620-622, as reprinted in *Charles S. Peirce: Selected Writings*, Philip P. Weiner (ed.), NY: Dover Publications, 1966 (1958), p. 332.

¹⁰ Baldwin wrote Peirce about doing entries for the *Dictionary* on 9 October 1900.

¹¹ James Baldwin’s *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* as reprinted in *Charles S. Peirce: The Essential Writings*, Edward C. Moore (ed.), NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972, p. 301.

¹² Peirce reiterates his indebtedness to Royce again in 1906; see CP 5.402n3.

¹³ Beverley Kent, *Charles S. Peirce: Logic and the Classification of the Sciences*: Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987, p. 236n10, thinks that Peirce only entertained the notion of a fourth grade during the years 1901-1903. Manley Thompson, *The Pragmatic Philosophy of C. S. Peirce*, p. 262, maintains: “After his dictionary article of 1902, Peirce did not continue to distinguish between a third and fourth grade of clearness but simply refrained from taking his maxim in a literal sense. “ I hold that the fourth grade continued in Peirce’s thought through at least 1908, but I cannot make the historical argument in a brief reference note. Part of my justification is that in his 1902 application to the Carnegie Institution seeking funding for thirty-six memoirs, Peirce

answers are found in the April 1900 *Clark University, 1889-1899: Decennial Celebration* review and the 1902 James Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* entry on Pragmatism. Here are the leading passages for analysis:

Clark University review:

...in my youth I wrote some articles to uphold a doctrine I called Pragmatism, namely, that the meaning and essence of every conception lies in the application that is to be made of it. That is all very well, when properly understood. I do not intend to recant it. But the question arises, *what is the ultimate application*;¹⁴ at that time I seem to have been inclined to subordinate the *conception* to the *act*, knowing to doing. Subsequent experience of life has taught me that the only thing that is really desirable without a reason for being so, is to render ideas and things reasonable. One cannot well demand a reason for reasonableness itself. Logical analysis shows that reasonableness consists in association, assimilation, generalization, the bringing of items together into an organic whole—which are so many ways of regarding what is essentially the same thing. In the emotional sphere this tendency towards union appears as Love; so that the Law of Love and the Law of Reason are quite at one.^{15,16}

Baldwin's *Dictionary* entry on Pragmatism:

The doctrine appears to assume that the end of man is action—a stoical axiom which, to the present writer at the age of sixty, does not recommend itself so forcibly as it did at thirty. If it be admitted, on the contrary, that action wants an end, and that that end must be something of a general description, then the spirit of the maxim itself, which is that we must look to the upshot of our concepts in order rightly to apprehend them, would direct us towards something different from practical facts, namely, to general ideas, as the true interpreters of our thought. Nevertheless, the maxim has approved itself to the writer, after many years of trial, as of great utility in leading to a relatively high grade of clearness of thought. He would venture to suggest that it should always be put into practice with conscientious thoroughness, but that, when that has been done and not before, a still higher grade of clearness¹⁷ of thought can be attained by remembering that the only ultimate good that the practical facts to which it directs attention can subserve is to further the development of concrete¹⁸ reasonableness, so that the meaning of the concept does not lie in any individual reactions at all, but in the manner in which these reactions contribute to that development.¹⁹

states "I shall develop a fourth, and higher, grade of clearness, resulting from an appreciation of the intellectual relations of the definitum [the thing defined]" (L75, ms. page 68, copy page 288).

¹⁴ The fourth grade of clearness. An ultimate application has the feel of an ultimate end or purpose, but 'application' puts the stress on the activity of applying.

¹⁵ Review of *Clark University*, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Peirce wrote about philosophy and reasonableness in August 1899 in a *Nation* review of Charles Renouvier's *La Nouvelle Monadologie*. "What is it that philosophy ultimately hopes to accomplish? It is, if we mistake not, to find that there is some intelligible truth, some absolutely valid reasonableness, to ascertain how far this reasonableness governs the universe, and to learn how we may best do its service. It may be this hope is not destined to be realized, although, being reasonable, it acts to strengthen itself." *Charles Sanders Peirce: Contributions to The Nation*, edited by Kenneth Ketner and James Cook, Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1978, vol. 2, p. 208.

¹⁷ The fourth grade of clearness.

¹⁸ The Latin root of the word 'concrete' is "grown together". Also, 'concrete' is usually contrasted with 'abstract'. The concepts of growth and non-abstract fit well what Peirce was conveying. Peirce did some writing on 'concrete' for *The Century Dictionary of the English Language*, p. 1170.

¹⁹ Baldwin's *Dictionary*, *ibid.*

A similar line of thought is seen in the Lowell Lectures of 1903.

The question is what theories and conceptions we ought to entertain. Now the word "ought" has no meaning except relatively to an end. That ought to be done which is conducive to a certain end. The inquiry therefore should begin with searching for the end of thinking.^{20,21}



The first two papers in the 1877-1878 *Popular Science Monthly* series are a set, which Peirce treated as a set. In the first paper, “The Fixation of Belief,” Peirce set forth methods of inquiry, establishing scientific procedures as the model for inquiry. Inquiry does not stop with some result; the result demands an expression. Whether the result is a belief, a truth, or a satisfaction, clarity of expression—as found in the third grade of clearness of “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”—is required. Inquiry must result in something clear; truth and clarity go together. When Peirce read Royce, after developing his own thoughts on evolution and the architectonic of theories,²² he began to recognize the Roycean (or maybe Hegelian) notion that goals, purposes, and ends are necessary for a successful account of inquiry. Clear inquiry must lead somewhere. Thus, Peirce was led to write the two passages quoted above.

Inquiry must always have an end or purpose. The doctrine of continuity requires that this end be a general²³ or a general concept, recognizing that this general as a general will never be realized. The name Peirce used for this end is “concrete reasonableness,” a phrase appropriate to inquiry and logic, although sometimes he used the phrase *summum bonum* when thinking in evaluative or ethical terms. The description of reasonableness is worth repeating: “reasonableness consists in association, assimilation, generalization, the bringing of items together into an organic whole.” Thus, inquiry is to bring particulars together. In simplistic language, inquiry should expand and harmonize a knowledge base. The implications of this concept are several: (1) inquiry should not be narrow; inquiry must fit within a larger context; (2) if inquiry leads to conceptual dissonance—a genuine impulse to further inquiry, the dissonance must ultimately be resolved; (3) the results of inquiry will change and evolve over time; (4) inquiry itself will change and evolve over time; (5) since inquiry takes place within an unending continuum, inquiry will never cease; (6) absolutes or final answers are to be rejected; final answers block the road of inquiry; (7) more concepts will be known; (8) concepts will become more general; (9) individual concepts will become related with other individual concepts in an continual manner, leading to large networks of concepts, which some might call theories.

²⁰ CP 5.594

²¹ With all the references to ends, reference should be made to Peirce’s objection to ultimates or absolutes. “The objection to an ultimate consists in its raising a barrier across the path of inquiry...” (CP 6.612).

²² *The Monist* series of 1891-1893, especially “Evolutionary Love” (CP 6.287-317), and “The Architecture of Theories” (CP 6.7-34).

²³ Generals are sometimes called ‘general ideas,’ or in the semiotic vocabulary ‘thirds.’ “Not only may generals be real, but they may also be physically efficient, not in every metaphysical sense, but in the common-sense acception in which human purposes are physically efficient. Aside from metaphysical nonsense, no sane man doubts that if I feel the air in my study to be stuffy, that thought may cause the window to be opened. My thought, be it granted, was an individual event. But what determined it to take the particular determination it did, was in part the general fact that stuffy air is unwholesome” (CP 5.431 [1905]).

The researcher engaged in inquiry must—no matter how specific the issue at hand—look into the distance and have a broad horizon. The researcher must see that any given issue does not stand alone, but “swims” in large numbers of continua. Peirce, taking his lead from Royce, is asserting that a very comprehensive context, expressed in a general, exists for any concept or issue. Peirce is not accepting the absolute of the early Royce, but the community of interpretation of the later Royce.²⁴ A context (1) narrows the set of possible purposes for inquiry, (2) provides a general sense of direction for inquiry (without a context, inquiry is haphazard), and (3) aids in discovering possible paths for inquiry. Furthermore, (4) a context is part of the meaning of a concept; a concept without a context may have multiple meanings among which no definitive choice is possible.

Here is a very simple example of how a context aids inquiry: When an experiment in a chemistry laboratory produces unexpected results, the researcher does not check her horoscope, does not call her automobile mechanic, and does not check the results of the latest governmental election. The researcher begins to examine the chemicals involved, the equipment involved, the measurements made, and the procedures followed. The chemistry laboratory is a very specific, yet rather broad, context. The context will provide hints of what to examine and hints of the meaning of the unexpected results.

Here is a very simple example of how the recognition of purpose aids inquiry: If the researcher is boiling water in a beaker for a cup of tea, the conceived expected result is very different from boiling a liquid in a beaker to obtain a precipitate. Or, placing sugar in a beaker of brewed tea has a different conceived result than placing sugar into a beaker of brewed tea to obtain a supersaturated solution.

Purpose and context are associated in that a purpose can act as a filter for possible ways of understanding a context and the inquiry taking place in that context. A context can limit the possible purposes of inquiry and the purpose of whatever is found within that context. Note that filtering and limiting are processes, leading to conceived general ends.



Within this fourth grade of clearness, within concrete reasonableness, the social or communal nature of inquiry is reinforced. The doctrine of continuity, synechism, inherent in the fourth grade means that a given concept (1) is connected in some manner with previous concepts, (2) will be connected with future concepts, and (3) will cohere with other concepts. The Cartesian notion of individual, clear, and distinct ideas standing apart in consciousness is resoundingly rejected. The notion of concepts having no predecessors is rejected. Note how these implications take us back to the 1868 *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* articles on the “four incapacities.”²⁵ Peirce’s work on inquiry is consistent while continually being refined.

The statement that “the Law of Love and the Law of Reason are quite at one” further emphasizes the relational aspect of reason, namely, to reason is to relate or to reason is to place

²⁴ On the early and later Royce, see for example John J. McDermott, “Introduction,” *The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, Vol. I, pp.3-18.

²⁵ CP 5.213-357.

within continua. Inquiry has a “tendency toward union.” As Peirce said in “Evolutionary Love,” “It is not by dealing out cold justice to the circle of my ideas that I can make them grow, but by cherishing and tending them as I would the flowers in my garden.”²⁶ Growth in rationality comes through “cherishing and tending.” Thus, inquiry progresses through “cherishing and tending.” In modern and simplistic language, inquiry does not progress through calculation or analysis alone. Yes, unbiased observation is required; yes, sharp and penetrating intellect is required. But, these qualities alone will not move inquiry forward. Sympathy with the subject of one’s inquiry is needed.²⁷ In contemporary terminology, Peirce has brought together the affective and the cognitive aspects of thought; in Peirce’s terms, the normative and the logical are not distinct.

The conclusion is that in the early 1900s Peirce recognized (1) that meaningful concepts have purposes, (2) that inquiry must have a purpose beyond mere removal of irritation, and (3) that inquiry serves to bring about concrete reasonableness. If we place the concepts from an inquiry into the four grades of clearness, the following results: First grade—the concept can be identified; second grade—the concept has no confusing parts; third grade, the pragmatic grade—the conceived actions to which the concept will lead are conceived; and fourth grade—the concept moves thinking forward on the continua of present and future concepts. Thus, in inquiry, what “tends toward union” is more productive. Herein, Peirce’s broader concept of inquiry is evident.



The obvious question is: How does Peirce justify taking this stance on inquiry and clearness?²⁸

First, one cannot ask for a reason for reasonableness. The only alternative is to determine whether the consequences resulting from the quest for reasonableness are present and positive or not. The question is whether the consequences are (in Peirce’s terms) admirable, which admirability is indeed exemplified by concrete reasonableness (or at least Peirce so believes). The evolving consequences form a spiral with a movement upward or downward and ever wider. Since inquiry grows out of experience and carries one forward in experience, inquiry becomes the ground for further progressive movement in thought; thus, a continuum is present. As long as one moves on the continuum, reasonableness is present. Since reasonableness is present, movement on the continuum is present and admirable. Thus, continua are inevitable, and growth in reasonableness is present and admirable always. The presence of growth in reasonableness shows the presence of the fourth grade of clearness; they are inseparable. Growth in reasonableness establishes the reality of the fourth grade of clearness.

²⁶ CP 6.288

²⁷ Some critics might point out that Peirce was a logician of the first rank. Can these ideas fit with his logic? Yes, remember that abduction, the generation of hypotheses, is not a matter of calculation, but of having a sympathetic sense for or immediate apprehension of the subject at hand. New concepts only come through abduction. Abduction generates the hypotheses that are tested using deduction and induction. Deduction and Induction can be more intellectually severe in approach, once the hypothesis, abduction, is in hand.

²⁸ Manley Thompson, *The Pragmatic Philosophy of C. S. Peirce*, notes rightly, “The recognition of a fourth grade of clearness...is necessitated not only by his realism and his coenosopic inquiry generally but in particular by any attempt to explicate and prove his pragmatism” (p. 261).

Second, meaningful concepts point toward some end. What does not point toward an end is disconnected, is unattached. Only related concepts can have meaning. Meaningful concepts are instances of concrete reasonableness; meaningful concepts further inquiry itself, not just the inquiry at hand. Meaning, purpose, and the fourth grade of clearness go together.²⁹ If concepts are meaningful, which indeed can be and is the case, then the fourth grade of clearness is real.

Third, the first three grades of clearness deal with conceived experiential effects, one might say conceived practical or lived effects. The fourth grade of clearness deals with the conceived effect or purpose of all inquiry, which is not experienced through the five senses, although having definite effects. At this level, the truth of the inquiry is seen in the effect of the inquiry on the movement on the continuum. Concrete reasonableness, as the general toward which all inquiry proceeds, impacts inquiry and the path it takes. While inquiry leads to conceived experiential effects, concrete reasonableness brings about effects of inquiry itself. The effects of inquiry itself, in the Peircean realm, are conceived experiential effects. Concrete reasonableness provides the conceived end or purpose which promotes some forms of inquiry over other forms of inquiry. In other words, concrete reasonableness points out which hypotheses are worthy of pursuit, with these hypotheses shaping the deductive and inductive endeavors of inquiry.³⁰ The meaning derived from the inquiry which utilizes the three grades of clearness only has complete meaning when it rises to the fourth grades of clearness, that is, fits the greater context, fits the end or purpose of all thought, which of course is the growth of concreteness reasonableness. The implications here are: (1) The fourth grade of clearness, conforming to concrete reasonableness, provides a tool for deciding among hypotheses, no matter how rough or vague that procedure might seem. (2) The fourth grade of clearness can be a tool for deciding which inquiries to undertake. And (3) the fourth grade of clearness can assist in deciding what questions or problems are genuine. If productive inquiry is present, the fourth grade of clearness is present. Productive inquiry (ignoring the content of the inquiry) establishes the reality of the fourth grade of clearness.

In general, the fourth grade of clearness is an ingredient in the growth of reasonableness, meaning, and inquiry.



The conclusion to this bit of history and analysis is that Peirce in his discussion of inquiry accepted fully his three grades of clearness while, under the influence of Josiah Royce, moving conceptually beyond them to a fourth grade. The fourth grade provides the context for an account of inquiry within which the Pragmatic Maxim itself can be

²⁹ I agree with T. L. Short (*Peirce's Theory of Signs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) when he states: "... semeiosis occurs in a context, that context being one of purposefulness" (p. 158), but not when he states: "Nothing is a sign except for its objective relevance to the purposes of possible agents" (p. 172). Short connects purpose to agents and individuals. Peirce does not; Peirce acknowledges that humans, animals, plants, and indeed inorganic processes can have purposes.

³⁰ Manley Thompson, *The Pragmatic Philosophy of C. S. Peirce*, p. 250, claims that Peirce's argument for the reality of God is an example of an argument using this fourth grade of clearness, namely, Peirce is claiming that the reality of God is a worthy hypothesis.

explained and justified.³¹ With his fourth grade of clearness, Peirce has provided a richer context for inquiry. Our task is to complete this development of the fourth grade of clearness.

Endnote on abbreviations:

Ms. refers to the manuscripts of Charles Peirce at Harvard University as cataloged by Richard Robin (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1967). These manuscripts were photocopied and microfilmed in the 1970s; the copies are available at various locations.

CP x.xx refers to the volume number and paragraph number of *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 volumes, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958, edited by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur Burks.

W x.xx refers to the volume number and page number of *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, volumes 1-6 & 8, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982- , edited by the Peirce Edition Project.

EP x.xx refers to the volume number and page number of *The Essential Peirce*, 2 volumes, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992 & 1998, edited by the Peirce Edition Project.

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³¹ The appearance is that the justification for this fourth grade of clearness and its role in thought is an element of a proof of Pragmatism. As Peirce said, the proof of Pragmatism “would essentially involve the establishment of the truth of synechism” (CP 5.415). But I will not tackle that endeavor at this moment, since that is a huge topic for another paper.