

The Pragmatic Maxim: Essays on Peirce and pragmatism

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Peirce and Scepticism

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Abstract and Keywords

Although Peirce endorsed fallibilism, he had no sympathy for philosophical concerns with scepticism. This was because 'real doubt' required a reason and the fact that we have no positive reason for accepting a proposition does not give us reason to doubt it. He argued that we can take scepticism seriously only if we adopt a flawed 'nominalist' conception of reality. If we adopt his favoured 'realist' conception of reality, and recognize that we have direct knowledge of external things, then there is no reason to take scepticism seriously. His pragmatic maxim provided reasons for accepting Peirce's conception of reality and for demonstrating that the truth is knowable by the method of science

Keywords: pragmatism, peirce, scepticism, doubt, reasons for belief, reasons for doubt, nominalism, realism

1.1 Introduction

Peirce's explicit discussions of scepticism are few, brief and, at first sight, simply dismissive. In 'The Fixation of Belief' 1877, he responds to philosophers who 'recommend us to begin our studies with questioning everything!' (EP 1: 115; W3: 248) by observing that the sceptical doubts entertained by such philosophers do not 'stimulate the mind to any struggle after belief': 'there must be real and living doubt, and without this all discussion is idle' (*ibid*). Such remarks are easily dismissed: those who acknowledge the force of sceptical challenges to their beliefs will insist that we do indeed have reasons to take them seriously and that those who

refuse to do so are simply turning their backs on important features of our epistemic position. for such doubts cannot be simply denied, and we are easily persuaded that they reveal something important about how well our beliefs put us into contact with reality.

Peirce's writings on these topics offer more than these blunt denials.¹ As we shall see below, Peirce's response to scepticism debates some views about reference and reality, showing how a flawed 'nominalist' conception of reality can make scepticism hard to resist while a more plausible 'realist' conception of reality shows how we can live without it. He also relies upon views about reasons for belief and reasons for doubt. The discussion of truth and reality in the Introduction rests on, and contributed to the understanding of the role of real, living doubt in cognition. After introducing issues about scepticism (Section 1.1) and fallibilism (Section 1.2), we describe Peirce's views about reasons for belief and doubt (Section 1.3). Subsequent sections discuss the issues about reality just alluded to (Section 1.4), and how experience provides direct contact with external things (Section 1.5). The final section considers some similarities between the responses to scepticism found in Peirce's work and in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*.

There are different ways of formulating the problems of scepticism.² The one I shall employ (at least in the earlier sections of the chapter) captures the core ideas behind (p.21) Pyrrhonian and Cartesian scepticism and is particularly well suited to grasping what is distinctive about Peirce's views. We can set it up in terms of a dialogue involving two characters that I shall call *believer* and *challenger*. (These roles may often be filled by the same person.) The dialogue begins when *believer* is identified as believing some proposition; and *challenger* then issues the primary challenge, requiring *believer* to demonstrate that he is entitled to accept the proposition in question. This challenge can take a number of different forms:

What reasons have you (have I) to believe that proposition?

How do you (I) know that the proposition is true?

Why are you (am I) justified in believing that proposition?

Why are you (am I) entitled to believe that proposition?

It is a presumption of the conversation that unless *believer* can respond to this primary challenge, then her epistemic position is unsound: she is not entitled to hold on to the belief in question. Moreover, for any proposition

that is believed, the primary challenge can legitimately be issued and believer must respond to it.

Once our protagonists are involved in this dialogue, the route to scepticism exploits the apparent fact that whatever answer *believer* provides can be shown to be incomplete or otherwise unsatisfactory. If *believer* invokes other beliefs in order to provide reasons for the belief, *challenger* can respond by issuing a version of the primary challenge directed at them in turn. Or *challenger* can point out that the reasons provided are insufficient to render the belief legitimate. We can illustrate this by appeal to J. L. Austin's well-worn example (Austin 1961: 83ff). Suppose I believe that the bird in the garden is a goldfinch. When asked how I know ('How can I tell that it's a goldfinch?'), I may respond 'By its red head'. *Challenger* may then issue a further primary challenge: How do I know that goldfinches have red heads? How do I know that the bird in the garden has a red head? Alternatively she may question the adequacy of my reason: Have I eliminated the possibility that it is a woodpecker, since they can have red heads too? And the most powerful challenges in her arsenal will appeal to familiar unverifiable alternatives: Can I rule out such possibilities such as that I am dreaming that there is bird with a red head or that I am deceived by wicked scientists using a computer wired into my disembodied envatted brain.

One common style of response to scepticism questions the legitimacy of the challenges that are used to impugn the legitimacy of our beliefs. Peirce's response is of this kind. However, we should bear in mind that such responses can have a number of different immediate targets. One strategy rejects the idea that it always makes sense to ask the questions that express the primary challenge: it denies that we can we always appropriately ask how someone knows some proposition, or why they are right to believe it. Another focuses on the ways in which sceptical challenges are used to question the sufficiency of the reasons we offer when responding to a primary challenge. Some sceptical challenges question our reasons for belief simply by identifying logically possible situations in which the reason would obtain and the proposition (p.22) for which it is a reason would be false. Others posit situations that are unverifiable or undetectable—for example the possibility that we are deceived by an evil demon. This anti-sceptical strategy allows that we need reasons for our beliefs but denies that *these* possibilities present challenges to our reasons. As we shall see below, Peirce adopts the first of these strategies: unless we have reason to doubt one of our beliefs, we may not need a reason to believe it.

Peirce's defence of such a position depends upon his views about reasons for doubt. Before we turn to this in Section 1.3, there is a preliminary issue to be discussed. As I have indicated, sceptical challenges feed on the ways in which we are fallible in our beliefs. Since Peirce claimed to be a 'contrite fallibilist', his work raises some important issues about how that position can be reconciled with a rejection of scepticism. Section 1.2 considers how we should understand fallibilism and examines how we should understand Hilary Putnam's claim that the combination of fallibilism with anti-scepticism was one of the defining marks of American pragmatism. Section 1.3 explores some of Peirce's views about *doubt*, trying to understand how he can dismiss philosopher's doubts as 'unreal' and as 'paper (or pretend) doubts'. This leads to the identification of some views about reasons for belief and doubt that are relevant to sustaining the combination of views discussed in Section 1.2. We then turn to his identification of some philosophical errors about how to think about *reality* that are likely to make the sceptical dialogue unavoidable. As we see in Section 1.4, Peirce wants to avoid 'nominalism' and embrace 'realism' and holds that doing so enables us to resist scepticism—as well as many other philosophical errors). In the closing section, we consider how scepticism may emerge once again in the light of Peirce's fallibilist, pragmaticist³ realism, and assess, in general terms, how he responds to this revised version.

1.2 Scepticism and fallibilism

Hilary Putnam once suggested that 'it is perhaps *the* unique insight of American pragmatism' that someone 'can be both fallibilistic *and* anti-skeptical' (Putnam 1994: 152). When one thinks about it, combining fallibilism with anti-scepticism should not be difficult. As C. F. Delaney has put it, scepticism is an 'attitude of cognitive despair' while 'fallibilism seems to be perfectly compatible with robust cognitive hope' (1993: 111). However, as we have seen, there are familiar philosophical moves which appear to undermine such optimism: Descartes, for one, seems to have thought that the possibility that one of our beliefs might turn out to be mistaken somehow undermines the legitimacy of our holding on to them (see Smyth 1997: ch.6).

In this section I shall examine how Peirce articulated and defended this 'unique insight'. Scepticism occasions despair by suggesting that all of our beliefs are (p.23) illegitimate, that we can be given sufficient reason to doubt each proposition that we currently believe. Even if we *cannot* doubt all these propositions, the standards of epistemic evaluation that we (do or should) take for granted decree that we *ought* to do so.

Fallibilism is more difficult to define. We can start from the observation that we have many beliefs that we actively regard as fallible, we can understand how these beliefs are acquired in ways that are compatible with their being false. We rely on someone's testimony and they turn out to be insincere or mistaken; we base our beliefs upon evidence while aware that more evidence may show that we were mistaken; we know we often form beliefs upon the basis of reasons while unaware of potential defeaters. In such cases, we can follow Delaney in describing fallibilism as a distinctive 'attitude of mind' (Delaney 1993: 110): we recognize that a well-supported belief may yet turn out to be false; we cannot insulate ourselves from all possibility of error. Such observations suggest that we often take ourselves to be right to believe propositions when we recognize that there is a real, albeit slight, possibility of error. But fallibilism is a bolder claim than this. In 1910, Peirce expressed his fallibilism thus: 'I will not, therefore, admit that we know anything whatever with *absolute certainty*' (CP 7.108).⁴ And Putnam has characterized fallibilism as holding that 'there is never a metaphysical guarantee to be had that such-and-such a belief will never need revision.' The talk of 'absolute certainty' and 'metaphysical guarantee' is supposed to extend our sense of fallibility beyond the familiar cases to cover all of our beliefs, including examples where we feel wholly certain of propositions and cannot readily imagine any circumstances in which we might come to abandon our acceptance of them (Putnam 1994: 152). How is this supposed to work?

When we describe a judgement or belief as 'infallible', we identify it as belonging to an epistemic kind of which, of necessity, all members are true. If direct reports of sense data are infallible, then, necessarily, all direct reports of sense data are true; if reports of one's sensations are infallible, then all such reports are true; if intuitions of the rational structure of reality are infallible, then all such intuitions are correct. This assignment to a kind identifies a metaphysical feature of the judgement or belief that guarantees its truth. (This must be a non-trivial matter: we do not show that a judgement is infallible by assigning it to the class of 'veridical judgements', for example.) If this is how we understand infallibility, then we can show that a judgement is *fallible* by demonstrating that there is no such kind to which it belongs. And this suffices to show that it is not infallible even if we feel totally certain of it and we cannot conceive of what might lead us to revise our judgement. I suggest that Putnam's talk of 'metaphysical guarantees' and Peirce's appeal to 'absolute certainty' should be understood in terms of this (p.24) understanding of fallibility: nothing is absolutely certain because

no judgement belongs to an epistemic kind which rules out the possibility of error.⁵

This characterization of infallibility may face problems: there may be judgements of which we do not feel confident yet which, for all that, belong to epistemic kinds that guarantee their truth. Suppose that we adopt a disjunctivist account of perception: perceptual judgements are factive so all perceptual judgements, of necessity, are true. Yet we may be unconfident of our judgement because we are unsure whether it is a judgement of perception or, perhaps, a member of a different epistemic kind, a report of illusion or hallucination, for example. There are two ways to deal with such an example. We might revise the characterization of infallibility to require that the belief *detectably* belongs to a kind which guarantees its truth. Alternatively, we might accept that fallibilism does not extend to all our judgements, recognizing the infallibility of perceptual ones, while also insisting that our beliefs *about* whether a given judgement is a perceptual judgement are fallible. I shall not discuss this further here.

Support for this way of understanding Peirce's position can be found in his explanation of why his fallibilism extends to the claim that twice two is four (CP 7.108, 1910). He acknowledges that he feels 'not the slightest real doubt of it' (CP 7.109); and, indeed, 'that it would be difficult to imagine a greater folly than to attach any serious importance' to the rather strained reasons for doubting it that he manages to dredge up (CP 7.108). He begins by noting that even 'computers' occasionally make errors in simple multiplications, which he takes to establish that doing a calculation just once does not provide an absolute guarantee that no error has been made: that a belief is the result of simple multiplication does not guarantee its truth. Perhaps repetition of the calculation, possibly by different people, enables us to progress from a conclusion that we feel very certain of, one that we cannot imagine we could be in error about, into one that is '*absolutely certain*'. Since it would be absurd to see just one calculation as enabling us to cross this metaphysical boundary, the safest recourse is to acknowledge that we are often extremely certain of the results of calculations but conclude that 'man is incapable of absolute certainty' (CP 7.108). This rests on the assumption that if there is a real distinction between fallible and 'absolutely infallible' beliefs, it needs to be a sharp one: there cannot be borderline cases between the fallible and the *absolutely* infallible; and Peirce agrees with Quine that philosophy cannot provide a sharp boundary of this kind. He denies that we can be 'absolutely certain' that twice two is (p.25) four, and this is grounded on the demonstration that we cannot identify a significant

epistemic kind to which this judgement belongs and which guarantees its truth.

Although Peirce and Putnam endorse fallibilism as a thesis about *all* our beliefs, it may not matter if this strong version of fallibilism can be sustained. It is enough that there are very many beliefs that we take to be legitimate and which are manifestly fallible. The challenge remains of showing that sceptical challenges do not demonstrate that our hold on *these* is illegitimate.

1.3 Reasons for belief and reasons for doubt

When defending the claim that the pragmatists were anti-sceptics, Putnam invoked the fact that they held that '*doubt* requires justification just as much as belief' (1994: 152). Indeed most epistemologists who refer to Peirce's writings focus on passages critical of Cartesian approaches to the theory of knowledge in which he urges that the sorts of sceptical challenge associated with such approaches can be safely ignored. He thinks that there is something absurd and even intellectually dishonest about taking sceptical challenges seriously. These views on doubt and Cartesian strategies in epistemology are found in some rather brief passages in two of his best-known relatively early papers.⁶

The first of these two passages is in 'Some consequences of four incapacities' that appeared in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in 1868. His aim is to challenge a philosophical picture that he calls 'the Spirit of Cartesianism': it marked a radical break with the spirit of scholasticism; and modern logic and science require a perspective that is, in many ways, closer to scholasticism.⁷

The first of his four 'marks of Cartesianism' is:

[Cartesianism] teaches that philosophy must begin with universal doubt; whereas scholasticism had never questioned fundamentals.(EP 1: 28; W2: 211)

Nine years later, in 'The Fixation of Belief', considering what norms we should accept for the conduct of inquiry, he identifies a similar target:

Some philosophers have imagined that to start an inquiry it was only necessary to utter a question or set it down on paper, and have even recommended us to begin our studies with questioning everything!(EP 1: 115; W2: 248)

Peirce's response to the suggestion is consistent. In the earlier discussion, he tells us that 'We cannot begin with universal doubt'. Inquiry must 'begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy'. Indeed, these prejudices are things which 'it does not occur to us can be questioned' and, for this (p.26) reason, they 'cannot be dispelled by a maxim' (EP 1: 28–9, 212). In the later discussion, he warns his readers that 'the mere putting of a proposition into the interrogative form does not stimulate the mind to any struggle after belief' (EP 1: 115; W3: 248). Doubt that derives from the 'Cartesian maxim' is of no epistemic value. In each passage, he concludes with a call to arms:

1868: Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts. (EP 1: 29; W2: 212)

1878: There must be real and living doubt, and without this all discussion is idle. (EP 1: 115; W3: 248)

We should be careful in interpreting these passages. What is the method of doubt? In the *Meditations*, Descartes undertook to examine all of his beliefs, and reject all those for which there is any ground of doubt. Effectively this means that for each belief (or, more strictly for each class of beliefs) he issues the primary challenge, demanding to know what reason there is to believe the proposition in question and, in addition, whether there is any reason to doubt it. Then, if the evidence for the belief is anything less than conclusive, the belief is to be (or should be) abandoned. The primary challenge must be presented in a way that treats it as an open question whether there is sufficient reason to believe the proposition. And Peirce seems to think that *this* is impossible.⁸

It will help if we consider an example. I believe that I was born in South East England, in Kent. Suppose that, in Cartesian spirit, I reflect on my belief to determine whether I am right to believe it. Let us suppose that I cannot find my birth certificate or any other documentary evidence which might settle the matter. One thing that can occur is that I encounter genuine reason to doubt this memory: perhaps I find evidence that my parents were living abroad around the time that I was born; or perhaps my relations become very evasive when I ask about my place of birth. In that case, I acquire a positive reason to doubt what I previously believed; it is intelligible that it would shake my habitual confidence about my birthplace and produce what Peirce would call a 'living doubt'. Another possibility is that I simply find no positive reason to believe that I was born in Kent: I have been certain of this for a long time; I have no positive reason to doubt it; but I can summon

up no positive reason to believe it either. I suspect that many of my beliefs are like this. The method of doubt would require me to abandon this belief, to suspend judgement about where I was in born solely because I cannot now find a positive reason in its favour. Peirce thinks that, in practice, I do not come to doubt propositions in these circumstances, and, indeed, that I cannot do so. If I were to start inquiring into the matter, my residual certainty that I was born in Kent **(p.27)** would actually distort the inquiry, making me insensitive to how paltry my evidence is. And this is not irrational.

Descartes may agree that it is not irrational to hold on to everyday beliefs in these sorts of cases. The method of doubt is adopted in special circumstances as part of a strategy that will enable us to make progress in the sciences, to obtain accurate knowledge of an independent reality. The special circumstances include the fact that, at the time at which Descartes wrote, there was much controversy about the fundamental principles of science and about the criterion of truth in the sciences the early seventeenth century witnessed a 'pyrrhonian crisis' (Popkin 1979: 108–9). We must now examine how Peirce was able to reject this method of doubt and repudiate Descartes' views about when we are warranted in coming to doubt what we currently believe.

In order to understand these Peircean views about when doubt is warranted, it is helpful to begin by considering the views of Isaac Levi, a philosopher whose work in epistemology is marked by his reading of Peirce. In a recent paper, Levi has emphasized that traditional foundationalist epistemology has had two distinctive features. The first of these concerns the structure of justification: there must be 'foundational premises and principles of reasoning that are self-certifying on the basis of which the merits of other beliefs and principles may be derived.' All anti-foundationalists reject this, but pragmatists additionally reject a more fundamental claim: this is the view, at first sight a platitude, that rationality requires that all of our current beliefs should be justified. Levi takes this to entail that belief is illegitimate if the believer does not possess reasons or justifications that can be used to support it. He comments:

Pragmatists do not think that the project of justifying current beliefs is implementable. In this respect they are skeptics. Such skepticism does not imply that because agent X at time *t* cannot justify his current beliefs, he should cease having them. Scepticism about reasons does not imply skepticism about belief.(Levi 1998: 177)

The fact that we cannot provide rational support for most of our beliefs—such as those mentioned in my example—does not show that we are wrong to hold them. Peirce, he tells us, ‘was a fan of the principle of doxastic inertia according to which there is no need to justify current beliefs, only changes in belief’ (Levi 1998: 179). This is initially offered as a description of our practice with epistemic norms. But Levi is quick to point out the corollary that ‘the burden is on the sceptic why I should cease being certain about many current [beliefs] just because there is a logical possibility that they are mistaken’ (Levi 1998: 178). ‘Real doubts’ are based on real possibilities of error.⁹ And ‘The inquirer’s current state of full [i.e. certain] belief is the (p.28) standard by which she currently judges truth’ and it also sets her ‘*standard for serious possibility*’ (Levi 1998: 179).¹⁰

In a manuscript from around 1906, Peirce endorses this position. Belief does not always require a reason: ‘If you absolutely cannot doubt a proposition—cannot bring yourself, upon deliberation, to entertain the least suspicion of the truth of it, it is plain that there is no room to desire anything more’ (CP 6.498).¹¹ And, he continues, ‘what one does not doubt cannot be rendered more satisfactory than it already is.’¹² And the pragmatist knows that ‘doubt is an art which has to be acquired with difficulty’ (*ibid.*).

The assumption here about when we need epistemic reasons is an important one, although Levi’s suggestion that we only need reasons for ‘changes of belief’ may overstate the case. It is important to keep in mind that the Cartesian ‘method of doubt’ is concerned with whether we have reasons to change our epistemic stance towards some proposition: if it is possible to doubt the proposition, then we ought to abandon our belief and replace it by an agnostic attitude towards that proposition, perhaps involving motivation to settle the matter one way or the other. Both Peirce and Levi deny that recognition that there is a *logical* possibility of error is sufficient to count as a reason for doubt. Once it is established that there is a *prima facie* reason for doubting the proposition, then a reason for belief may be required even if there is no change of belief: in order to resist the doubt, we need reason to eliminate the possibility of error that it proposes. And, of course, reasons for belief are (always?) required when we move from an agnostic stance towards a proposition to one of belief. In other cases, it may be important to keep track of the reasons that have persuaded us of the truth of some proposition because we are aware that we may be proved wrong about the reason and want to be in a position, if that occurs, to revise our attitude towards the proposition. There are also some cases where the lack of a reason to believe a proposition *can* provide a reason to doubt it—and there are interesting

questions about how these cases are distinguished from the others. There are cases where this might have a moral grounding: certainty that a friend is disloyal or a partner is unfaithful needs to be supported by reasons. Other cases arise with scientific views that others might reject for example. Or with cases where there is general recognition that mistakes are likely to occur. The important point is that it is primarily changes in cognitive stance (or retention of a cognitive stance in circumstances where a change (p.29) was on the cards) that require a reason, and there must always be a special reason in other cases why reasons are required for belief to be legitimate.

This provides a description of our practice: we do not think that beliefs always require reasons or 'justification'. Its anti-sceptical force is important. First, the fact that we cannot provide a solid justification for one of our certain beliefs does not provide us with any reason to doubt it. The sceptical challenge to it can be resisted. Second, as Olsson (2005: 188; and cf. Levi 1991: 58) reminds us, this allows for a quick dismissal of the sceptical possibilities exploited in modern sceptical arguments. The certainties that stand in no need of further justification will include the fact that I am not the victim of a *malin genie*, or a disembodied brain in a vat of chemicals.¹³ It is another corollary of this position that it helps us to see how fallibilism can be undisturbing. Our fallibility extends to these propositions of which we are certain, even after careful deliberation. We are confident that few of these certainties will be shaken, but we allow (as an abstract possibility) that any might. Since our certainty does not depend upon reasons, it is not shaken by this abstract acknowledgement of fallibility. The fact that we cannot rule out the possibility that we will come to have a reason to doubt some proposition is not itself a reason to doubt the proposition.

But, as Levi points out, all this does for epistemology is shift the burden of proof: good reasons are required before we adopt the epistemic standards that lead to the method of doubt. Descartes himself did not hold that the method of doubt was implicit in our ordinary epistemic practices: he thought that there were positive reasons for adopting this strategy. And Peirce too held that it might be rational to do so, given either a distinctive set of metaphysical and epistemological views, or given some views about the real possibilities for the progress of inquiry. The next two sections consider these two possibilities in turn.

1.4 Nominalism and two conceptions of reality

The previous section suggested that the Cartesian method of doubt, which can be used to mount some strong sceptical challenges, is not obviously compelling. Our normal practice of epistemic evaluation does not require us to have sufficient reasons for *all* of our (legitimate) beliefs. Reasons come into our own when we consider changing our system of epistemic stances. But, as we noted, this is not sufficient to dismiss these challenges: even if the method of doubt is not a natural outgrowth of our ordinary habits of reflection, it is still conceivable that the method is one that we *ought* to use in place of our customary practices, at least in some circumstances. At best, Peirce's views (p.30) about doubt establish that the burden of proof lies with someone who wishes to adopt methods that are in harmony with the method of doubt: they must persuade us to change our habits of epistemic evaluation. This would have come as no surprise to Descartes.

In his earlier writings, Peirce identified a pair of closely related views that were conducive to adoption of the method of doubt. One of these was a view about the structure of cognition and justification; the other involved adoption of a distinctive view of *reality*. Each, he thought, was a consequence of nominalism, a philosophical vice that he uncovered in the work of almost all of his predecessors, from Plato to Kant and Hegel. The view of cognition was a kind of foundationalism; and the view of reality allowed for the existence of a potentially unbridgeable gap between the real and the knowable. Peirce, always ready to insist upon his extreme realism, criticized these ideas about the structure of cognition in some papers published in the late 1860s. And, during the 1870s, he set about clarifying the concept of *reality*, defending what he called a 'realist' conception that, he thought, kept Cartesian challenges at bay.

As this terminology suggests, Peirce's 'realism' contrasts with 'nominalism': he thought that pragmatism was unavoidably committed to a non-Humean view of laws and 'generals' and, in his later work, he emphasized that generality, causal interactions, and law governed patterns were present in perceptual experience. But he also embraced quite a robust realism about external things. We get the flavour of his realism in the 1870s when we identify a common-sense assumption which, in 'The Fixation of Belief' (1877), he seemed to think was required if we are to make sense of the possibility of *doubt* and also to make sense of there being a question of which methods of inquiry we *ought* to adopt.

There are real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; those realities affect our senses according to regular

laws, and, though our sensations are as different as our relations to the objects, yet, by taking account of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really are, and any man, if he have sufficient experience and reason enough about it, will be led to the one true conclusion (EP 1: 120; W3: 254).

We will only understand this when we know what it means to describe something as 'real'. The nominalist conception seems to be designed to capture this perspective, but does not do so. Peirce's own realist conception is designed to clarify this assumption.

In 'Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man' (1868), Peirce attacks the idea that cognition involves having 'intuitions', a word he presumably takes from Kant.¹⁴ Sometimes he characterizes cognitions in terms of a foundationalist account of knowledge. An intuition is 'nearly the same as "premiss not itself a conclusion"'. This (p.31) has to be qualified only because terms like 'conclusion' and 'premiss' apply only to 'judgements' while an intuition can be 'any kind of cognition whatever'. This is intended to allow for the possibility that a sensory experience may be an intuition. The official definition of intuition is: 'a cognition not determined by a previous cognition of the same object, and therefore so determined by something out of consciousness'. And Peirce allows that 'cognitions not judgments may be determined by previous cognitions; and a cognition not so determined, and therefore determined directly by the transcendental object, is to be termed an intuition' (CP 5.213). The insistence that intuitions may be (always are?) cognitions that are not judgements is required to capture the nominalist character of this view: the cognitions solely determined by the transcendental object are taken to be wholly singular representations, not involving any predication.

Three years later, in a review of a new edition of Berkeley's philosophical writings, this perception is formulated as an account of reality: having noted that 'Objects are divided into figments, dreams, etc., on the one hand, and realities on the other', he notes that the 'latter are those which have an existence independent of your mind or mine or that of any number of persons'. He then offers a simple 'definition' of reality: 'The real is that which is not whatever we happen to think it, but is unaffected by what we may think of it' (CP 8.12). The nominalist conception tries to further clarify this idea of mind-independence by exploiting the idea that our thoughts are caused by our sensations and these sensations by something out of the mind: 'this thing out of mind, which directly influences sensation, and,

through sensation, thought, because it is out of the mind, is independent of how we think it, and is, in short, the real' (CP 8.12). We know about external things through the mediation of what seem to be intuitions, singular representations ('sensations') which are determined by ('directly influenced by') the transcendental object and which provide the sole basis for our thoughts.

If this is the correct way to think about reality and experience, then it may be possible to make a case for adopting Cartesian epistemological strategies. This view assigns a fundamental role to intuitions: they are our point of contact with (and only source of information about) reality. (1) The method of doubt can then be seen as a device for identifying what is really given to us in intuition; it helps us to free ourselves from those aspects of our perceptual beliefs that are determined by background substantive assumptions rather than being determined by the transcendental object. (2) It also supports an individualist approach to epistemic evaluation. While we *can* use the testimony of others as a source of corrective information, this function is mediated through the intuitions that are determined in *us* by the utterances and other behaviour of our fellows. (3) It supports the possibility that once error enters our system of belief, we cannot be confident that further inquiry will enable us to correct it. As Descartes put it, once one bad apple enters our corpus of opinions, it is likely to infect the others—our only source of confidence in our ability to acquire knowledge of reality is to prevent error ever entering the corpus. (4) Our confidence in our knowledge has to depend upon assumptions that are inexplicable and unknowable on ordinary empirical (p.32) grounds. Thus Descartes needs belief in God (an 'absolutely inexplicable, unanalyzable ultimate') to assure us that the processes by which our intuitions are determined by the transcendental object are reliable (see EP 1: 28–9; W2: 212).

If he has to sustain his anti-sceptical confidence, and also reconcile it with fallibilism, Peirce thinks he needs to reject this nominalist vision. In 'Some Consequences of Our Incapacities', he tells us that:

Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods, so far as to proceed only from tangible premisses which can be subjected to careful scrutiny, and to trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibres maybe ever so slender, provided they are

sufficiently numerous and intimately connected.(EP 1: 29; W2: 213)

If our knowledge is based upon intuitions, we might suppose, we have no alternative but to view our reasoning as a chain, which is no stronger than its weakest link.

Peirce considers several ways of arguing for the claim that we rely upon intuitions for our knowledge. In 1868, he evaluates the suggestion that it is evident to introspection that there are intuitions, and he considers the argument that they are required to block a potential regress of justification and cognition. In 'Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man', he responds to this in the course of a complex argument. He appeals to a variety of facts about our unreliability in describing our own psychological states in order to argue that not only can we not tell 'intuitively' whether a state is an intuition, but we also lack an introspective ability to examine our cognitions and see what they are determined by. We can establish that we have intuitions only as the conclusion of an explanatory inference; and all the evidence shows that our cognitions are all partly determined by other cognitions of the same object. Once we recognize that not all cognitions are judgements, the supposed regress ceases to be a cause for concern: Peirce is happy to see sensory experience as a continuous process, and to deny that the experience of a particular object must have a fixed first point. I'm not exploring the details of these arguments here: it would take too much space, and the interest of the strategy does not stand or fall with the details of its execution in Peirce's writings.¹⁵

The other argument for the Cartesian picture of cognition that Peirce considers depends upon the analysis of reality. We need to understand what the mind-independence of real things consist in, and, if the nominalist conception of reality is the best clarification of this, then there may be another route into the doctrine of intuitions. But, after describing the nominalist conception of reality, Peirce offers an alternative, which he describes as 'less familiar' but also as 'even more natural and obvious' (CP (p.33) 8.12). He also describes it as 'a highly practical and common-sense position' (CP 8.16). The underlying idea is that 'human opinion universally tends in the long run to a definite form, which is the truth' (CP 8.12).

The arbitrary will or other individual peculiarities of a sufficiently large number of minds may postpone the general agreement in that opinion indefinitely; but it cannot affect what the character of that opinion shall be when it is reached. This final opinion, then, is independent, not indeed of

thought in general, but of all that is arbitrary and individual in thought; is quite independent of how you, or I, or any number of men think (CP 8.12).¹⁶

This is supposed to be enough to make sense of the mind-independence of reality: this picture is thus meant to provide for the thought that, although ‘all human thought and opinion contains...an element of error’, further inquiry and investigation will enable us to remove errors and improve our cognitive position.¹⁷ It is easy to see that this conception of reality need provide no obstacle to combining fallibilism and anti-scepticism. Indeed, it seems to be a positive mark of realism that there is no gap between what is real and what can be, in principle, known. However, while the strategy adopted in these early writings may enable us to see that the Cartesian cannot discharge the burden of showing that a lack of reason for a proposition provides us with a reason to doubt that proposition, there is still work to be done before we stop worrying about scepticism.

1.5 Experience and the external world

The story we have examined so far may suggest that Peirce is stuck in a familiar dialectic. The characterization of his realism that we took from ‘The Fixation of Belief’ had an empiricist flavour: we can obtain stable knowledge of reality by exploiting the ways in which external things affect our senses. Indeed, it is through the senses that we encounter the external world. The nominalist conception of reality incorporated that idea: sensory intuitions serve as intermediaries between external things and our thoughts about them. But the nominalist conception was neither true to our experience nor satisfactory as a basis for explaining how our beliefs are legitimately held. But when we turn to the realist conception, which appears to explain reality in terms of a **(p.34)** fated consensus upon a body of coherent opinions, we face the question of how we should explain the fundamental role of perception in the fixation of belief and, also, how experience can be understood as an encounter with an external world. Part of this explanation will consist in an account of the role of, for example, inductive and experimental reasoning in enabling us to revise and correct our beliefs *en route* to the truth. In this section I want to consider another distinctively pragmatist theme, the account of perception that Peirce began to develop after 1880.

The problem we have just raised has two aspects. First, there is the idea that we *encounter* the external world through perceptual experience: there is a kind of *directness* in our perceptual contact with things. Second, the testing

of empirical beliefs and theories depends upon experiment and observation. If we do arrive at the truth through inquiry, this depends fundamentally on our having perceptual experiences of things. The nominalist conception of reality builds these features into cognition from the beginning. It does so by claiming that the first premisses from which all our beliefs should be derived are descriptions of our sensory experience. The realist conception does not give this role to perception. Can it give perception a fundamental role at all?

Let us begin with the dimension of *encounter* or *directness*. It is because we experience objects that we are able to refer to them, to think about them or talk about them. One aspect of *encountering things* seems to be a sort of direct reference to them: when I observe the book on my desk, I can pick it out through a demonstrative or indexical sign; I report what I see by saying or thinking '*That* is a yellow book'. Indeed, I encounter the object directly even if the perceptual judgement I form is false. For example the thing I take to be a yellow book may be a box painted to look like a book. I make fallible judgements that involve direct reference to external things. On the nominalist view, reference to external things is likely to be *indirect*: the book should be referred to as the 'object out of mind' that caused this sensation or experience. I should think of external things as the causes of the sensations that are the things I really encounter.

In two ways, the content of experience is richer than it is taken to be in the sort of traditional empiricism allied to what Peirce calls the nominalist conception of reality. The first, we have just considered, is that we experience things as external, as available for direct reference. Second, in experiencing things, we bring concepts to bear, experiencing things as behaving in patterned and law governed ways. In a lecture from 1903, Peirce appeals to ambiguous figures such as the Schroeder stair to show that general concepts are present in perceptual experiences as much as they are in reflective and conscious reasoning. Walking in the country in the late evening, I make the perceptual report that *that sheep is lying on the ground*. The object is picked out demonstratively, and how it looks reflects the concepts that are brought to bear. In view of the links between these concepts and others, I expect my experience to develop in predictable ways—I expect the sheep to get up and move away under appropriate circumstances; I expect distinctive tactile experiences if I move up close to (p.35) it; and so on. And when it doesn't behave as expected, I can revise my judgement: that object, which I took to be a sheep on the basis of how it looked, turns out to be a bush. I revise my judgement by interacting with the thing that I saw, and I learn what the thing I saw *really* was by interacting

with it and collecting more information about it. We can thus combine the thesis that we directly perceive external things, with the claim that what these things *really* are is to be clarified through further inquiry. The view accords with the realist conception of reality.

In a discussion of *facts* from the mid-1890s, Peirce claimed that our knowledge of facts depends upon their 'resisting us'. He continues:

A man may walk down Wall Street debating within himself the existence of an external world; but if in his brown study he jostles up against somebody who angrily draws off and knocks him down, the sceptic is unlikely to carry his scepticism so far as to doubt whether anything beside the ego was concerned in that phenomenon. The resistance shows him that something independent of him is there.(CP 1.431)

This passage describes some aspects of the 'outward clash of experience', features which are evidently relevant to scepticism about external things. As we have just seen, experience does not simply provide neutral or subjective sense data that can serve as evidence for the existence of external things. Rather it presents something as *other* or as external: something 'beside the ego' is contained in the perceptual phenomenon. It is not merely that I cannot prevent a judgement about external things arising, one that is not open to critical self-control as it is formed: it is the experience of encountering something external that is distinctive in the perceptual encounter. We directly perceive external things, albeit fallibly.¹⁸

Perceptual judgements anchor our beliefs in two distinct ways. First, the primary form of reference to external things is through the use of demonstrative signs in perceptual judgements: that is how we encounter external things and it is the source of our sense that we are part of a world of objects with which we can interact and of which we can obtain knowledge. The second perception provides premisses for our reasoning. Perceptual judgements force themselves upon us: we find them irresistible and do not accept them on the basis of conscious *reasons*. When we accept perceptual judgements, we see no need to raise the primary challenge and ask what reason we have to accept them. Peirce sometimes describes them as (at the time they are made) 'acritical'. But it is compatible with this that, subsequently, we can have reason to doubt them. We recognize that they are not to be taken at face value. And in revising them, we are guided by our background knowledge: we can understand how a bush on a hillside in murky light can appear to be a sleeping sheep.¹⁹

(p.36) 1.6 Avoiding despair in the face of the future

Several of the pragmatist ideas that have been discussed will remind readers of themes from the later Wittgenstein. The claims about perception mentioned in Section 1.5 resemble views from part two of the *Philosophical Investigations*, and Peirce's theses about reasons for belief and reasons for doubt have much in common with claims to be found in *On Certainty*.²⁰ I do not intend to make a detailed comparison here, but I shall draw attention to some pertinent differences in order to identify yet another pragmatist theme in thinking about these issues.

It is common ground that the legitimacy of most of our current beliefs should not be threatened by sceptical challenges. It is also agreed that, for many of our certainties, we can offer no reasons and do not need to do so, unless some reasonable doubt is raised about them. Doubts need a reason, and reasons for doubt are harder to come by than many epistemologists have supposed. One difference, noted by Tiercelin, is that, in effect, Wittgenstein stops at this and, for that reason, it is easy to follow Robert Fogelin in seeing his work as capturing what is living in pyrrhonian scepticism (Fogelin 1994: passim). Peirce doesn't stop at this point. First, a representative figure of the nineteenth century, he aspired to embed his discussion in an ambitious philosophical architectonic which included a (empirically grounded) system of metaphysics. This is linked to the fact that, unlike Wittgenstein, he had a strong need to vindicate realism. I don't propose to discuss this here, although I shall consider one of the strategic moves that led him in this direction. Second, as the realist conception of reality indicates, Peirce views inquirers as occupying a position in history. We need to be confident, not only of our current certainties, but also of our ability, as time goes by, to identify and correct errors and to find the right answers to our questions and solutions to our problems. We need to be confident that we are, indeed, fated to arrive at the truth, so long as we manage our inquiries to the best of our ability. This concern is absent from *On Certainty*.

In many cases, this presents no problem. I am certain of the short-term reliability of induction and testimony, I have no reason to doubt that I am poor at assessing the reliability of doubts in ordinary cases, I know that in many circumstances, I am good at solving problems and answering questions, and so on. Unless there is a good reason to doubt one of these certainties, then there is nothing illegitimate in my relying on these methods and capacities in managing my beliefs and inquiries. The strategy described in Section 1.3 can be used to address these issues too.

But it is not clear that we can always sustain our confidence that we can obtain knowledge of reality in that way. Particularly in the more theoretical reaches of the sciences, and perhaps in connection with ethical propositions, there are too many (p.37) contingencies that can get in the way of our progress towards the 'fated consensus'. Think, first, of some of the capacities we need to carry out inquiries successfully. We must be able to analyse and describe problems and questions clearly, evaluate what sorts of considerations are relevant to the issue, think up solutions that we find plausible, evaluate and try to answer subordinate questions, reflect on the ways in which socio-historical considerations can distort our (and other people's) thoughts about the matter and so on.²¹ The capacities we have will be determined in large part by training and education, and by experience that need not be directly applicable to the new problems we face. Particularly when we are dealing with difficult and novel kinds of issues, it is hard to see that we will be certain that we possess all the capacities that are required for making a serious contribution to solving our problem. And in that case, it is hard to see that the strategies described in Section 1.3 will fit the bill.

In that case, another pragmatist strategy enters the frame. In later work, Peirce appears to allow that our confident participation in inquiry does not always require confident certainty that we have the abilities required to advance towards the fated consensus. It may be enough that we rationally *hope* that we can do so. We hope that the problem can be solved, and that we possess the capacities required for solving it. We hope that our sense of plausibility (for example) will lead us to favour the right sorts of hypotheses. This offers a way of recognizing the unanswerability of challenges that might lead to scepticism, but disarming their tendency to lead us to doubt our ability to participate.²²

1.7 Conclusion: scepticism and pragmatism

The most important elements in Peirce's strategy for responding to scepticism are echoed in the writings of other pragmatists. I shall illustrate this by comparing the views of Peirce and William James. The first component of this strategy is epistemic conservatism, or what Levi calls 'doxastic inertia' (Levi 1998: 179).

Beliefs are justified unless there is a positive reason for doubting them: the concept of a reason for doubt is more fundamental than the concept of a reason for belief.

(p.38) James's commitment to the principle of doxastic inertia is evident from his 1908 'Lectures on Pragmatism', especially in lecture II in which he explains 'What Pragmatism Means' and introduces his pragmatist account of truth. Acknowledging the influence of Dewey and Schiller, he explains how our beliefs are revised. Against the background of a 'stock of old opinions', we encounter inconsistencies between our beliefs, or we find 'facts' that are incompatible with them. Our strategy when facing such problems is to save as much of our existing corpus of beliefs as we can: 'in this matter of belief we are all extreme conservatives' (James 1907: 34). James's conservatism is manifest when he writes that we 'preserve the older stock of truths with a minimum of modification, stretching them enough to make them admit the novelty, but conceiving that in ways as familiar as the case leaves possible' (James 1907: 35). We only revise our beliefs when we are given reason to do so.

This is compatible with fallibilism: our confidence in our opinions is not shaken by the recognition that some of our beliefs are likely to be false. We would be disturbed if we could not believe that, in normal cases, errors would eventually be identified; but our confidence in this will be fallible in most cases too. Epistemic conservatism justifies our confidence that we do not confront errors that cannot be corrected. The defence of the method of science in Peirce's paper 'The Fixation of Belief' is intended to secure our confidence in this.

The second element of the pragmatic strategy is a diagnosis of the errors that lead us to perceive scepticism as a genuine threat. For Dewey, the threat is 'the copy theory of truth', and for Peirce it is the nominalist conception of reality. James observes that there are two ways of looking at our duty in the matter of opinion—ways entirely different, and yet ways about whose difference the theory of knowledge seems hitherto have shown very little concern. *We must know the truth and we must avoid error* (1897: 17). These 'two separable laws' 'Believe truth!' and 'shun error' can be in tension, and 'by choosing between them we may end by coloring differently our whole intellectual life' (1897: 18). James's view is that in some contexts, we should give prominence to one of these laws, and in other contexts, we should rely upon the other. In that case, 'scepticism...is a certain practical kind of risk. *Better risk loss of truth than chance of error*' (James 1897: 30). Once the question is posed in this way, it is a practical question of what sorts of risks we are prepared to take. The sceptic fails to see that the issue should be seen in this way, and the pragmatists tend to attribute this error to the adoption of flawed metaphysical pictures (see Hookway 2012).

Notes:

(1) It is interesting that Stanley Cavell asserts that, unlike positivists and some ordinary language philosophers, pragmatists like Peirce and Dewey follow Wittgenstein in 'taking the *general* relation of knowledge and object as their *problem*' (Cavell 1980: 225).

(2) Erik J. Olsson offers a 'reconstruction' of Peirce's anti-sceptical strategy that is not directed, at the sort of doubt-based scepticism I am considering, but at more modern sceptical positions that exploit a closure principle to show that I cannot know that I have a hand, for example, unless I can know that I am not a brain in a vat (Olsson 2005: 187-90).

(3) 'Pragmaticism' is the word that Peirce introduced in 1905 to distinguish his nuanced position from other views falling under the general characterization 'pragmatism.'

(4) He makes similar remarks elsewhere. 'There are three things to which we can never hope to attain by reasoning: namely absolute certainty, absolute exactitude, absolute universality' (CP 1.141, 1897). It is hard to say what expressions like '*metaphysical* guarantee' and '*absolute* certainty' mean, but I take it that talk of the '*metaphysical*' and the '*absolute*' go together.

(5) This way of understanding fallibilism is useful for understanding the later sections of Quine's 'Two dogmas of empiricism' (1951). There are also points of similarity with Michael Williams's views about the role of what he calls 'epistemological realism' in generating scepticism (Williams 1991: 108-13). This view holds that, in evaluating our beliefs, we think of them as belonging to broad natural kinds, our justification in holding a belief depending upon the reliability of beliefs that depend upon these kinds. In each case, the views lead to the contextualist claim that epistemic evaluation occurs within a context, where much is taken to stand firm, and to require no reflective defence. Two differences are that, where Williams is concerned with the role of what we might call 'explanatory kinds' of beliefs, Peirce discusses whether there are sharply demarcated classes of beliefs; and where Williams is concerned with identifying the errors that make scepticism seem unavoidable, Peirce's aim is to make a case for an extreme form of fallibilism.

(6) In a draft of a logic text written in 1893, Peirce observes that 'Descartes marks the period when Philosophy put off childish things and began to be a conceited young man' (CP 4.71). The child treats tradition as infallible, and

the mature thinker treats it as a valuable albeit fallible resource; and the philosophical adolescent undertakes to abandon it.

(7) For further discussion of Peirce's response to Cartesianism, see the Introduction.

(8) Peirce has other objections to the method of doubt too (see Feibleman 1971: 70f). One of these is that Descartes never extends his doubt to his assurance that he doubts some proposition (see for example CP 5.382n). He is satisfied that, if he deliberately includes the proposition in a conscious list of doubted ones, then it is really doubted. Peirce suspects that the proposition will usually remain active in a habitual, unconscious way, influencing how we act and how we adjust our other beliefs. The unconscious operation of our beliefs will then interfere with our attempts to evaluate the proposition that we 'pretend' to doubt.

(9) This combination of views reconciles anti-scepticism with fallibilism. A real doubt of a belief must rest on the recognition of a real possibility that the belief may turn out to be mistaken. If we have no information that will provide a real doubt of some proposition, then we are entitled to continue in our acceptance of it. But the lack of reason to doubt a proposition is compatible with belief in it being fallible.

(10) It is worth noting a similar asymmetry between the legitimacy of belief and doubt in Olsson's writings on coherentism. Having spent most of his book arguing that the fact that our beliefs are coherent does not provide us with a reason for accepting them, he does allow (in the Peircean final section) that incoherence among our beliefs *does* provide a reason for doubt (Olsson 2005, *passim*).

(11) To avoid confusion, I take it that the claim that I 'absolutely cannot doubt' something in this passage should be compatible with fallibilistic claim (see Section 1.2) that it is not '*absolutely* certain'.

(12) Other remarks in this passage show how far Peirce had been influenced by the common-sense tradition in philosophy. On most 'ordinary matters of everybody's life', we find that what we find indubitable coincides with what 'no well matured man doubts'. Such certainties are often instinctive, although the things we find indubitable mutate over our lifetimes.

(13) This is a legitimate use of the Peircean strategy and may be a sufficient response to these possibilities. We should note, however, that Peirce's

pragmatist maxim might also be employed to show that these possibilities are empty or unintelligible because their realization would make no (practical) difference to our experience. I suspect that the move considered in the text is the more fundamental one: if we did not have *this* reason to discount such possibilities, then we might have reason to doubt the pragmatist maxim. (For an examination of the pragmatist maxim, see Chapter 9.)

(14) There is at least one respect in which Peirce's account of intuitions differs from Kant. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, space and time are introduced as the forms of intuition rather than as general categories of the understanding. From his earliest writings, Peirce explained our understanding of space and time as involving the mastery of general spatial and temporal concepts, subject to his system of categories, and denied that there were any a priori structures other than those provided by his system of categories.

(15) There is another theme—one which anticipates the pragmatist maxim for clarifying ideas from ten years later. Peirce undertakes to show that we can have no conception of something which is 'incognizable'. Since the nominalist conception, according to Peirce, requires the incognizable idea of a transcendental object, then this may offer a direct argument against nominalism. It also provides reason to reject the idea that we can understand the more extreme sceptical possibilities.

(16) *Contra* Bernard Williams and Hilary Putnam, this explanation of truth and reality in terms of the convergence of opinion does not involve any sort of commitment to there being what is sometimes called an 'absolute conception of reality'. Indeed, Peirce takes it to be a merit of his view that it enables him to acknowledge the reality of secondary qualities and artefact kinds. (See Chapter 3.)

(17) Some readers may be puzzled at this conception of reality being called 'realist', since it does not appear to allow for any gap between what is real and what is knowable. It may help to think of Peirce's position as a generalization of the view that Kreisel expressed about Platonism vs. constructivism in mathematics: 'the problem is not the existence of mathematical objects but the objectivity of mathematical statements' (Kreisel 1958—there is a mystery about this view of Kreisel's. It is often referred to, for example by Michael Dummett and Crispin Wright, and this is always accompanied by a reference to this article, but I haven't actually been able to find the quoted passage there). The realities are captured through objective statements; and the identity of the propositions

on which we converge does not depend upon the will or feelings of ourselves or our fellows. The convergence is unforced, 'fated', or 'destined'.

(18) This duality of ego and object within perceptual experience is a manifestation of what Peirce calls 'secondness' (see, for example, CP 1.24).

(19) For further discussion of these issues, see Hookway (1985: ch.5 and 2000: ch.4).

(20) Claudine Tiercelin has an extensive and interesting discussion of what she sees as Peirce's and Wittgenstein's related but distinct 'pragmatist strategies' for dealing with sceptical doubts in Tiercelin (2005: ch.5).

(21) Some of these intellectual virtues are suggested by Westphal's (2004: 47–50) characterization of 'mature judgment'. He is discussing Hegel's epistemology, but since he reads Hegel as a somewhat Peircean pragmatist, what he says is relevant here too.

(22) In his *Minute Logic* (1898), Peirce discussed another way of defending logical and epistemological principles, demonstrating their truth by showing that they are presuppositions of inquiry, or of the possibility of doubt. He acknowledged that he had once favoured such arguments himself, a result of the influence of Kant upon his work, but by 1898 he held that 'indispensability' could not serve as a justification for belief. He came to reject the philosophical value of what are often called 'transcendental arguments'. When he wrote 'The Fixation of Belief', Peirce may have been more sympathetic to this strategy, since he argued that the most fundamental logical principles are those which are 'necessarily taken for granted in asking whether a certain conclusion follows from certain premises'. These depend upon facts which are 'already assumed when the logical question is first asked'. I doubt that Peirce was here treating indispensability as a sign of truth, and I have discussed the role of transcendental arguments in Peirce's engagement with scepticism, comparing the views of Peirce and Josiah Royce, in Hookway (2000: ch.4).

