

Nehemias Jimenez
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Prof. Kaye
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“Descartes and Pierce’s Fundamental Differences on Belief”

In “The fixation of belief” the four methods that one might use to settle a belief according to Pierce are the method of tenacity, the method of authority, the method of experience, and lastly the method of science. The first of these, the method of tenacity, is a method that leans on exuding strong mental force against any dissenting opinion contrary to one's own. A great image of this is the ostrich putting its head underground, isolating itself from any external influence. The good in this method may be that there are moments of mass disinformation being fed to one. Or the overall character of this method can be seen as good from the angle of its unwillingness to just give in. The obvious cons are that almost no one can live in isolation and sheltering from dissenting ideas. It also leads to bigotry and very tribal biases that creates factions that are very against each other based on mere opinion, even on something trivial. The next method is the method of authority which is meaning to talk about belief being settled by an elite few that is then widely accepted by the masses. These elite few may not always be in the greatest sense qualified which is a con if one wants beliefs that are in the ballpark of true and accurate. And another con may be the suppression of opposing reasoning. Although in comparison to the method of tenacity, this one has greater results because the masses are usually in favor of having their opinions settled for them. The third method is the a priori method or the method of experience. The simplest way of understanding this is that belief is settled by what works for a person in their experience. This is great for a society that wants to respect other opinions and it appeals to people being able to make connections between

moments to understand reality. But it easily can get out of hand because then everyone has their own belief that can be made by unsound connections. Another con is that of the social disorder in teaching and learning because there will be too many beliefs on the same subject that are completely different considering peoples' psychological and cultural differences. The last method which Pierce holds to be the best is the method of science. This method is much like the scientific method that most children learn for their elementary school science fair projects. It is based on the notion that there is reality independent of our opinions and that we can know it through inquiry. How does one inquiry in this method? One takes up a hypothesis as our possible solution to settling their belief and back checks it against reality. This way one can reflect on aspects of why their hypothesis was wrong and get closer understanding. Like playdough being pushed through a mold the excess gets removed and hopefully creates a clearer picture of what is real and what is fiction. What is good about this is since the same reality exists for everyone, the push back from reality should lead all people to the same answers after enough inquiry. When Pierce is talking about belief, he is referring to a firm mental ground that one can base their actions and desires on. And more importantly he sees these two things as inextricably linked. One's actions always correlate with their beliefs, even if what one vocalizes is their belief is against their action. And so, doubt is the absence of this firm ground to base actions from. In this sense it is when one does not know how to act or what to do in a given context. There is no firsthand or secondhand experience and knowledge that has been filtered through inquiry for a belief to be settled on a subject or issue.

This understanding of belief and doubt is exactly where the issues Pierce has with Descartes arises. Descartes' view is that beliefs must be true and for them to be true they must be relegated to purely rational or mental concerns. Pierce is not as concerned with true belief as Descartes is and so Descartes' crisis is meaningless in Pierce's eyes. He would describe it as committing mental torture because Pierce fundamentally disagrees with why beliefs exist. In Pierce's eyes, Descartes' beliefs are there to guide his actions and desires. This means that the only source of doubt should be when there is no belief on a subject to prescribe a behavior, or when there is a more efficient or productive action based on another belief. And moreover, Descartes' final position is that his beliefs are purely rational and only exist in his mind. Pierce would argue that this makes his beliefs disconnected from his bodily actions and desires, or at least they have no practical use. Some of this futility that Pierce sees in Descartes' philosophy is what makes him believe that his view is superior. He believes that the method of science to determine beliefs is better than pure rational reflection because the beliefs made by the method of science are based on reality itself. Descartes' beliefs being purely rational does not mean they work in the world or in any practical sense. A literal objection to the idea of the belief that you are fundamentally a thinking thing Pierce would bring is that it does not prescribe actions for a physical world even if it is all a façade as Descartes fears. So in comparison, Pierce believes he has a better method for settling beliefs and a better understanding of why beliefs exist.