

Combining Pricean and Peircean Pragmatism

Henrik Rydenfelt

Motives

- Pricean expressivist pragmatists could account for conceptual content in a Peircean manner
 - Conversely Peirceans could benefit from a Pricean expressivist view
- (Even more tentatively:) Pricean expressivist pragmatism could be combined with a notion of realism via Peirce

Descriptivism vs. expressivism

- Descriptivism: judgments/assertions in the business of describing ways things are
 - E.g. the sentence “snow is white” expresses the proposition (or *means*) that snow is white
- Expressivism: judgments/assertions express “mental states”
 - Assertability conditions (Price): it is *appropriate* to assert “snow is white” if and only if one believes that snow is white

Expressivism and content

- Mental states have content (which differentiates them from other such states)
 - The content inherited by the appropriate sentence
 - Thus e.g. propositions: what *can* be believed (asserted, denied, desired, hoped for...)
- An expressivist genealogy:
 - 1) Mental states
 - 2) Judgments: expressions of mental states
 - 3) Conceptual content: considered independently of judging/asserting

Expressivism and inference

- How do expressions of mental states enter into logical connections? (Frege-Geach-Searle problem in case of normative judgments)
- 1) Minimalist/deflationist track
 - “Cheap”, allows for too much
- 2) Attitudes track: attitude/disposition to be/not to be in certain mental states at once
 - Results in a huge number of such attitudes/dispositions
- 3) Contents and consistency:
 - One attitude, contents may be inconsistent
 - E.g. Mark Schoeder: A(blaming for murdering), A(not blaming for murdering)
 - Looks most promising

A problem of content

- If some mental states have conceptual/propositional content (e.g. they are propositional attitudes), must we grasp contents prior to having such states?
- 1) Contents (representations)
 - 2) Mental states (attitudes)
 - 3) Language (expressions)
- Even worse: perhaps we need to have language to grasp conceptual content?
- 1) Language
 - 2) Contents
 - 3) Mental states

Content as implicit

- Expressivists must provide an account of the content of mental states in terms of something *else* (where content is “implicit”)
 - Terminological issue about whether this is *anti*-representationalism
- 1) Psychological, causal, functional explications (e-representations?)
- 2) Brandom’s inferentialism: implicit inferential commitments (i-representations)
 - Why don’t we have e.g. tonk-commitments?
 - (Rortyan) linguistic idealism?
- “The basic way of working out the pragmatist explanatory strategy is to understand *saying* (thinking, believing . . .) *that* such and such (that is, adopting a *propositionally contentful* attitude) in terms of a distinctive kind of knowing *how* or being able to *do* something. Inferentialism picks out the relevant sort of doing by its *inferential* articulation.” (Brandom 2000, 17.)

Peircean pragmatism

- Peirce: “intentional” states (aspects of) *habits of action* (or dispositions)
 - E.g. brushing one’s teeth every morning
- Making our habits explicit by judgments
 - Not *inferential* commitments but (broader) commitments of conduct
 - We may pull apart two sides (Humean belief+goal/desire)
 - E.g. belief that brushing one’s teeth keeps the dentist away, and desire to keep the dentist away
- Perhaps i-rep rather than e-rep (if can be distinguished):
 - Habits may to a great extent be the results of interaction with environment
 - Habits still not at bottom ways of “tracking the environment”

The benefits

- Broader notion of content (or *doing*), not just linguistic / scorekeeping
- Logic of contents: inferential connections *follow* from conceptual content (and not equal to it)
 - Consistency of content a matter of what we can *do*: cannot brush one's teeth and not brush one's teeth - or eat one's cake and have it (as a basic lesson from experience)

Should Peirceans be Priceans?

- Peirce often read as a descriptivist and “representationalist”
- But unclear how “propositional attitudes” are at once (aspects of) habits
 - Peirce himself wavers on assertion, belief, assent...
- Peirceans should adopt a Pricean, expressivist view about assertion/judgment
- Moreover, only such a view makes sense of Peirce’s account of *truth* (as we’ll see)

Expressivists on disagreement

- Gibbard's (very limited) notion of *disagreement*: I have planned for you what you haven't planned for you
 - Different from disagreement of assertion/belief (Gibbard's representationalism)
- Price's wider third norm of assertion, *truth*: we censure others for contrary assertions
 - Does this extend to normative judgments?
- Why does disagreement matter?
- How to resolve disagreement?

Peirce on truth

- Some Peirceans (e.g. Misak, Talisse) propose a descriptivism *about* truth
 - To believe that p is true is to believe that p is F – say, supported by evidence, where evidence is something like “experience” and “experience” is something like “sensation” and...
- Rather, Peirce’s view is proto-minimalist:
 - “The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall think to be true. But we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so.”
 - No other *conceptual* truths about truth
- However, different ways of *revising* belief
 - Not every habit explicit (or belief/goal *proper*):
 - Peirce: habits of *deliberate conduct*: those that we have “checked” by one way or another
 - Further habits of checking / inference

Fixing beliefs

- Four methods of fixing belief (or of what counts as evidence)
 - Tenacity: keeping to what one believes
 - Compare Price's Mo'ans: no-fault disagreement
 - But a push for objectivity: fixing belief so that it's fixed for all
 - Authority: e.g. religion, society
 - A priori: settled by (our joint) Reason
 - Scientific: fixed so that they are independent of any particular individual's or group's beliefs (*reality*)
 - The only method that we will ultimately find satisfactory
 - Assumes a realistic hypothesis

Fixing aims

- Analogous use of the methods in revising the “goal-side” of habits (or “desires”)
 - Tenacity: what will serve my desires (“maximizing utilities”, “Humeans”)
 - Authority: customs, religion, etc.
 - A priori: moral law “inside” (“Kantians”, Rawls)
 - Scientific: ends that are “independent of us” (Peircean teleology)
- Expressivism enables the Peircean view of fixing belief to be extended to “fixing aims”
 - Hypothesis of moral/normative realism

Realism and recap

- Even if
 - 1) Judgments not descriptions but expressions
 - 2) “Contents” are not representations
 - 2) “Truth” is not a substantial predicate/notion
- We might have
 - 1) A logic of contents
 - 2) An intelligible notion of realism