

Charles sanders pierce's concept of inquiry

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Mother Nature's greatest creation.

It is through our minds that humans explore and experiment, trying to understand the concepts behind life and answer the many questions that come with. Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher, explores the philosophical significance of human Belief and Doubt that demonstrate his concept of inquiry. Before understanding what Pierce's concept of inquiry is, we must first understand his philosophy on Belief and Doubt. According to Pierce, "beliefs guide [human] desires and shape [human] actions" (232). Beliefs are natural habits that determine, not only one's actions, but also one's identity as a human being. A person's behavior, actions, and interactions with others are all results of one's beliefs. Pierce then states, "Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state for which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief" (233).

Doubt builds such uneasiness in one's mind that the irritation motivates them to fulfill, or destroy, that doubt by any means. Even the biggest doubts could be destroyed with the simplest of answers and techniques as long as the person "believes" that their doubt is gone. Although Belief and Doubt both affect human actions, the two have very different effects. Pierce differentiates belief as a habit that "does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in a certain way, when the occasion arises" (233). Doubt also does not make us act at once but the irritation of doubt itself could be a great enough motivation to destroy it in order to obtain belief. Doubt could be rooted from the simplest of ideas but the effects it may cause are endless. This struggle to attain a state of belief from doubt is what Pierce terms as inquiry.

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In Pierce's concept of inquiry, doubt cannot prosper without belief but belief can live independently from doubt. This ignorance would actually make a person living without doubt much happier than a person living with doubt. According to Pierce, doubt is where the struggling begins for one to attain a state of belief, and the "cessation of doubt" (233) is where it ends. Once the doubt is answered or erased, then the human mind can become completely satisfied, regardless of how accurate the answer or belief is. Therefore, Pierce claims that the "sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion" (233). Every person needs a belief and for one to think of their belief to be the true one is an important component of inquiry. Pierce agrees that "our beliefs should be such as may truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires; and this reflection will make us reject any belief which does not seem to have been so formed as to ensure this result" (233).

As long as doubt exists within one's beliefs, the human mind will go through great measures to satisfy and meet their desires. Beliefs are established in the minds to meet one's own desires in life but these desires are not always satisfied. Pierce questions, "If the settlement of opinion is the sole object of inquiry, and if belief is of the nature of a habit, why should we not attain the desired end of taking any answer to a question, which we may fancy, and constantly reiterating it to ourselves, dwelling on all which may conduce to that belief, and learning to turn with contempt and hatred from anything which might disturb it" (234). This question from Pierce was very interesting to me, because if satisfying our doubts and settling opinions is indeed the sole purpose of inquiry, then what is truly stopping us from believing what we want to believe and living a truly happy, and satisfying, life. But to many

extends this self-satisfying technique is ineffective when so many other beliefs live, and influence, in society and it is almost impossible for an institution to regulate opinions among every person in society. Many people would blame " bad communities" as the reason for the high rate of criminals and criminal activities in society while others would describe these " criminals" as " products of their environment. " Pierce believes that " it is the mere accident of their having been taught as they have, and of their having been surrounded with the manners and associations they have, that has caused them to believe as they do and not far differently" (236).

Therefore, many people's beliefs are established depending on what type of environment they were raised in. These young believers would eventually become faithful followers to their beliefs. We, as human beings, naturally try to protect our beliefs and destroy anything that may threaten it. Whether it be a religious war between countries or a development of ignorance towards beliefs that contradict your own; we are always trying to protect our beliefs. I enjoyed Pierce's example of comparing a man's beliefs to a man and his bride. Once a man has dedicated himself to his bride, he will go through any length to protect her and may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to separate a man from his bride (240). Maybe in modern times this situation would be a little different but the concept still exists.

The human mind is a very complex system that thrives on knowledge, beliefs, and doubts. These doubts motivate the mind to question and seek fulfillment. These beliefs are what identify ones purpose in life and one will

spend their entire lives protecting these beliefs and going to any length to do so.