

The Impingement Account: A Peircean Response to Radical Skepticism

Introduction

Here's a simple observation. The reader of this paper thinks about the world, understands arguments and comprehends text. To do these things, my reader must have capacities for thought, reasoning and language. None of us question this. In fact, even in the case of skeptical philosophers who question whether we have knowledge of the external world, they act in the world (by assuming it exists) while exercising these capacities.

However, suppose I'm not satisfied by taking it to be obvious that I truly have these capacities of language, thought and reason. Mistaken beliefs are often indistinguishable from true beliefs before they're revealed to be mistakes, so why couldn't I be mistaken about having these capacities right now? Suppose I want to be sure that I'm not merely under the illusion that I have them. How would I do this? Wouldn't I inevitably need to use language, thought and reason? Again, what if it's an illusion that I have these capacities and can use them to justify beliefs? In fact, what if it's an illusion that I even have the language capacities needed to ask these questions in the first place. What if it's an illusion that these very thoughts and sentences have any coherent meaning? What about this sentence, and the next, and so on?

This problem of justifying the claim that we have certain mental capacities is what I call the *problem of mental capacities*, which I claim is a radical form of skepticism that is underexplored compared to external world skepticism. I argue that solving this form of skepticism will shed light on how we may solve other forms of skepticism. The goal of this paper is to formulate this problem and propose a route to solving it. In section 1, I formulate this problem by first arguing that we can extend Cartesian skeptical scenarios to not only question our knowledge of the

external world, but also our knowledge of our own mental capacities. Then, I show that compared to external world skepticism, trying to solve the problem of mental capacities runs into a uniquely pernicious obstacle reminiscent of Hume's problem of induction: circularity and performative contradiction. In section 2, I will sketch and defend the *impingement account*, which is a partial solution to the problem on the work of C.S. Peirce. The aim will be to provide epistemic reassurance in one's belief that one has mental capacities, by showing that this belief is the best epistemic choice in the immediate present. In section 3, argue that my account has advantages over hinge epistemology and rule-circularity views in solving the problem of mental states. Finally, in section 4, I outline a possible way to extend the impingement account to possibly provide justification for belief in PT into the future.

Section 1: The Problem of Mental Capacities

I want to first seek a more precise statement of the problem of mental capacities. Let me begin by clarifying that the capacities I have in mind are *belief-forming capacities*, which are the capacities by which I may form beliefs or which I may even require to form beliefs. They include thought, reason, logic, language, sensory perception, awareness of mental states or even just the capacity to have beliefs at all. For instance, in order to believe the claim "I am sitting in a chair," I may have exercised my capacity to be aware of sensory perceptions and I require the capacity for language necessary to understand the meaning of the claim.

Consider the *possession thesis* (hereafter, 'PT'): "I have belief-forming capacities that I can use to form beliefs." To clarify, this need not be every belief-forming capacity that I listed earlier, but rather that I have *some* belief-forming capacities, such that I am not outright incapable of forming beliefs. The obvious importance of the truth of PT cannot be overstated: all inquiry, philosophical or otherwise, rests on the assumption that you can obtain beliefs through inquiring

(preferably true beliefs). In fact, a core pillar of ordinary adult human life is agency and the ability to act upon beliefs, and thus presupposes PT.

The issue is that epistemology cannot take PT for granted. To see how skepticism about PT is possible, let us turn to two major historical forms of skepticism: Cartesian and Humean. The aim will be to reconstruct the structure of each form of skepticism, then show how they jointly apply to PT.

1.1 Cartesian Skepticism

First, let's consider the following reconstruction of Cartesian skepticism (Comesaña and Klein 2024; Descartes 1960). Let H be some everyday claim about the external world, such as "I see a door in front of me." Let SH (skeptical hypothesis) be the hypothesis "There is an evil demon simulating all of my sensory perceptions of the external world, even though the sensory perceptions are highly inaccurate." The following skeptical argument is meant to show that most, if not all, of our everyday beliefs about the external world are not justified.

(1) (Closure) If I am justified in believing that H, then I am justified in believing that \sim SH.

(2) I am not justified in believing that \sim SH.

Therefore, I am not justified in believing that H.

Premise (2) traditionally seems to be supported by two considerations (Nozick 1981, 167–69).

(2a) SH is possible, because there is nothing incoherent or absurd about a skeptical scenario like SH. An example that might be more plausible to modern readers would be the brain-in-a-vat scenario, where scientists feed particular signals to a brain isolated from its body, thus simulating false sensory experiences. (2b) It is completely indistinguishable to a subject whether SH or H is

true. For any experience or argument that could supposedly demonstrate that SH is possible, Nozick himself observes that such experiences or arguments could in fact be inaccurate and themselves be part of the simulated experience, presented to us as though they were accurate. Thus, there seem to be no grounds on which to believe H instead of SH.

The crucial point is that all these considerations and the argument form applies just as well to PT. My goal in this section is now to show that if we take Cartesian arguments to pose a genuine challenge to explain how we have knowledge about the external world, then we must say the same about PT and knowledge about one's mental capacities.

Let me begin by describing the relevant Cartesian skeptical scenario. Consider a typical Cartesian demon named Dennis who is capable of making you experience, think and believe anything he wants. Not only can he manipulate your sensory perceptions, he can make you have any mental state he chooses. He can make you feel any emotion, have any thought or form any belief he wants you to, no matter how irrational. Consider the following description of the world SH': "PT is false, but Dennis is making you mistakenly think that there are good reasons to believe PT, so you mistakenly believe PT." The analogous skeptical argument for PT, then, would be:

(1') (Closure) If I am justified in believing that PT, then I am justified in believing that ~SH'.

(2') I am not justified in believing that ~SH'.

Therefore, I am not justified in believing that PT.

Firstly, Premise (1') seems simple enough, because SH asserts ~PT, so PT implies ~SH. If we accept the closure principle that is at play in premise (1), then it makes sense to accept (1') as

well. Premise (2'), on the other hand, doesn't seem quite as intuitive. That is, it seems very obvious that I am justified in believing \sim SH', if it denies PT. I'm making assertions, writing in language and doing reasoning as we speak, so surely I'm capable of forming beliefs! However, I will argue that the very considerations that lead us to accept (2) also force us to accept (2').

Firstly, consider (2a). I claim that SH' is a coherent description of the world. The first thing I will concede right away is that I am completely unable to imagine how PT could possibly be false or SH' true. It seems absolutely incoherent to me to think that PT is false. However, the skeptical hypothesis SH' can accommodate any such reason I have for believing PT. The hypothesis can simply claim that the demon is manipulating me into mistakenly thinking that denying PT is incoherent. Even if I think that denying PT is incoherent, there is nothing incoherent about asserting that the demon is making me mistakenly think that denying PT is incoherent. You could say that the demon is simply blocking you from conceiving of how denying PT could be coherent.

Immediately you can see a dialectic emerging. Consider any other reason for viewing SH' as incoherent. For instance, someone could say that PT must be true for the demon to deceive you or in order for you to even be able conceive of SH'. Another response could be that it is overwhelmingly intuitive to me that I exist and am thinking, and that I have some sort of direct access to at least some parts of my mind, to the point where I couldn't conceive of a way I don't exist. The word "I" is even present in these sentences and implies that I claim to exist as we speak. However, we can accommodate all of these intuitions into the scenario, by simply saying "Dennis is just mistakenly making you think that and making you unable to conceive how and why it fails to support PT." In short, for any argument that supposedly proves PT or shows that SH' is incoherent, we can say the following: "He's making you mistakenly think this on the basis

that you have a good argument for PT, or that PT is obviously true, or that denying that you have mental states and capacities is absurd, incoherent, inconceivable or impossible for whatever reason. In reality, this is all part of the deception.”

(2b) similarly applies. The description of the world contained in SH' is completely consistent with any reasoning you could engage in or any experience you could have, such that it's indistinguishable whether your belief is true or whether Dennis is deceiving you. Once again, for any experience, argument, thought or reason you could think of, all of these could be incorporated into the hypothesis by positing that “Dennis planted it into your mind.” Thus, it doesn't matter what warrant for believing PT you claim to have, whether it be experiences or *a priori* epistemological arguments supporting belief in PT or even the claim that you don't need evidence for PT. In every case, your evidence, justification or warrant is equally consistent with a skeptical scenario SH' where PT is false, so it seems that you cannot rule out the skeptical scenario and know PT. The *problem of mental capacities*, then, is *how* we know PT, given that our experience and reasoning is consistent with a skeptical scenario in which PT is false.

The bottom line is that, insofar as Western philosophy has taken external world skepticism as posing a serious question for how we have knowledge about the external world, we must take skepticism about one's belief-forming capacities and PT just as seriously. This is because the same considerations that lead us to skepticism about the external world also apply to one's mind and PT. That is, the evil demon scenario I've outlined shows that it is imperative for epistemology to explain how we know PT and thus know that we have the belief-forming capacities that philosophical inquiry itself rests on.

1.2 Humean Skepticism

I want to now highlight a second way in which the problem of mental capacities seems to be even more insoluble and pernicious than external world skepticism, as it involves a problem not traditionally associated with external world skepticism: circularity and performative contradiction. To do this, let me present a form of skepticism that is associated with issues of circularity: Hume's problem of induction. Let me present a reconstruction of the problem (Hume 1739), and show how it applies to PT.

- (1) Inductive inferences presuppose the claim UN: "the future will resemble the past."
- (2) Belief in UN can only be justified through inductive inference.
- (C) All inductive inferences cannot be justified without circularity.

This isn't entirely historically precise or comprehensive. Notably, premise (2) is traditionally replaced with a series of premises about the so-called Humean fork and how either deduction or induction is required to justify inductive inference. Haack (1976) generalized this problem to deductive reason, another belief-forming capacity. Thus, the problem of mental capacities is meant to generalize such arguments to belief-forming capacities in general.

Now consider PT. Circularity seems inevitable when you merely *try* to answer this question of how we know PT. The key idea is that for any possible way I may justify PT, that justification presupposes PT. Consider some possible way to justify PT. Perhaps I want to provide an argument, guide you through a line of reasoning, or even try to claim that PT doesn't require justification. The issue is that to even claim to have formulated such claims or possible justification, I would've had to exercise at least some of the capacities I'm trying to demonstrate I have, and I must have presupposed PT. Thus, we obtain

(1') All possible attempts to seek justification for PT (arguments or for PT, or claims that PT doesn't require justification) presuppose PT.

The following is somewhat trivial.

(2') Belief in PT can only be justified by a possible attempt to seek justification for PT.

Thus, we see the issue of circularity.

(C') PT cannot be justified without circularity.

In this paper, I want to bring to the forefront the problem that this raises for philosophical inquiry, including any inquiry into solving this problem itself. Philosophers have certainly examined questions such as whether external world skepticism can extend to knowledge of one's mind, leading to so-called internal world skepticism (Silins 2020). Nonetheless, I want to argue that the full epistemological and metaphilosophical importance of this problem has been overlooked. These authors discussed papers and conducted philosophical argumentation regarding internal world skepticism, without addressing the performative contradiction in doing so. Even if I merely consider doing philosophy to prove that I have belief-forming capacities, I seem to inevitably presuppose PT insofar as all inquiry relies on PT. Whenever I manage to alleviate my doubts by enquiring into PT, I am forced to remember that I must've presupposed PT and thus my doubts arise again. Thus, it's unclear how one could even *conceive* of a way to solve the problem of mental capacities without circularity, and thus justify the act of inquiring itself. This is the overlooked problem I claim we must solve.

Section 2. The Impingement Account

2.1 The Shape of a Solution

We can summarize the problem of mental capacities, Cartesian skepticism shows that there is a need to justify belief in PT, and Humean skepticism shows that trying to do so is circular. What we need out of a solution, then, is that it must:

- (a) Bestow some positive epistemic status (such as justification) upon belief in PT
(Cartesian problem)
- (b) Do so without running into the aforementioned circularity (Humean problem)

The first thing I want to get clear on is how much I'm aiming to achieve, in terms of how strong of a positive epistemic status I want to impart onto belief in PT. There are a number of such standards I could provide, such as claiming that belief in PT is excusable, justified or knowledge. An ideal, full solution to PT would show that we know PT, or at least show that belief in PT is justified. For now, I merely wish to provide an account that does not claim to demonstrate that we know PT, but merely aims to serve as a reassuring epistemic guide and minimize the impact of the problem of mental capacities on our epistemic practices. For now, I'd also like to sidestep debates about the nature of knowledge or justification or the conditions under which a belief is known or justified. Therefore, my goal is to say the following:

(Best Choice) Whatever epistemic standard we wish to attain for our beliefs, belief in PT is the choice that is most likely to achieve that epistemic standard.

If we can say this about PT, then we can at least be reassured in terms of having epistemic guidance. Even if PT somehow turned out to be false, we have reason to believe PT instead of disbelieving it.

One immediate clarification is that my proposed solution won't attempt to replace any theory of truth or justification. My account isn't trying to show that we can absolutely know that PT is true, and I won't rely on premises that seem to have implications for what truth is or what counts as true. In particular, even though we will see that my account is going to end up being entirely agent-centric, it isn't meant to make truth or justification agent-relative.

2.2 The Impingement Account and Addressing the Cartesian Problem

Let me outline my solution to the problem of mental capacities. I will call my account the *impingement account*, as it takes as a starting point the Peircean intuition that experience is “that which impinges upon us” (Misak 2004, 10). I will present this account as centered on two major Peircean claims. Here is the first:

- (1) When experience impinges on us in the immediate present, it impinges regardless of what we believe, want, do or think.

The following quote more fully encapsulates the idea (Misak 2013, 38):

Experience is that which is compelling, surprising, unchosen, brute, involuntary, or forceful: “anything is . . . to be classed under the species of perception wherein a positive qualitative content is forced upon one’s acknowledgement without any reason or pretension to reason. There will be a wider genus of things partaking of the character of perception, if there be any matter of cognition which exerts a force upon us . . . ” (CP 7. 623; 1903).

Following Peirce, then, I use the term ‘experience’ in the broadest sense, such that it would not only include illusory and veridical sensory perceptions, but also awareness of beliefs and one’s cognition. For instance, I don’t just call seeing a door or an illusion of a door an experience.

There is also an experience of remembering a tree you once saw, or of performing a mental math calculation, or even just realizing that you have a particular belief (e.g. “I believe I exist”). That is, there is distinct qualitative content that you experience when you do these things, and the key reason I view these as experiences is that you cannot control that this qualitative content impresses itself onto you. Even if you consciously initiate a thought, the experience of having that thought impinges on you outside of your control. For instance, if you try to mentally outline an argument in premise conclusion form, you will have the experience of being aware that you are having philosophical thoughts, and you cannot stop this awareness from impinging on you using some thought or belief. This is analogous to the way that you may consciously choose to get on a bike, but then the experience of touching the bike impinges itself on you even if you try to believe otherwise.

The key insight in claim (1), then, is that when I experience things in the present, it is *out of my control* that I’m having this experience. In particular, experience impinges on us just the same, whether or not we believe PT. Moreover, contained in my experience is the awareness that I apparently have the aforementioned belief-forming capacities. Subsequently, I can’t help but believe PT. I don’t mean this in a normative sense e.g. that denying belief in PT is irrational. Nor do I mean that denying PT is psychologically impossible, because I could’ve conceivably believed that PT is false, such as if I took drugs and was convinced that PT merely appeared true due to hallucinations. Rather, I mean that as a matter of fact, I lack the *ability* to not believe PT in the present moment, such that I believe PT in the present moment regardless of my will. I will

take it as a premise that if I lack the ability to not be in state X, then I am making the best epistemic choice available to me by being in state X, because I lack any other choice. Therefore, believing PT is the best epistemic choice available to me, as required. This addresses the Cartesian problem in the problem of mental capacities.

The basic reassuring intuition, in short, is that you cannot be choosing poorly by believing in PT, despite whatever “paper” doubts Cartesian philosophy may present to you, as Peirce puts it (1877, CP 5.416). You cannot help but believe in PT, and so you cannot meaningfully doubt PT, as there is no way to deny PT at the end of inquiry. Thus, we may at least have the epistemic guidance that believing PT in the present is the best choice.

2.3. Clarification: the Present

A very important clarification is that the impingement account focuses on the problem of mental capacities as it applies to the *immediate present*, such that I’m merely attempting to make inquiry permissible in the immediate present. So far, all I’ve said is that *in the moment* that you have an experience, there is nothing you can think, do or believe to not have that experience.

To elaborate, let me begin by pointing out a potential issue for my account. There is one sense in which there is no belief I cannot help having, at least in principle. To put it another way, it seems that in principle, I have the ability to change any of my beliefs. That is, once I’m aware that I have some belief P, I could imagine causing myself to believe that not P, even if it was irrational to believe that not P. In ordinary instances, this could look like choosing to intentionally disregard evidence for P and keep focusing on evidence for not P, such that I gradually deceive myself into believing P. We can even imagine a more extreme scenario in which there existed a drug that could alter our brain chemistry to make us believe, assert and act upon any arbitrary

claim of our choosing, no matter how irrational. In that case, I could change any belief by intentionally taking the drug, so there is no belief that I am not helpless in having, denying the key premise in my account.

Notice, however, that no matter how I would change my belief, that would require recognition of my belief and *then* acting to change my belief. This is captured in the second core Peircean claim:

(2) Inquiry is the “struggle to attain a state of belief” (Peirce 1877, 6).

That is, deciding on belief is done through a *process* of inquiry. Even if you could change belief, it could only ever occur in the future. This is not meant to be a complex claim about time that takes particular positions in debates in the metaphysics of time. This is based on a very mundane and everyday principle: if you want to perform an action to change X, then X can only become changed in the future, not the present.

Thus, this is how my impingement account focuses on there being beliefs I can't help having, in the sense that experience impinges itself on me in the *immediate present*, such that my account only tries to establish the possibility of inquiry based on PT in the immediate present. It doesn't attempt to provide justification or knowledge into the future e.g. it doesn't attempt to show to you now that you should keep believing PT instead of knocking yourself unconscious two seconds from now in order to stop believing PT. However, even if our inquiry concluded that we must change any arbitrary belief (even PT itself), that's only possible at a later moment, so such inquiry doesn't affect the fact that experience in the immediate present is unaffected as the grounds for the possibility of inquiry in the immediate present. Thus, the goal of my account is

very Peircean in the sense that it attempts to make experience the starting point for inquiry in the immediate present.

2.4. Addressing Circularity, Performative Contradiction and the Humean Problem

Now let's address the Humean problem and requirement (b) in an adequate solution to the problem: we must avoid the circularity and performative contradiction in the problem of mental capacities. Thus far, the account still seems to contain the very circularity and performative contradiction I wanted to avoid, insofar as I must presuppose PT to even begin to conceive of my account and eventually show that belief in PT is permissible. For instance, the very act of proposing this account and writing this paper required me to presuppose that I have reason and can understand the English language, so I must've presupposed PT. Put another way, suppose I try to ease my doubt about PT by reminding myself that I can't help but believe PT. Reminding myself of this implies that I must've presupposed PT even though all of my thoughts are consistent with a demon deceiving me into believing PT. Thus, my doubts arise again.

The key move I want to make in response to this is to turn the table on the skeptic. I argue that we shouldn't view it as doubt creeping in every time I assert PT, because I realize I presupposed PT. Rather, every time I doubt PT, experience once again impinges on me and I argue that my account shows how this erases doubt. First off, the impinging experience is what contains your awareness that you believe PT. In fact, for *every* belief of mine that I am aware of, the awareness that I have that belief is contained in the impinging experience. In particular, if I accept the arguments in my paper, part of the impinging experience right now is my *awareness* that I believe that my account is correct, which is my basis for believing that PT in the immediate present is permissible.

The crucial observation, then, is that this act (or process, if you prefer) of experiencing does not require you to presuppose belief in PT, as it occurs beyond your control and regardless of what you will or believe. As mentioned in the last section, experience impinges on you just the same, whether or not you believe in PT. Thus, my account shows that the process of experience impinging on you is what makes belief in PT permissible, without requiring that you presuppose PT, thus solving the issue of circularity and performative contradiction. The idea, then, is that this entire time that I've been writing this paper, experience impinges on me regardless of whatever doubt I have and is what contains my very feeling of doubt. This whole time, I could not help but believe PT and be aware of my entire belief system. The same applies to the reader of my paper, as they read this paper. Therefore, I was permitted to presuppose PT and that I have beliefs with which to reason and obtain this solution, because experience impinges on me regardless of whether I presuppose PT and contains the experience of believing PT, and because I could not have done otherwise this whole time.

Thus, my account solves the Humean problem in the problem of mental capacities, as it applies to the immediate present. In short, even if you have doubts about PT based on philosophical arguments, such doubt cannot overcome the force of experience when it impinges upon you.

Section 3. Other Schools

In this section, I will argue that my account has advantages in solving the problem of mental capacities as it pertains to inquiry in the immediate present, when compared to two major competing schools. The first competing school would be certain views in *hinge epistemology*. Hinge epistemology views argue that for various practices we engage in, those practices require

that we hold fixed our belief in certain propositions, which we call hinge propositions. A paradigmatic example is Wright's (2004) view that we are *entitled* (a type of warrant distinct from justification) to believe in various hinge propositions such as the reliability of induction, if we are to ever get our cognitive projects off the ground. Such hinge epistemologists would presumably resolve the problem of mental capacities by arguing that any cognitive project, including justification itself, requires us to believe in PT, so we are at the very least entitled or permitted to believe in PT. The second competing school consists of *rule-circularity* views. These views argue that rule-circularity need not be vicious i.e. there are cases where we can justify inference rules by using those inference rules. For instance, van Cleve (1984) has argued that we may justify inductive reasoning by using inductive reasoning, without non-vicious circularity. Such views might try to extend their arguments to show that we may justify our belief in PT by using our belief in PT, without vicious circularity.

The key problem with both schools of thought is that they aren't sufficient to answer what I call the *non-denial* question, which asks why we should not deny PT in the immediate present. Both hinge epistemology and non-vicious circularity accounts attempt to show that we may believe PT, *given* that we choose certain conditions. For hinge epistemology, Wright would argue that we're entitled to believe PT, assuming we choose to engage in cognitive projects that require PT. Alternatively, hinge epistemologists might argue that belief in PT is required, in order to attempt justification at all. Rule-circularity accounts would attempt to show that we can justify belief in PT, *if* we believe in PT. However, part of justifying PT is to ask why it's not irrational to just deny PT. The issue is that if we were to simply deny PT or refrain from cognitive projects that require belief in PT (e.g. inquiry or justification), then neither the aforementioned hinge epistemology nor non-vicious circularity accounts could explain why we must believe PT. Thus,

they are unsatisfyingly unable to explain why we may rule out the choice of denying PT. The Peircean account I'm defending, on the other hand, has a very simple answer: we can rule out the choice to deny PT in the immediate present, given that we *can't* deny PT. At most, we could deny PT at a later point in time, but we're incapable of doing so now, so we are permitted to believe PT now.

I do want to note that this move in the impingement account is compatible with both competing accounts, in a sense. For instance, once my account has ruled out denying PT and made inquiry permissible in the immediate present, rule-circularity views might offer another way to additionally justify belief in PT, or explain why we are justified in continuing to believe PT. In fact, I would welcome either account as a supplement to the impingement account in this way. Nonetheless, both hinge epistemology and rule-circularity views would ultimately rely on the impingement account to resolve the non-denial question, thus making inquiry (based on belief in PT) in the immediate present permissible in the first place.

On combining hinge epistemology and the impingement account, I particularly want to note that Peirce himself seemed to also have an argument greatly resembling hinge epistemology in which he similarly incorporated the insight that we can't deny certain propositions. Roughly, his argument was that we must have hope and believe in 'regulative assumptions,' or beliefs that are required for practices such as inquiry to be possible (reminiscent of hinges). This is because they are of the "utmost importance" and are indispensable, so even if this is not grounds for thinking that they are true, we cannot deny them (answering the non-denial question) (Misak 2013, 51). For instance, we must believe in the existence of an external reality, even if we are unable to prove it, if we are to ever inquire and act. Such a Peircean view aligned with hinge epistemology might very well have similarly treated PT as indispensable insofar as it is a regulative

assumption of inquiry, since inquiry requires belief-forming capacities. Other Peircean hinge epistemologists such as Howat (2013) would also plausibly agree with this strategy.

The contribution of the impingement account to this Peircean regulative assumptions strategy would then be to precisely and explicitly introduce the notion of lacking control over certain indispensable beliefs, and systematically explain this notion's role in the epistemic status we may thereby grant PT. That is, to say that belief in PT is indispensable is not merely to say that it is useful. The impingement account clarifies that it is also indispensable insofar as we are *unable* to dispense of such beliefs in the immediate present, given that we cannot help but experience ourselves to be entities that think, believe and inquire (again, at *least* in the immediate present).

Section 4: Into the Future

So far, I've only addressed the issue of believing PT in the immediate present. The question naturally remains: why may we continue to believe PT into the future? That is what I would like to attempt to address in this final section. To be clear, the argument in this section is merely meant to be a supplement to the impingement account, which stands on its own independently of the argument in this section.

The argument begins with a third major Peircean claim that offers a suggestion on how to continue belief into the future.

(3) (Conservation) Until you have a reason to change a belief, it is rationally permissible not to change the belief.

As Misak (2013, 34) explains it: "All our beliefs are fallible but they do not come into doubt all at once. Those which inquiry has not thrown into doubt are stable and we should retain them until a reason to doubt arises."

I want to argue that there is a plausible path from accepting the impingement account to accepting this Peircean Conservation principle. The basic observation is that I currently exist in the world while holding a variety of beliefs that I've previously formed over my lifetime. In particular, the experience that impinges on me already contains awareness of an entire belief system, in which I must operate. That is to say, it's not possible for me to reject my entire belief system wholesale. I cannot simultaneously doubt all parts of my belief system, for reasons familiar to both Peirce and Wittgenstein (1969). Their reasoning is that it's not possible to rationally alter all of my beliefs, because doubt and inquiry presuppose a certain set of background assumptions against which inquiry may be carried out. For instance, if I want to count the money in my hand to make sure I have the correct amount, I must presuppose beliefs like the accuracy of my visual perception when I inquire into the sum of money in my hand.

The point, then, is that the impinging experience in the immediate present also presents you with the awareness of a belief system that you already have. You cannot arbitrarily choose to have an entirely different belief system, because this experience impinges on you just the same, and regardless of what you believe, want or think, you realize that you have a certain belief system or way of life in place. I cannot, at will, decide that I will no longer have visual beliefs, because I continue to have visual perceptions and beliefs about them, regardless of this hollow decision.

The point, then, is that you cannot choose the starting points of inquiry, namely the belief system you begin with and which you must presuppose for inquiry. Even if you may worry that what counts as a reason to change your belief is relative to the "arbitrary" belief system in the background that you start out with, it is senseless to wonder "what other" belief system you could have started out with or try to radically alter your entire belief system without being given

a reason to. Thus, there is a story that begins with the impingement account and naturally ends at this third Peircean principle.

The key observation for PT, then, is simple. You have absolutely no reason to doubt PT and you have absolutely no reason to stop believing PT. Your experience brings absolutely abundant evidence that makes it seem absolutely obvious to believe PT. At this very moment, I personally feel the force of experience compelling me to believe PT. Even if there's a description of the world consistent with this experience in which PT is false, that is not an active reason to doubt PT. That is not an experience that indicates that PT is false in any way. Thus, by the third Peircean principle, it is rationally permissible to continue believing PT based on the experience that impinges on me in the present.

4.1. Possibly Justification

Let's briefly consider a stronger epistemic standard than Best Choice. Let's consider whether there is a way to claim that belief in PT in the present is justified, particularly under internalist theories of justification. Internalist theories of justification are those that argue that for any belief B an agent A has, only factors internal to A could influence whether her belief in B is justified. They are traditionally contrasted with externalist theories that argue that factors external to A may be involved in whether A is justified. Some internalists have supported a principle similar to the following (Bonjour 1980):

Principle: If an agent believes P after appropriately performing one's epistemic duties regarding P, then that agent's belief in P is justified.

By epistemic duties, I mean something like exercising best practices that are likely to get you towards the truth about whether P is true or not. For instance, inquiring into P with an open mind

and seeking evidence while minimizing personal bias. To an extent, the notion of epistemic duties is meant to accommodate the idea that after inquiring adequately, your belief in P is rational. To apply this principle to PT, we'd like to show that we in fact believe P after performing our epistemic duties.

Now, one may of course object that merely being unable to deny a belief like PT doesn't mean that this standard has been met. For instance, if someone obtains overwhelming and tragic evidence that his missing child has died in an accident, he may have obtained it by performing his epistemic duties. However, the trauma may psychologically render him unable to truly accept the truth that his child has died. We would not say that he is epistemically justified in his belief. Similarly, it doesn't seem sufficient to say that our belief in PT is justified, just because we are unable to believe otherwise in the immediate present.

However, the key difference I want to highlight is that we do not have defeaters for PT. That is, we have no reason to deny PT. There is plenty of evidence in the missing child case that constitutes a good reason for the father to deny his belief that his child is alive, even if he is psychologically incapable of actually doing so. In the case of PT, however, we have performed our epistemic duties by seeing whether there is any way to deny PT in the present (there is not) and there are no defeaters for our belief in PT. On that basis and the internalist principle outlined earlier, I want to suggest that our belief in PT is not merely the best choice, but is also justified in the immediate present.

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