

*The Epistemological Failures of Peirce's Pragmatic Maxim*

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In his 1878 article, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," American philosopher Charles Peirce proposed three degrees of clarity that one can have an idea. The third and highest of these degrees is achieved using the 'pragmatic maxim,' a scientific approach which proposes understanding an idea through sensible experience based on purposeful action being performed on the object in question. Peirce then used the pragmatic maxim to support his basic idealism—the philosophic belief that anything that is real can be represented by an idea.

However, Peirce's pragmatic maxim has several flaws which cast doubt onto Peirce's basic idealism. In this presentation, I define Peirce's degrees of clarity and how this leads into his conclusion of basic idealism. I then present Thomas Nagel's thought experiments on consciousness and my "problem of missing senses" to show flaws in Peirce's pragmatic maxim for clarifying all of reality. This then leads me to reject Peirce's basic idealism and presents an intriguing perspective on the limits of human knowledge.