

§4. WHAT IS THE USE OF CONSCIOUSNESS?†23

559. In the last chapter, †24 I assumed the reader would occupy the position of Common Sense, which makes the real things in this world blind unconscious objects working by mechanical laws together with a consciousness as idle spectator. I pointed out that this spectator cannot have part or lot even in the intelligence and purpose of the business; for intelligence does not consist in feeling intelligently but in acting so that one's deeds are concentrated upon a result.

Peirce: CP 7.560 Cross-Ref: ††

560. This makes the universe a muddle. According to it consciousness is perfectly impotent and is not the original of the material world; nor on the other hand can material forces ever have given birth to feeling, for all they do is to accelerate the motions of particles. Nay, that they should so much as give rise to sensations in that consciousness is more than incomprehensible, it is manifestly impossible. There is no room for reaction between mind and matter. The only consistent position for such a philosophy is flatly to deny that there is any such thing as consciousness. Even were that denial made, the question would be insoluble -- not for us merely, but in its own nature, -- how all the laws of mechanics came about, or why they should have the curious relationships they exhibit. Then, were that impossibility disregarded, just look out of your window, reader, and see this world in all its infinite manifoldness, and say whether you are content to take it wholly unaccounted for, as something that always has been, and always has been as complex as it is now. For mechanical forces never produce any new diversity, but only transform one diversity into another diversity.

Peirce: CP 7.561 Cross-Ref: ††

561. The whole of this suicide of Common Sense results from its incautious assumption that it is one thing to look red or green and another thing to see red or green. Now metaphysicians never have agreed, or at least never have perceived that they agreed, about anything; but I believe that every man who has ever reflected deeply about knowledge has come to the conclusion that there is something wrong about that assumption.†25

Peirce: CP 7.562 Cross-Ref: ††

562. Grant that that assumption is somehow wrong, though we may not, at first, see how exactly, and the muddle begins to clarify itself. The spectator is no longer on one side of the footlights, and the world on the other. He is, in so far as he sees, at one with the poet of the piece. To act intelligently and to see intelligently become at bottom one. And in the matter of auditing the account of the universe, its wealth and its government, we gain the liberty of drawing on the bank of thought.

Peirce: CP 7.563 Cross-Ref: ††

563. This method promises to render the totality of things thinkable; and it is plain there is no other way of explaining anything than to show how it traces its lineage to the womb of thought.

Peirce: CP 7.564 Cross-Ref:††

564. This is what is called Idealism. As soon, however, as we seek preciser statement, difficulties arise, -- by no means insuperable ones, yet calling for patient study based upon a thorough understanding of logic. All this must be postponed. Yet one very obvious and easily answered objection may be noticed. It will be said that the identification of knowledge and being threatens to deprive us of our Ignorance and Error. Let me hasten to swear that no act of mine shall lay hands on those sacramenta.

Foot notes:

23 Chapter IV

24 The materialistic aspect of reasoning

25 Take for instance that superlatively cunning defense of common sense, the doctrine of immediate perception, - a doctrine so subtle that it has eluded the grasp of many a fine logician.- and what is it, after all, but a confession that to see and to be seen are one and the same thing.