

“The Fixation of Belief” (1877)



Charles Sanders Peirce
(1839-1914)

“The sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion.”

Belief, Doubt, & Inquiry

- **Belief** is a habit of mind; **doubt** is its absence.
- **Belief** guides actions; **doubt** inhibits actions.
- **Belief** is pleasant; **doubt** is unpleasant.
- **Inquiry** (thought) is our attempt to regain belief in the face of doubt.
- The sole object of **inquiry** is the settlement of opinion.

Four Methods for Fixing a Belief

- **Tenacity**: believe what seems right and hang on tight.
- **Authority**: believe the authorities.
- ***A Priori***: follow your deepest prejudices.
- **Scientific**: test your beliefs against reality.

Which of these methods is most successful?

“The Ethics of Belief” (1877)



William Kingston Clifford
(1845-1879)

“It is wrong always,
everywhere, and for
anyone, to believe
anything upon
insufficient
evidence.”

Clifford on Believing

Justification vs Truth

“... the question is not whether their belief was true or false, but whether they entertained it on wrong grounds.”

My beliefs can harm others by:

- causing the death or injury of another (my ship sinks ...).
- placing others at unnecessary risk (my ship completes the voyage).
- damaging the shared fabric of received knowledge by adding beliefs that are unworthy of being believed.
- making myself credulous.