

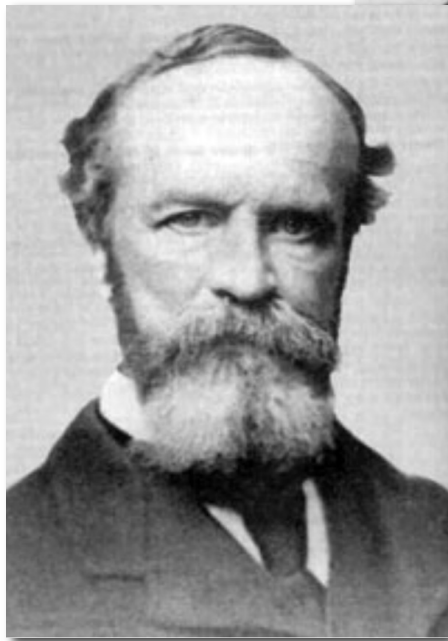
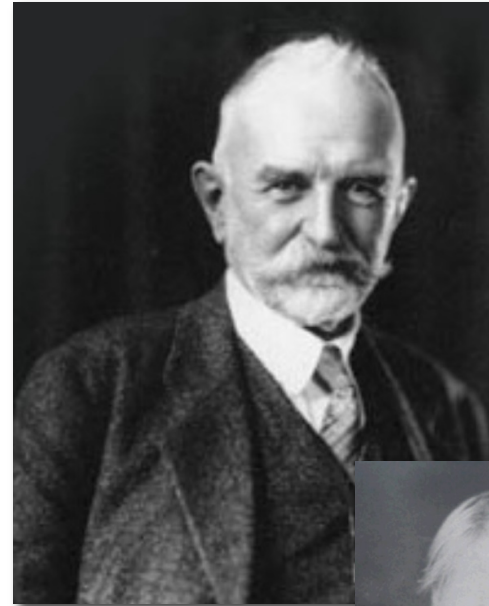
# Peirce and Pragmatism

# Early American Pragmatists

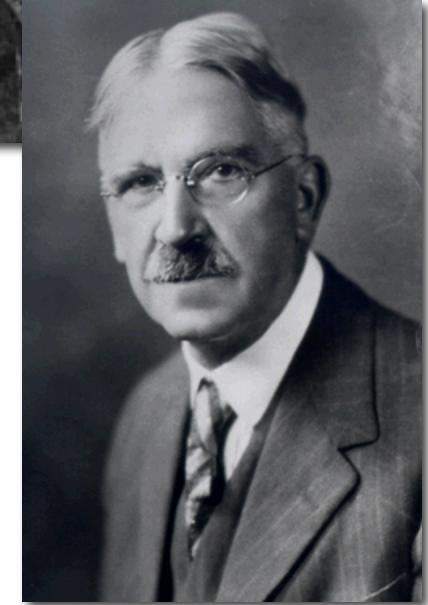
C. S. Peirce  
(1839-1914)



G. H. Mead  
(1863-1913)



William James (1842-1910)



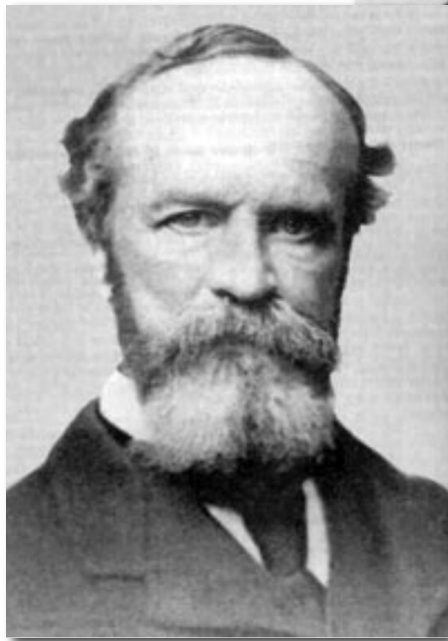
John Dewey (1859-1952)

# Early American P

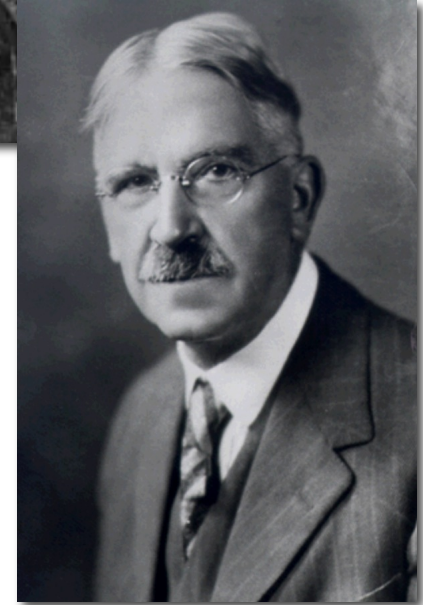
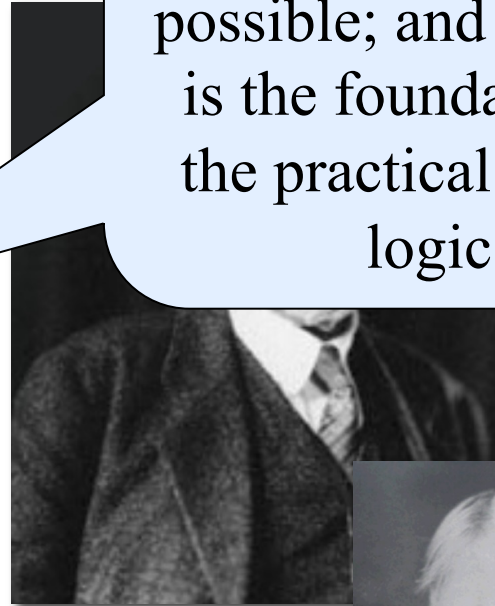
C. S. Peirce  
(1839-1914)



Bad reasoning as well as good reasoning is possible; and this fact is the foundation of the practical side of logic.



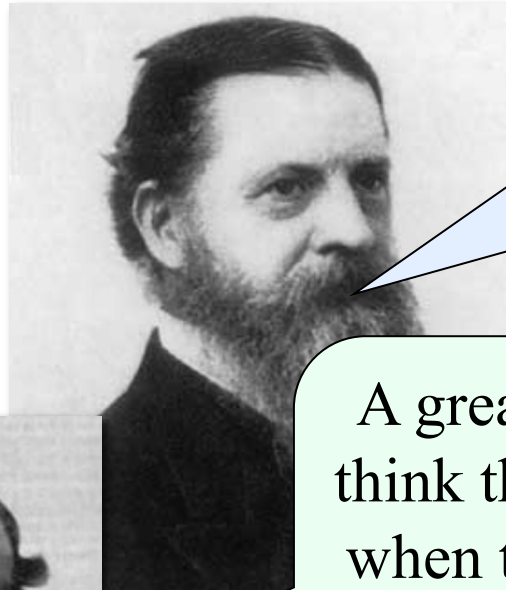
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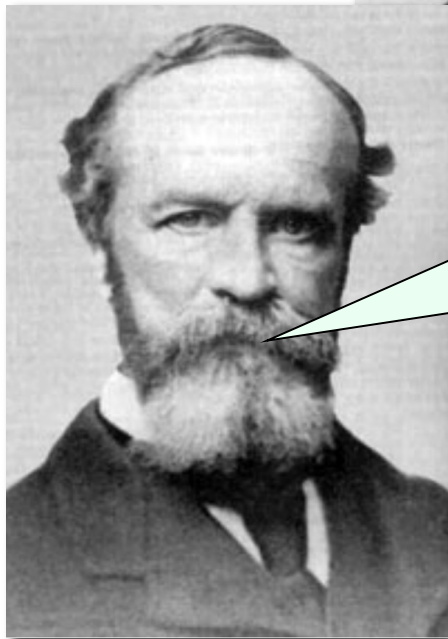
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# Early American Pragmatism

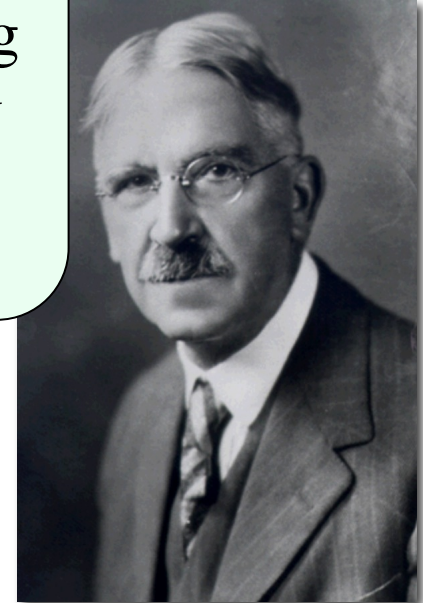
C. S. Peirce  
(1839-1914)



Bad reasoning as well as good reasoning is possible; and this fact is the foundation of the practical side of logic.



A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.

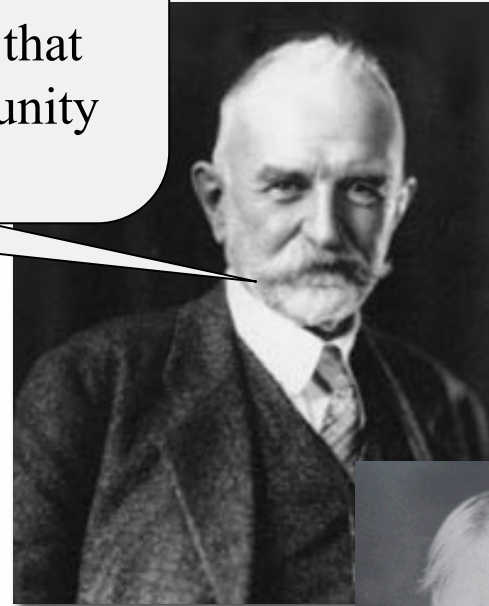


William James (1842-1910)

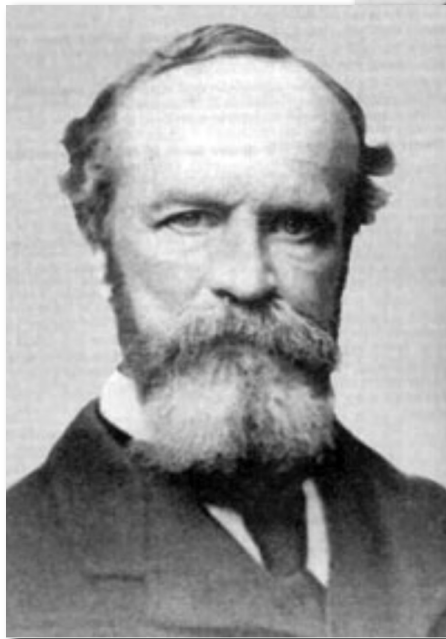
John Dewey (1859-1952)

# Pragmatists

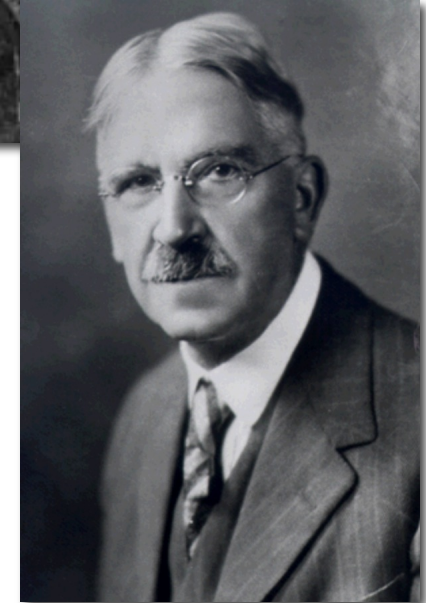
These are two phases in the larger process of the **self**. The **I** is an immediate and unthinking response that is also the basis of individual personality. The **me** is the phase of self that sees itself from the perspective of community values and expectations.



G. H. Mead  
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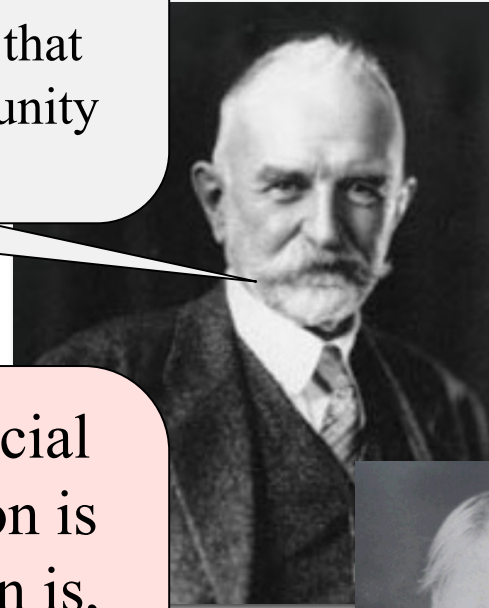
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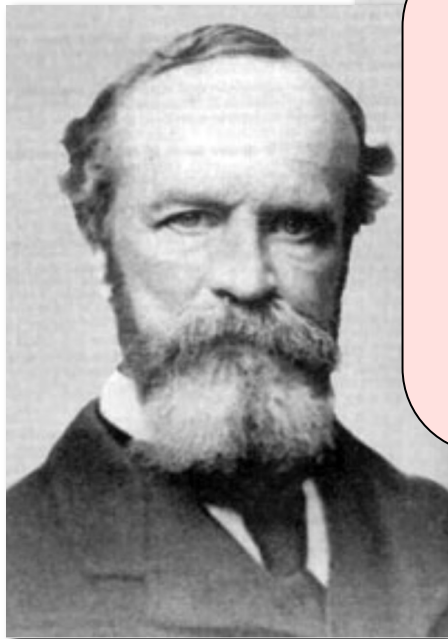
# Pragmatists

These are two phases in the larger process of the **self**. The **I** is an immediate and unthinking response that is also the basis of individual personality. The **me** is the phase of self that sees itself from the perspective of community values and expectations.

G. H. Mead  
(1863-1913)



Education is a social process. Education is growth. Education is, not a preparation for life; education is life itself.



William James (1842-1910)



John Dewey (1859-1952)

# Pragmatism

on Meaning and Truth

# What is meaning?

The primary goal of pragmatism was  
**to clarify the meaning of words  
and sentences.**



# What is meaning?

The primary goal of pragmatism was  
**to clarify the meaning of words  
and sentences.**



For example, what does the following sentence mean?

“That’s one vicious looking dog!”

# What is meaning?

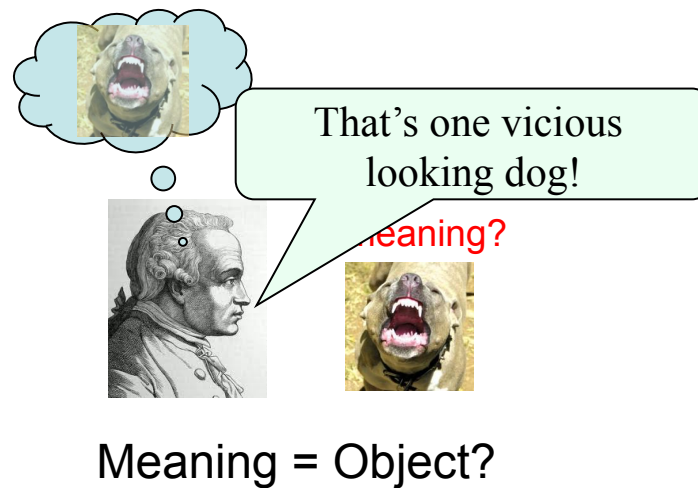
The primary goal of pragmatism was  
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Meaning = Idea?

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and sentences.**

meaning

meaning?

Meaning = Ideas

Meaning = Objects

Meaning = Behavior?

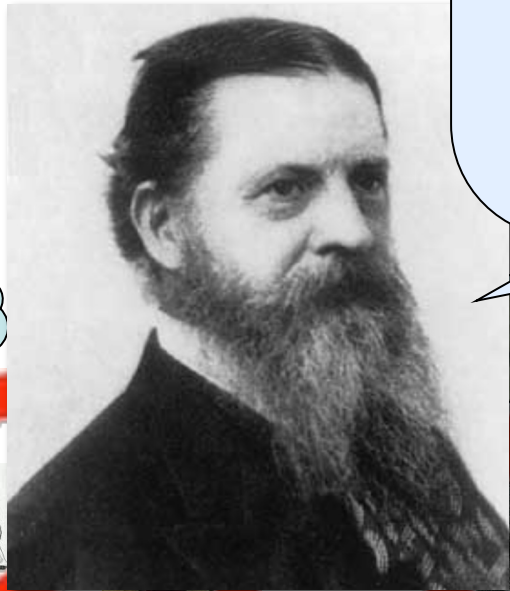
# What is meaning?

The primary goal  
to clarify the

“Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conceptions to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our concept of the object.”

was  
is

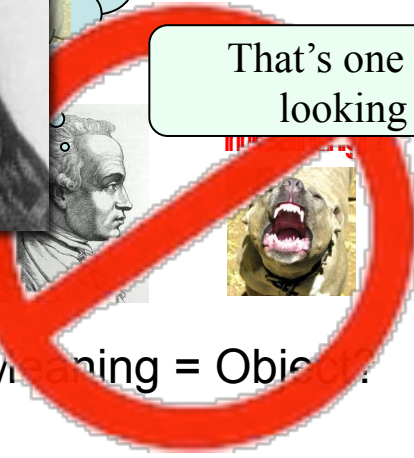
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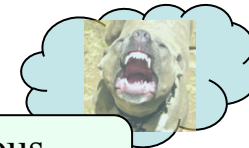
meaning



Meaning = Ideas?

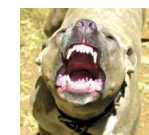


Meaning = Objects?



Meaning = Behavior?

meaning?



# Meaning and Truth

**Meaning:** The meaning of a word or statement is its consequences for our actions. For two words or statements to differ in meaning, they must have different implications for our actions.

**Truth:** A statement is true if ...

... it is still believed at the end of all inquiry.

... when acted on, it gets us where we want to be.



# Four Basic Themes of Pragmatism

- Antiskepticism
- Fallibilism
- Fact-value continuity
- Primacy of practice

# Four Basic Themes of Pragmatism

- **Antiskepticism**
- Fallibilism
- Fact-value continuity
- Primacy of practice

Doubt requires justification just as much as belief.



René Descartes  
and his  
Methodological Doubt

# Four Basic Themes of Pragmatism

- Antiskepticism
- **Fallibilism**
- Fact-value continuity
- Primacy of practice

None of our beliefs  
are immune from  
correction.



You are not God.  
Therefore, you might be mistaken.

# Four Basic Themes of Pragmatism

- Antiscepticism
- Fallibilism
- **Fact-value continuity**
- Primacy of practice

There is no clear border between description and prescription.

“Yer out!” both **describes** (“you were tagged”) and **prescribes** (“you did not score, and must return to the bench”).



# Four Basic Themes of Pragmatism

- Antiscepticism
- Fallibilism
- Fact-value continuity
- **Primacy of practice**

Meaning and truth  
are grounded  
ultimately in our  
practice.

Success and failure is just **practice**  
with or without the right **theory**.



# “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

# “The Ethics of Belief” (1877)



William Kingston Clifford  
(1845-1879)

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

# CBS News/NY Times Poll

## Sept. 4-8, 2007 ( $\pm 3\%$ )

**“Do you think Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?”**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
	%	%	%
ALL adults	33	58	9
Republicans	40	51	9
Democrats	27	63	10
Independents	32	60	8

# 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.” [p. 255, c2]

- Beliefs have consequences:

short-term...

long-term...

- One’s belief is not a wholly private affair

“No one man’s belief is in any case a private matter....” [p. 323, c.2]

The “universal duty of questioning all that we believe.” [p. 324, c.1]

The social fabric of shared beliefs is a public trust.



# Clifford's Argument

Doing this makes me (and all of society) more credulous (i.e., it undermines the social fabric of reliable belief).

Doing this is more likely to lead to harmful actions.

Holding a belief on insufficient evidence is morally wrong.

He believed the ship was safe on insufficient evidence.

+ The ship sank.

What's morally relevant are my actions, not my beliefs.

The shipowner is guilty of wrongdoing (even if the ship doesn't sink).

The shipowner is also responsible for the deaths.

# Beliefs with consequences...

Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction.



I'm absolutely sure that there are weapons of mass destruction there and the evidence will be forthcoming.



Some have argued that the nuclear threat from Iraq is not imminent. I would not be so certain.

We know where they are. They're in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad, and east, west, south, and north, somewhat.



We don't want the "smoking gun" to be a mushroom cloud.



I'm not convinced.



Joschka Fischer  
German Foreign Minister