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## **PRAGMATISM AND EDUCATION- ITS IMPLICATIONS IN PRESENT EDUCATION**

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As an outgrowth of the changes brought about by the Civil War, the fabric of rural Americanism had been rent. America was rapidly becoming an urban, multi-group society in which the ongoing dialogue of democracy was bogging down because of the inability of people to talk with each other. Whole new languages were emerging as the nation became more industrialized and special interest group arose. Just as science and technology have been a blessing to us, they have also been something of a burden.

Pragmatism as a philosophy of education has only come into its own in the very late nineteenth and the twentieth century's. This is largely due to the work of a number of educational philosophies such as William Heard Kilpatrick, Boyd Bode, and George Counts. These men built an education structure on a philosophical foundation wrought by such philosophers as Chauncey Wright, William James, Charles S. Peirce, and the man who best combined the roles of educator and philosopher, John Dewey.

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### **PRAGMATISM**

**According to Robert R. Rusk**, the Oxford Dictionary first referred to the term pragmatic in 1643 and the term pragmatism in 1663. The term pragmatism, means Doctrine that evaluates any assertion solely by its practical consequences and its bearing on human interests. The term pragmatism has been derived from the Greek term **pragma** which means use. Thus, pragmatism is an ism according to which uses the criteria of reality.

Pragmatism is basically an epistemological undertaking keyed by its theory of truth and meaning. This theory states that truth can be known only through its practical consequences and is thus an individual or a social matter rather than an absolute. This is implicit in the following statement by Peirce: Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object. Pragmatism sees thought as intrinsically connected with action. The value of an idea is measured by the consequences produced when it is translated into action. Pragmatism is based on traditional ways of thinking and finding ways to incorporate new ideas to achieve a desired result. This philosophy keeps people looking for effective methods for completing specific tasks.

### **HISTORICAL RETROSPECT OF PRAGMATISM**

One of the most important schools of philosophy of education is pragmatism. It is also as old as idealism, naturalism and realism since it is more an attitude, than a philosophy. In the fifth century B.C. Heraclitus said, 'one cannot step twice into the same river.' Thus, Reality is a flux, things are ever changing. Modern pragmatists agree with the Greek sophists. According to Protagoras, 'Man is the measure of all things.' this

maxim is the basis of modern humanism. Another famous sophist Gorgias used to say, 'Nothing exists and if thing exists we can never know it.' this agnosticism has led to relativism in pragmatic epistemology.

### **THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

**A.** Chauncey Wright is perhaps the least known of the nineteenth century contributors to the pragmatic movement. At Harvard he performed brilliantly in science and mathematics but only poorly in languages. Wright was constantly plagued with ill-health and had a propensity to drink and smoke to excess. He made friends easily, was well liked, and was considered a leader among the intellectuals. Wright became a member of the Metaphysical Club and during those years William James wrote of him that, he was not merely the great mind of a village if Cambridge will pardon the expression but either in London or Berlin he would, with equal ease, have taken the place of master which he held with us. In his forties, Wright was the acknowledged intellectual leader of Cambridge. Peirce, James and others flocked to him for intellectual leadership.

**B.** Although considered the founder of the American school of pragmatism, Peirce's major contribution to the intellectual stream of pragmatism was his criterion of truth or meaning. This was, for him, a methodological approach to his philosophy of idealism.

**C.** It has been said, with some degree of justification that Henry James wrote like a philosopher, while his brother, William James wrote like a novelist. Perhaps this explains the enduring popularity of both men. As a philosopher, William James arrived on the scene at a critical time in American thought. As Americans reacted to the increasing technological and scientific changes in this country they turned philosophically to 'science'.

The sword with which James hoped to slay the dragons of 'tough-mindedness' and 'tender-mindedness' was the system of pragmatism. For James, pragmatism became more than a method; it became his central philosophical principle. As White has so aptly said of James, 'He wanted facts but he also wanted a religion.' and it was through pragmatism that he hoped to achieve both. James was brilliant, concise, and perhaps most important, an independent thinker who is highly original. He has been described as original, exciting, and cosmopolitan.

Perhaps the most controversial aspects of James' philosophy relate to his application of the pragmatic principle to religion. James, in his *Essays in Pragmatism*, said, 'The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable.' His position, simply stated, was that ideas were of value to the degree that they were useful and functional and were not in conflict with other truths that could be empirically substantiated. Using this as his intellectual touchstone, James was able to support much of religion, including the hypothesis of God. The last several paragraphs of James' essay, 'What Pragmatism Means,' are the best available statement of the view of pragmatism as the great mediator between empiricism and rationalism; the 'tough-minded' and the 'tender-minded.' 'You see by this what I meant when I called pragmatism a mediator and reconciler. She has in fact no prejudices whatever, no obstructive dogmas, and no rigid canons of what shall count as proof. She is completely genial. She will entertain any hypothesis, she will consider any evidence. It follows that in the religious field she is at a great advantage over both positivistic empiricism, with its saint-theological bias, and over religious rationalism, with its exclusive interest in the remote, the noble, the simple, and the abstract in the way of conception.'

### **THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

In his earliest philosophical phase, John Dewey, who has been described as the greatest American philosopher, was a Hegelian idealist. While at Johns Hopkins University he had fallen under the influence of George Sylvester Morris. He was also influenced by the work of William Torrey Harris, probably America's most important and popular spokesman for the Hegelian idealists. During the first ten years of his college teaching (1884-1894), Dewey moved from the idealist's camp to the beginnings of a pragmatic philosophy which he was to characterize with the name of instrumentalism. During the twenty years immediately prior to the First World War, Dewey worked at refining his philosophy into play in the arena of human

discourse. Philosophy was not, for Dewey, a game played with intellectual abstractions and theoretical constructs; rather it was part of the ongoing life of individuals and the society. Philosophy was, as far as he was concerned, a part of culture and the way we philosophized, as well as the things about which we philosophized, was determined in large part by this culture. While Dewey was certain not the first educational philosopher, he saw the relationship between philosophy and education in a new and wholly different manner that did his predecessors. In *Democracy and Education*, first published in 1916, he tried to clarify the relationship. John Dewey's philosophy and its educational implications are inextricably interwoven. As Dewey pointed out, he regarded philosophy as a general theory of education and for this reason placed a great deal of emphasis on epistemological and axiological considerations. His philosophy emphasizes the social function of intelligence- that ideas are instruments of living rather than ends in them. Education is seen as basically a social process rooted in problem-solving and the exploration of the meaning of experience focus of research is to make an impact on the child's life with regards to their individuality. Each experiment reflected individual growth.

### **PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALE OF PRAGMATISM**

#### **Metaphysics of pragmatism-**

Naturalism reduces everything to life or matter, Idealism to mind or self. Pragmatics sees no necessity of limiting herself to one or two fundamental principles of explanation, she is quite content to admit several principles of explanation and accordingly pluralistic. In brief Pragmatism is a mid way in between the extreme form of naturalism and absolute idealism. That is why many philosophers even do not consider it as a philosophy, they treat it as a process or method or attitude. There are two major points which must be made about the ontological bases of pragmatism.

First, the traditional distinction between mind and matter as two separate and independent substances is rejected by the pragmatists.

Second, the pragmatist's use, as their ontological base lines the concept of experience This is really a sophisticated form of naturalism.

### **EPISTEMOLOGY OF PRAGMATISM- KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH**

Knowledge is rooted in experience, but experience may be immediate or mediated. Immediate experience is simply 'undergoing.' Mediated experience is the interaction of man and his mind with his environment. It requires the use of intelligence. It is intelligence which determines direction. As John Dewey pointed out: It seemed almost axiomatic that for true knowledge we must have recourse to concepts coming from a reason above experience

There are three major points of significance to the pragmatic epistemology. First, it is an open-ended, activity, open, to the public and in fact, dependent upon the public test rather than some private metaphysical test. Second, it is subject to error and is continuously being revised in terms of new conditions and new consequences. And, third, it places the ultimate responsibility for truth and knowledge directly upon the shoulders of man. This is a tremendous responsibility and there are many who would rather shirk this responsibility and retreat to this security of a more authoritarian system.

### **AXIOLOGY OF PRAGMATISM**

#### **1. Ethics-**

Ethical values are a product of the transactional functioning of man and society. The good is that which resolves indeterminate situations in the best way possible. Thus, the use of the intellect in the solving of problems is considered good by the pragmatists while total avoidance of human problems or unthinking reliance on some higher authority would be considered bad. Values emerge from the process of reflective

deliberation and the accepted only after reflective deliberation. In each generation must create new values and new solutions to deal with new problems.

## **2. Aesthetics-**

The pragmatist's standards of art and beauty differ from those of the other philosophies we have discussed in that they do not exist in some separate realm. What is beautiful is simply what we find beautiful in our own experience, what has the power to move us and to make us feel deeply. Art is a form in which an artist describes his own personal experience to the viewer. But the description need not be detailed or an exact reproduction of what the artist has seen. In every work of art, however, these meanings are actually embodied in a material which thereby becomes the medium for their expression. This fact constitutes the peculiarity of all experience that is definitely esthetic.

### **EDUCATIONAL AIMS OF PRAGMATISM**

Pragmatists believe that the aims are always determined by individual not by any organization or any structure. Perhaps the best statement of what might be called the pragmatists educational aims can be found in the writing of John Dewey.

The aim for education is to teach children to be comfortable in their learning environment to an extent that children are living their life. Dewey believed in this type of environment that is not considered a preparation for life, but life. He believed that educators should know the things that motivate and interest children and plan accordingly. Dewey believed that aims should grow out of existing conditions, be tentative, and have an end view. In *Democracy and education*, he wrote that education is 'that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience.' The aim that might be derived from the foregoing definition of education would include the helping of the child to develop in such a way as to contribute to his continued growth. While Dewey disliked the use of the term aims in its usual sense because it implied an end and Dewey saw no final and permanent end to education, he did set down three characteristics of good educational aims. These were:

1. An educational aim must be founded upon the intrinsic activities and needs of the given individual to be educated it is one thing to use adult accomplishments as a context in which to place and survey the doings of childhood and youth; it is quite another to set them up as a fixed aim without regard to the concrete activities of those educated.
2. An aim must be capable of translation into a method of cooperation with the activities of those undergoing instruction. It must suggest the kind of environment needed to liberate and to organize their capacities. Until the democratic criterion of the intrinsic significance of every growing experience is recognized, we shall be intellectually confused by the demands for adaptation to external aims.
3. Educators have to be on their guard against ends that are alleged to be general and ultimate. Every activity, however specific is, of course, general in its ramified connection of possible future achievements, the less his present activity is tied down to a small number of alternatives. If one knew enough, one could start almost anywhere and sustain his activities continuously and fruitfully.

### **THE STUDENT**

The student is an experiencing organism capable of using intelligence to resolve its problems. He learns as he experiences; as he does and as he undergoes. As a thinking organism his experiences and his reflections upon those experiences become a part of him determining his likes, dislikes, and the future direction of his learning. The pragmatist views the student as a whole organism constantly interacting with the environment. The school is both a part of this environment and a special manmade environment designed to provide the best possible educative experience to the learner.

## THE TEACHER

The role of the teacher is important in successfully educating children. The teacher must capture the child's interest and build on the natural motivation that exists. Teachers need to remember to vary their teaching methods to accommodate each individual learning style. Not all children learn at the same pace or are at the same point; therefore, the teacher must vary his/her style. Dewey believed that knowledge should be organized and relate to current experiences. The teacher, for the pragmatist, is a member of the learning group who serves in the capacity of helper, guide, and arranger of experiences. He is as involved in the educative process as are these students.

## CURRICULUM

It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that the universe is the subject matter for the pragmatist. Any educative experience is the subject matter of the pragmatist's curriculum any experience contributing to growth. The subject matter exists ready to be explored, but the real concern must always be for the interaction of the pupil with the subject matter of his current needs, capacities, and concerns. Teachers and students have a tendency to view subject matter in different ways. For the teacher it is organized into bodies of knowledge which generally show a progression from the simple to the more complex, but for the student this is not the case. As a child stands before a complex structure, he sees only what is, at the moment, important to him. As homely example may suffice

## TEACHING METHODOLOGY

To discuss the methods of teaching employed by the pragmatist is to open up a veritable Pandoras box. The widest variety of techniques has been justified in the mane of pragmatic philosophy, ranging from the almost complete laissez-faire to the relatively structured. Probably the most common method employed by those most in line with the Thinking of the pragmatists is the project method. Classroom discussion in a free and open atmosphere is encouraged, as well as individual problem solving research. All of this may well involve a tremendous amount of reading, studying, and traditional subject matter mastery. The methods of educating are unique to each individual. This philosophy believes that not all children learn the same way, so it is important to vary educational methods. This philosophy supports large print text, small desk, and things that move easily. The classroom would be a functional atmosphere with the interest of the children at hand. Problem solving, themes, experiments are all parts of the pragmatic philosophy. The curriculum for the pragmatic philosophy supports a connection between knowledge and experience.

**After analyzing pragmatism, we find that this philosophy best describes our teaching style. This philosophy is easier to understand and make connections. Pragmatism reminds teachers to individualize their instruction to meet the needs of each learner. One must remember to keep old traditions, but incorporate new idea.**

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