

The Question of Truth in Pragmatic Philosophy

سؤال الحقيقة في الفلسفة البراغماتية

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Abstract:

Pragmatism is among the most important, widespread and influential contemporary philosophies. It has a deep influence on the individuals and social life especially in western societies. Although many studies have dealt with this philosophy from its various aspects, many of questions related to it are still raised, such as the legitimacy of the basis on which the pragmatists' criterion of truth is established and the possibility of undermining it logically. Then, how to justify that pragmatism still have an attractive aspect ? Which makes it characterized by effectiveness, vitality and adaptation to new facts , and thus, characterized by its specific resistance to criticism. This article is concerned with the problem of truth in pragmatist philosophy, it analyzes the criterion of truth regarding the historical and cultural background of its formation, with a focus on criticizing this criterion from a logical perspective.

Keywords: Truth ; Pragmatism ; Experience ; Practice ; Success.

ملخص:

تعتبر البراغماتية من بين أهم الفلسفات المعاصرة وأكثرها انتشارا وتأثيرا على حياة الأفراد وعلى الحياة الاجتماعية، لاسيما في المجتمعات الغربية. ورغم أن العديد من الدراسات تناولت هذه الفلسفة من مختلف جوانبها، إلا أن العديد من الأسئلة المتعلقة بها لا تزال مطروحة، ومنها مثلا مدى شرعية الأساس الذي يقوم عليه معيار الحقيقة عند البراغماتيين، وإمكانية تقويضه منطقيا. ثم كيف يمكن تبرير ما تتمتع به البراغماتية من جاذبية وقوة تأثير؟ مما يجعلها أحيانا قادرة على التكيف بفعالية وحيوية مع المتغيرات والحقائق الجديدة، وبالتالي تتميز بمقاومتها الخاصة للنقد. يهتم هذا المقال بإشكالية الحقيقة في

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الفلسفة البراجماتية، أي أنه يحلل معيار الحقيقة فيما يتصل بالخلفية التاريخية والثقافية لتشكله، مع التركيز على نقد هذا المعيار من منظور منطقي.
الكلمات المفتاحية : الحقيقة؛ البرغماتية؛ التجربة؛ الممارسة؛ النجاح.

The word "pragmatism" is derived from the Greek word "pragma", which means action. It includes the words "Practice" (practicing work) and "Practical". It may refer to the word "Pramirikos," which means "Practicability." (Mayada Al-Basel, Fawzi Muhammad, 1997, p. 295). Based on such definitions, the concept of pragmatism refers to what is utilitarian and practical.

Pragmatism believes that the criterion for truthfulness of opinions and ideas is the value of their practical results, and that the truthfulness of a given proposition lies in its usefulness, which means that knowledge is a tool to serve the requirements of life. Therefore, the pragmatist is who aims at success or who proceeds to special benefit. In other words, pragmatist is more concerned with implementing concrete practical measures and tends to embody clear useful goals, seeking the desired results by means of any possible method, based on the principle that the end justifies the means. Pragmatists consider that their method and theory could be of tremendous utility in solving intellectual problems and in forwarding man's progress (Richard H. Pookin, Avrum Stroll, Philosophy Made Simple, 1975, p.264).

No one can deny the historical, cultural and ideological differences between pragmatists, the simple argument is the difficulty for them to give a clear and common definition to Pragmatism. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) is considered as the first to employ the concept of pragmatism in 1878. He is the founder of Pragmatism as a new philosophical method and as a revolt against what he called a sterile philosophy in American colleges. According to him, such philosophy is no more than a sequence of words which respect the grammatical rules and appear in form of propositions without being actually so (Pierce C. S., Collected Papers, 1935, p. 204). His renewal method in philosophy has effected many ideas in contemporary philosophy and science.

Peirce was initially influenced at the beginning of his life by Kant (1724-1804), then he turned from critical idealism (of Kant) in 1868 to adopting a type of Common Sense realism, according to Thomas Reid, represented by the philosophy of "common understanding." He ended up rejecting idealism and establishing his pragmatist tendency in 1870. Pragmatism arose between 1872 and 1874 by some members of what was known as the "Metaphysical

Club,” in which Peirce and William James were members. Peirce presented two articles that marked the first appearance of pragmatism:

1 - The Fixation of Belief (November /1877).

2- How to Make Our Ideas Clear (January /1878)

Besides Kant , he was influenced by the English biological philosopher Alexander Bain (1813 - 1903). The latter considers that the basis of belief lies in readiness for action. Peirce goes beyond this confirming that belief in the truth of every idea is the action itself, not the preparation for it. He was deeply influenced by Berkeley when assuming that not everything we think about is something that exists, which means that our thinking does not reflect all the reality, and the opposite is also true. Furthermore, we should mention that Peirce was also influenced by the development of science in his time.

In addition to Pierce’s contribution, pragmatism was developed by other philosophers such as John Dewey (1859-1952) and William James (1842 - 1910). Their writing helped in spreading peirce’s philosophy and in making it wordly known. Furthermore, it is obvious that his diverse interests represent a significant link between pragmatists.

John Dewey defined pragmatism as an opposite philosophy to the ancient philosophy that starts with perceptions, then it moves to establish according to these perceptions new results which can be logically deduced (Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, 1982, p.223). That is, he defined his tendence as “the means or the instrumental.” John Dewey included the “instrumental” method within pragmatism when he made knowledge as a tool for work and means for experimentation. His works tends to encourage people to search for appropriate ways to realize successfully their goals. He contributed in establishing the foundations of pragmatism and applied its educational theories in the American school.

The meaning of pragmatism, according to William James, can be defined as the following:

. - It is merely a philosophical approach that follows philosophical problems with clarification and specificity by studing their actual results or effects, it is concerned mainly with the method research whithout having any specific or fixed beliefs or principles with the exception of the approach itself because it is merely a method ruther than a philosophy. In other words, it is a method of clarifying ideas in order to remove any ambiguity.

- Furthermore, it is a theory of truth which has, according to pragmatists, a link with practical success and can be translated into successful behavior. According to William James, we must extract from every utterance its actual immediate value and put it into action within the scope of our experience. In fact, the role of philosophy is to determine what really occurs when we adopt a given concept instead of another (William James, 1911, p. 25).

Pragmatism as a philosophical tendency believes that truth is related to human experience, and therefore knowledge is just a tool for work or activity, and that any idea is true to the extent of its practical success or to the extent of its positive practical effects. Therefore, it focuses on the value of experience and practice. It calls for making philosophy free from theoretical considerations, which means that truth is a common thing among people. In short, pragmatism is the philosophy of practical effectiveness. A judgment is truthful when experience indicates that it is mentally and practically useful. In contrast, any theory that does not transform into application is useless.

Pragmatism belongs to American philosophy in its origin and content, that agrees with English empiricism, as proposed by its pioneers such as Bacon, Locke, Hume and Mill, in relying on external reality. However, instead of being interested in analyzing reality and knowledge and returning it to its simple origins as Locke and Hume did. Her interest is based on linking our knowledge to experience and practice. Not in terms of origin but in terms of results. It does not ask how knowledge or ideas arise, but rather asks about the results that could emerge from these ideas.

Diversity in races that immigrated to the United States of America with different cultural background raised a problem regarding what could be common between them, and there must have been an interaction between these different cultures. From a philosophical standpoint, it can be said that the disagreement relates to fundamental philosophical issues, such as asking about the criterion for distinguishing between right and wrong, it means how to judge that a given idea is true instead of being false, which means truth problem. This cultural conflict has been reflected historically in the civil war (1861-1865). The causes of civil war seem to be related to disagreements, especially between the north and the south of USA over legal and economic issues, but the truth is, in essence, a conflict due to a dispute over the problem of truth. The Americans found no way out on which they could agree except to consider work and practice as a main standard for testing the validity of their ideas.

Although some philosophies and religions had immigrated to the American continent, they failed to push American society toward integration and progress, so they did not adhere to them. An example of this is the idealistic philosophy that Germans brought to America, as well as the Christian religion, which no longer plays the same role in the life of American society. Pragmatism arose in United States during the last decades of the nineteenth century and developed during the beginning of the twentieth century. It found in the free capitalist system based on individual competition the best environment for its development.

In Peirce's article, "How to Make Our Thoughts Clear," Popular Science Monthly published about Peirce that, after he made it clear that our beliefs are in fact rules for action, he added that in order to develop a given idea, we have to find the appropriate behavior which results from it. (William James, 1965, p-p. 53-54), It means that Peirce links the idea or meaning to the nature of the behavior that it determines. Every behavior has feelings, and every feeling is related to certain ideas.

Peirce presented pragmatism as a philosophical doctrine that has two aspects: the first is that the true judgment or correct idea is the one that works successfully in our experiences (which works satisfactorily). The second is that the truth is an event that presents an idea or a ruling and makes it true through the action it achieves. In another way, pragmatism believes that truth has a relation with human experience. It considers that knowledge is therefore just a tool for work or activity, and therefore any idea is realized to the extent of its practical success. Therefore, it acknowledges the role of experience and thus rids philosophy of any theoretical element. According to Peirce, an idea is a plan of action or a project for action, not a reality in itself, as the followers of rationalism claim. In this context, truth should be common among people, and the value of a given idea lies in its practical effectiveness.

It can be said that the origins of pragmatism, in its cognitive dimension, go back to English empiricism, and in its moral dimension, to the English doctrine of utilitarianism, which was founded by Jarmy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Despite its realistic orientation, pragmatism is considered hostile to idealism and realism. Pragmatists reject the absolute academic tendency towards idealism and the extreme realist tendency, and criticize the subjective changes offered by realist philosophy. Rather, they consider that reality is determined according to the individual's sensory experience. A person's knowledge is limited

to the scope of his experiences. This indicates that the practical doctrine depends on Pure sentimentality. (Jifni Naeem Habib, 2010, p-p. 185-186).

No matter how different the opinions on pragmatist philosophy are in acceptance or rejection, they all converge at a point that everyone agrees on, which means that pragmatism came as an expression of the data of our scientific era, and that it is impossible for anyone who is aware of the culture of this era to turn a blind eye to this intellectual current, and to his great influence and the spread of his ideas in Western culture. (Ali Said Ismail, 1995, p. 22).

In other words, pragmatism has greatly influenced not only philosophical sphere, but also other fields such as economics, law, politics, sociology, psychology, and literary criticism. Pragmatism has proposed a new thought that differs from what had previously been presented by the philosophies that preceded it, whether in its intellectual starting points or in the results. It is characterised by its practical principles which rely especially on multiple applications of our ideas, seeking for the best way of making them in use.

Pragmatism is an attempt to renew philosophy by overcoming the existing conflict between rational philosophy, experimental philosophy and other philosophies. It sought to renew philosophy and preserve its pioneering role and worked to overcome the quarrels and empty debates which pragmatism considers useless discussions that do not lead to a clear truth. It tended to resolve the conflict between philosophical schools, and in addition to that, it proposed an attempt to reconcile the spiritual side of human life, i.e. (religion), and man's love of knowledge. (Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, 1987, p-p. 127-128)

Previous philosophers were interested in issues that have no relation with reality, such as those investigating the nature of the soul, and whether it is immortal or mortal. Many other topics were a subject of controversy and interest from previous philosophers, as they relied on firm and well-established ideas or principles. Thus, these philosophies were isolated from the ordinary life of people because they relied on a priori explanations (prior to experience) or on fixed and absolute principles (William James, 1965, p. 07).

Pragmatism did not adhere to what was prevalent and well-established. It moved away from fixed and absolute principles, and it was more concerned with the tangible and practical facts. It was characterised by its insistence on practical results and benefits as essential components of truth, and refused to say that human principles and thought alone represent truth, thus opposing skeptical and rationalist positions. According to her

perspective, theories and information are only important as a struggle between intelligent beings and their surrounding environment. On the other hand, not everything that is useful and practical is true, such as things that help us in our lives in the short and very limited term, but what is taken as true is what contributes to the long-term benefit of humans.

There are several factors that contributed to the emergence of pragmatist philosophy, the most important of which are:

A - The theory of evolution founded by Darwin: It had a profound impact on philosophers, especially pragmatists. The principle of this philosophy, or the law of "survival of the fittest", establishes the idea of the connection between truth and benefit. Man uses rational formulas to preserve his existence and can abandon what is useless ones to replace them with what is practically useful. This idea is the basis of John Dewey's instrumentalism.

B - The advancement of psychological sciences: Psychological sciences developed, considering that everything in mind aims for a specific goal. Peirce was one of the leading psychologists and the author of the "Law of Utility" in psychology. (Karam Youssef, 1996, p. 414)

C - Religious needs: The religious aspect of pragmatism appeared clearly in a theory that belief in the occurrence of miracles helps to achieve them. Despite this, most of the pragmatists were atheists, such as: John Dewey, who declared atheism and issued the Humanists' Manifesto. (Saad Saleh, A., 1991, p. 20)

D - Social conditions: Pragmatism appears as a result of the interaction between the ideas and cultures of immigrants to America and the ideas and culture existing in the new environment. In solving their problems, the immigrants relied on work and practice, and for this reason their thinking was linked to work, and theories became mere hypotheses to be tested by the positions that resulted from them. Practical and subject to change in response to developments in reality, this spirit has been known as pragmatism, a name given to the American spirit (Al-Ahwani Ahmed Fouad, 1968, p. 82).

The factors for the emergence of pragmatist thought are many and varied, and the factors that contributed to its growth and spread are different and overlapping. Pragmatist philosophy is an expression of special historical conditions and a general feeling, not only as a type of specialized philosophical thinking, but also because the basic approach of

pragmatism aimed at ideas as tools is completely consistent with the nature of the adventurous immigrants who came to the American continent, and carried with them many concepts, including economic concepts, about trade in its various political and social dimensions, about specialization in work and mass production, the development and influence as a means of successful life, and mental concepts about science and its applications and about continuous change. American life was based on agriculture before the end of the nineteenth century, then it began to move towards an industrial character, and American society began to liberate himself gradually from the control and stagnation of the Church. The incoming European cultures began to merge into unified culture, reflecting the scientific spirit of the age and the principle of evolution. Finally, the philosophical content of this new culture was expressed in the works of Peirce, William James, and John Dewey.

Pragmatism is a reflection of an environment that is keen to adhere to science as a necessary path to present life and denies anything else. Pioneers of pragmatism emphasize that thought in our practical scientific age has no need to the stillness and darkness that it used to seek help in the past, but rather has become linked to laboratory experiments that are carried out in broad daylight. The United States has become a special human society in which thought and practice are linked together. Everyone thinks and everyone works continuously at the same time, there is no separation between thought and action, in pursuit of achieving the maximum possible development, as a response to the American slogan "The sky is the limit".

From a critical point of view, there are many criticisms that can be presented against the pragmatic position, the most important of them are the following:

- Pragmatism made a break with the past against what it considered to be well-established philosophical ideas and intellectual habits among philosophers, but at the same time it returned to ancient ideas that it considered to represent the roots and origins of pragmatism, such as Protagoras, who considered man to be a measure. All things including truth are relative, variable, and different from one person to another according to the benefit they bring to their owner.

- The concept of success or benefit may differ from one individual to another. What represents a success for me could be a failure for others.

- Linking truth to practical benefit will distance the will from human virtues such as justice, equality, altruism, and compassion, and will push individuals and societies towards more

intense competition for private benefits, so excessive selfishness will prevail and conflict and injustice will increase.

- Some of the virtues that seem to be characteristics of pragmatism and its capitalist system, such as discipline, respect for time and appointments, and honesty in many transactions, are not intended in and of themselves as virtues, but rather because they bring more benefit or because adherence to some of them averts a lot of harm and punishment imposed by law. Pragmatism establishes a subjective standard that links the legitimacy and sincerity of the idea to self-satisfaction. It is most appropriate for the sincerity of the idea to be based on objectivity as a common standard among people, for truth succeeds because it is true, it is not truth because it succeeds. An idea may be useful, but it is incorrect, like lying and its benefits compared to honesty and its harms in some contexts.

We cannot make reality an absolute standard for confirming our beliefs and ideas because some of them may be true for those who have not yet reached the stage of confirmation on the level of practice. On the contrary, some of our beliefs mislead us into believing that they agree with reality at a certain period, then they are quickly refuted by new ideas, and this is what we find in the field of scientific research, for accordance with reality is not a sufficient criterion for truth.

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