

The roles of action in the pragmaticist philosophy

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Pragmatism as a philosophy of action?

- In the intro of the conference description:

“From the pragmatist point of view, action is central to all philosophical problem-solving: philosophical – also conceptual and theoretical – issues are never unrelated to action. [...] the pragmatist stance can only be comprehended as a philosophy of action.”

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Action in Peirce's pragmatism?

- For Peirce, pragmatism was essentially a **philosophical** doctrine and
- philosophy was a special branch of *theoretical sciences*. About them Peirce said:

“pure science has nothing at all to do with *action*” (CP 1.635, 1898)

⇒ Pragmaticist philosophy should have nothing at all to do with action.

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Six roles of action in pragmatism

- Pragmaticist conception of
 1. **science** as action (inquiry)
 2. **belief** as habit of action
 3. **ultimate impact of science** as internalized belief
 4. **meaning** (maxim of pragmatism)⇒ Theoretical philosophical sciences of
 5. **Practics** (the normative science of deliberate conduct)
 6. **Metaphysics** (identity of entities is in continuities rather than essences)

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Conception of science

- ‘Scientificity’ of science is not in its
 - results, scientific beliefs, or
 - ‘scientific worldview’ (as set of beliefs)
- Doctrines and beliefs belong to religion and to practices of everyday life.
- ⇒ Sciences should be identified in their **methods**
- ‘Scientificity’ of a science is in the criteria of scientificity of its **inquiry**

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Pragmatist conception of belief

“*beliefs* [...] has no place in science at all” (CP 1.635, 1898)

- belief was defined as a (semiconscious) **habit of action**:

“We believe the proposition we are ready to act upon.” (CP 1.635, 1898).
- Nevertheless, the whole purpose of pragmatism as a method of science was to “fix our beliefs” and “make our ideas clear” (1878).
- A genuine belief, according to which we (instinctively) act, is *not* under an inquiry.

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'Scientific spirit'?

- Beliefs concerning the methods of science *must* have certain place in science.

“That which constitutes science, then, is not so much correct conclusions, as it is a correct method. But the method of science is itself a scientific result. [...] it was a historic attainment and a scientific achievement. So that not even this method ought to be regarded as essential to the beginnings of science. That which is essential, however, is the scientific spirit” (CP 6.428, 1893).

Theoretical and Practical sciences

- Inquiry is action and action is actively guided, goal-directed conduct
- The purposes of an inquiry functions as its normative criteria, its criteria of success
- Sciences can be divided into two branches according to the *ultimate purpose* of their inquiry:

“I recognize two branches of science: Theoretical, whose purpose is simply and solely knowledge of God's truth; and Practical, for the uses of life.” (CP 1.239, 1902)

Internal and external goals of inquiry

Theoretical sciences

- The ultimate criterion of validity is not exterior to the inquiry at hand
- Truth about the chosen object of an inquiry is a purpose *internal* to that inquiry
- The search for true knowledge about the object of an inquiry is the scientific spirit with which scientificity of science is identified.

Practical sciences

- The ultimate purpose of an inquiry is practical use or need
- As such it is *exterior* to science

'truth' without capitalizing

- The truth is relative to each inquiry and each object of inquiry.
- In theoretical sciences, the goal is to achieve as full and self-conscious representation about the chosen object of an inquiry as possible.
- This desired representation is
 - *not* the perfect picture about the world but
 - about *what we know* (and do not know) about the *object* in case through *this* inquiry.

Why utilities should not be mingled with theoretical inquiry

- Peirce's main motivation: theoretical sciences should not be mingled with practical ones

“the two masters, *theory* and *practice*, you cannot serve. That perfect balance of attention which is requisite for observing the system of things is utterly lost if human desires intervene, and all the more so the higher and holier those desires may be.” (CP 1.642, 1898)

Why results of sciences should not be applied in action too eagerly

- In many cases reasoning is too slow way of getting concrete results.
- Science can err – in practice, reasoning is very unsecure operation
- ⇒ applying scientifically proven but erroneous 'truths' in practice may produce unpredictable results – the results of traditional ways of doing are more predictable

The ultimate impact of theoretical science

- If an inquiry can be kept on to the point where an inquirer finds that everything knowable is known, the process of this individual inquiry ceases.
- The results of such inquiry – if they are significant enough – will get the undeniable status of “established truths” and they will be *believed* without any genuine doubt and as such they will be part of our living practice.

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The growth of instinctive beliefs

- The consensus concerning a ‘scientific truth’ is *not* a sign of a success of the corresponding inquiry – it does not guarantee its truth. It is just a description of what happens, when no one doubts it *de facto*.
- Undeniable results of scientific inquiry, whether true or false, will gradually be embedded in common world view and practices.
- ‘scientific truths’ will step away from the sphere of science and mingle with other common beliefs
- If no one doubts a common belief, its reasons (if there are any) can be forgotten.

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Pragmatist conception of meaning

- The maxim of pragmatism (1878) in order to *make our ideas clear*
- Its motivation and content is:
No bullshitting
- In Peirce’s pragmatism, the maxim forms a kind of minimum definition of rational meaning of a concept.

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The original maxim of pragmatism

"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."
(CP 5.402, 1878)

- not the simple idea of meaning as *actual use* but
- a meaning of a conception is
 1. a(nother) *conception* about
 2. the *all*
 3. *conceivable*
 4. *practical* effects of the object of the original conception.

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A conditional mood of the maxim

"Pragmatism, considered as the maxim that the entire meaning and significance of any conception lies in its *conceivably* practical bearings,—not certainly altogether in consequences that would influence our conduct so far as we can foresee our future circumstances but which in *conceivable* circumstances would go to determine how we should deliberate act," (EP2:145, 1903)

- The meaning of a conception is a conjunction of its those logical consequences that are ‘practical’ ones.
- ‘Practical’ here refers to such events that are recognizable, ‘verifiable’, or producible independently on their becoming as the effects of the concept.

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The application of the maxim

"I understand pragmatism to be a method of ascertaining the meanings, not all ideas, but only of what I call "intellectual objects", [...] Intellectual concepts convey more, not merely than any feeling, but more, too, than any existential fact, namely, the "*would-acts*" of habitual behavior;"
(EP2:401-402, 1907)

- The ‘habitual behavior’ here do not need to be human behavior, it can as well be the ‘behavior of the world’ that is predicted (or produced) and observed.

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Future meaning

- In order to have any rational meaning, a concept must have some practical consequences (differing from ones of other alternatives)
- This principle was designed to be applied also to metaphysical and logical concepts.
- It is significant that the meaning of a concept is
 - not in the (intuitive) origin of concepts, or
 - not in its actual (conventional) use (e.g. in communication), but
 - in its potential effects on possible future behavior.

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Significance of the origin of concepts

- Another formulation of the maxim:

"The elements of every concept enter into logical thought at the gate of perception and make their exit at the gate of purposive action; and whatever cannot show its passports at both those two gates is to be arrested as unauthorized by reason." (CP 5.212, 1903)

- ⇒ No a priori concepts
- Origins do not determine the meaning nor applicability, but to know the origin of a concept, might be useful in making it clear
 - ⇒ More control on smuggled contents

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Philosophical observation

- Concepts of theoretical philosophy should be derivable from the *general observation* present in any phenomena
 - Familiar everyday experience is a good enough source for philosophical concepts
 - Restrictions on what philosophy is capable of representing

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