

**Interview to be published in Russian in a special volume of *Istoriya filosofii/ History of Philosophy* (ISSN 2074–5869)**

Short cv

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Questions

1. *Much of contemporary pragmatism looks very different from the original version. Is there any continuity in American pragmatism's progress from its early days to the present time? What does the history of pragmatism teach us?*

American pragmatism has commonly been considered by European philosophers to be something parochial, outside the mainstream of philosophy. It has often been understood as *an American way* of dealing with knowledge and truth that is alien to the general discussion. As Rorty noted, although philosophers in Europe study Quine and Davidson, «they tend to shrug off the suggestion that these contemporary philosophers share their basic outlook with American philosophers who wrote prior to the so-called linguistic turn» (Rorty 1990, p. 1). It has become more and more apparent that there has been a continuous development of thought from Charles S. Peirce to W. V. Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, Hilary Putnam and so on, and that this tradition of thought —as Bernstein suggested— «not only challenges the characteristic Cartesian appeal to foundations, but adumbrates an alternative understanding of scientific knowledge without such foundations» (Bernstein 1983, pp. 71-72). The recent resurgence of pragmatism in philosophy makes it particularly relevant to try to understand the complex and intriguing relation between American pragmatism and European philosophy throughout the twentieth century until the present.

The overwhelming dominance of the analytic tradition in the Anglo-American world in the second half of the past century has resulted in the neglect of the history of thought. As Hilary Putnam wrote, «the long dominance of the idea that 'philosophy is one thing and history of philosophy is another' is now visibly coming to an end» (Putnam 1997, p. 200). A key source for this "flashback" process, for this retrieval of "old good philosophy" is not only the discovery of a continuous tradition within American thought —which has its beginnings in the debates at Harvard between Royce and James, in the work of Peirce and Dewey, and which is flourishing today— but also the detailed historical study of the irruption in Europe of pragmatist ideas and proposals.

It was not so in the first decade of the past century. In the World Congress of Philosophy at Heidelberg on 1908 the pragmatist movement held a central position in the debates (Nubiola 2017; Elsenhans 1909). With the ascent of logical empiricism in the 1920s pragmatism began to fade from the philosophical scene, as if pragmatism had exhausted its creative potential. The dispersion of the Vienna Circle and the Second World War moved the center of philosophical discussion from Europe to the United States. In my view, that transplanted of the Vienna Circle was successful owing to the common ground established

by the general pragmatist orientation of American academic philosophy in the previous decades. Analytic philosophy in the hands of European *émigrés* took over the departments of philosophy in the American universities of the fifties. With few exceptions, a deep affinity between analytical philosophy and the pragmatist tradition has been commonly overlooked. Not only were many of the issues and basic ideas common, but both movements—in a broad-brush philosophical approach—shared similar goals, similar views about the relation between philosophy and science and about how philosophical work had to be conducted.

2. Which term, “experience”, “language” or “social practice”, best expresses the central motivation of late pragmatism?

The three terms are key for understanding the central motivation of pragmatism. If I am required to choose one term from these three I would choose *experience*, because it is much more basic and general than “language” or “social practice”. Let me say openly that pragmatism is not a philosophy of language nor a social theory, but a method that might be very fruitfully used in both fields of research. Let us recall Papini's metaphor of the hotel corridor in James' words (1906, p. 339):

Pragmatism, according to Papini, is thus only a collection of attitudes and methods, and its chief characteristic is its armed neutrality in the midst of doctrines. It is like a corridor in a hotel, from which a hundred doors open into a hundred chambers. In one you may see a man on his knees praying to regain his faith; in another a desk at which sits some one eager to destroy all metaphysics; in a third a laboratory with an investigator looking for new footholds by which to advance upon the future. But the corridor belongs to all, and all must pass there. Pragmatism, in short, is a *great corridor-theory*.

Experience is the source of all our knowledge from common sense wisdom to the most recent discoveries of highly advanced science. I like to recall that Charles S. Peirce defined science as a diligent inquiry into truth for truth's sake, developed by a community of inquirers skilled in the manipulation of particular instruments, and trained in certain ways of *perceiving* or particular modes of thought. For Peirce, “science does not advance by revolutions, warfare, and cataclysms, but by cooperation, by each researcher's taking advantage of his predecessors' achievements, and by his joining his own work in one continuous piece to that already done” (CP 2.157, c.1902). Science is a way of life, a craft handed down from masters to apprentices.

For this reason, the key to the advancement of knowledge and to the development of sciences is not revolution, but communication. Communication between the members of a science community is essential for scrutinizing the evidence and the results achieved in research. There is no algorithm or unailing method for discovering the truth or knowing for sure when you have it. Thus, truth and knowledge—at least in the hard sciences—are located at the level of the scientific community rather than the individual inquirer (Ransdell 1998, p. 2). More specifically, Peirce clearly asserts that the scientific community, far from being an assembly or a parliament whose members fight each other with fierce arguments, should be more like a family. “A given science with a special name, a special journal, a special society, studying one group of facts, whose students understand one another in a general way and naturally associate together, forms what I call a family” (CP 1.238, c.1902). A scientific community is always—or at least should be, according to Peirce—an affective community. In this respect, actual scientific practice is unfortunately quite different.

A second point of interest is the encouragement of cross-disciplinarity between sciences: "One of the most salient phenomena of the life of science is that of a student of one subject getting aid from students of other subjects" (*HP* 805, 1904). It is not only that "the higher places in science in the coming years are for those who succeed in adapting the methods of one science to the investigation of another. That is what the greatest progress of the passing generation has consisted in" (*CP* 7.66, 1882), but that new knowledge is generated wherever communication between different branches of science is enhanced.

3. *William James understood pragmatism as "primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes". What positive role, if any, could pragmatists play in "settling" current analytical-continental controversy?*

In recent years there has been an increasing amount of scholarship trying to understand both pragmatism and analytic philosophy as different aspects of one broad philosophical attitude. In my view, a key source for developing an integrated study of both currents is to be found in Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), the founder of pragmatism, who was interpreted by Karl-Otto Apel as the milestone in the semiotic transformation of transcendental philosophy into analytic philosophy. In this 'flashback' process, it is even possible to discover a continuous tradition within American thought, which has its beginnings in the work of Peirce, James and Dewey, and flourishes in Quine, Putnam and Rorty (Putnam 1990, p. 267). Instead of viewing the analytic movement as representing a sharp rupture with pragmatism, the most recent resurgence of pragmatism suggests that there has been on the contrary a continuity between both movements: the later one can be understood as a refinement, as a genuine development of the earlier movement.

The intellectual history of the last century is really complex. It may be affirmed that the rise of logical positivism in America after the Second World War almost eliminated pragmatism from the philosophical scene. Scientism, as held by the Circle of Vienna and its positivist heirs, became from the 1950's the dominant culture, converting itself into a materialist realism which sought to explain everything right now, or which trusted blindly in the progress of human reason and its ability to explain, in a definitive way and in the immediate future, all problems. In contrast with this optimism, post-modern thought, widely spread in the last decades, oscillated between a presentation of science as a mere power structure or as just another form of literature. The presence of both approaches is detected clearly in many levels of our culture that present a curious amalgam of vulgar pragmatism, scientific foundationalism, and literary skepticism.

It seems to me that it is not an overstatement to affirm that reason is in danger nowadays. Reasonableness is not the hallmark of our politicians or businessmen all over the world, and it seems also that it is far away from the real practices of our scientific colleagues. We philosophers, who —in Husserl's expression— feel ourselves to be "civil servants of humankind," have a serious responsibility about our fellow citizens, like Socrates with Athens. With our work we are not only transmitting philosophical knowledge to new generations, we are keeping alive the flame of rigorous thinking in freedom, the flame of being in plenitude human beings. I bring a quotation from Hilary Putnam, which I have had during years as a guideline for my work in philosophy:

I try to defend the idea that the theoretical and practical aspects of philosophy depend on each other. Dewey wrote in *The Need of a Recovery in Philosophy* that 'Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of

philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men.' I think that the problems of philosophers and the problems of men and women are connected, and that it is part of the task of a responsible philosophy to bring out the connection (Harlan 1992, p. 22).

Philosophy is not —and cannot be— only an academic exercise, but is an instrument to progressive critical and rational reconstruction of everyday living. In a world in which daily living is frequently found removed from an intelligent examination of oneself and of the fruits of human activity, a philosophy that separates itself from genuine human problems, would be a luxury that we cannot afford.

The revival of pragmatism —that this congress in Moscow also credits— draws attention to the growing evolution of a new sensibility disillusioned with the vain promises of scientific progressivism, but anxious at the same time, in accordance with the best philosophical tradition, to forge a future which might be different from the past (Rorty 1995, p. 198). In fact, a feature of this new sensibility is the preferred attention it gives to our communicative practices, to the human ability to build bridges between both individual and cultural differences. According to that it seems to me that inspired young thinkers from all the European countries, well trained on continental and pragmatist traditions, may be essential to overcome the poverty of most of the (almost dying for multiple reasons) analytical and continental philosophies which still have a dominant position in Europe. The task is in our hands. Pragmatism is what Europe needs today!

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