

INTRODUCTORY:

SITUATING PRAGMATISM TODAY

(PRAGMATISM AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY)

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We have gathered here at this conference to discuss pragmatism (the philosophy of pragmatism). Pragmatism is *our philosophy*, that is philosophy we have found or “discovered”, for our purposes; philosophy we acknowledge and consider it right in many ways, though by no means an absolute philosophy (and we think there is no such thing as absolute philosophy which could be right once and for good); philosophy we try to sustain and develop further today in our post-post-modern contexts.

Pragmatism is philosophy we have not created, but which we have inherited from our trans-Atlantic ancestors. Let me say (with Joe Margolis who has recently summarized it nicely in his *Pragmatism's Advantage*¹) that pragmatism, though American by its origin, “is no longer merely or even distinctly American”. Pragmatism in the past decades has become international or even global, finding its proponents almost in every corner of the world. It might be interesting to explore why pragmatism has become attractive today in the countries where the dominant philosophical traditions have been utterly different, let alone to say directly anti-pragmatist, but this is not the place for such an exploration.

However, permit me just to remark, that Western philosophy in its history has been and to some significant dimension still is *Eurocentric* (and European philosophy is conservative), which means that to introduce (let alone to embed) any kind of non-European philosophy into its *milieu*, might sometimes seem as a Sisyphean work.

Why? Because we Europeans have our Plato and Aristotle, our Descartes and Kant, Hegel and Marx and all those others, so why should we need somebody else? Why should we learn from others and change our philosophical habits, our paradigms or our styles of philosophizing? Moreover: do Kantians need Hegelians, or *vice versa*, in order to develop their philosophies? Or do Cartesians need Nietzscheans and *vice versa*? Who needs whom in philosophy and what for? Of course, Kantians need Hegelians both need each other in order to criticize each other and thus to demonstrate their own philosophical truth they consider if not an absolute one, then at least the best one of all. Thus what kind of motivation might European philosophers, specifically those educated in dominant continental or analytic traditions, have to look elsewhere for a different kind of philosophical truths or thoughts? What kind of motivation to read pragmatists might have contemporary, say, phenomenologists other than Ryle or Carnap had when appealed to avoid Heidegger, or Searle has when calling for not to read Derrida? Many times it seems that philosophy lives and works as if in some self-enclosed circles, which sometimes might interpenetrate, but primarily defend themselves and argue for their core ideas as if self-sufficient and self-absorbed doctrines. This, to some extent, is understandable, that is to the extent in which they avoid dogmatism, but pragmatism is essentially a *different* philosophy.

Pragmatism, at least as I see it, is an *open* and *transformative* philosophy because it is capable (and even willing) to learn from others. It also does not pretend to be the final philosophical wisdom which would desire to dominate or absorb others. Pragmatism is *pluralistic* and *dialogical* philosophy, as it contends philosophy should be. Pragmatism invites us to unblocked and general “conversation of mankind” (to use Rorty's famous phrase). These are some well-known philosophical virtues of pragmatism (and pragmatists).

¹ See Margolis, J. 2010. *Pragmatism's Advantage*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, xi

Now, let us move closer to the topic of this panel “Pragmatism in the context of modern philosophy”. When I suggested the topic of this panel to the organizers, what I had in mind was mostly the place of pragmatism in the history of modern Western philosophy. This topic includes the questions such as: Is pragmatism a unique (a “new”) philosophy, and if, in what sense? What has pragmatism brought to Western modern philosophy that is new (and different); what is not (or would not be) there, were it not for pragmatism? In what sense it is in alliance with or in opposition to traditional modern philosophy? What are the main philosophical ideas/theories pragmatism has contributed to modern philosophy? What is the relation of pragmatism to the key modern thinkers/schools like Cartesianism, Kantianism, Hegelianism, Marxism, Freudism, etc.? Is pragmatism itself a type of modern philosophy or rather a postmodern (post-postmodern, trans-modern, anti-modern) philosophy?

But, what does it mean to be “modern” (or post-post-modern) within the context of philosophy? I must confess that when suggesting the topic of this panel, the previously lost and unfinished volume of John Dewey *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*,² which now is available, was unknown to me. When presenting the papers at The 7th CEPF Conference, Turda, Romania, June 3-9, 2012 titled “Modernity and Pragmatism”, I said to my colleagues that: “Clearly nobody would object to the suggestion that ‘pragmatism is modern philosophy’ and one of its constituent parts (and not simply from a temporal perspective); although *the concept of modern philosophy* itself is still predominantly *Eurocentric* (indeed, so is the very concept of philosophy that we have become used to employ until recently)”. And I went on to indicate the continuity of pragmatism with

² See Dewey, J. 2012. *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*. Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press.

“modern philosophy” and its dominant traditions and figures, following recent works of Robert Brandom³ and Sami Pihlström⁴ (who join those who define pragmatism as a synthesis of German idealism and Darwinism), having included in this broad modern tradition both original Cartesianism as well as pragmatist anti-Cartesianism, etc. In fact, the uppermost interpretation of modern philosophy predominant in Europe so far has been that its founding-father was Descartes and its decisive schools have been those already mentioned above (Cartesianism, Kantianism, Hegelianism, etc.). But Dewey gives us much broader and deeper interpretation of the history of modern philosophy: according to him, we have never been modern in philosophy up to the rise of pragmatism; because those traditional philosophies traditionally called “modern” have continued in the traditional dualisms (subjective/objective, etc.) established by Ancient and prolonged by Medieval philosophers. Thus, according to Dewey, to be modern is to get rid of those artificial philosophical dualisms, or, in other words, to become a pragmatist (or rather the pragmatist), or something like that in philosophy.

Either way, concerning the place of pragmatism in the history of philosophy, it has been undoubtedly secured, even though there still are interpretations which attempt to avoid or ignore or just diminish it. Sometimes it is only we pragmatists who consider it one of the three current dominant traditions along with continental and analytic, but the proponents of the latter two do not thing the same way.⁵

³ See Brandom, R. 2011. *Perspectives on Pragmatism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

⁴ See Pihlström, S., ed. 2011. *The Continuum Companion to Pragmatism*. London and New York: Continuum.

⁵ See, the works of the well-known and important Oxford philosophical historian Anthony Kenny (1931-) does not recognise pragmatism in his *A Brief History of Western Philosophy* (1998); neither does Roger Scruton (1944-) in his *A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (1981). While Kenny does at least partially correct this in the fourth volume of his *A New History of Western Philosophy* entitled *Philosophy in the Modern World* (2007) when

To sum up (as, for instance, the authors of the volume *100 Years of Pragmatism*, edited by John Stuhr, 2010, are doing),⁶ pragmatism has not changed (reversed) the course of Western modern philosophy so far; it has not accomplished a philosophical revolution in the way it perhaps should and could have done. Pragmatism has been largely contested and also ignored (largely too), and more often misunderstood. But the potential of pragmatism to be developed and to become the philosophy relevant to human life and problems of men and women, is a greatly promising one.⁷

writing about Peirce and James (although not, however, about Dewey), Scruton continues to ignore pragmatism in the second edition of his history book (2002).

⁶ See Stuhr, J. 2010. *100 Years of Pragmatism*. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press.

⁷ The text is a part of the research conducted within the grant VEGA SR No 2/0053/12.