

THE PRAGMATIST PHILOSOPHY OF THE MODERN BOURGEOISIE

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I.

**The Modern Bourgeoisie's
Philosophy of Pragmatism**

Introduction

Pragmatism is a school of subjective idealism. An American, Charles Sanders Peirce, was the first who used the term pragmatism in philosophy. In 1878, Peirce wrote an article titled “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” which was published in the journal *Popular Science Monthly*. In this article, he said that to make people have a completely clear idea of a thing, it is only necessary to think about what kind of actual effect this thing has. The idea of effect is the entirety of our idea of the thing. The idea of a thing exists when it has actual effects on people. Without actual effects means to be without any idea about this thing. This is the theory of pragmatism put forward by Peirce. This theory is in contradiction with the materialist viewpoint that ideas are reflections of objective things.

Twenty years after this theory was published, in 1898, another American, William James, mentioned this again in his lectures on philosophy at the University of California. Pragmatism became disseminated and the pragmatist movement in the U.S. was formed. In 1907 James published a book entitled *Pragmatism*. Pragmatism as a philosophic school of the bourgeoisie was then formed. Therefore, strictly speaking, it was at the beginning of the present century that pragmatism appeared as a philosophic school.

Pragmatism is a reflection of the viewpoint of the vulgar utility of the bourgeoisie.

It was particularly welcomed by imperialism, which is easy to understand. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, capitalism developed into the stage of imperialism. Capitalist exploitation was unprecedentedly cruel and aggressive war was unprecedentedly barbarous. Imperialism needed such a philosophy to explain that acts of exploitation and aggression are all reasonable and correct! Action follows from needs. Any action that follows from needs is reasonable. Therefore, aggressive acts that follow from imperialist needs are also reasonable. In this way, pragmatism used its philosophy of action to justify imperialism.

The theoretical foundation of pragmatism is the empiricism of modern subjective idealism. The mind produces experience and experiences create the world. This is the road that empiricists of subjective idealism take to negate the existence of the objective world. From the first half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, a new branch was born of the empiricism of subjective idealism: positivism. The founders of positivism were Auguste Comte of France, and John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer of England. Positivists hold that only experience is a genuine reality. Apart from man's experience, there is no real world. The world is created by experience; science is only a description of experiential facts. Only when we have man's experience do we have the external objective world.

Without man's experience means to be without the experiential objective world. This is the fundamental point of the empiricism of subjective idealism. This viewpoint can be traced back to the British subjective idealist of the early 18th century, George Berkeley. He said:

[A] certain color, taste, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted as one distinct thing, signified by the name apple; other collections of ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book, and the like sensible things...¹

As Berkeley saw it, things are the aggregates of ideas. Positivists inherited this viewpoint, but they changed the word ideas to experience or knowledge. Pragmatism is a continuation of positivism. It, together with logical positivism, semantics, and Machism are all derived from positivism. Logical positivism advocates that the world was created by logical structures. Semantics advocates that the world was created by the meaning and grammar of language. Machism advocates that the world was created by senses and the complex of senses. Pragmatism advocates that the world was created by experience and by so-called practice.

There are many differences among the philosophic schools of the modern bourgeoisie, but in essence, they are the same. They all proceed from the basic viewpoint that ideas create the world and man's will creates the world. As soon as pragmatism gained currency, Lenin

¹V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 12.

pointed out that the difference between Machism and pragmatism is as insignificant as the difference between empirio-criticism and empirio-monism.

The viewpoint and the purpose of pragmatism and the other schools of positivism do not differ all that much in substance. For example, they all emphasize experience and only experience. They are in opposition to materialism. They do not regard experience as a reflection of the objective world but rather that experience is the creator. They consider that the world and mankind are both created by it.

Second, they all pretend to be neutral or detached. They pretend to be against both materialism and idealism. They call materialism and idealism metaphysics. In fact, under this cover of the signboard of positivist science, they are trying to harmonize the contradiction between science and religion. They propagate the doctrine of religious belief; this is out-and-out subjective idealism.

Third, they all pretend to be scientific and advertise their theory as a scientific theory. They glibly emphasize science and maintain that science should rule the world. The essence of such a proposal is actually to use the name of science to safeguard and uphold capitalism. Who can have science? To the pragmatist and the positivist, only the bourgeoisie can have science.

Fourth, they are all against class struggle. They stand for social balance and class collaboration. In reality, they all deny the existence of classes and use all sorts of fine words to lull the consciousness of the working-class.

Fifth, they all oppose Marxism, viciously attack the socialist system and do their best to justify capitalism. In their opposition to Marxism, they frequently use the method of confusing materialism and idealism, obliterating the line of demarcation between materialism and idealism.

John Dewey was one of the main representatives of pragmatism in the U.S. In his main philosophic work, *Experience and Nature*, he tells the reader that his philosophy is “empirio-naturalism” or “naturalistic empiricism.” What is the experience so much emphasized by Dewey? He said experience possesses two meanings; in his words:

[E]xperience means the land that was tilled, the seeds that were sown, the fruits that were harvested, and changes like day and night, spring and autumn, dry and wet, cold and heat. All these things people have observed, have feared, have longed for. Experience also means the people who plant, harvest, work and rejoice, hope, fear, plan and resort to magic, chemistry, are downcast or joyful.

Dewey thought that “there is no difference between action and matter, the subjective and the objective,” that these two aspects are included “in an unanalyzable whole.” The meaning of these words is that he considers the objective world, matter, man, and man’s thoughts, to be experiences. This is to use experience to obliterate the distinction between matter and consciousness, and the difference between things and thoughts. In fact,