## ЗАРУБЕЖНАЯ ФИЛОСОФИЯ. СОВРЕМЕННЫЙ ВЗГЛЯД

## Из истории философии. Новые публикации

# 150 YEARS OF PRAGMATISM
# 150 ЛЕТ ПРАГМАТИЗМА

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**Аннотация**

Прагматизм – философия практики, фокусирующаяся на динамическом характере социальных практик и материальной деятельности в конкретных исторических условиях. Это историцистская философия, в которой важное место занимают понятия процесса, прогресса, перехода и непредсказуемости изменений. Представители философии прагматизма, столь разные как Уильям Джеймс, Джон Дьюи и Ричард Рорти, предлагают антифундаменталистские варианты понимания прогресса: они хотят убедить нас в том, что мы должны стремиться достичь положения, при котором мы больше ничего не обожествляем и не ищем замены божественному. Чтобы придать привлекательность идее о постметафизической и подлинно гуманистической культуре, прагматисты продолжают наследие Просвещения. Статья поднимает вопрос о том, можно ли в этом контексте говорить о «прагматистском просвещении». Что означало бы это понятие? Каковы следствия идеи о том, что прагматизм, как философия практики или «натуралистический гуманизм» (Дьюи), может внести вклад в завершение проекта Просвещения?

Антифундаменталистское понимание прогресса Рорти находит выражение в стремлении создать «постметафизическую культуру», в которой особенности самосозидания могут сосуществовать с процессом достижения демократического консенсуса по вопросу о том, как максимизировать счастье и как развивать новые формы солидарности. Если мы хотим продолжить рассуждения Дьюи и Рорти о прогрессе и эмансипации, то нам не следует беспокоиться об аналитико-континентальных расхождениях или противоречиях. Следует сосредоточиться на наиболее убедительном и наиболее элегантном

способе объединения аналитической философии, континентальной философии, интеллектуальной истории, литературоведения и американистики.

**Ключевые слова:** прагматизм, Просвещение, гуманизм, постметафизика, поэтизированная культура, практика творчества.

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## 150 YEARS OF PRAGMATISM

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**Summary**

Pragmatism is a philosophy of praxis that concentrates on the dynamic character of social practices and material activities in particular historical circumstances. Moreover, it is a historicist philosophy that puts an emphasis on process, progress, transition, and the unpredictability of change. Pragmatists as different as William James, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty tell antifoundationalist stories of progress, that is, they seek to convince us that we should try to reach a point where we no longer deify anything and where we no longer look for God-substitutes. Trying to make the idea of a postmetaphysical and genuinely humanistic culture look attractive, pragmatists continue the legacy of the Enlightenment. This article discusses the question of whether it is possible to speak of a "pragmatist enlightenment" in this context. What would this term denote? What exactly are the implications of the idea that pragmatism, as a philosophy of praxis or "naturalistic humanism" (Dewey), can contribute to completing the project of the Enlightenment?

Rorty's antifoundationalist story of progress culminates in the attempt to make "a postmetaphysical culture" in which the idiosyncrasies of self-creation can coexist with the process of achieving democratic consensus about how to maximize happiness and how to develop new forms of solidarity. If we are willing to continue telling Deweyan and Rortyan narratives of progress and emancipation, then we should no longer worry about the analytic-continental split or controversy. One should focus on the most convincing, and most elegant, way of bringing together analytic philosophy, continental philosophy, intellectual history, literary studies, and American studies.

**Keywords:** pragmatism, enlightenment, humanism, postmetaphysics, poeticized culture, creative praxis.

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Pragmatists as varied as William James, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty tell antifoundationalist stories of progress. By doing so, they radicalize the legacy of the Enlightenment. The history of pragmatism teaches one the significance and the far-reaching consequences of this radicalization. Would it go too far to speak of a "pragmatist enlightenment" in this context? While pragmatism throughout its history has been criticized and partly even ridiculed by empiricists, materialists, critical theorists, analytic philosophers, and natural scientists, its reputation has enormously grown in the past decades. Rorty's version of pragmatism has played a crucial role in this context, of course, but many other philosophers and theorists have contributed to the much-debated renaissance of pragmatism. In *Ethics without Ontology* (2004), Hilary Putnam speaks of a "third enlightenment," which has not fully happenend yet but which we should strive to make happen. If one follows Putnam, Dewey's work prepared the ground for this kind of enlightenment. Putnam underscores, as he does in other texts, that it is the combination of fallibilism *and* antiskepticism that is probably the most important characteristic of pragmatism:

> I suggested that we need a "third enlightenment," one whose conception of knowledge is much more fallibilistic than that of the seventeenth and eighteenth century – fallibilistic and antimetaphysical, but without lapsing into skepticism. I described Dewey as, in many ways, the philosopher who points us in the direction we need for such a third enlightenment [Putnam (2004), 110].

In his discussion of Rorty's radical critique of epistemology, Robert Brandom also elucidates the implications of his former teacher's attempt "to complete the project of the Enlightenment." While the first phase of the Enlightenment advanced a critique of religion and the idea of human abasement before a divine Other, the second phase questioned the 'seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural sciences' notions of objectivity and certainty. According to Brandom, Rorty's pragmatism helps humans achieve full maturity and thus completes the project that began with a critique of authoritative religion, otherworldliness, and (Platonic) metaphysics:

That undertaking is nothing less than to complete the project of the Enlightenment, as Kant codifies it in "Was ist Aufklärung?": to bring humanity out of its adolescence into full maturity, by taking *responsibility* for ourselves, where before we had been able only to acknowledge the dictates of an alien *authority*. Rorty's biggest idea is that the next progressive step in the development of our understanding of things and ourselves is to do for epistemology what the first phase of the Enlightenment did for religion [Brandom (2000), xi].

Pragmatism is a philosophy of praxis that concentrates on the dynamic character of social practices and material activities in particular historical circumstances. Moreover, it is a historicist philosophy that puts an emphasis on process, progress, transition, and the unpredictability of change. Strongly influenced by Darwinism, pragmatism centers on human beings' creativity of action in a world that was not made for them. As regards the idea of a "third enlightenment," one has to note that pragmatism, by questioning dualisms such as theory-practice, knowledge-action, or finding-making or doing, focuses on human beings' actions and the consequences of those actions in a detranscendentalized world. We work, we speak, we creatively solve problems, we invent social practices, we invent norms that govern those social practices, we imagine new ways of speaking and new ways of redescribing former vocabularies and/as social practices – pragmatism is a form of humanism that prepares the ground for the establishment of a genuinely postmetaphysical culture and that, moreover, shows that the conceptual tools for talking about the world of practice can only be invented in the world of practice (there is no other). F.C.S. Schiller, James, Dewey, Richard J. Bernstein, and Rorty help one appreciate the implications of the idea that pragmatism ought to be considered a kind of humanism. However, we have to be more precise. These pragmatist philosophers complete the project of the Enlightenment, I submit, by showing how pragmatism, humanism, anti-authoritarianism, and postmetaphysics are linked.

The creativity of action and the power of the imagination are central to both James and Dewey's versions of pragmatism. It is interesting to see to what degree James's famous insistence that "the trail of the human serpent [. . .] is over everything" [James (1907), 33] and his emphasis on "man's divinely-creative functions" [James (1907), 113] are mirrored in Dewey's suggestion that philosophy "is vision, imagination, reflection" [Dewey (1917), 67] and in his idea that man "is primarily

a creature of the imagination" [Dewey (1919), 118]. Dewey's reputation almost immediately waned after his death in 1952. It was not only Dewey's theory of logic and inquiry, his concept of experience, or his naturalist epistemology that bothered many analytic philosophers, but also books such as *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920) and *The Quest for Certainty* (1929). These books, elegantly combining philosophy and intellectual history, tell antifoundationalist stories of progress. From today's perspective, these two books are among his most valuable, thought-provoking, and illuminating texts. These antifoundationalist stories of progress and emancipation demonstrate how pragmatism, humanism, anti-authoritarianism, and postmetaphysics are interlinked. It hardly comes as a surprise that Rorty clearly preferred *Reconstruction* and *Quest* to *Experience and Nature* (1925) or *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938).

It is crucial to note that Dewey, like James, was not a radically postmetaphysical thinker, yet both show that the world of practice and the world of poetry do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. In spite of his emphasis on the significance of (experimental) science, Dewey would have appreciated James speaking of "the world's poem" [James (1907), 122]. Both pragmatists are integral parts of the antifoundationalist story of progress that seeks to illuminate the development from Romanticism to pragmatism since both helped prepare the establishment of a postmetaphysical poeticized culture.

Dewey's brand of pragmatism indeed cannot be grasped without considering the role of Romanticism and humanism. Like his fellow pragmatist humanist Schiller, Dewey calls attention to the Protagorean idea that "Man is the measure of all things," and like his fellow antifoundationalists and antirepresentationalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and James he underscores the significance of the transformative will, of the idea of a deepened human experience, and of the creative (and idiosyncratic) imagination. That Dewey's future orientation reminds one of Walt Whitman's intensity hardly needs to be mentioned.
Dewey's antifoundationalist and humanist story of progress depicts history as a story of increasing human freedom, of an increasing willingness to experiment, of humanity constantly reinventing itself, and of a heightened awareness that it might be fruitful to see cultural evolution as continuous with biological evolution. Dewey's "romance of democracy," as Rorty correctly contends, "required a more thoroughgoing version of secularism than either Enlightenment rationalism or nineteenth-century positivism had achieved" [Rorty (2009), 257].

Further below in his piece Rorty writes: "Dewey's stories are always stories of the progress from the need of human communities to rely on a nonhuman power to their realization that all they need is faith in themselves; they are stories about the substitution of fraternity for authority" [Rorty (2009), 262].

"The quest for certitude," as Dewey maintains, "has determined our basic metaphysics" [Dewey (1929), 18]. The influence of his anti-foundationalism on Rorty's brand of pragmatism is obvious. Rorty of course continued Dewey's critique of the quest for certainty. In spite of the former's critique of Dewey's fixation on the concept of experience (which he wanted to replace with language) and in spite of his critical attitude toward "Dewey's Metaphysics" (as he called an essay published in 1977), he highly valued Dewey's attack on traditional theories of knowledge and representation. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty contends that Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey, whom he notoriously calls "the three most important philosophers" [Rorty (1979), 5] of the twentieth century, abandon the notion of knowledge as accurate representation, the idea of a general theory of representation, and the alleged necessity of having something like foundations of knowledge. Accordingly, they "set aside epistemology and metaphysics as possible disciplines" [Rorty (1979), 6]. In view of this anti-Cartesian and anti-Kantian revolution, which Rorty also interprets as a Hegelian, Darwinian, and Derridean revolution, he describes the aim of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*: "The aim of the book is to undermine the reader's confidence in 'the mind' as something about which one should have a 'philosophical' view, in 'knowledge' as something about which there ought to be a 'theory' and which has 'foundations,' and in 'philosophy' as it has been conceived since Kant" [Rorty (1979), 7].

One begins to clearly see the contours of the pragmatist enlightenment when one realizes that from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* to his final collection of *Philosophical Papers* Rorty repeatedly underscored that his antifoundationalism, antiessentialism, and antirepresentationalism ought to be regarded as a suggestion to consider pragmatism as a kind of humanism. The idea of progress, to Rorty, implies the human subject's realization that everything transcendental and metaphysical is man-made. Progress, in other words, can only be realized when we leave the Platonic world of ideas, turn away from the idea of the transcendental Good, and radically question the idea of correctly representing the intrinsic nature of reality, the essence of things, and the real core of the self. Instead of accepting the imperatives and laws

of traditional epistemology and moral philosophy, the human subject should finally come to understand that his or her only responsibility is to his or her fellow human beings in the world of practice.

In order to fully appreciate the radical gesture of Rorty's antifoundationalist story of progress, one has to see how for him the idea of completing the project of the Enlightenment and the notion of a postmetaphysical and poeticized culture are linked. Rorty wants us to achieve a position where we would no longer deify anything. In other words, he wants his fellow human beings to continue the process of secularization which ought to eventually culminate in a culture in which man would gladly admit that the creativity of human inventions is all he needs in the world of practice. Rorty summarizes the antifoundationalist story he tells in the first chapter of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, "The Contingency of Language," as follows: "The line of thought common to Blumenberg, Nietzsche, Freud, and Davidson suggests that we try to get to the point where we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi divinity, where we treat *everything* – our language, our conscience, our community – as a product of time and chance" [Rorty (1989), 22].

Combining atheism, antifoundationalism, antiessentialism, antirepresentationalism, and anti-authoritarianism, Rorty's humanist ideal culture is radically anthropocentric in a Protagorean, Nietzschean, and Deweyan sense, and it illustrates the centrality of the subject's creativity of action for the completion of the project of the Enlightenment. Instead of seeking metaphysical comfort in the confrontation with contingency and instead of insisting to continue to use terms and expressions like representation, imitation (or mirroring), discovery (or metaphors of finding), and being adequate, the ideal member of a Rortyan literary or poeticized culture will gladly accept the instability and historicity of our vocabularies, the contingency of our ways of speaking and moral standards, as well as the unpredictability of the consequences of our actions. Moreover, she will not hesitate to acknowledge her finitude. Having taken the final step from the idea of finding to that of making, she will understand "that there is nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves, no criterion that we have not created in the course of creating a practice, no standard of rationality that is not an appeal to such a criterion, no rigorous argumentation that is not obedience to our own conventions" [Rorty (1982), xlii]. It is crucial to note that Rorty seems to hold that only in his ideal poeticized culture would one achieve full human maturity and dignity.

What story does Rorty tell regarding the origin of his literary or poeticized culture? In his opinion, this kind of culture is "unlike anything that has existed in the past" [Rorty (2004), 4]. Desiring "a new intellectual world" and "a new self-image for humanity" [Rorty (2004), 4], Rorty tells a story which is full of replacements and transitions. Religion was replaced by philosophy, Kant's transcendental idealism and its ideal of philosophy-as-science was replaced by Hegel's historicism, Romanticism was replaced by pragmatism, and philosophy has finally been replaced by literature. Underscoring the humanistic character of a literary culture, Rorty contends that this sort of culture "drops a presupposition common to religion and philosophy – that redemption must come from one's relation to something that is not just one more human creation" [Rorty (2004), 11]. In one of his last pieces, "Philosophy as Transitional Genre," he states a thesis which is central to many of his texts: "It is that the intellectuals of the West have, since the Renaissance, progressed through three stages: they have hoped for redemption first from God, then from philosophy, and now from literature" [Rorty 2004, 8]. In a genuinely antifoundationalist, nominalist, and de-divinized culture, a culture which is humanist and historicist, one must no longer strive to enter into a relation with a nonhuman entity or power, but instead one should try to get in touch with the present limits of one's imagination. The profoundly romantic character of a Rortyan literary culture becomes clear when he points out that "[i]t is a premise of this culture that though the imagination has present limits, these limits are capable of being extended forever. The imagination endlessly consumes its own artifacts. It is an ever-living, ever-expanding, fire" [Rorty (2004), 12].

Rorty's romanticized pragmatism not only demonstrates how pragmatism, humanism, anti-authoritarianism, and postmetaphysics are interlinked, it also shows that in a poeticized culture people would refrain from looking for God-substitutes or priest-substitutes (such as metaphysicians and physicists) because they would understand that the ideal of escaping from a world of appearances to an enduringly real world in which humans will become as gods and in which the True and the Good are One only arrests the progress of mankind. Rorty's antifoundationalist story of progress culminates in the attempt to make a culture look attractive in which the idiosyncrasies of self-creation can coexist with the process of achieving democratic consensus about how to maximize happiness and how to develop new forms of solidarity.

"A postmetaphysical culture," as Rorty emphasizes in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, "seems to me no more impossible than a postreligious one, and equally desirable" [Rorty (1989), xvi]. As intellectuals, in this kind of culture we would no longer pose the question of whether "language" or "social practice" is more important for our purposes. Rather, we would consider language to be the most important form of social practice (the practice of giving and asking for reasons, as both Brandom and Rorty make clear). Inventing new ways of speaking; redescribing people and things; replacing metaphors of depth, height, and finding with those of width, horizontal progress, and making; and making our Emersonian, Whitmanian, and Deweyan notion of hope and future orientation look good – the practice of telling sweeping stories of progress, emancipation, and secularization is social insofar as we hope that our vocabularies and new sets of metaphors will stimulate other people to use them for the most diverse purposes. When the (Romantic *and* Davidsonian) idea that language is not a medium of representation comes together with the idea that there is no such thing as the human subject's answerability to the world, then we will understand that the pragmatist process of de-divinization culminates "in our no longer being able to see any use for the notion that finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings might derive the meanings of their lives from anything except other finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings" [Rorty (1989), 45].

If we are willing to continue telling Deweyan and Rortyan narratives of progress and emancipation, then we should no longer worry about the analytic-continental split or controversy. Moreover, we should no longer ask whether one does real philosophy or whether one is rather interested in the history of philosophy (and thus in such utterly unreadable texts as, for instance, Hegel's *Phenomenology*). Contributing to the pragmatist enlightenment by telling antifoundationalist stories of progress is only possible if one puts aside the notion of philosophy as a *Fach*, or if one is willing to follow Rorty who in *Philosophy as Poetry* speaks of "narrative philosophy" [Rorty (2016), 41] in this context. Instead of worrying about the analytic-continental split, one should focus on the most convincing, and most elegant, way of bringing together analytic philosophy, continental philosophy, intellectual history, literary studies, and American studies (to name but one combination that would offer one the possibility of telling a story of progress of the West). The Jamesian idea that pragmatism "unstiffens all our theories" [James (1907), 28] could be fruitfully (mis)interpreted as an incentive

to invent new genres. Maybe we should call this new genre, as Rorty suggested, culture criticism, or maybe we ought to refrain from naming it at all and simply enjoy its hybrid status.

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