

Pragmatism, social inquiry, and critique: economics and hegemony

One recent trend in pragmatic political philosophy is the attempt to meet a perceived lack in the classical pragmatists and those who followed them in addressing questions of power, justice, domination, and other central categories of political life and political philosophy. Because of this lack, critics of pragmatism argued, thinkers such as John Dewey, do not have a good rejoinder to the charge that pragmatism is 'bourgeois philosophy made in the USA' from the left, or from the right, that it cannot provide political philosophy with an appropriate criterion for moral action, nor access to deep meaning concomitant with existentially deep commitment to our political beliefs.¹ While recent defenders of pragmatism have met these challenges in a variety of conceptual registers, including the concepts of 'power', 'justice', 'evil', and 'violence' there remains a relative silence with respect to economic forces. Nancy Fraser has recently made efforts to refocus the tradition of Critical Theory back upon the concept of capitalism as a central analytic category of any thinking that would address the problematic situation of contemporary globalization. I believe a reorientation of pragmatic political thought in this direction is required as a supplement to the recent work done to establish pragmatism's political credentials as a viable normative and descriptive enterprise in handling the complexities and pathologies of the present.

To reorient the normative vocabulary of creative and radical democracy in the direction of economic practices is not a novel enterprise. Indeed, Dewey, Addams, and Mead, all discussed and criticized a variety of economic practices and institutions. In their own ways, Richard Rorty, Roberto Unger, and Cornel West among neopragmatists have addressed a variety of criticisms to economic practices. In this paper I would like to continue to build on their work by appropriating two concepts from other traditions that I will argue are necessary for engaging in what Dewey referred to as social inquiry: hegemony and ideology critique.

First, in order to reconstruct the logic of inquiry and to throw into relief the 'framework of reference' as Dewey referred to it, the dominant conception of the foundation of neoclassical economics, the rational agent, will be examined. Upon demonstrating the crucial role the model of action of the rational chooser plays in contemporary economics, the link to other social sciences will be made. By linking this model of action to the paradigm of science to the dominant trends in social science outside of economics, the concept of the human agent as *Homo Economicus* is established. Specifically, the practical and economic consequences for social inquiry in adopting this falsified model will be examined. It is at this point that a pragmatic theory of social inquiry must cross borders and join with the tradition of *ideologiekritik* to elucidate the path towards global economic problem solving in a democratic fashion. The concept of hegemony as marshaled by Gramsci will be invoked and reconstructed for democratic purposes to achieve this end.

¹ J.S. "Against Pragmatism: Bourgeois Philosophy 'Made in U.S.A.'", *The Communist*, Volume 2, #2, Fall/Winter 1977. GK Chesterton, "The Suicide of Thought", in *Everyman's Library* (April 5, 2011)*The Everyman Chesterton*.