

## The Concept of Truth in American Pragmatic Philosophy and Significance for Vietnam

*Economia Política Marxista: Um Quadro de Análise Abrangente das Transformações Socioeconômicas*

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### ABSTRACT:

Pragmatism, a distinctive American school of thought, emerged in the late nineteenth century with key representatives such as C. Peirce, W. James, and J. Dewey. This school of philosophy emphasizes the practical value of knowledge and promotes effective action. In pragmatism, the concept of truth is central, determined not by objective correspondence but by practical utility. Peirce considered truth as the result of establishing stable beliefs, James equated truth with utility, and Dewey considered truth as a cognitive tool for solving problems. Although it brings considerable value in promoting practical and innovative thinking, pragmatism also faces limitations when it overemphasizes the subjectivity of truth. Therefore, a comprehensive study of this concept is essential to better understand its impact on modern knowledge and practice.

**KEYWORDS:** Pragmatic Philosophy, Truth, Practical Effectiveness, Usefulness, C. Peirce, W. James, and J. Dewey

## RESUMO

A economia política marxista, desenvolvida por Karl Marx e Friedrich Engels, oferece um marco teórico único para análise econômica por meio da luta de classes, da mais-valia e da dinâmica do capitalismo. Este artigo apresenta princípios centrais como a teoria do valor-trabalho e as contradições intrínsecas do capitalismo, além de examinar suas raízes na Revolução Industrial do século XIX. O estudo avalia a influência dessa teoria nos movimentos revolucionários, nas políticas econômicas socialistas da China e do Vietnã, e no pensamento crítico moderno. Os resultados demonstram que a teoria permanece válida para explicar a desigualdade e as crises econômicas, mas necessita de adaptações no contexto da globalização e da tecnologia digital. Conclui-se que a economia política marxista é uma ferramenta essencial para compreender a economia contemporânea, exigindo mais pesquisas para adequá-la aos novos desafios.

**Palavras-chave:** Marxismo, Economia Política, trabalho digital, Revolução Industrial, Vietnã.

## 1. Introduction

Pragmatic philosophy, a distinctive school of philosophy in the United States, emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with prominent representatives such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. This philosophical movement has exerted broad influence, extending beyond the country to many regions worldwide. Pragmatic philosophy goes beyond mere theory, embodying a practical mindset characteristic of the American people, reflecting their emphasis on practicality, creativity, and innovation. It arose alongside the rapid development of the United States, significantly contributing to the building and strengthening of national power. Americans view pragmatic philosophy as a vital tool for maximizing human potential in service of national development. In particular, it focuses on solving practical problems, closely tying the concept of truth to practical effectiveness and the transformation of reality.

The United States, with its culture strongly influenced by Europe, has adopted many Western philosophical ideas but at the same time developed in its own way, in accordance with the country's specific conditions. At the end of the nineteenth century, when the United States entered the post-industrial society, the need for economic development and science and technology became a top priority.

Pragmatic philosophy was born in that context as a reaction to the speculative and abstract nature of traditional Western philosophy. America needs a philosophical system that can distinguish between true science and pseudoscience, and turn science into a driving force for social development. Therefore, the concept of truth in American pragmatic philosophy is built on the basis of practicality and effectiveness. This is not only an epistemological adjustment, but also has profound implications for the development of the United States.

Currently, Vietnam is in the process of international integration, absorbing many cultural and scientific achievements from the West, including American pragmatic philosophy. However, since 1975, Vietnam-US relations have gone through a prolonged period of "freezing". It was not until the mid-1990s, when the two countries normalized relations, that economic, political and cultural cooperation was promoted. However, the study of American culture and philosophy in Vietnam is still limited, not commensurate with practical needs. Meanwhile, the current context of integration requires Vietnam to have a better understanding of modern Western philosophical trends, including American pragmatic philosophy.

The study of the concept of truth in American pragmatic philosophy is of great significance for Vietnam, especially in the context of a developing knowledge economy. When every activity is judged on the basis of effectiveness, the pragmatic philosophy approach of truth, taking usefulness as a measure, becomes more and more relevant. This can help Vietnam develop practical thinking, move away from dogmatic and abstract ways of thinking, and promote creativity and innovation in all fields. Therefore, the absorption of appropriate values from American pragmatic philosophy will contribute to improving the efficiency of economic, scientific and educational activities in Vietnam in the current development period.

## 2. Literature review

Pragmatic philosophy emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, marking an important development in American philosophical thought with three key figures: C. Peirce, W. James, and J. Dewey. Since its emergence, pragmatism has drawn research interest both domestically and internationally.

In Vietnam, before 1986, research on pragmatic philosophy was mainly critical, such as the work of the Marxist-Leninist Institute (1982) and Pham Minh Lang (1984). After Doi Moi, research works became more diverse, focusing on pragmatic philosophers and the influence of this trend on Vietnamese thought. Some typical works include *Modern Western Philosophy* (D Scott, 2000), *American Philosophy* (John Lachs, Robert B. Talisse, 2008). These studies have contributed to the systematization of pragmatic philosophy but have not delved into the concept of truth.

Overseas, works such as *The American Pragmatists* (Konvitz & Kennedy, 1960) and *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism* (Thayer, 1968) have analyzed the formation, development, and

characterization of pragmatism. However, these studies have not focused on clarifying the concept of truth in the American pragmatic philosophical system.

Studies on the concept of truth in American pragmatic philosophy are scattered, primarily addressed in individual analyses of Peirce, James, and Dewey. Peirce views truth as the outcome of establishing stable belief; James emphasizes the usefulness of truth in practice; Dewey equates truth with cognitive tools that aid problem-solving. Pragmatism as a way of life: The lasting legacy of William James and John Dewey (H Putnam, 2017) and The pragmatic maxim: Essays on Peirce and pragmatism (C Hookway, 2012) address certain aspects but do not systematize the concept of truth in American pragmatic philosophy. Overall, while there is considerable research on pragmatic philosophy, there remains a lack of in-depth work that systematizes its concept of truth. Thus, studying this concept comprehensively and logically is essential to better grasp its value and limitations.

### **3. The Position of the Problem of Truth in the System of Pragmatic Philosophy**

Pragmatic philosophy in the United States is one of the most influential philosophical currents in the United States, appearing at the end of the nineteenth century with three typical representatives: Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey (Margolis, J, 2002). The highlight of this school lies in its practical approach to philosophy, emphasizing the value of the application of knowledge in human life. In the entire system of pragmatic thought, the question of truth plays a central role, because the concept of truth not only has an epistemological meaning but also guides the way people think and act in practice. Since its inception, pragmatic philosophy has challenged the traditional notions of Western philosophy, which have mainly focused on ontological and epistemological issues (Biesta, G, 2021). Pragmatic philosophers do not focus on finding the origin of the world or determining an absolute truth, but on the practical possibilities of thought in human life. Therefore, according to them, truth is not an abstract concept but something of practical value, helping people achieve their goals through actions.

Although Peirce, James, and Dewey differ in their approaches, all three philosophers agree that truth is not a fixed entity, existing independently of man, but is determined through its effectiveness in practice. It is this approach that makes the fundamental difference between pragmatic philosophy and many other philosophical schools.

#### ***3.1 Charles Sanders Peirce's conception of truth***

Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of truth, the founder of pragmatism, represents a unique approach in which truth is not seen as an absolute or immutable entity, but as the result of a purposeful process of thinking (Ochs, P., 1992). Peirce closely linked truth to belief, arguing that it arises from the effort to eliminate doubt in the human mind. According to him, an idea can only be considered "true" if it produces clear and comprehensive practical effects in reality. To clarify this view, Peirce developed

"pragmatic maxim", a core principle that asserts that the meaning of a concept is determined only through the specific practical consequences it brings about. In other words, if an idea does not lead to any verifiable effects in reality, it has no philosophical or scientific value.

Unlike traditional notions of truth as a fixed objective truth, Peirce saw truth as the product of a continuous scientific process. He argued that truth was not something that could be achieved instantly or permanently, but rather a goal that people worked towards through testing, experimenting, and adjusting their beliefs. For Peirce, beliefs served as the basis for human action. He argued that people needed strong beliefs to guide their behavior and make decisions in their daily lives. However, he did not require these beliefs to accurately reflect objective reality. Instead, philosophy, according to Peirce, should help people develop beliefs that were strong enough to act on, even if they were not absolutely true.

This view of Peirce laid the foundation for later concepts of the utility of truth, developed by William James and John Dewey. If Peirce focused on linking truth to the scientific process and its practical consequences, James and Dewey expanded on this idea by emphasizing the value of truth in serving practical human purposes. For Peirce, truth is not a final destination, but a continuous journey in which skepticism is replaced by trust through experience and verification. This approach not only shaped pragmatist philosophy, but also profoundly influenced the way we understand the relationship between thought, action, and reality in the modern world.

### ***3.2. William James's conception of truth***

If Peirce focused on the scientific method of determining truth, William James was interested in the practical application of knowledge in life. According to James, truth does not have a fixed value, but changes according to each specific situation. He argued that an idea can only be considered truth if it brings practical and valuable benefits to the user.

James developed this view in his work *Pragmatism* (1907), in which he asserted: "Truth is the best functioning of our experience" (Moore, E. C., & Hurlbert, R. B., 1966). This means that the standard of truth is not conformity with an objective reality, but the ability to help people solve problems in life. Truth, according to James, is not an immutable entity but can always be adjusted based on the effect it brings. This is also one of the most controversial points in pragmatic philosophy, which holds that truth can flexibly change according to human goals.

### ***3.3. John Dewey's conception of truth***

John Dewey developed pragmatic philosophy into instrumentalism, in which he emphasized that knowledge and thinking are not merely beliefs or usefulness, as James asserts, but also a continuous cognitive process in which thought must be tested and adjusted based on actual experience (Riga, F., 2020). Dewey argues that truth is not a transcendental entity that exists independently of man, but is the

product of experience and experimentation (Shook, J. R., 2000). He said: "Knowledge is not a reflection of objective reality, but a tool that helps people regulate their actions in the environment (Habermas, J, 2015).." This view of Dewey has expanded the scope of application of pragmatic philosophy to many different fields, especially education and democracy, making pragmatic philosophy an important part of American social life.

The concept of truth in pragmatic philosophy can be seen as a continuous process of development, from Peirce to James to Dewey. While Peirce grounded itself on pragmatism, James systematized and concretized the concept of truth by associating it with utility, Dewey continued to expand and identify truth with instrumentalism.

Peirce asserted that truth must be judged on the basis of the actual effect it brings. James concretizes this view by emphasizing that what benefits and helps people achieve success is truth. Dewey, who inherited and developed the ideas of his two predecessors, defined truth as a tool that helps people solve practical situations, emphasizing that the correctness of an idea is not absolute, but depends on the ability to solve problems in a specific context. However, pragmatic philosophy is also not immune to its limitations. The identification of truth with practical effectiveness can lead to extreme relativism, in which each individual may have a different standard system of truth. This can make it difficult to identify a common frame of reference to assess the correctness of scientific and ethical knowledge.

In addition, while pragmatic philosophy places great emphasis on the scientific and empirical method of verifying truth, pragmatists tend to deny the objective standard of truth, arguing that truth is merely personal gratification and success in action. This represents a subjective and somewhat one-sided position, especially in defending the interests of the bourgeoisie in capitalist society.

The question of truth in pragmatic philosophy has many important contributions, but it is also inevitable that there are limitations. This school has brought a new approach, emphasizing the practicality of knowledge and the impact of thought on human life. However, when considering this issue, it is necessary to have a balanced view, both absorbing the rational points of pragmatic philosophy and overcoming the irrational points so that it can be effectively applied in modern philosophical and scientific research.

#### **4. The concept of truth in American pragmatist philosophy**

Identifying truth with practical effect is a core feature of the concept of truth in American pragmatic philosophy, forming its foundation and emphasizing the effectiveness of action. As a result, some scholars describe it as a philosophy centered on action. This explains why pragmatic philosophy has become a defining trait of American culture. Its significant influence on Americans and their society stems from how the concept of truth addresses life's practical challenges to enhance human reality. It focuses on answering how to think and act effectively, usefully, and successfully. Notably, pragmatic

philosophy, particularly its concept of truth, aligns closely with American culture and lifestyle, making it widely accepted as an intrinsic philosophy deeply embedded in society. Its impact extends beyond the United States to many countries worldwide, serving as clear evidence of the value of this concept and pragmatic philosophy as a whole.

The basic values of the concept of truth in American pragmatic philosophy can be summarized in the contents that attach importance to reality, emphasize effectiveness in action, criticize the speculative concept of truth, and affirm subjective dynamism in the process of realizing truth (Davidson, D., 1990). That value does not stop at the theoretical aspect, it is also a practical affirmation. The reality of America is a land that proves that a philosophical school that knows how to solve the problems of the reality of life will have great power and influence. This is very true to the concept of truth in American pragmatic philosophy.

It can be affirmed that the main characteristic of the concept of truth in pragmatic philosophy is the emphasis on effective action; This has certain rational elements, meeting needs, aspirations, desires for freedom, creativity and the desire for change; especially the importance of individual creative achievements is shown in usefulness and success. It has brought certain values to people and society. However, also from the concept of too much emphasis and absolutization of effectiveness, the usefulness of action has led to certain limitations. Pragmatic philosophy in general, the concept of truth of pragmatic philosophy in particular, cannot solve the relationship between the common and the particular, between the efficiency of the individual and the effect for the social community. Of course, in comparison with the concept of truth of Marxist-Leninist philosophy in general and the practical category in particular, we see more clearly the values and limitations of the concept of truth in American pragmatic philosophy.

Truth is a fundamental problem in cognitive reasoning. The concept of truth of this school of philosophy is an attempt to find a new interpretation, different from the traditional conception of the nature of truth. The unique and new concept of pragmatic philosophy on the issue of truth has caused many conflicting opinions, agreeing yes, opposing, praising yes, criticizing yes. However, we cannot deny the influence of pragmatic philosophy on American society in particular and on countries around the world in general. That influence is in two directions, both in a positive direction and in a negative direction; There was even a time when people equated pragmatism with pragmatic lifestyles. The reason for such a great influence is precisely the question of the true value pursued by pragmatic philosophy, or the interpretation of the concept of truth of this school of philosophy.

When we talk about America, the American people and America's strength in the modern world, we are talking about pragmatic philosophy - a philosophy that is considered the "spiritual specialty of the American people", which is considered the most effective tool to help America assert its might (Ratner,

S., 2019). Americans worship pragmatic philosophy as they worship the truth of survival in a multi-ethnic, multicultural nation. From C. Peirce's pragmatic maxim, truth lies in future usefulness to human goals, W. James has developed into the concept that truth is effective, what is useful is truth (Apel, K. O., 2001). For J. Dewey, truth is a well-founded affirmation, that affirmation is based on effectiveness, which has the effect of helping people to be satisfied and successful in solving problematic situations. Of the three American pragmatic philosophers, C. Peirce's view emphasizes the theory of meaning more than the doctrine of truth. He was the one who laid the foundation for the entire theory of pragmatic philosophy of truth. W. James's views on the question of truth are most fully and completely expressed. J. Dewey was the one who developed the theory of truth in the theory of instrumentalism. Identifying truth with usefulness becomes the fundamental view of pragmatic reasoning about truth.

The concept of truth of pragmatic philosophy has limitations, besides there are certain values (Dewey, J., 1908). The value of pragmatic philosophy when discussing the issue of truth lies in the criticism of the limitations and mistakes of philosophical philosophy, considering truth as eternal and immutable values. In this respect, pragmatic philosophy is justified in holding that truth is only relative and must be corrected frequently when the grounds for its existence have changed. However, denying the absoluteness of truth is a wrong view. Pragmatic philosophy deals with the practical problem, the conformity of the concept with "reality". On this point, pragmatic philosophers have been faithful to their fundamental view that conformity with reality is not conformity with the objective world, but the conformity of a part of the world with the interests of man. It can be said that this view of pragmatic philosophy has denied the objective standard of truth; considering the truth purely subjective, which is the satisfaction of human interests. The emphasis on the perception of truth as a process that is validated and effective in practical life has shown that pragmatic philosophy attaches great importance to practical issues in cognition; view cognition as a dialectical process that is corroborated by practical effectiveness. American pragmatic philosophers uphold the dynamic and creative role of the subject in the process of realizing the truth, because after all, human beings as subjects are considered the source of creativity and power in cognition and improvement of the world. or man is the measure of himself and of all things. Naturally, their mistake is that their understanding of reality is nothing more than a purely subjective experience of human beings for the purpose of benefiting human beings.

#### 4. Conclusion

It can be said that pragmatic philosophy was born, existed and developed as a theoretical system that is suitable for American society in particular and the characteristics of Western society in general. Studying the concept of pragmatic philosophy of truth helps us have a basis for comparison and contrast with the concept of truth of modern Western philosophical currents and other philosophical trends.



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