

Pragmatism

What is Pragmatism?

There is a way to go forward. There is a way to define things and values without sticking to any one dogmatic belief.

The answer is to maintain a methodology for your life that allows you to constantly update yourself along with the very methodology you use.

With pragmatism, you are using a higher order to organize how you recycle methodologies, holding a self-determined and clear goal as the highest priority around which you organize your decisions.

Philosophy, to some, is about answering questions like: Is there a world outside? Or are we in a simulation?

Pragmatism, a branch of philosophy, would answer every question with another: Does the answer to this question change how I will act in the future?

Pragmatism is about concluding the next course of action based on the currently known variables. The only worthwhile questions are those whose answer affects what we do with our lives. Pragmatism says the distinction is only necessary when it affects how you choose to act in the world. And I take that one step further, to say that the path to answering these deep questions should be guided by the comparable value of the outcome in your life each different answer would elicit.

When you are trying to figure out the answer to deep questions, you should look to how each possible answer would affect your life - and choose the answer that gives you the best life.

The nihilist life-disaffirming ideologies currently fighting for purchase in the world cannot prevail if we replace vapid nothingness with purpose and meaning. Living our own lives can be fulfilling and life-changing for millions who will later join or support the cause we are presenting/spearheading here.

Step by Step

How to move forward

If you think there is no way of deeming the value of something, you have never made a decision in your life. To choose implies knowledge of at least one variable to choose a position on.

We do well to be open to change, but must maintain some things at any point in time in order to move forward. In this way, we jump from ground to new ground, able to leave previously used notions behind.

We must maintain reference to at least one thing as we move from one lilypad of understanding to the next. But equally, we do not need to retain loyalty to any thought longer than it serves us.

I am a pragmatist. I believe we owe it to ourselves to do the best we can for what we care about based on the current information we have and also to constantly derive new ways of gaining new information and processing such information. So I say:

My philosophy allows for good and bad as they relate to real values like health and well-being. It is directedness, as a philosophy. It gives a way to imagine the best categorization of topics. Pragmatism does not limit reality but instead works with what is possible.

Spiritual Origins: The Eightfold Path

Lately I noticed that the Eightfold Path turns out to mirror my philosophy well, but I am confused because these are born of the Four Noble truths, which are themselves potentially misleading unless taken with a grain of salt.

Four Noble Truths state, more eloquently than this:

1. Life is suffering
2. The cause of suffering is craving
3. The end of suffering comes with an end to craving
4. There is a path which leads one away from craving and suffering

It's not hard to see where a pragmatist would take issue with the first clause. The second clause seems to dig a deeper hole, problematizing what should be seen as a behavior caused by internal distress - as if to define the sufferer by their ailment. I had come to pragmatism from a place of utility - I had been studying many world religions, focusing on eastern, pagan, and native American, for my entire life at that point and was dismayed to spend any time at all in a college philosophy course focusing on utilitarianism, as barbaric as that philosophy can get.

Pragmatism seemed to be the more rational sibling to this approach - lead by a simple rule of "finding the best in the moment" - acknowledging that every situation had more factors at play than could be pinned down. Pragmatism, to me, described an approach rather than a concrete doctrine - aka something that I might tire of down the road.

I'm not saying this definitively as an expert on the topic of the four noble truths, but as these truths appeared to me on the first, second, and third evaluations, and through all the understandings resonating throughout my past 12 years of philosophical inquiry, they have remained untrue to me, or at least unreasonable for me to advise a person to imagine as true, if that person was on a search for happiness.

I see reality as the direct result of our ability to comprehend what we perceive and that it is both real (to an extent) beyond us, deserving respect as something we cannot claim to fully comprehend - and that simultaneously we are way more intimately connected to what happens on a large and small scale in the world around us.

When I went back to college the third time, I wrote several papers that were rough, culminating sketches of a philosophy I had developed years previously in a series of revelatory experiences where I saw a new geometry of ideas unfolding before me that led me to fully understand pragmatism as the crux of my philosophical contribution. I called it "directionality": to take responsibility for the fact that we can discern good from bad in whatever way we choose and then take actions in relation to that goal.

I realized that the Taoist doctrines I had found to be true and taken as wisdom my entire life were actually a dangerous direction/goal I could fall into. The pure balance does not include discernment between good and bad.

I wrote a paper called Actualization in Dogen where I addressed these concerns and found an answer to only one of these concerns in one Zen Buddhist teacher, Dogen's, ideas. He said that all persons are buddhas choosing to walk in zazen or blissful meditation on life itself.

Zen, when I reexamined Buddhism as an adult, was more appealing to me than Mahayana because of concepts like "immediate enlightenment" and how Nagarjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, and the koans, described reductions of seemingly essential concepts into nothingness. This reduction process, at least, coincides with one level of my philosophy: namely the routine destruction of old structures to make way for new methods of discerning enlightenment based on new ways of interpreting past actions and future actions, similar to the "mindfulness"

described in the eightfold path. I just never confronted more fully, until now, the question left unanswered within this eightfold path: What does this look like when we take it to action in our lives and outer social interactions?

I tried to like Dogen for his concept of Shusho, or the nonduality of practice and enlightenment, but even then I was adding a whole new dimension to these zen concepts - I was positing that there was one duality that did serve us to devote our lives to - that of better vs not better. the problem is not that some negative is needed to create positive, but

How can we follow truth knowing that our actions lead to harm?

I came to my philosophy with a question: how to maintain a determined opposition to the ideologies of determinism and escapism. Where I admired Zen and many other spiritual philosophies in their ability to leave the actual prescription of action for the practitioner/observer of the religion to ascertain for themselves, though it seems to me now I was being too forgiving of this omission. In other papers, I wrote at the time, with names like "We Should Not Deny Life: Against Renunciation", I described a pragmatic philosophy based on taking responsibility for actions and assessing your current understanding on an ever-advancing meter of greatness.

When we go forward and choose to make our livelihood, do we consider the largest sense of how that affects our larger community and thus, our ultimate happiness? Connection is a huge part of life.

Right mindfulness is that you always are mindful to take a look for what in your process and thus your results has to be tended to. It looks back to the first 6 tenets with the knowledge that only constant improvement makes this possible. Every new plateau of understanding requires an entire reworking of the steps that follow.

And right concentration would point to where you put your attention.

Right View or Right Understanding: Insight into the true nature of reality

Right Intention: The unselfish desire to realize enlightenment

Right Speech: Using speech compassionately

Right Action: Using ethical conduct to manifest compassion

Right Livelihood: Making a living through ethical and nonharmful means

Right Effort: Cultivating wholesome qualities and releasing unwholesome qualities

Right Mindfulness: Whole body-and-mind awareness

Right Concentration: Meditation or some other dedicated, concentrated practice

How would we treat our fellow man if we trusted one another as we would fellow-buddhas? Violence is never a decision that follows from voluntary interactions. Someone who was not acting voluntarily would not be inviting others to be voluntary with them. And that would lead quickly to them being dealt with.

I don't think anything has the power to destroy us all. The more we are personally empowered, the more we have the opportunity and ability to defend ourselves and swarm like bees

Voluntaryism is a conviction that nobody has the right to aggress upon another person, which excludes self-defense.