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**Discorso del Prof. Frank Granger**

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## **THE CONTRIBUTION OF PRAGMATISM TO THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY**

The philosophic movement generally known by the name of Pragmatism, suffers by a certain ambiguity in the statements of its supporters. Consequently, the critics of Pragmatism have been led to depreciate the importance of the movement for the history of philosophy. I do not write as a pragmatist but as one who has gained something from pragmatism and therefore as a friendly critic. The critic should have some standard of comparison, which is generally recognised, even if not generally accepted. I propose, therefore, to examine pragmatism and its opposite idealism in the light of the categories and especially the categories of Aristotle.

What are we to understand by pragmatism? I propose to seek an answer in William JAMES « *Meaning of Truth* ». « Pragmatism's originality », we are told, « is in its use of a *concrete* way of seeing. It begins with concreteness and ends there ». (p. 212) Again, « as a pragmatist. I have postulated reality *ab initio* ». (p. 195). Any one who is familiar with the rich and concrete expositions of this lamented writer, will accept these statements of his method. And it is from these statements that I shall start. Unfortunately, these statements are contradicted in the same book. « I begin *with the abstract* notion of an objective reality. I postulate it ». A little more use of the despised law of contradiction, would have saved James from making conflicting statements in this way. However there is a danger lest we should be drawn from the main current of our discussion by inconsistencies of this kind. And I shall

presume that *human experience is founded upon the intuition of the real*. From this principle there follow the consequences enumerated in the first two quotations.

It is of no avail to appeal to *introspection* as ordinarily understood. For introspection consists in treating what is not real as if it were. For example, we can perceive a tree and in so doing we have an intuition of the reality of the tree. But when we proceed to introspection, we separate the several aspects of the tree (so far as they are presented) from the instance in which they are embodied. That is to say, we generalise them. We form ideas of them. It is doubtful therefore whether the intuition of reality, can gain in clearness by bringing it under any other category than that which is disclosed in the intuition itself. I shall therefore presume the category of reality. The other categories which disclose themselves to introspection, are so to speak « hypostasised », treated as if they alone were real. Now it is against this misuse of the categories that WILLIAM JAMES protests « In concrete thinking the universal is not the ground for the concrete particular » (op. cit., p. 263). In other words, the attributes which we mark off by abstraction, depend upon the ultimate subject of the judgment in which abstraction takes place.

And this brings us to *subsumption* upon which the method of idealism, in nearly all its phases, is based. In subsumption the only categories which are immediately involved are those of the subject, *hoc aliquid*, and the predicate which is usually a quality. That is to say, the method of idealism deals with reality under only two categories and inverts the proper relation between the universal and the singular. « The essence of subsumption » says Mr. BOSANQUET, *Knowledge and Reality*, 272, « is that it only works with the category of subject and predicate ».

The idealist, therefore, who has thus cut himself off from reality by his very assumption, can only occupy himself with the deductions from the universals which he posits. His criterion of truth is no longer correspondence with reality, but the internal consistency of his subject matter. In the light of the contradiction which we found in WILLIAM JAMES' exposition, it is unfortunate that the idealist should seem to him to « arrive at sheer helplessness by uncritical applications of the law of contradiction ». *Mind*, New Series, 50, 262.

For the idealist, with his partial application of the categories, has firm grasp upon the principle by which knowledge is advanced: namely that we must approach reality

piecemeal in order to understand it. The methods of the sciences, both positive and regulative, proceed upon the assumption that we can detach some aspect or portion of reality from the whole of reality in order to understand it the better. The mathematician assumes points, lines, planes, in order to deduce from his assumptions, a geometry which shall partly interpret reality. In distinguishing, however, between the reality of which we have an intuition and the objects which we hypostasize by abstraction, I do not mean to hand over even this latter class of objects as non-existent, «merely ideal». But this point does not concern our present discussion and may be reserved. All that it is necessary to point out now, is that not only mathematics which some might claim as purely ideal and subjective construction, but also such sciences as physics and chemistry and even psychology, disregard reality as a whole in order the better to understand a part. What was said a short time since about introspection will indicate the limitations even of psychology. In emphasising the universal, the sciences emphasise the abstract, that which is limited, that which falls short of concrete reality. Thus it appears that the very limitation of the methods of idealism, enables ideas to work not only in the mental, but in the objective world generally. From this stand point therefore idealism, with its emphasis upon the universal and abstract, is justified upon the principles of pragmatic method.

Nay more: the abstract method is indispensable towards the complete pragmatic method. Only by moving away from reality as a whole, by dwelling upon part of reality, has idealism made it possible to pass from the first unthinking intuition of reality, by way of abstraction, to the fuller apprehension of reality. Where the idealist, often, makes the mistake, is that when he gains something by his method of abstraction, he proceeds onward in the same direction further away from reality in the proper sense. And now we can indicate in a sentence the great contribution which pragmatism makes towards the philosophic movement. To the categories of quality, quantity, and relation which suffice many idealists, the pragmatist adds the category of action and thereby returns to the second form of the intuition of reality. This, in its turn, furnishes a fresh starting point. Perhaps somebody may say that we have been dealing with a caricature of method such as no idealist employs. Here again there is not the opportunity for a discussion upon a side issue. I will take a single eminent example. Mr. BRADLEY extirpates the ca-

tegory of action from his world, on the ground that the will is not preeminent. He does not fairly meet the alternative, that the will may be something ultimate and yet not preëminent. And this is all that I am concerned now to maintain.

I will bring this discussion to an end by pointing out that later idealists have gone beyond the limits laid down by Plato himself. In the *Sophistes*, 250 b, Movement comes next in order to Being; Likeness and Diversity, which seem to answer to the category of Quality, come in the latter place. If therefore Aristotle is sometimes said to be more of a Platonist than his followers, so, in like manner, it may be suggested with profit that Plato's categories offer more resemblances to those of Aristotle than appears from the idealist tradition which finds its beginning with Plato. The pragmatism therefore that was treated at the Heidelberg Congress by some critics with a certain impatience, has a function to fulfil in the dialectical movement which constitutes the history of philosophy.

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