What pragmatism means, an essay by james provokes: truth's pragmatic view

Revised Argument Outline for What Pragmatism Means

James provokes many questions in his essay What Pragmatism Means. The main question I focused on was pertaining to truth. That is, are there truths in the world, or are we just clinging to what seems rational, and if there are truths, how do we go about finding them? I understand that he wrote an entire essay on the pragmatic view of truth, however, this essay proposed the vagueness of truth first. By this I do imply that truth is an ambiguous word.

In this essay James says that pragmatists do not associate themselves with truths. " He [a pragmatist] turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power" (Menand 97). James goes on to say that pragmatists " turn away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins" (Menand 97). In short, a pragmatist's job is to understand the world through simply what he can see as concrete and certain without any speculation.

James answers the question as this to show the practicality of pragmatism. He wishes to highlight that pragmatists only seek answers and not more questions. For, what is the purpose of seeking an answer if it only provokes a more complex question? Eventually, we burry ourselves so deep in questions that we forget what the original question was and this causes a regress of understanding. If we always look towards an absolute causal answer to everything we will find that there is no such truth.

Personally, I feel as though this answer that truth is malleable, yet we should only accept what we know for certain is begging the question. If pragmatists only believe what is certain to them, they will barely know anything at all because the world as we understand is bound up in theoretic concepts. For instance, electricity is a theory, but I am not walking around in a rain storm with a twenty foot iron rod attached to my forehead. Even more so, pragmatists are represented as not dealing with vagueness, but how does one come to learn anything if they do not start from vagueness? This would suggest an a priori understanding of things. However, James explicitly states, that this is not where pragmatists come from. James' view of the pragmatists, as seen in this essay, is contradictory to itself.

To me, truth is only the most recent understanding of a concept. To say that we ever completely know something is almost ignorant to the fact that nothing is known to this point in existence. Everything that we claim to know is based on some sort of assumption. As much as we may be rational creatures, we are also assumptive creatures. Our nature is to look at things and create sense out of them, whether we know the facts or not.

For example, take a look at mathematics. When graphing something we use a series of points. These points signify the exact location of a given existence on a plane. However, when you break it down, you will see that any given point is stretching across some sort of distance. Now, how could it be that a point stretches a distance? As assumptive animals, we must simply just infer that this point is as exact as we can hope it to be. Of course, a pragmatist

would say that this is your usual philosopher looking way too far into things. Unfortunately, we understand the world through assumptions and questions.

This has a lot to do with our lives. Every person you meet is searching for truth to some extent. The most difficult thing is that even when you find something that may pose as truth; you have no idea as to whether or not the truth you found is the absolute truth. I believe James portrays the opinion that we can only know what is for certain in a weak way and this will cause some people to fall of the boat for him.

So, this essay finishes where everyone is always at. That is, no closer to the understanding of truth, but slightly warmer to the idea that we may have to settle without it.