

SCIENCE AS CULTURAL PRACTICE

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1. Introduction:

The problem of science today and the need for new (pragmatist) philosophy of science

Science is the key phenomenon in the contemporary world.

Science itself is a problem — not only the solution of all human problems.

How do we see science?

The pragmatist conception of science as cultural (or sociocultural) practice.

(or sociocultural) practice

2. The pragmatist conception of practice(s): the practical starting point

- The *pragmatist concept of practice* is an expression of a pragmatist concept of **human being as a practical being**.
- According to pragmatism, everything humans do is a kind of a practice, and in particular, a kind of social practice – all human existence is practical as well as social.
- **John Dewey**: a “**practical enterprise**”: “practical in its proper vital meaning is nothing more nor less than the whole conduct of life with respect to the medium, physical and cultural, in which one lives” (Dewey, 2012. *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, 218).
- The “**practical starting point**” (PSP) in pragmatism – the pragmatist “principle of practice” is anti-dualistic and non-reductionist.

2. The pragmatist conception of practice(s): functionality

- “One major characteristic of pragmatist thought is that pragmatists turn their attention to human practices and habits. Philosophical views and concepts are examined in such practical, experiential terms. However, this is **not to say that practice is “prior to” theory**; rather no sharp dichotomy between theory and practice is presupposed in the first place. Even the most scientific and philosophical matters are examined in the light of their potential connections with human practical action.”

(Pihlström, 2011. The Continuum Companion to Pragmatism, 2).

- If there is any meaningful priority of practice, it “is neither in temporality nor in ontology but in **functionality**. Practice is a test of a theory’s value for our practices or habits, which, after all, are constitutive of our lives”

(ibid., 38).

2. The pragmatist conception of practice(s): **transactionism**

- What, then, is practice according to pragmatism?
- There are three concepts (at least) that can serve as the foundation for the pragmatist philosophical theory of practice: *experience*, *habit*, and *transaction*.
- I contend that the most promising option for the pragmatist philosophy of practice is the concept of *transaction*.
- **Transactional ontology** is the approach according to which all that exists is what it is on account of its role within the **web of transactions** between **social agents** and their environment, as well as among **social agents** themselves.

2. The pragmatist conception of practice(s): intellectual practice

- **Human activities** – scientific research, artistic creation, management planning, political negotiation, pedagogical instruction, spiritual meditation, and many others include – labeled as “**theorizing**”.
- In their social practical contexts, they represent “**intellectual practices,**” to which “immaterial labor” is inherent.
- **Theory** is better understood as a kind of practice:
 - science (knowledge production) is scientific practice,
 - education (knowledge dissemination) is educational practice,
 - art (beauty production) is artistic practice, etc.
 - all kinds of “**creative intellectual practices**”.
- Human thought and knowledge can be reconceptualized in terms of social practices.

3. Scientific practice as cultural practice: 2 forms of practices based on 2 types of transactions

- What is science?
- The pragmatist philosophical understanding of science as practice (social and cultural)
- All socio-cultural practices have two basic (ontological) forms:
 1. Practices, in which humans are in causal transactions with nature – transactions between humans and nature (primarily nonlinguistic),
 2. Practices, in which humans are in mutual meaningful transactions between themselves – transactions between humans and humans (primarily linguistic).
- The concept of scientific practice itself also has two basic forms:
 1. Scientific practices that involve and inquire into causal transactions with natural reality (natural and technical sciences),
 2. Scientific practices that involve and inquire into meaningful transactions with socio-cultural reality (social and human sciences).

3. Scientific practice as cultural practice: culture

- Science is **embedded** in culture, their relationship is internal, not external – **science in culture**.
- Culture is a **part** of every science-as-practice – **culture in science**.
- One important characteristic of this pragmatist philosophy of science-as-cultural practice is ***historicism***.
- Another – and the most important – characteristic is ***value-ladenness* and *normativeness*** of science-as-cultural practice.

4. Conclusion: Science as cultural value

- What is all science good for?
- The goals of science are the goals it takes on from and **within culture** (or cultures) and its (their) **values**.
- “Has the progress of the sciences and arts – that is of culture – contributed to the moral progress of humanity?”
- **Without understanding and describing science as cultural practice**, there is no way for us to reply.