

physical inquiry is to introduce some change in order to see what other change ensues; the correlation between these changes . . . constitutes the definite and desired object of knowledge."²⁷ He made clear that he thought that there was only one valid scientific method, and it was the method used both in laboratories and in industries. "Moreover, there is no difference in logical principle between the method of science and the method pursued in technologies."²⁸

At any rate, James and Dewey took what they thought was the scientific method from the limited arena of applied science and gave it universal application as *the* method. They attempted to make experimentation into a way of life. Ideas and concepts were conceived, in this context, as a scientist was believed to conceive of hypotheses, that is, as instruments of change. As James put it,

*Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest. We don't lie back upon them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid.*²⁹

²⁷ John Dewey, "The Quest for Certainty," *The Golden Age of American Philosophy*, Charles Frankel, ed. (New York: George Braziller, 1960), p. 414.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 414-15.

²⁹ James, "What Pragmatism Means," *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Dewey spells out the implications of this belief:

. . . Here it is enough to note that notions, theories, systems . . . must be regarded as hypotheses. They are to be accepted as bases of actions which test them, not as finalities. . . . They are tools. As in the case of all tools, their value resides not in themselves but in their capacity to work shown in the consequences of their use.³⁰

As tools, then, ideas are relative to the uses to which they are put. If the point does not emerge, it must be stated: pragmatists are relativists.

John Dewey Spells It Out

The importance of pragmatism for social reform was made abundantly clear in the numerous works of John Dewey. The indications are that Charles Sanders Peirce was interested in technical philosophy rather than reform. William James was more concerned with the psychology of belief than with social reform. It was left to Dewey, then, to apply pragmatism to ameliorative reform. He is best known as an educational reformer, but he was much concerned with all sorts of reform. He may well have been the central figure in the promotion of reformism in America.

³⁰ Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 145.

Dewey openly advocated that philosophy should be reoriented so as to perform a social function, that is, to make over men and society. Too long, he thought, philosophers had pretended to have some special method for arriving at truth, to be concerned with Reality beyond reality. The time had come for philosophy to come out in the open and get on with the task it had been covertly performing all along. "Philosophy which surrenders its somewhat barren monopoly of dealings with Ultimate and Absolute Reality will find a compensation in enlightening the moral forces which move mankind and in contributing to the aspiration of men to attain to a more ordered and intelligent happiness."³¹ More bluntly, and in the form of rhetorical questions, he proclaimed what he conceived to be the real end of philosophy:

. . . But would not the elimination of these traditional problems permit philosophy to devote itself to a more fruitful and more needed task? Would it not encourage philosophy to face the great social and moral defects and troubles from which humanity suffers, to concentrate its attention upon clearing up the causes and exact nature of these evils and upon developing a clear idea of better social possibilities; in short upon projecting an idea or ideal

which . . . would be used as a method of understanding and rectifying social ills?³²

Despite the appearance of caution in formulating the ideas, there should be no doubt that Dewey thought philosophy should perform a melioristic function.

Reshape the Environment

In sum, then, the pragmatists had denigrated and repudiated traditional philosophy. They held forth the vision of a universe in a continuous state of flux. Such order as existed would have to be wrought by man, and no order would be final or complete. Man's task was to reshape and remake himself and his environment. There were no pre-existing rules — no fixed principles, no enduring laws, no underlying order — to guide or restrain him in his endeavor. Traditionalists had been wrong in believing that there were static natural laws; naturalists had been wrong in thinking there were forces-as-laws governing development. Pragmatists affirmed a radical new freedom — the freedom to reshape reality according to how they would have it be. The method for operating in this flux was to be pragmatism, the method of continual experimentation in moving toward their indefinite goals.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 124.