



Whatever works

Description

Pragmatism has a bad name in politics. Whether or not by avowed allegiance many on the political spectrum will claim they subscribe to a no-nonsense pragmatism. Pragmatic politicians advocate practical solutions rather than adherence to an ideology.

In more innocent times, 2016, in the lead up to the US presidential election, commentator Christopher Scalia placed Trump in the camp of the pragmatists, along with Clinton and Obama. The ideologue was the left-leaning Bernie Sanders.

Philosophical pragmatism makes its appeal to practical application as the benchmark for truth. (See post [Pointlessness](#)). This maxim gets distorted at the hand of politicians in at least three ways.

- Truth is whatever works for the politician and his/her orbit. We see now, if it wasn't evident before, that Trumpian pragmatism focuses on whatever works for Trump. Philosophical pragmatism has various antidotes to narcissism, not least its requirement that the [Maxim of Pragmatism](#) operates in the social sphere.
- Short-termism. It takes time to test whether a proposition works, and imagination to project into the future. The unimaginative tend *not* to take the long view.
- Utilitarianism. In less imaginative hands, pragmatism easily reduces to utilitarianism, which is basically the view that one seeks out policies and decisions that deliver the greatest good for the greatest number. Amongst the many problems with utilitarianism, the numbers for whom the good is to apply are generally decided in a way that is highly partisan.

I'm reviewing pragmatism as I put the finishing touches on a book *Peirce for Architects* (Routledge). Also see post: [All watched over by Ayn Rand](#).

Reference

- Ryan, Alan (ed). 1987. *John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham: Utilitarianism and Other Essays*. London: Penguin

- Scalia, Christopher J. 2016. Trump is a pragmatist, too. Thatâ??s the problem. *The Washington Post*, 27 May. Available online: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-is-a-pragmatist-too-thats-the-problem/2016/05/27/398b1044-2106-11e6-aa84-42391ba52c91_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.212f8e44cdc2 (accessed 1 June 2018).



Category

1. Culture

Tags

1. politics
2. pragmatism
3. trump
4. utilitarianism

Date Created

June 2, 2018

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