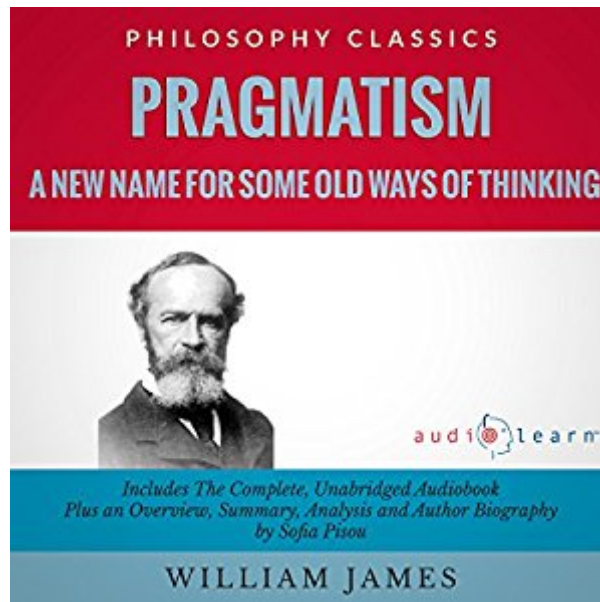


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Pragmatism: A New Name For Some Old Ways Of Thinking



Synopsis

Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking by William James is a unique work in American philosophy. This collection of lectures James himself delivered at the dawn of the twentieth century has been a landmark in the development of the philosophical movement of pragmatism. This summary includes a biography, a key synopsis, and an insightful analysis of the main distinctive points of pragmatism as a mediating system opposed to rationalism and empiricism, the dominant philosophies of that era. Suitable for students and any reader interested in clarifying the basic notions of absolute monism and empirical pluralism and in studying the critical approach to old systems of thought by one of the founders of pragmatism, William James. Includes: A brief background of the author and the work Overview, synopsis, and analysis Historical context, criticisms, and social impact Chapter-by-chapter summary The full narration of the text This audiobook is suitable for students and anyone interested in contemporary philosophy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One is surprised to read in the first two reviews that James's pragmatism is a justification for relativism, nihilism, and even despotic tyranny. This evaluation comes from interpreting James in terms of utilitarianism, rather than understanding what he means by practical consequences. One will hear James claim in *Pragmatism* that, "I am accustomed to put questions to my classes in this way: In what respects would the world be different if this alternative or that were true? If I can find nothing that would become different, then the alternative has no sense." The pragmatic maxim does not invite us to accept the most expedient point of view for the purpose of utility, but instead invites

us to return to the world and experience in evaluating the nature of concepts. Thus, to adopt an example from Peirce, an application of the pragmatic maxim to a concept such as "salt" would lead us to look at the practical consequences of this concept for real world experience such as its hardness, seasoning capabilities, chemical nature, ability to combine with other elements, etc.. In other words, pragmatism, as James agrees, is also an empiricism. Given this, an application of the pragmatic maxim to the political concepts of democracy and fascism would indeed lead us to discern vast differences between the two doctrines and to ultimately reject the former by virtue of its practical consequences. In final analysis, Pragmatism is a curative of philosophical abstractions which would ask us to turn away from empty first principles to see what difference those principles actually make in our actions and lives.

In his 1909 book *Pragmatism*, William James attempts to reconcile the grim eschatology of empiricism with the noble incentives of religion. James sets the stage by defining empiricists as "tough-minded" realists, deducing truth solely from material experience, and rationalists as "tender-minded" religious types, virtuous but prone to dogmatic thinking and an unverifiable belief in oneness. His answer to what he calls this "present dilemma of philosophy" is pragmatism, a bridging doctrine that seeks to value a "scientific loyalty to facts, and willingness to take account of them,...but also the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity, whether of the religious or of the romantic type." James posits that in order for truth to be truth, it must have "cash-value." He states, "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons." Simply put, James feels strongly that there must be a verifiable correlation between what we believe and what we experience. A righteous starting point. *Pragmatism* is a stimulating read, and with his background in psychology, James delves profoundly into the rationalizations of human thinking. Despite its bold statements, the book has a kindly tone, and the author's earnest attempts to convince are without academic snideness or scorn. But as perceptive as *Pragmatism* is at times, James inevitably comes off as just an empiricist with a heart, as sort of a materialist's "compassionate conservative." Robert Frost biographer Jay Parini says that James was "trying to have his cake and eat it too" and inconsistencies do arise.

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