Pragmatism as the Ontological Basis of Charles Sanders Peirce's Thought

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Abstract: : This research aims to examine the ontological foundation in the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce as the originator of pragmatism. The method used is qualitative with a library research approach, analyzing various written works such as journals and books on Peirce's thought. The main findings of the study show that Peirce's pragmatic ontology is built on three fundamental concepts—belief, inquiry, and meaning—that form the framework for understanding reality as something that has practical consequences. Peirce proposed a dynamic ontological view through the categories of trichotomy (Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness) that bridged the gap between idealism and materialism. Peirce's ontological dimension is also seen in his role in reformulating metaphysics and his emphasis on the communal aspect of the determination of reality. In conclusion, Peirce's pragmatism is not just a method of thinking, but rather a comprehensive ontological system that transforms the understanding of reality, truth, and meaning through pragmatic verification that emphasizes the relationship between belief, inquiry, and practical consequences.

Introduction

Pragmatism is one of the understandings in philosophy that has the goal of helping find solutions to problems that exist in the world around us. pragmatism is growing rapidly in all areas of life in America, be it as a perspective on life, social, political, logical, religious and others. The word pragmatic is now often used in everyday life.[1] The term that has the same meaning as 'pragmatic' is practical and realistic. Pragmatism can also be described as, applying a wide variety of thinking and understanding how they can find a way out to realize their goals, for example; being open-minded , flexible, non-radical towards certain dogmas especially in assessing ideas and beliefs to the extent that they have been made to achieve a solution or success.[2]

One of the most important figures and also the originator of pragmatism is Charles Sanders Peirce. Starting from discussing the nature of belief, habits of thought, doubts and beliefs so that he is said to be a person who has a sharp thought construction. In obtaining

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[1] Steven Lybrand, *"American Pragmatism BT - The Palgrave Encyclopedia of the Possible"* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 1–16, doi:10.1007/978-3-319-98390-5_236-1.

[2] Wasitohadi Wasitohadi, "Pragmatisme, Humanisme Dan Implikasinya Bagi Dunia Pendidikan Di Indonesia," *Satya Widya* 28, no. 2 (2012): 175–89, doi:10.24246/j.sw.2012.v28.i2.p175-190.

what the essence of 'belief' is, Peirce assembles several methods, namely persistence, power, a priori and scientific methods. From this series of methods, we will be able to find the nature of belief and clarify the confusion of ideas in it, until finally we are able to find meaning. Belief is between concept and effect, between thought and action as the directing of desires arising from the human mind, which then form concrete actions. However, trust can be undermined by indecision. For Peirce, this is not something detrimental, because through the indecision experienced, the human mind begins to act authentically.[3]

The main problem in this study is the ontological basis of Charles Sanders Peirce's thought. The formulation of the problem in this study is how the ontological basis in the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce. The purpose of this study is to discuss the ontological basis of Charles Sanders Peirce's thought. With this research, it is hoped that it will be able to provide insights and contributions to the study of philosophy both theoretically and practically. As a first step in research, the frame of mind has a significant role in compiling a research. Ontology comes from the Greeks, namely Ontos and Logos. Ontos means 'that which exists' while Logos means 'knowledge'. With that, it can be explained that ontology is the science that explains something that exists. In terminology, ontology is a branch of philosophy that has a correlation with the nature of life or with an existence.[4] Includes everything that exists and may exist. While pragmatism comes from the Greek word Progma which means

action or deed, while according to KBBI, pragmatism is a form of belief that a truth or value of a teaching depends on its implementation in the interests of humans themselves.

Pragmatism is a guideline for the exploration and interpretation of meaning that was first put forward by C.S. Peirce in the 1870s. The embodiment of Peirce's pragmatism is that in order for any statement to be significant, it must have a reasonable significance. Peirce considered a balanced-minded clarification of its importance to be a technique for explaining transcendentalism and aiding logical requests. This has prompted many to respect Peirce's early statement of the conscious mind as a sign of verificationist clarification of significance advocated by coherent positivists.[5]

Regarding previous research, as far as the efforts that have been made by the author have not been found, no specific research has been found discussing similar things. However, there are several studies that have been conducted by experts related to the object of research materials conducted by the author. First, the author found an article in the journal Education and Islamic Institutions Volume 8, No. 2 of 2017 written by Fera Andriani with the title *"Pragmatism: Dismissing Doubts, Strengthening Beliefs."* This article discusses pragmatism fundamentally, pragmatism in the perspective of Charles Sanders Peirce.[6] Furthermore, this article explains that pragmatism can be said to be a new way of thinking or pragmatic thinking means that a problem can be solved practically. Second, the researcher found an article titled *"Charles*

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[3] David Wiggins, "C.S. Peirce: Belief, Truth, and Going from the Known to the Unknown," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary* 24 (1998): 9–29, doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.1998.10717494.

[4] Dewi Rokhmah, "Ilmu Dalam Tinjauan Filsafat: Ontologi, Epistemologi, Dan Aksiologi," *Cendekia: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 7, no. 2 (2021): 172–86.

[5] Falah Riza Zahriyal, "Landasan Filosofis Pendidikan Perspektif Filsafat Pragmatisme Dan Implikasinya Dalam Metode Pembelajaran," *Jurnal Filsafat* 5, no. 2 (2017): 374–92.

[6] Fera Andriani, "Pragmatisme: Menepis Keraguan, Memantapkan Keyakinan," *Syaikhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pranata Islam* 8, no. 2 (2017): 240–49, doi:https://doi.org/10.58223/syaikhuna.v8i2.3163.

Sanders Peirce's Thoughts on Pragmatism." This article was written by Gama Pratama and Sholihan in the Change Think Journal Volume 2, No. 1 of 2023. In this article, Gama Pratama and Sholihan explain for Charles Sanders Peirce that the essential truth is the truth in fact and not just perspective, because the truth that is based on perspective alone depends on what is agreed upon by someone who makes the perspective itself while it is different from the truth that according to the facts is real.[7]

Research Methodology

The method used in this study is a qualitative method by applying the library research method, which is a method that uses the process of reading various written works such as journals and articles as a reference for the writings to be compiled.[8] Sumber data primer yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah berbagai jenis karya tulis (jurnal dan buku) mengenai pemikiran Charles Sanders Peirce. Meanwhile, the secondary data sources use articles, media and documents that have a correlation with the topic of discussion. This research does not require a specific time and place because it is not an experimental research, but a research of thought that is mostly taken from various types of scientific papers such as journals, articles, books and other media.[9]

Results and Discussion
Definition of Ontology

Ontology comes from the Greeks, namely Ontos and Logos. Ontos means 'that which exists' while Logos means 'knowledge'. With that, it can be explained that ontology is the science that explains something that exists. In terminology, ontology is a branch of philosophy that has a correlation with the essence of life or with an existence. Includes everything that exists and may exist. According to Jujun S. Suriasumantri, the main problems that became the barometer of philosophy study were logic, ethics, metaphysics, and politics which were then able to develop to give birth to branches of philosophy with more specific fields of study.[10] Ontology basically discusses the 'existing' nature of science, the nature of the object of knowledge, and the nature of the relationship between the subjects and objects of knowledge. For example, how science when viewed from an ontological perspective is ontology, the discussion is ontology conducting a review and analysis of science also based on whether science is said to exist or not.

This ontology is very important for every individual who needs to concentrate appropriately on it. It is comprehensive about the universe and useful for the field of science study precisely such as physics, humanism, humanities, clinical sciences, social sciences and other sciences. Then, according to Anton Bakker (1992) ontology is the most general science. Ontology is one of the main fields of philosophy that discusses the essence of the truth of everything that exists.[11]

Definition of Pragmatism

Pragmatism comes from the Greek language, namely pragma or pragmatikos which means an action or deed, so pragmatism can be said to be the science of action. In reference to the word philosophical, realism is the center of reasoning to decide the value of information

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[7] Gama Pratama and Sholihan, "Pemikiran Charles Sander Pierce Tentang Pragmatisme," *Change Think Journal* 2, no. 1 (2023): 92–107.

[8] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed (Thousand Oaks: CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 179.

[9] Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2017), 337.

[10] Rokhmah, "Ilmu Dalam Tinjauan Filsafat: Ontologi, Epistemologi, Dan Aksiologi."

[11] William J Callaghan, "Charles Sanders Peirce: His General Theory of Signs," *Semiotica* 61, no. 1/2 (1986), 123-161.

based on its pragmatic use. The grounded use of what is implied is not a recognition of true truth based on training in any case, something that can satisfy the abstract excesses of an individual.[12]

Pragmatism argues that the purpose of seeking information is not only to understand the information itself, but also to understand it in society and the world. Information is not just an object of understanding, but also something that can provide benefits and the value of common sense in expanding honesty for society and the world. Practicality emphasizes that to assess considerations, thoughts, speculations, approaches, and articulations is not enough if it is only coherent and flawless in its plan, but whether the information can be proven, implemented, and won in terms of bringing benefits.[13] Thus, the truth of all things is tested through whether or not it can be implemented and realized in bringing benefits, progress and benefits.

Pragmatism was initially a philosophical movement in America, which emerged around the 19th century AD. Its originator was Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Then, it was continued by several other figures, namely William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952). The theory of pragmatism makes functional values a barometer of the concept of truth. Therefore, something is considered clear if it is possible to provide benefits to humans and society. The truth for pragmatists is paramount. A thought or hypothesis is decided to be wrong if it does not provide any benefit at all.[14]

Pragmatism Charles Sanders Peirce

He was born in 1839 in Cambridge, and died in Millford on 19 April 1914. Peirce was an intelligent figure in philosophy and other fields of science that was not limited to philosophy alone, but to chemistry, physics, and geology. So he is said to be a person who also contributed greatly to improving aspects of science at that time, even still useful today. The works he produced were able to reach 12,000 pages, and some that were archived or unpublished reached 80,000 pages in the form of handwriting. The discussion in his work includes mathematics, physics, economics and other fields of science. So, the scope is very wide.[15]

Peirce formulated his main idea in his essay entitled "The Fixation of Belief." In 1877 and the second was titled "How to Make Our Ideas Clear." In 1878. Around 1903 the two writings were combined in a single chapter entitled "My Plea for Pragmatism." Where, the rumor is that he used to have plans to publish it but until now the work has never been published. With him Peirce chose both themes, it is evident that there is a deep awareness of what is significant for philosophy to explain the implications of knowledge in human life. Why Peirce involves the words 'belief' and 'ideas' is because only humans are capable of having beliefs and creating ideas. These two things become one in human beings themselves. Thus, human life is closely related to beliefs and ideas.[16]

According to Peirce, pragmatism is not a form of reasoning, but a way of dealing with reasoning. The development of practicality in the way of thinking is certainly not a methodical way of thinking like rationalism or idealism. Of

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[12] Saidah Andi Hafid, "Pemikiran Essensialisme, Eksistensialisme, Perenialisme, Dan Pragmatisme Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam," *Al Asas* 3, no. 1 (2015), http://ejournal.iainpalopo.ac.id/index.php/asas/article/view/165.

[13] Yuni Pangestutiani and Aina Noor Habibah, "Pragmatisme John Deweydan Korelasinya Terhadap Ajaran Islam," *Spiritualis: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Tasawuf* 8, no. 1 (2022): 112–16.

[14] Anastasia Jessica Adinda S., *Menelusuri Pragmatisme: Pengantar Pada Pemikiran Pragmatisme Dari Peirce Hingga Habermas* (Yogyakarta: PT Kanisius, 2015).

[15] Pratama and Sholihan, "Pemikiran Charles Sander Pierce Tentang Pragmatisme."

[16] Atkin Albert, "Charles Sanders Peirce: Pragmatism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d.

course, this pragmatism is a new movement that colors the world of philosophy, Peirce seeks to bring a new world in philosophy that is more useful and practical.[17]

Belief, Inquiry dan Meaning

Belief

Broadly speaking, Peirce explains how we can achieve a belief in something, in which there must be at least three basic properties: First, the existence of a proposition. Second, there is an assessment. Third, there is a habit in the mind. So, with belief, it will produce a habit of mind. Peirce also distinguishes between doubt and belief in this is what makes Peirce unique, he does not accept doubt or dim because it falls into the category of doubt, thus belief is different from trust because belief This means that we believe (firmly, clearly) not just believe. If in the term Descartes used it is called 'clear and distinct'.[18]

Inquiry

According to Pierce, a correct belief in reality can be obtained through analytical strategies by using the procedures of perception, testing, thinking, and purpose in the context of translation. So truth is the result of endless searching, testing, and elaboration of reality.

Meaning

Charles Sanders Peirce argued that one will not find logical truth and how to find reality itself if he does not have the importance of true belief. Through his important hypothesis put forward by Charles Sanders Peirce, one can understand the view that must be taken to explain his thoughts. Therefore, meaning theory

is an essential part of the logic of research. Meaning theory is a hypothesis that truly upholds the mention of observable facts and the exploration of something. This hypothesis urges scientists to quickly discover the true meaning of what they have investigated. In any case, it had to be discussed again whether he was really sure that he would find a definite interest once he finished his exploration.[19]

The three fundamental concepts in Peirce's thought—belief, inquiry, and meaning— are not merely separate elements, but form a coherent ontological unity in his pragmatism. This triadic relationship forms the basic structure that explains how knowledge and reality are interrelated in Peirce's thought. As Misak asserts, these three concepts form the basis for realism without metaphysics—an ontological view that acknowledges objective reality without having to be trapped in metaphysical definitions that transcend experience.[20]

Belief in Peirce's ontological framework is the starting point and goal of the investigation process. However, in contrast to the psychological understanding of beliefs, Peirce places beliefs in a pragmatic context as a habit of acting. Peirce explains that belief is something with which a person is ready to act. Thus, belief has a real ontological status because of its manifestation in actions and behavior. As Bernstein explains, Peirce's ontology avoids reducing belief to a mere mental state and emphasizes its practical dimension in its interaction with the world.[21] Meanwhile, inquiry in Peirce's ontology plays the role of a dynamic

[17] Nidawati Nidawati, "Keterkaitan Dan Implikasi Pragmatisme Dalam Pendidikan," *Jurnal MUDARRISUNA: Media Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam* 12, no. 2 (2022): 423, doi:10.22373/jm.v12i2.14782.

[18] Gabriele Gava, "Christopher Hookway, The Pragmatic Maxim: Essay," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* V, no. 2 (2012): 0–6, doi:10.4000/ejpap.563.

[19] Andriani, "Pragmatisme: Menepis Keraguan, Memantapkan Keyakinan."

[20] Cheryl Misak, "Peirce on Vital Matters," *Cognitio – Revista de Filosofia*, no. 3 (2002): 150–74.

[21] Richard J Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhdvj.

process that mediates between doubt and belief. Doubt is not a desired state, but rather a stimulus that triggers research to achieve a more stable and satisfactory state of belief. In Peirce's thought, inquiry is not just an epistemological activity, but has an ontological dimension because it is through this process that reality is revealed and realized.[22] Investigations reflect the ever-evolving nature of reality and are never fully revealed at one time.

This ontological dimension of inquiry is strengthened by Peirce's view that inquiry is not an individual process, but a communal one. Peirce asserts that the scientific method as the highest form of inquiry can only operate in the context of a community that shares sharedstandards and practices. The ontological implication is that reality itself has a social dimension and cannot be understood regardless of the community of investigators who seek to reveal it.

The concept of meaning complements the ontological triad by affirming the relationship between signs, objects, and interpretations. Peirce states that the meaning of a concept is nothing but the totality of its practical consequences. This statement has profound ontological implications because it implies that the reality of an object is not separate from the effects it can produce in experience. Short explains that Peirce's theory of pragmatic meaning offers a middle ground between nominalism and naïve realism by asserting that universalia has reality but only to the extent that it impacts concrete experience.[23]

The interconnection between these three concepts creates a dynamic and procedural ontological model. Belief is never static but is always open to revision through inquiry when faced with new doubts. Meanwhile, meaning provides criteria to assess the validity of beliefs and direct the inquiry journey. As discussed by De Waal, Peirce's ontology is not foundational in the traditional sense, but fallibilis—always evolving and never reaching finalization. Peirce himself illustrates the relationship between these three concepts in the metaphor of a web of beliefs that is constantly being adjusted through new experiences. Then, he describes knowledge as a structure that does not stand on an indisputable foundation; All of its points can be revised if new experience demands it. This metaphor shows that Peirce's pragmatic ontology is contingent and experiential, not absolute and a priori.[24]

Thus, the triad of belief, inquiry, and meaning not only forms an epistemological but also ontological framework in Peirce's thought. These three concepts together articulate a view of reality that is inseparable from the process of knowing and acting, while offering an alternative to the subject-object dualism that is dominant in the Western philosophical tradition. Furthermore, this triad shows that Peirce's pragmatism, far from being a mere method or approach, is a coherent and comprehensive ontological system.

Ontology of Pragmatism

As explained above, in general, ontology is a science that discusses something that exists. Meanwhile, pragmatism is an understanding in which something can be said to be true if it is able to provide benefits as long as there is no conflict between the term and reality, nor does it contradict the representation, interpretation and object. That is, not only correspondent but also

[22] Ignas K Skrupskelis, *"Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society,"* ed. Armen T Marsoobian and John Ryder 4, no. 1 (April 30, 2007): 417–24, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40321196.
[23] T L Short, "The Development of Peirce's Theory of Signs," in *The Cambridge Companion to Peirce*, ed.

Cheryl Misak, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 214–40, doi:DOI: 10.1017/CCOL0521570069.009.
[24] Cheryl Misak, "Peirce on Vital Matters."

coherent.[25] Therefore, the 'that is' according to Peirce's pragmatism is that which provides benefits. However, there is a difference between Peirce's pragmatism and pragmatism in general, which is a simple example: when someone steals from a mini market , if the person is visibly benefiting from the stolen product. However, for Peirce thisincident was contrary to his pragmatic understanding. Because for Peirce, the right goal should be obtained from the right way or way.[26]

Peirce's pragmatic ontology brings a unique dimension to the understanding of the 'existing' as something real and useful. According to Peirce, reality cannot be understood through abstract conceptions alone, but must refer to practical consequences that can be verified through experience. In his work 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear' Peirce asserts that the meaning of concepts lies in the totality of their practical consequences.[27] The difference between Peirce's pragmatism and pragmatism in general lies in the understanding of these practical consequences which for Peirce are not merely utility, but relate to the enduring truth.

The ontological dimension in Peirce's pragmatism is reflected in his theory of universal categories that he calls Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. These three categories form the ontological framework that underlies all of his thought. Firstness refers to the quality or possibility of being purely realized; Secondness is concerned with actual existence and causal relations; while Thirdness concerns the dimensions of order, law, and representation.[28] Through this tricotomy, Peirce offers a dynamic

ontological view in which reality is not a static entity, but rather a process that continues to evolve through the interaction of the three categories.

Peirce's pragmatism establishes an ontological basis that differs from the Cartesian tradition that sharply distinguishes between mind and matter. For Peirce, such dualism is irrelevant because reality must be understood through its influence on experience and action. As Hookway asserts, Peirce's ontology gave birth to the modified concept of scholastic realism, in which universalia has an objective reality but is manifested through particular manifestations in the world of experience.[29] This approach allows Peirce to bridge the gap between idealism and materialism by positioning reality as a continuous interpretive process.

The uniqueness of Peirce's pragmatic ontology is also evident in his attitude towards metaphysics. In contrast to logical positivism that rejects metaphysics, Peirce sees metaphysics as a field that can be enriched through the scientific method. In 'The Architecture of Theories,' Peirce reveals that metaphysical principles must be tested through their consequences in experience.[30] Thus, Peirce's ontology is not anti-metaphysical, but rather reformulates metaphysics to conform to pragmatic verification standards.

Another important factor in Peirce's pragmatic ontology is the role of community in determining reality. Peirce argues that truth and reality must be understood in the context ofan infinite community of investigators moving toward a long-term consensus.[31] This communal

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[25] Rokhmah, "Science in Philosophical Review: Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology."

[26] Lybrand, "American Pragmatism BT - The Palgrave Encyclopedia of the Possible."

[27] Charles Sanders Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," dalam *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (1878): 286-302. Juga dimuat dalam *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne dan Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958), 5.402.

[28] Gava, "Christopher Hookway, The Pragmatic Maxim: Essay."

[29] Christopher Hookway, *Peirce* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 106.

[30] Charles S Peirce, "THE ARCHITECTURE OF THEORIES," *The Monist* 1, no. 2 (April 30, 1891): 161–76, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27896847.

[31] Cheryl Misak, *Truth, Politics, Morality: Pragmatism and Deliberation* (London: Routledge, 2000).

approach makes Peirce's ontology not only individual but also social, where reality is formed through a never-ending process of collective inquiry. This shows that Peirce's pragmatism is a profound ontological basis because it combines individual and social dimensions in understanding what exists and what is real The existence of something useful there is 'existing' in the real world not in the world of ideas, it's just that the concept exists that we can directly feel and know its existence and there is also something that must be paired between empirical data with each other in order to produce or know its existence in simple terms: the smoke is not only a sign of the existence of fire, Even if it does come from a flame, the fire produced also does not only come from a bonfire but many other possibilities that we can explore until we finally know what the smoke comes from or is caused by it. Moreover, what 'exists' in pragmatism is something that goes on and changes constantly (not constantly) unlike monism which believes that there is only one substance in this universe.

Conlusion

Charles Sanders Peirce's pragmatism provides a unique ontological foundation for understanding reality as something that has practical consequences in human experience. Through three fundamental concepts—belief, inquiry, and meaning—Peirce succeeded in building a framework of thought that bridged the gap between idealism and materialism by placing reality as a continuous interpretive process. Peirce's pragmatic approach does not reject metaphysics, but rather reformulate it to conform to the standard of pragmatic verification. Peirce's pragmatic ontology also emphasizes the social dimension of reality through the role of community in the determination of truth, which makes his views not only individual but also collective. Thus, Pierce's pragmatism is not just a method of thinking, but a comprehensive ontological system that transforms the understanding of reality, truth, and meaning.

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