

The Metaphysics of Pragmatism

By Sidney Hook

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Considered by some the most controversial American philosopher of contemporary times, SIDNEY HOOK (1902-1989) was infamous for the wild swing in his political thought over the course of his career, starting out as a young Marxist before the Great Depression and ending up a vehement anti-Communist in his later years. The Metaphysics of Pragmatism-Hook's first work, originally published in 1927-is something of a malicious joke on the philosopher's part, one he readily acknowledges in his introduction, a bringing together of one discipline, that of metaphysics, with the one generally regarded as its polar opposite, that of pragmatism, for the purposes of rescuing the second. Though not a political work at all-except, possibly, one of academic politics-this is nevertheless a fascinating introduction to this notorious figure. In its expression of the author's "passionate moral interest in the creative power... of human thinking," it may, perhaps, begin to lend some understanding to the shifts in his own thinking that characterized his work.

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Editorial Review

Review
Sidney Hook played a unique and often controversial role in contemporary American philosophy. Among the chief heirs to the pragmatic tradition, this student of John Dewey illustrated, perhaps more than any other philosopher, the application of pragmatic intelligence to ethical, social, and political issues. But since its founding in the 19th century by Charles Sanders Peirce, the pragmatic school had been criticized as anti-metaphysical and its focus on scientific method and critical inquiry viewed as undermining one of the very foundations of traditional philosophy. First published in 1927, Sidney Hook wrote The Metaphysics Of Pragmatism as his doctoral dissertation to juxtapose the terms "metaphysics" and "pragmatism" thereby showing that the pragmatic method cannot begin to help us solve human problems without holding to a particular view of how the world is arranged both physically and conceptually. As his groundbreaking (and career launching) study shows, pragmatism has an interactive dimension in which human problems are contingent on the ways we structure our questions and design methods for finding solutions, both of which can change (and the implied metaphysic evolves) as inquiry uncovers new information about ourselves and the world. Though in his "early years" at the time of The Metaphysics Of Pragmatism, Hook's skill in writing and persuasion is quite evident in this classic work from one of America's leading pragmatists. -- *Midwest Book Review*

From the Back Cover
Since its founding in the nineteenth century by Charles Sanders Peirce, the pragmatic school had been criticized as antimetaphysical and its focus on scientific method and critical inquiry viewed as undermining one of the very foundations of traditional philosophy. In the Metaphysics of Pragmatism, written as his doctoral dissertation and first published in 1927, Hook began his distinguished philosophical career by juxtaposing the terms "metaphysics" and "pragmatism" to show that the pragmatic method cannot begin to help us solve human problems without holding to a particular view of how the world is arranged both physically and conceptually. But this does not imply that pragmatism holds to a traditional, rigid metaphysic. Rather, as Hook's ground-breaking study shows, it has an interactive dimension in which human problems are viewed as contingent on the ways we structure our questions and design methods for finding solutions, both of which can change - and the implied metaphysic evolve - as inquiry uncovers new information about ourselves and the world.

About the Author
Sidney Hook is Senior Research Fel-low at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace.

John Dewey(1859 1952) was anAmerican philosopher, psychologistandeducational reformerwhose ideas have been influential in education and social reform. Dewey was an important early developer of the philosophy ofpragmatismand one of the founders offunctional psychology. He was a major representative ofprogressive educationandliberalism.In 1894 Dewey joined the newly foundedUniversity of Chicago(1894 1904) where he developed his belief in an empirically based theory of knowledge, becoming associated with the newly emerging Pragmatic philosophy. His time at the University of Chicago resulted in four essays collectively entitledThought and its Subject-Matter, which was published with collected works from his colleagues at Chicago under the collective titleStudies in Logical Theory(1903). During that time Dewey also initiated theUniversity of Chicago Laboratory Schools, where he was able to actualize the pedagogical beliefs that provided material for his first major work on education, The School and Social Progress(1899).In 1899, Dewey was elected president of theAmerican Psychological Association. From 1904 until his

retirement in 1930 he was professor of philosophy at both Columbia Universityand Columbia University'sTeachers College.In 1905 he became president of theAmerican Philosophical Association. He was a longtime member of theAmerican Federation of Teachers.

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