



The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority

John Patrick Diggins

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For much of our century, pragmatism has enjoyed a charmed life, holding the dominant point of view in American politics, law, education, and social thought in general. After suffering a brief eclipse in the post-World War II period, pragmatism has experienced a revival, especially in literary theory and such areas as poststructuralism and deconstruction. In this critique of pragmatism and neopragmatism, one of our leading intellectual historians traces the attempts of thinkers from William James to Richard Rorty to find a response to the crisis of modernism. John Patrick Diggins analyzes the limitations of pragmatism from a historical perspective and dares to ask whether America's one original contribution to the world of philosophy has actually fulfilled its promise.

"Diggins, an eminent historian of American intellectual life, has written a timely and impressive book charting the rich history of American pragmatism and placing William James, Charles Peirce, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Sidney Hook, and Richard Rorty in their times and in the light of contemporary concerns. The book also draws on an alternative set of American thinkers to explore the blind spots in the pragmatic temper."—William Connolly, *New York Times Book Review*

"An extraordinarily ambitious work of both analysis and synthesis. . . . Diggins's book is rewarding in its thoughtfulness and its nuanced presentation of ideas."—Daniel J. Silver, *Commentary*

"Diggins's superbly informed book comprises a comprehensive history of American pragmatic thought. . . . It contains expert descriptions of James, John Dewey and Charles Sanders Peirce, the first generation of American pragmatists. . . . Diggins is just as good on the revival of pragmatism that's taken place over the last 20 years in America. . . . [A] richly intelligent book."—Mark Edmundson, *Washington Post Book World*

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