

Book Review

Peirce/Marx: Speculations on Exchanges between Pragmatism and Marxism, by E. San Juan Jr.

Noe M. Santillan**I. Pursuing Peirce**

In the preface, E. San Juan Jr. (ESJ) traces how he came across with pragmatism through William James' association with the Anti-Imperialist League with Mark Twain as its most popular personality. ESJ exhumes the progressive projectile of pragmatism from Peirce through James. He puts his readers on notice that his deliberation joins together the disciplines of cultural studies, comparative politics and philosophy so as to bestir academic activists in political impasse.

In the foreword, ESJ vindicates Peirce from the prevailing perception of the latter's pragmatism. He confirms prior pronouncement pertaining to Peirce as a critique against "colonial conquest" and "imperial violence." ESJ's observation about a "self-rectifying discourse of the community's pooled intelligence" bears resemblance to his prior pronouncement on the role of Filipino intellectuals as the articulators of collective consciousness of the masses. He elucidates on the relationship between the dialectics and Peirce's semiosis, and in the fullness of time, to "social praxis and collective action." In citing Richard J. Bernstein, he notes how pragmatism corresponds to Marxism, e.g., "social practice, critical common sense, secular experience, and the imperative of empirical testing." Hence, he makes a potent path in deliberating between semiotics and dialectics.

In the main text, ESJ starts his deliberation by benchmarking with earlier discussants of this unfamiliar terrain between Peirce's pragmatism and Marxism. He notes some Marxist critics attacking pragmatism and failing to anticipate some sort of analogues between the two. He points out the earlier readings of pragmatism as a "philosophy of imperialism," a some kind of "subjective idealism," and pertinent to positivism. He then throws light on the core concepts of Peirce's pragmatism especially how it accommodates materialist dialectics. Putting Peirce's pragmatism in parallel with Marxist method of historicizing epistemology challenges the modalities of Peirce to find their meaning not only through conjectures but also in praxis. Unlike prior perceptions of pragmatism, ESJ squeezes out the progressive elements from Peirce's pragmatism that can be effectively employed by Marxists awaiting the revolutionary ruptures and the socialist rapture. In pointing out Peirce's perception of potentiality, ESJ relates Peirce's idea with Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, Gramsci's organic intellectuals, and Lenin's avant-garde. ESJ relates these

three with Peirce's epistemology, ethics, and politics. Just as Peirce was hinting at the US colonial conquest of the Philippines, it is now the intent of this review to posit the purposeful part of Peirce's pragmatism in a Philippine predicament of pursuing pragmatism.

II. Peirce's Power and Possibilities

ESJ rescues American pragmatism from American capitalism and in doing so Peirce can now become purposeful in Global South.

Peirce is not as famous as James and John Dewey; however, ESJ provides a good reason for re-reading Peirce and makes pragmatism a purposeful principle for the struggling masses. In an era ruled by "globalized predatory capitalism," ESJ shows how to make pragmatism purposeful by *unconcealing* its Marxist material, for without which, Peirce's principle is susceptible to the powers that be. ESJ presents Peirce's pragmatism pursuing possibilities. As an anti-imperialist intellectual, Peirce's pragmatism transforms from problem-solving of parochial predicament to greater causes, e.g., the Philippine national democratic movement.

Without historicizing knowledge and the pertinent materialist lens, pragmatism is susceptible to the imperialist interest. ESJ elucidates the gravity of Marxism to pragmatism differentiating from Dewey's deliberations and shows that James' pragmatism cannot withstand the driving ideology of mass consumption. The utility of James' pragmatism is for private or individual agenda – vulnerable to becoming conformist.

With ESJ's elucidation, Peirce's pragmatism may pave the way to link theory and praxis rather than the accustomed argument of "doing" yet without sharp and scientific scrutiny of society brought by idealist imperial interests.

In the Philippines, many educators and educators-to-be still commit the mistake of reducing pragmatism to "doing," i.e., doing what the powers that be require from them as employees – ignoring what ESJ enunciates as the role of Filipino intellectuals in the national democratic movement. Both educators and educators-to-be tend to become acquiescent amid the aggression of imperial interests in the Global South. Instead of becoming neoconservatives and instruments of imperial interests, educators and educators-to-be may become purposeful pragmatists, but without a Marxist method, pragmatism dawns upon praxis without a strong theoretical foundation like a butchered chicken running without its head; hence, inclined to individualism through subjectivism and practical utility – acquiring the semblance of neo-positivism. Whereas Peirce's pragmatism is dragged to positivism and idealism, ESJ pierces Peirce to Marxism and shows how to approach Peirce and navigate the discourses with pragmatism. Moreover, ESJ clarifies the confusion

between Peirce's points and those of Harry K. Wells, i.e., reducing pragmatism as a "philosophy of imperialism," and making accusations about Peirce as a positivist. On top of this dubiety, Peirce is not known in many Philippine academic institutions. Many educators and educators-to-be are not familiar with him. ESJ does not only introduce Peirce but also elucidates on how purposeful is the latter's pragmatism. Moreover, ESJ extracts Peirce from the misreading and accusations. At least, any academic activist may have a good start in perceiving pragmatism through Peirce.

Pragmatism, without ESJ's interfacing with Marxism, may be useful to the powers that be. Today, imperial physical violence no longer shows in a Cold War-like aggression ala Vietnam but in subtle carrying out of imperial interests, e.g., misreading Peirce and misappropriating pragmatism. Pragmatism cannot escape the force of "historical specificity" of any political, economic, and/or cultural context which any pragmatist cannot overlook, but with ESJ, explicating the dialogue with Marxism, pragmatism may now be purposeful in a Global South predicament. With a materialist method, pragmatism can be historically sensible to imperial aggression and to the mobilizations of the masses in the Global South. ESJ's elucidation enunciates Peirce's pragmatism as a purposeful principle. For the Left leaning academic activists, *Peirce/Marx* opens up a path to see pragmatism purposeful in a Global South struggle.

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Reference

San Juan, Epifanio. 2020. *Peirce/Marx: Speculations on Exchanges between Pragmatism and Marxism*. Washington, DC: Philippine Studies Center.