

AMERICAN PRAGMATISM AS PORTRAYED IN MIRANDA PRIESTLY CHARACTER IN THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to find out the pragmatism values as portrayed in the character of Miranda Priestly in The Devil Wears Prada movie script. The research method employed is a qualitative method and used philosophical approach to explain pragmatism as an ideology of America. The finding implies that Miranda Priestly has characteristics such as practical, realistic, instrumental and materialistic indicating that she is a pragmatic person.

Keywords: character, movie, pragmatism, values

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America is one big nation which influenced by various values and philosophical movements. Pragmatism is considered as a view of life that most adopted in The United States and it is believed as one of the biggest influential values and philosophies in the characteristic of American society. Pragmatism known as the names of Instrumentalism or Experimentalism is one word that is interrelated with numerous other values such as individualism, liberalism, and idealism. Charles S. Peirce originally formulated Pragmatism through his writing, but it was brought to a wider audience afterward by William James and John Dewey. Pragmatism started to become a tendency in American culture since the nineteenth century. Charles S. Peirce is considered as the founder of pragmatism when he published his article in a paper *How to Make Your Ideas Clear*, contributed to the *Popular Science*. He called his approach as Pragmatism.

Pragmatism can be described as an action, attitude, concept, principle, philosophy and view of life that use the practical consequences or bearings as the standard for determining whether a value is true or false. In a simple word, pragmatism is about verifying assumptions, theories or ideas by putting them to be tested in reality through everyday experience and practice. According to Pierce (1878), the best way to discover the meaning of many ideas is by putting them to an experimental test and observing the results. Meanings appear not by intuition but by experience or experiment. If an idea cannot be tested by its effects or consequences in reality, then it is meaningless. Meanwhile, James (1907) defined pragmatism as the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts. Dewey (1970) described pragmatism as Instrumentalism or Experimentalism and he prefers to see

experience as an affair of the intercourse of a living being with its social and physical environment. Therefore, experience is one of the keywords in Dewey's pragmatic theory.

Besides those philosophers of the founding pragmatism, some of the pragmatism researchers have an opinion about pragmatism as well. Some of them who have studied about pragmatism as well such as Shields (1998)., he stated that Pragmatism is the philosophy of common sense ... It is the philosophy of common sense, because actions are assessed in light of practical consequences. In addition, Garrison (2000) described pragmatism as the union of artistic creation with theoretical knowledge in the context of concrete practice. According to *Collins Dictionary online* (2012), pragmatism is described as: 1). Action or policy dictated by consideration of the immediate practical consequences rather than by theory or dogma; 2). The doctrine that the content of a concept consists only in its practical applicability; 3).The doctrine that truth consists not in correspondence with the facts but in successful coherence with experience

In research of Yudoprasetyo (2004) discussed about pragmatism philosophy of William James in his nonviolent essay, *the Moral Equivalent of War*. Her analysis is that William James' *the Moral Equivalent of War* as an American nonviolent essay tried to channel the contradictory thought between war (violence) and peace (nonviolence). In Wilson (2001) the purpose of this research is

to determine the extent to which the principles and practices of American pragmatism can be found in the art and science of performance measurement as practiced in the State of Texas. In the result of his research, it seems clear that pragmatic principles are indeed implied, if not acknowledged, in the area of performance measurement. It also seems clear from the research that has been done by Wilson that there is a significant presence of basic pragmatic principles in the everyday practice of performance measurement in Texas.

This research is related to Yudoprasetyo's and Wilson's researches, as this research of *American Pragmatism as Portrayed in the Character of Miranda Priestly in The Devil Wears Prada*. As we know, *The Devil Wears Prada* is an American novel written by Weisberger (2003) which reflects the principles of American society characteristics such as ambitious, hard worker, perfectionist, individualist and idealist that have a tendency to be pragmatist as well. The story tells about an intelligent woman, Andrea Barnes, who struggles hard to do her first job in New York right after she graduated from her university. She works as one of the personal assistants of a famous fashion magazine's head editor who has really difficult personalities to deal with. Related to the research above, this research described about pragmatism of American society as well, in which this research focused on the character of Miranda Priestly since American

Pragmatism is strongly portrayed in the character of Miranda Priestly. The character of Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada* has a practical personality and a great deal of self-rule that have tendencies to pragmatism of American society. This research aims are to determine and explain how the characteristics of American pragmatism reflected in one of the character *Miranda Priestly* in the movie script *The Devil Wears Prada*.

METHODS

This research used qualitative methods in which it provided the answer to the objectives of this research and to determine the existence of pragmatism in the character of Miranda Priestly in Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada*.

The Devil Wears Prada originates from a best-selling novel written by Lauren Weisberger published in 2003 by Doubleday. It has been made into a movie in 2006 by 20th Century Fox. The movie script of *The Devil Wears Prada* written by Peter Hedges in 10th March 2005 is used as the primary source of the data in this research. The writer preferred the movie script to be analyzed because the pragmatism values in the character of Miranda Priestly in the movie are stronger and more focus than in the novel.

In data collection procedures, 1). Reading thoroughly the movie script *The Devil Wears Prada*; 2). Identifying which expressions in the movie script *The Devil*

Wears Prada that contain of pragmatic values; 3). Finding out the characteristic of pragmatism based on some philosophical experts such as Charles Sanders Pierce, William James, and John Dewey. In data analysis procedures, 1). The data were categorized based on the characteristic of pragmatic values; 2). Analyzing each characteristic by explaining with the corresponding dialogue from the movie script *The Devil Wears Prada*; 3). Drawing up a conclusion. The writer compiled the results of all study activities and came up with a conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Relationship between Pragmatism and American Society

Pragmatism is a value that captures the characteristic of American attitudes which are a preference for practical success over principles, a materialistic approach to life, and an instinct for achieving a satisfying successful financial in life as William James referred to this as the truth's cash-value in experiential terms (James, 1907). Pragmatism captured an approach in achieving success in the terms of cash-value, and it is especially reflected in the conduct of American society.

Pragmatism has grown out of certain aspects of living through experiences, especially in the aspects of American life. Pragmatism is an expression of the mood of America, of the emphasis ideas and value in

getting things done and on satisfactory consequences of each individual. Wells (2012) in his thesis entitled *Pragmatism as American Exceptionalism*, from its founding fathers to its professional philosophers, pragmatism has been dominant in America's personality. This is a direct result of the sort of social democracy that is unique to the United States, meanwhile Kloppenberg (1996) in his journal entitled *Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking*, an argumentative study of William James' pragmatism, Kloppenberg said that Pragmatism appeals to many American thinkers as a homegrown alternative to postmodernism that escapes the weaknesses of enlightenment rationalism without surrendering our commitments to the values of autonomy and equality.

Pragmatism is considered as one of the most influential values for American society and as the reason of American's searching for a democracy. Pragmatism has become the only philosophy contained of typical American ideals such as liberalism, optimism, individualism and the realization of American dreams. It is seemed as if pragmatism is the most compatible philosophy for the United States, because American wanted the ideas of being good for something, practical, and significance in reality, which emphasizes the American practicality. Pragmatism has become the reflection of American life which is created by the American society itself. Therefore,

there is a strong connection and relationship between pragmatism and American society because pragmatism represents the point of view of Americans about life and real world. Pragmatism is the realization of beliefs and attitudes of Americans that has great influences to the whole aspects of their life such as in law, politic, economy, culture, and religious activities.

Analysis of Miranda Priestly's Pragmatism

Pragmatism contains of some values such as practical, realistic, instrumental, and materialistic. The character of Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada* is considered as a pragmatic person because she is a kind of person who adopts those values in her life and uses it as the instruments in achieving more success in her business.

Practical Way of Life

Practical way of life has meaning of relating to the actual doing or use of something rather than theory (Oxford, Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2009). People with practical life of view concern more to the actual use rather than the theoretical possibilities.

Being a pragmatic person means believing to an idea that has a practical bearing and has an influence to the real world, therefore a pragmatic person is a practical person as well. In the dialogue above, Miranda does not like to be bothered by the thought of thinking what kind, color, or fabric

of the skirts she needs. She only cares that perfectly done in front of her eyes practically. when she needs it, the skirts have to be

Andy

She said she needs a skirt from Ralph Lauren for the Meisel shoot with Naomi next week.

Emily

Did she say which skirt?

(Andy shakes her head, No)

Did she say what kind?

(No.)

Color? Shape? Fabric?

(No. No. No.)

God I hate it when she does that.

(The Devil Wears Prada movie script, 2005, p.20)

Miranda

Most of it, I don't get at all. What I do get, I don't like. I cannot let you do this to yourself. Or to me. My reputation is on the line here too.

(The Devil Wears Prada movie script, 2005, pp.51)

(She gestures the collection)

Miranda

--is just plain bad. Burn it. Think of something else. I know it will be divine.

(The Devil Wears Prada movie script, 2005, pp.52)

In the dialogue above Miranda rejects all collection of her designer and wants it all being reorganized while not giving the detail of what she wants. She just wants the satisfying results in the end. It definitely shows the typical of a practical person.

Being a Realistic Person

Realistic is defined as 1) Having a sensible and practical idea of what can be achieved, 2) Showing things in a way that is accurate and true to life (*Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 2009).

Thus, being realistic means looking sensible.
forward to reality, being reasonable, and

Miranda

I never thought I would say this, but I see a lot of myself in you. Your sharpness, your focus, your ability to see a move or two ahead. Above all, your dedication.

Andy

Thank you, Miranda.

Miranda

Your father was ill yet you chose to stay and help me and help Runway. That's very admirable.

(The Devil Wears Prada movie script, 2005, p.110)

In the dialogue above, Miranda starts to ignore and even forget about her family's to look herself in Andy and proud of her matter. That's the harsh reality of being a part determination to focus in one thing that is of working society and Miranda's and Andy's more important, her job as Miranda's dedication towards job is considered as being assistant even though it means that she has to realistic

Miranda

The more powerful you get, the more you'll be judged and scrutinized, on display. You'll miss things – vacations, sunsets, moments with your family. Some people in your life will never accept your priorities. Not everyone can withstand that pressure, Andy. But now you know that you can.

(Andy stares at her, blown away by what Miranda is saying.)

And so you know that you can have my life. You can do what I do.

Because you can sacrifice the things that need to be sacrificed.

Andy

But what if I can't do that I mean, what if that's not what I want?

(Miranda looks at her and smiles, and this time, for the first time, her smile is almost maternal.)

Miranda

Don't be silly, Andy. Of course that's what you want. Everyone wants to be me.

(The Devil Wears Prada movie script, 2005, p.111)

Miranda has a realistic point of view in life. She always thinks that we cannot dream as if everything will come to our side itself while we have another thing to keep an eye on. We have to let something go in order to gain something better.

Instrumentalism as Goal of Life

Based on the definition taken from *Collins Dictionary online* (2012), instrumentalism means a system of pragmatic philosophy holding that ideas are instruments that they should guide our actions and can change the world, and that their value consists not in their truth but in their success.

Miranda Priestly loves her job and her current position as the head editor of Runaway so much that she tries to secure her position in any way possible. She does not care whether her way is true or false, as long

as a success is waiting up ahead. As in dialogue above, Miranda tries to intimidate Irv so he will think twice not to replace Miranda from her position in Runaway.

By saying that other fashion magazines desire her, she emphasizes that if she leave Runaway, she will definitely work for them as the enemy of Runaway.

Materialistic Motive of Life

Conceptually, materialistic motive of life is rooted from materialism. According to *Collins Dictionary Online* (2012) materialism is defined as an interest for money, possession, etc, rather than spiritual or ethical values.

It is related to what William James stated that a pragmatic person more concerns with the 'cash-value' and satisfied results more than the process of how it works.

Irv

*Miranda, there's something I'd like to discuss with you and—
(Miranda takes a piece of paper out of her Hermes portfolio and pushes it towards him.)*

Irv

What is this?

Miranda

It's a list.

(Irv looks at the list.)

Miranda

As you know, I have an open invitation from every other fashion magazine in the world... Vogue, Elle, Harper's... And if, for whatever reason, I had to leave Runway...

(Indicates list)

... these are all the designers who have said they will give me first look at their collections, this is the list of photographers who will book time with me first, and these are the top models who will do the same.

(She smiles)

Miranda

You know how I feel about Runway. I intend to be there as long as you'll have me. So my intention is never to use this list. But I do have it.

(The Devil Wears Prada movie script, 2005, p.107)

Miranda

... I grew up reading Runway, Elle, Vogue, sneaking into New York to stand in the back of the shows, soaking it all up.

...

Miranda

When I was hired as Natalie's assistant, I knew I would make it. I knew I would be her someday. That's all I ever wanted to be. The editor of Runway...

(The Devil Wears Prada movie script, 2005, p.96)

Miranda Priestly is a typical of person who will do anything to keep her job, it is not clear the reason of her hard work to maintain her position as the head editor of Runway is because of money or not, however her obsession over Runway and her possessiveness toward her position as the head editor are obviously seen through the dialogue above.

CONCLUSION

Pragmatism is an interesting topic to analyze and these days not only in America, there are many countries that have been influenced by pragmatism value as well, such as England and Indonesia. After thoroughly conducting the analysis of the movie script *The Devil Wears Prada*, the writer concludes that Miranda Priestly has the characteristic of pragmatism such as practical, realistic,

instrumental and materialistic, thus it can be concluded that Miranda Priestly can be classified as a pragmatic person.

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