

Title: American Pragmatism and the Construction of the Universe

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Abstract: Some theoretical physicists, Chris Fuchs among them, take quantum mechanics to go hand in hand with an anti-representationalist account of truth and reality such as that offered by the American pragmatists - William James, Charles Peirce, Richard Rorty, etc. On this view, scientific theories are instruments, rather than mirrors of the real world. In this talk, Iâ€™ suggest that if the quantum physicist is to team up with the pragmatist, heâ€™d do best to join not with James and Rorty, who see the world as radically plastic or malleable. He would do best to join with the founder of pragmatism, Peirce, who argued that a regulative assumption of inquiry is that there is a right or determinate answer to the question at hand. It may look as if the anti-representationalist quantum theorist will be unhappy with this suggestion, but Iâ€™ argue that this would be a mistake. The trail of the human serpent, as James said, is over everything but, as Peirce saw, this does not toss us into the sea of post-modern arbitrariness, where there is nothing to say about what is true and what is real.



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