

WILLIAM JAMES'S CONCEPTION OF TRUTH¹

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¹ *Pragmatism: a new name for some old ways of thinking*. Popular Lectures on Philosophy, by William James (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907). The following article is reprinted from the *Albany Review*, January, 1908, where it appeared under the title "Transatlantic 'Truth.'" It has been criticised by William James in *The Meaning of Truth* (Longmans, 1909), in the article called "Two English Critics."

THE history of philosophy," as William James observes, "is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments." In dealing with a temperament of such charm as his, it is not pleasant to think of a "clash"; one does not willingly differ, or meet so much urbanity by churlish criticisms. Fortunately, a very large part of his book is concerned with the advocacy of positions which pragmatism shares with other forms of empiricism; with all this part of his book, I, as an empiricist, find myself, broadly speaking, in agreement. I might instance the lecture devoted to a problem which he considers "the most central of all philosophic problems," namely, that of the One and the Many. In this lecture he declares himself on the whole a pluralist, after a discussion of the kinds and degrees of unity to be found in the world to which any empiricist may wholly assent. Throughout the book, the distinctive tenets of pragmatism only make their appearance now and again, after the ground has been carefully prepared. James speaks somewhere of Dr. Schiller's "butt-end foremost statement of the humanist position." His own statement is the very reverse of "butt-end foremost"; it is insinuating, gradual, imperceptible.

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A good illustration of his insinuating method is afforded by his lecture on common sense. The categories of common sense, as he points out, and as we may all agree, embody discoveries of our remote ancestors; but these discoveries cannot be regarded as final, because science, and still more philosophy, finds common-sense notions inadequate in many ways. Common sense, science, and philosophy, we are told, are all insufficiently true in some respect; and to this again we may agree. But he adds: "It is evident that the conflict of these so widely differing systems obliges us to overhaul the very idea of truth, for at present we have no definite notion of what the word may mean" (p. 192). Here, as I think, we have a mere *non sequitur*. A damson-tart, a plum-tart, and a gooseberry-tart may all be insufficiently sweet; but does that oblige us to overhaul the very notion of sweetness, or show that we have no definite notion of what the word "sweet-

ness" may mean? It seems to me, on the contrary, that if we perceive that they are insufficiently sweet, that shows that we do know what "sweetness" is; and the same surely applies to truth. But this remark is merely by the way.

James, like most philosophers, represents his views as mediating between two opposing schools. He begins by distinguishing two philosophic types called respectively the "tender-minded" and the "toughminded." The "tender-minded" are "rationalistic, intellectualistic, idealistic, optimistic, religious, freewillist, monistic, dogmatical." The "tough-minded" are "empiricist, sensationalistic, materialistic, pessimistic, irreligious, fatalistic, pluralistic, sceptical." Traditionally, German philosophy was on the whole "tender-minded," British philosophy was on the whole "tough-minded." It will clear the ground for me to confess at once that I belong, with some reserves, to the "tough-minded" type. Pragmatism, William James avers, "can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts." This reconciliation, to my mind, is illusory; I find myself agreeing with the "tough-minded" half of pragmatism and totally disagreeing with the "tender-minded" half. But the disentangling of the two halves must be postponed till we have seen how the reconciliation professes to be effected. Pragmatism represents, on the one hand, a method and habit of mind, on the other, a certain theory as to what constitutes truth. The latter is more nearly what Dr. Schiller calls humanism; but this name is not adopted by James. We must, therefore, distinguish the pragmatic *method* and the pragmatic *theory of truth*. The former, up to a point, is involved in all induction, and is certainly largely commendable. The latter is the essential novelty and the point of real importance. But let us first consider the pragmatic method.

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"Pragmatism," says James, "represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empiricist attitude, but it represents it, as it seems to me, both in a more radical and in a less objectionable form than it has ever yet assumed. A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant and the rationalist temper sincerely given up. It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality, and the pretence of finality in truth"

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(p. 51).

The temper of mind here described is one with which I, for my part, in the main cordially sympathise. But I think there is an impression in the mind of William James, as of some other pragmatists, that pragmatism involves a more open mind than its opposite. As regards scientific questions, or even the less important questions of philosophy, this is no doubt more or less the case. But as regards the fundamental questions of philosophy—especially as regards what I consider *the* fundamental question, namely, the nature of truth—pragmatism is absolutely dogmatic. The hypothesis that pragmatism is erroneous is not allowed to enter for the pragmatic competition; however well it may work, it is not to be entertained. To “turn your back resolutely and once for all” upon the philosophy of others may be heroic or praiseworthy, but it is not undogmatic or open-minded. A modest shrinking from self-assertion, a sense that all our theories are provisional, a constant realisation that after all the hypothesis of our opponents may be the right one—these characterise the truly empirical temper, but I do not observe that they invariably characterise the writings of pragmatists. Dogmatism in fundamentals is more or less unavoidable in philosophy, and I do not blame pragmatists for what could not be otherwise; but I demur to their claim to a greater open-mindedness than is or may be possessed by their critics.

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William James, however, it must be admitted, is about as little pontifical as a philosopher well can be. And his complete absence of unction is most refreshing. “In this real world of sweat and dirt,” he says, “it seems to me that when a view of things is ‘noble,’ that ought to count as a presumption against its truth and as a philosophic disqualification” (p. 72). Accordingly his contentions are never supported by “fine writing”; he brings them into the market-place, and is not afraid to be homely, untechnical, and slangy. All this makes his books refreshing to read, and shows that they contain what he really lives by, not merely what he holds in his professional capacity.

But it is time to return to the pragmatic method.

“The pragmatic method,” we are told, “is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable. Is the world one or many?—fated or free?—material or spiritual?—here are notions either of which mayor may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever

can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other’s being right.” And again: “To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all” (pp. 45-7).

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To this method, applied within limits and to suitable topics, there is no ground for objecting. On the contrary, it is wholesome to keep in touch with concrete facts, as far as possible, by remembering to bring our theories constantly into connection with them. The method, however, involves more than is stated in the extract which I quoted just now. It involves also the suggestion of the pragmatic criterion of truth: a belief is to be judged true in so far as the practical consequences of its adoption are good. Some pragmatists, for example, Le Roy (who has lately suffered Papal condemnation), regard the pragmatic test as giving *only* a criterion;¹ others, notably Dr. Schiller, regard it as giving the actual *meaning* of truth. William James agrees on this point with Dr. Schiller, though, like him, he does not enter into the question of criterion *versus* meaning.

¹ Cf., e.g., Le Roy, “Comment se pose le problème de Dieu,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, xv. 4 (July, 1907), pp. 506, 507 n.

The pragmatic theory of truth is the central doctrine of pragmatism, and we must consider it at some length. William James states it in various ways, some of which I shall now quote. He says: “Ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience” (p. 58). Again: “Truth is *one species of good*, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good, and coordinate with it. *The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons*” (p. 75). That truth means “agreement with reality” may be said by a pragmatist as well as by anyone else, but the pragmatist differs from others as to what is meant by *agreement*, and also (it would seem) as to what is meant by *reality*. William James gives the following definition of agreement: “To ‘agree’ in the widest sense with a reality *can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it as*

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to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed" (p. 212). This language is rather metaphorical, and a little puzzling; it is plain, however, that "agreement" is regarded as practical, not as merely intellectual. This emphasis on practice is, of course, one of the leading features of pragmatism.

In order to understand the pragmatic notion of truth, we have to be clear as to the basis of *fact* upon which truths are supposed to rest. Immediate sensible experience, for example, does not come under the alternative of *true* and *false*. "Day follows day," says James, "and its contents are simply added. The new contents themselves are not true, they simply *come* and *are*. Truth is *what we say about* them" (p. 62). Thus when we are merely aware of sensible objects, we are not to be regarded as knowing any truth, although we have a certain kind of contact with reality. It is important to realise that the *facts* which thus lie outside the scope of truth and falsehood supply the material which is presupposed by the pragmatic theory. Our beliefs have to agree with matters of fact: it is an essential part of their "satisfactoriness" that they should do so. James also mentions what he calls "relations among purely mental ideas" as part of our stock-in-trade with which pragmatism starts. He mentions as instances "1 and 1 make 2," "white differs less from grey than it does from black," and so on. All such propositions as these, then, we are supposed to know for certain before we can get under way. As James puts it: "Between the coercions of the sensible order and those of the ideal order, our mind is thus wedged tightly. Our ideas must agree with realities, be such realities concrete or abstract, be they facts or be they principles, under penalty of endless inconsistency and frustration" (p. 211). Thus it is only when we pass beyond plain matters of fact and *a priori* truisms that the pragmatic notion of truth comes in. It is, in short, the notion to be applied to doubtful cases, but it is not the notion to be applied to cases about which there can be no doubt. And that there are cases about which there can be no doubt is presupposed in the very statement of the pragmatist position. "Our account of truth," James tells us, "is an account ... of processes of leading, realised *in rebus*, and having only this quality in common, that they *pay*" (p. 218). We may thus sum up the philosophy in the following definition: "A truth is anything which it pays to believe." Now, if this definition is to be useful, as pragmatism intends it to be, it must be possible to know that it pays to believe something without knowing anything that pragmatism would call a truth. Hence the knowledge that a certain belief pays must be classed as knowledge of a sensible fact or of a "relation among purely mental ideas," or as some compound of the two, and must be so easy

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to discover as not to be worthy of having the pragmatic test applied to it. There is, however, some difficulty in this view. Let us consider for a moment what it means to say that a belief "pays." We must suppose that this means that the consequences of entertaining the belief are better than those of rejecting it. In order to know this, we must know what are the consequences of entertaining it, and what are the consequences of rejecting it; we must know also what consequences are good, what bad, what consequences are better, and what worse. Take, say, belief in the Roman Catholic Faith. This, we may agree, causes a certain amount of happiness at the expense of a certain amount of stupidity and priestly domination. Such a view is disputable and disputed, but we will let that pass. But then comes the question whether, admitting the effects to be such, they are to be classed as on the whole good or on the whole bad; and this question is one which is so difficult that our test of truth becomes practically useless. It is far easier, it seems to me, to settle the plain question of fact: "Have Popes been always infallible?" than to settle the question whether the effects of thinking them infallible are on the whole good. Yet this question, of the truth of Roman Catholicism, is just the sort of question that pragmatists consider specially suitable to their method.

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The notion that it is quite easy to know when the consequences of a belief are good, so easy, in fact, that a theory of knowledge need take no account of anything so simple—this notion, I must say, seems to me one of the strangest assumptions for a theory of knowledge to make. Let us take another illustration. Many of the men of the French Revolution were disciples of Rousseau, and their belief in his doctrines had far-reaching effects, which make Europe at this day a different place from what it would have been without that belief. If, on the whole, the effects of their belief have been good, we shall have to say that their belief was true; if bad, that it was false. But how are we to strike the balance? It is almost impossible to disentangle what the effects have been; and even if we could ascertain them, our judgment as to whether they have been good or bad would depend upon our political opinions. It is surely far easier to discover by direct investigation that the *Contrat Social* is a myth than to decide whether belief in it has done harm or good on the whole.

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Another difficulty which I feel in regard to the pragmatic meaning of "truth" may be stated as follows: Suppose I accept the pragmatic criterion, and suppose you persuade me that a certain belief is useful. Suppose I thereupon conclude that the belief is true. Is it not obvious that there is a transition in my mind from

seeing that the belief is useful to actually holding that the belief is true? Yet this could not be so if the pragmatic account of truth were valid. Take, say, the belief that other people exist. According to the pragmatists, to say “it is true that other people exist” means “it is useful to believe that other people exist.” But if so, then these two phrases are merely different words for the same proposition; therefore when I believe the one I believe the other. If this were so, there could be no transition from the one to the other, as plainly there is. This shows that the word “true” represents for us a different idea from that represented by the phrase “useful to believe,” and that, therefore, the pragmatic definition of truth ignores, without destroying, the meaning commonly given to the word “true,” which meaning, in my opinion, is of fundamental importance, and can only be ignored at the cost of hopeless inadequacy. 137

This brings me to the difference between *criterion* and *meaning*—a point on which neither James nor Dr. Schiller is very clear. I may best explain the difference, to begin with, by an instance. If you wish to know whether a certain book is in a library, you consult the catalogue: books mentioned in the catalogue are presumably in the library, books not mentioned in it are presumably not in the library. Thus the catalogue affords a *criterion* of whether a book is in the library or not. But even supposing the catalogue perfect, it is obvious that when you say the book is in the library you do not *mean* that it is mentioned in the catalogue. You mean that the actual book is to be found somewhere in the shelves. It therefore remains an intelligible hypothesis that there are books in the library which are not yet catalogued, or that there are books catalogued which have been lost and are no longer in the library. And it remains an inference from the discovery that a book is mentioned in the catalogue to the conclusion that the book is in the library. Speaking abstractly, we may say that a property A is a *criterion* of a property B when the same objects possess both; and A is a *useful* criterion of B if it is easier to discover whether an object possesses the property A than whether it possesses the property B. Thus being mentioned in the catalogue is a *useful* criterion of being in the library, because it is easier to consult the catalogue than to hunt through the shelves.

Now if pragmatists only affirmed that utility is a *criterion* of truth, there would be much less to be said against their view. For there certainly seem to be few cases, if any, in which it is clearly useful to believe what is false. The chief criticism one would then have to make on pragmatism would be to deny that utility is a *useful* criterion, because it is so often harder to determine 138

whether a belief is useful than whether it is true. The arguments of pragmatists are almost wholly directed to proving that utility is a *criterion*; that utility is the *meaning* of truth is then supposed to follow. But, to return to our illustration of the library, suppose we had conceded that there are no mistakes in the British Museum catalogue: would it follow that the catalogue would do without the books? We can imagine some person long engaged in a comparative study of libraries, and having, in the process, naturally lost all taste for reading, declaring that the catalogue is the only important thing—as for the books, they are useless lumber; no one ever wants them, and the principle of economy should lead us to be content with the catalogue. Indeed, if you consider the matter with an open mind, you will see that the catalogue *is* the library, for it tells you everything you can possibly wish to know about the library. Let us, then, save the taxpayers’ money by destroying the books: allow free access to the catalogue, but condemn the desire to read as involving an exploded dogmatic realism.

This analogy of the library is not, to my mind, fantastic or unjust, but as close and exact an analogy as I have been able to think of. The point I am trying to make clear is concealed from pragmatists, I think, by the fact that their theories start very often from such things as the general hypotheses of science—ether, atoms, and the like. In such cases, we take little interest in the hypotheses themselves, which, as we well now, are liable to rapid change. What we care about are the inferences as to sensible phenomena which the hypotheses enable us to make. All we ask of the hypotheses is that they should “work”—though it should be observed that what constitutes “working” is not the general agreeableness of their results, but the conformity of these results with observed phenomena. But in the case of these general scientific hypotheses, no sensible man believes that they are true as they stand. They are believed to be true in part, and to work because of the part that is true; but it is expected that in time some element of falsehood will be discovered, and some truer theory will be substituted. Thus pragmatism would seem to derive its notion of what constitutes belief from cases in which, properly speaking, belief is absent, and in which—what is pragmatically important—there is but a slender interest in truth or falsehood as compared to the interest in what “works.” 139

But when this method is extended to cases in which the proposition in question has an emotional interest on its own account, apart from its working, the pragmatic account becomes less satisfactory. This point has been well brought out by Prof. Stout in *Mind*,¹ and what I have to say is mostly contained in his remarks.

Take the question whether other people exist. It seems perfectly possible to suppose that the hypothesis that they exist will always work, even if they do not in fact exist. It is plain, also, that it makes for happiness to believe that they exist—for even the greatest misanthropist would not wish to be deprived of the objects of his hate. Hence the belief that other people exist is, pragmatically, a true belief. But if I am troubled by solipsism, the discovery that a belief in the existence of others is “true” in the pragmatist’s sense is not enough to allay my sense of loneliness: the perception that I should profit by rejecting solipsism is not alone sufficient to make me reject it. For what I desire is not that the belief in solipsism should be false in the pragmatic sense, but that other people should in fact exist. And with the pragmatist’s meaning of truth, these two do not necessarily go together. The belief in solipsism might be false even if I were the only person or thing in the universe.

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¹ October, 1907, pp. 586-8. This criticism occurs in the course of a very sympathetic review of Dr. Schiller’s *Studies in Humanism*.

This paradoxical consequence would, I presume, not be admitted by pragmatists. Yet it is an inevitable outcome of the divorce which they make between *fact* and *truth*. Returning to our illustration, we may say that “facts” are represented by the books, and “truths” by the entries in the catalogue. So long as you do not wish to read the books, the “truths” will do in place of the “facts,” and the imperfections of your library can be remedied by simply making new entries in the catalogue. But as soon as you actually wish to read a book, the “truths” become inadequate, and the “facts” become all-important. The pragmatic account of truth assumes, so it seems to me, that no one takes any interest in facts, and that the truth of the proposition that your friend exists is an adequate substitute for the fact of his existence. “Facts,” they tell us, are neither true nor false, therefore truth cannot be concerned with them. But the truth “A exists,” if it is a truth, is concerned with A, who in that case is a fact; and to say that “A exists” may be true even if A does not exist is to give a meaning to “truth” which robs it of all interest. Dr. Schiller is fond of attacking the view that truth must correspond with reality; we may conciliate him by agreeing that *his* truth, at any rate, need not correspond with reality. But we shall have to add that reality is to us more interesting than such truth.

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I am, of course, aware that pragmatists minimise the basis of “fact,” and speak of the “making of reality” as proceeding *pari passu* with the “making of truth.” It is easy to criticise the claim to “make reality” except within obvious limits. But when such

criticisms are met by pointing to the pragmatist’s admission that, after all, there must be a basis of “fact” for our creative activity to work upon, then the opposite line of criticism comes into play. Dr. Schiller, in his essay on “the making of reality,” minimises the importance of the basis of “fact,” on the ground (it would seem) that “facts” will not submit to pragmatic treatment, and that, if pragmatism is true, they are unknowable.¹ Hence, on pragmatistic principles, it is useless to think about facts. We therefore return to fictions with a sigh of relief, and soothe our scruples by calling them “realities.” But it seems something of a *petitio principii* to condemn “facts” because pragmatism, though it finds them necessary, is unable to deal with them. And William James, it should be said, makes less attempt than Dr. Schiller does to minimise facts. In this essay, therefore, I have considered the difficulties which pragmatism has to face if it admits “facts” rather than those (no less serious) which it has to face if it denies them.

¹ Cf. *Studies in Humanism*, pp. 434-6.

It is chiefly in regard to religion that the pragmatist use of “truth” seems to me misleading. Pragmatists boast much of their ability to reconcile religion and science, and William James, as we saw, professes to have discovered a position combining the merits of tender-mindedness and tough-mindedness. The combination is really effected, if I am not mistaken, in a way of which pragmatists are not themselves thoroughly aware. For their position, if they fully realised it, would, I think, be this: “We cannot know whether, in fact, there is a God or a future life, but we can know that the belief in God and a future life is true.” This position, it is to be feared, would not afford much comfort to the religious if it were understood, and I cannot but feel some sympathy with the Pope in his condemnation of it.

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“On pragmatic principles,” James says, “we cannot reject any hypothesis if consequences useful to life flow from it” (p. 273). He proceeds to point out that consequences useful to life flow from the hypothesis of the Absolute, which is therefore so far a true hypothesis. But it should be observed that these useful consequences flow from the hypothesis that the Absolute is a fact, not from the hypothesis that useful consequences flow from belief in the Absolute. But we cannot believe the hypothesis that the Absolute is a fact merely because we perceive that useful consequences flow from this hypothesis. What we can believe on such grounds is that this hypothesis is what pragmatists call “true,” i.e. that it is useful; but it is not from this belief that the useful consequences flow, and the grounds alleged do not make

us believe that the Absolute is a fact, which is the useful belief. In other words, the useful belief is that the Absolute is a fact, and pragmatism shows that this belief is what it calls "true." Thus pragmatism persuades us that belief in the Absolute is "true," but does not persuade us that the Absolute is a fact. The belief which it persuades us to adopt is therefore not the one which is useful. In ordinary logic, if the belief in the Absolute is true, it follows that the Absolute is a fact. But with the pragmatist's meaning of "true" this does not follow; hence the proposition which he proves is not, as he thinks, the one from which comforting consequences flow.

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In another place James says: "On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true" (p. 299). This proposition is, in reality, a mere tautology. For we have laid down the definition: "The word 'true' means 'working satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word.'" Hence the proposition stated by James is merely a verbal variant on the following: "On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, then it works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word." This would hold even on other than pragmatistic principles; presumably what is peculiar to pragmatism is the belief that this is an important contribution to the philosophy of religion. The advantage of the pragmatic method is that it decides the question of the truth of the existence of God by purely mundane arguments, namely, by the effects of belief in His existence upon our life in this world. But unfortunately this gives a merely mundane conclusion, namely, that belief in God is true, i.e. useful, whereas what religion desires is the conclusion that God exists, which pragmatism never even approaches. I infer, therefore, that the pragmatic philosophy of religion, like most philosophies whose conclusions are interesting, turns on an unconscious play upon words. A common word—in this case, the word "true"—is taken at the outset in an uncommon sense, but as the argument proceeds the usual sense of the word gradually slips back, and the conclusions arrived at seem, therefore, quite different from what they would be seen to be if the initial definition had been remembered.

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The point is, of course, that, so soon as it is admitted that there are things that exist, it is impossible to avoid recognising a distinction, to which we may give what name we please, between believing in the existence of something that exists and believing in the existence of something that does not exist. It is common to call the one belief true, the other false. But if, with the pragmatists, we prefer to give a different meaning to the words "true"

and "false," that does not prevent the distinction commonly called the distinction of "true" and "false" from persisting. The pragmatist attempt to ignore this distinction fails, as it seems to me, because a basis of fact cannot be avoided by pragmatism, and this basis of fact demands the *usual* antithesis of "true" and "false." It is hardly to be supposed that pragmatists will admit this conclusion. But it may be hoped that they will tell us in more detail how they propose to avoid it.

Pragmatism, if I have not misunderstood it, is largely a generalisation from the procedure of the inductive sciences. In so far as it lays stress upon the importance of induction, I find myself in agreement with it; and as to the nature of induction also, I think it is far more nearly right than are most of the traditional accounts. But on fundamental questions of philosophy I find myself wholly opposed to it, and unable to see that inductive procedure gives any warrant for its conclusions. To make this clear, I will very briefly explain how I conceive the nature and scope of induction.

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When we survey our beliefs, we find that we hold different beliefs with very different degrees of conviction. Some—such as the belief that I am sitting in a chair, or that $2 + 2 = 4$ —can be doubted by few except those who have had a long training in philosophy. Such beliefs are held so firmly that non-philosophers who deny them are put into lunatic asylums. Other beliefs, such as the facts of history, are held rather less firmly, but still in the main without much doubt where they are well authenticated. Beliefs about the future, as that the sun will rise to-morrow and that the trains will run approximately as in Bradshaw, may be held with almost as great conviction as beliefs about the past. Scientific laws are generally believed less firmly, and there is a gradation among them from such as seem nearly certain to such as have only a slight probability in their favour. Philosophical beliefs, finally, will, with most people, take a still lower place, since the opposite beliefs of others can hardly fail to induce doubt. Belief, therefore, is a matter of degree. To speak of belief, disbelief, doubt, and suspense of judgment as the only possibilities is as if, from the writing on the thermometer, we were to suppose that blood heat, summer heat, temperate, and freezing were the only temperatures. There is a continuous gradation in belief, and the more firmly we believe anything, the less willing we are to abandon it in case of conflict.

Besides the degree of our belief, there is another important respect in which a belief may vary, namely, in the extent to which it is *spontaneous* or *derivative*. A belief obtained by inference may be called *derivative*; one not so obtained, *spontaneous*.

When we do not need any outside evidence to make us entertain a belief, we may say that what we believe is *obvious*. Our belief in the existence of sensible objects is of this nature: “seeing is believing,” and we demand no further evidence. The same applies to certain logical principles, e.g. that whatever follows from a true proposition must be true. A proposition may be obvious in very varying degrees. For example, in matters of aesthetic taste we have to judge immediately whether a work of art is beautiful or not, but the degree of obviousness involved is probably small, so that we feel no very great confidence in our judgment. Thus our spontaneous beliefs are not necessarily stronger than derivative beliefs. Moreover, few beliefs, if any, are *wholly* spontaneous in an educated man. The more a man has organised his knowledge, the more his beliefs will be interdependent, and the more will obvious truths be reinforced by their connection with other obvious truths. In spite of this fact, however, obviousness remains always the ultimate source of our beliefs; for what is called verification or deduction consists always in being brought into relation with one or more obvious propositions. This process of verification is necessary even for propositions which seem obvious, since it appears on examination that two apparently obvious propositions may be inconsistent, and hence that apparent obviousness is not a sufficient guarantee of truth. We therefore have to subject our beliefs to a process of organisation, making groups of such as are mutually consistent, and when two such groups are not consistent with each other, selecting that group which seems to us to contain the most evidence, account being taken both of the degree of obviousness of the propositions it contains and of the number of such propositions. It is as the result of such a process, for example, that we are led, if we are led, to conclude that colours are not objective properties of things. Induction, in a broad sense, may be described as the process of selecting hypotheses which will organise our spontaneous beliefs, preserving as many of them as possible, and interconnecting them by general propositions which, as is said, “explain” them, i.e. give a ground from which they can be deduced. In this sense, all knowledge is inductive as soon as it is reflective and organised. In any science, there is a greater or less degree of obviousness about many of its propositions: those that are obvious are called *data*; other propositions are only accepted because of their connection with the data. This connection itself may be of two kinds, either that the propositions in question can be deduced from the data, or that the data can be deduced from the propositions in question, and we know of no way of deducing the data without assuming the propositions in question. The latter is the

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case of working hypotheses, which covers all the general laws of science and all the metaphysics both of common sense and of professed philosophy. It is, apparently, by generalising the conception of “working hypothesis” that pragmatism has arisen. But three points seem to me to have been overlooked in this generalisation. First, working hypotheses are only a small part of our beliefs, not the whole, as pragmatism seems to think. Secondly, prudent people give only a low degree of belief to working hypotheses; it is therefore a curious procedure to select them as the very types of beliefs in general. Thirdly, pragmatism seems to confound two very different conceptions of “working.” When *science* says that a hypothesis works, it means that from this hypothesis we can deduce a number of propositions which are verifiable, i.e. obvious under suitable circumstances, and that we cannot deduce any propositions of which the contradictories are verifiable. But when *pragmatism* says that a hypothesis works, it means that the effects of believing it are good, including among the effects not only the beliefs which we deduce from it, but also the emotions entailed by it or its perceived consequences, and the actions to which we are prompted by it or its perceived consequences. This is a totally different conception of “working,” and one for which the authority of scientific procedure cannot be invoked. I infer, therefore, that induction, rightly analysed, does not lead us to pragmatism, and that the inductive results which pragmatism takes as the very type of truth are precisely those among our beliefs which should be held with most caution and least conviction.

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To sum up: while agreeing with the empirical temper of pragmatism, with its readiness to treat all philosophical tenets as “working hypotheses,” we cannot agree that when we say a belief is true we mean that it is a hypothesis which “works,” especially if we mean by this to take account of the excellence of its effects, and not merely of the truth of its consequences. If, to avoid disputes about words, we agree to accept the pragmatic definition of the word “truth,” we find that the belief that A exists may be “true” even when A does not exist. This shows that the conclusions arrived at by pragmatism in the sphere of religion do not have the meaning which they appear to have, and are incapable, when rightly understood, of yielding us the satisfaction which they promise. The attempt to get rid of “fact” turns out to be a failure, and thus the old notion of truth reappears. And if the pragmatist states that utility is to be merely a *criterion* of truth, we shall reply first, that it is not a useful criterion, because it is usually harder to discover whether a belief is useful than whether it is true; secondly, that since no *a priori* reason is shown why

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truth and utility should always go together, utility can only be shown to be a criterion at all by showing inductively that it accompanies truth in all known instances, which requires that we should already know in many instances what things are true. Finally, therefore, the pragmatist theory of truth is to be condemned on the ground that it does not “work.”