There’s no such thing as an absolutely true ethical statement, our “facts” are simply what is valuable to accept as true**.** If morality doesn’t need to be expected then it’s meaningless via being unenforceable. **Rorty[[1]](#footnote-1)**

My first characterization of **pragmatism [redefines]** is that it is simply anti-essentialism applied to notions like "truth," "knowledge," "language," "morality," and similar objects of philosophical theorizing. Let me illustrate this by James' definition of **"the true" as "what is good [to]** in the way of **belie[ve].'' [because]** This has struck his critics as not to the point, as unphilosophical, as like the suggestion that the essence of aspirin is that it is good for headaches. James' point, however, was that there is nothing deeper to be said: **truth is not the sort of thing which has an essence.** More specifically, his point was that **it is no use being told that truth is "correspondence to reality**." Given a language and a view of what the world is like, one can, to be sure, pair off bits of the language with bits of what one takes the world to be in such a way that the sentences one believes true have internal structures isomorphic to relations between things in the world. When we rap out routine undeliberated reports like "This is water", "That's red", "That's ugly", "That's immoral", our short categorical sentences can easily be thought of as pictures, or as symbols which fit together to make a map. Such reports do indeed pair little bits of language with little bits of the world. **Once one gets to negative universal hypotheticals,** and the like, **such pairing will become messy and ad hoc,** but perhaps it can be done. James' point was that **carrying out this exercise will not enlighten us about why truths are good to believe, or** offer any clues as to why or **whether our present view** of the world **is,** roughly, **the one we should hold.** Yet nobody would have asked for a "theory" of truth if they had not wanted answers to these latter questions. Those who want truth to have an essence want knowledge, or rationality, or inquiry, or the relation between thought and its object, to have an essence. Further, they want to be able to use their knowledge of such essences to criticize views they take to be false, and to point the direction of progress toward the discovery of more truths. James' thinks these hopes are vain. There are no essences anywhere in the area. **There is no wholesale, epistemological, way to direct, or criticize,** or underwrite, **the course of inquiry.**

Statements of value are simply statements of preference. To compare these, a criterion of decided preference should be applied, the conclusion is utilitarianism with an emphasis on higher pleasures.

**Mill Writes,** (John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume X - Essays on Ethics, Religion, and Society,* ed. John M. Robson, Introduction by F.E.L. Priestley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985). Chapter: *CHAPTER II: What Utilitarianism Is)*

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that **actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.** By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that **pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.**Now, such a theory of life excites in many minds, and among them in some of the most estimable in feeling and purpose, inveterate dislike. To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure—no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit—they designate as utterly mean and grovelling; as a doctrine worthy only of swine, to whom the followers of Epicurus were, at a very early period, contemptuously likened; and modern holders of the doctrine are occasionally made the subject of equally polite comparisons by its German, French, and English assailants.When thus attacked, the Epicureans have always answered, that it is not they, but their accusers, who represent human nature in a degrading light; since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable. If this supposition were true, the charge could not be gainsaid, but would then be no longer an imputation; for if the sources of pleasure were precisely the same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for the one would be good enough for the other. **The comparison of the** Epicurean **life to that** of **beasts is** felt as **degrading, precisely because a beast’s pleasures do not satisfy a human being’s conceptions of happiness. Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification.** I do not, indeed, consider the Epicureans to have been by any means faultless in drawing out their scheme of consequences from the utilitarian principle. To do this in any sufficient manner, many Stoic, as well as Christian elements require to be included. But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation. It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, &c., of the former—that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic nature. And on all these points

Thus the way we come to know value epistemologically and practically is through a utility preference. Mill 2.

utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the other, and, as it may be called, higher ground, with entire consistency**. It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise** the fact**, that some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.**

If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. **Of two pleasures, if there be one** to **which** all or **almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference,** irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. **If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.**

The standard is maximizing expected quality of life

And prefer util

(see Michael Harris’ parameters)

1. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 53, No. 6. (Aug., 1980), pp. 717+719-738. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)