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What Pragmatism Means by Practical

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Pragmatism, according to Mr. James, is a temper of mind, an attitude; it is also a theory of the nature of ideas and truth; and, finally, it is a theory about reality. It is pragmatism as method which is emphasized, I take it, in the subtitle, "a new name for some old ways of thinking."[1] It is this aspect which I suppose to be uppermost in Mr. James's own mind; one frequently gets the impression that he conceives the discussion of the other two points to be illustrative material, more or less hypothetical, of the method. The briefest and at the same time the most comprehensive formula for the method is: "The attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts" (pp. 54-55). And as the attitude looked "away from" is the rationalistic, perhaps the chief aim of the lectures is to exemplify some typical differences resulting from taking one outlook or the other.

But pragmatism is "used in a still wider sense, as meaning also a certain theory of truth" (p. 55); it is "a genetic theory of what is meant by truth" (p. 65). Truth 304
means, as a matter of course, agreement, correspondence, of idea and fact (p. 198), but what do agreement, correspondence, mean? With rationalism they mean "a static, inert relation," which is so ultimate that of it nothing more can be said. With pragmatism they signify the guiding or leading power of ideas by which we "dip into the particulars of experience again," and if by its aid we set up the arrangements and connections among experienced objects which the idea intends, the idea is verified; it corresponds with the things it means to square with (pp. 205-6). The idea is true which works in leading us to what it purports (p. 80).[2] Or, "any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor, is true for just so much, true in so far forth" (p. 58). This notion presupposes that ideas are essentially intentions (plans and methods), and that what they, as ideas, ultimately intend is *prospective*—certain changes in prior existing things. This contrasts again with rationalism, with its copy theory, where ideas, *as* ideas, are ineffective and impotent, since they mean only to mirror a reality (p. 69) complete without them. Thus we

[1] William James, *Pragmatism. A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking.* (Popular Lectures on Philosophy.) New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1907. Pp. xiii+309.

[2] Certain aspects of the doctrine are here purposely omitted, and will meet us later.

are led to the third aspect of pragmatism. The alternative between rationalism and pragmatism "concerns the structure of the universe itself" (p. 258). "The 305
essential contrast is that reality ... for pragmatism is still in the making" (p. 257). And in a recent number of the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*,[3] he says: "I was primarily concerned in my lectures with contrasting the belief that the world is still in the process of making with the belief that there is an eternal edition of it ready-made and complete."

I

It will be following Mr. James's example, I think, if we here regard pragmatism as primarily a method, and treat the account of ideas and their truth and of reality somewhat incidentally so far as the discussion of them serves to exemplify or enforce the method. Regarding the attitude of orientation which looks to outcomes and consequences, one readily sees that it has, as Mr. James points out, points of contact with historic empiricism, nominalism, and utilitarianism. It insists that general notions shall "cash in" as particular objects and qualities in experience; that "principles" are ultimately subsumed under facts, rather than the reverse; that the empirical consequence rather than the a priori basis is the sanctioning and warranting factor. But all of these ideas are colored and transformed by the dominant influence of experimental science: the method of treating conceptions, theories, etc., as working hypotheses, as directors for 306
certain experiments and experimental observations. Pragmatism as attitude represents what Mr. Peirce has happily termed the "laboratory habit of mind" extended into every area where inquiry may fruitfully be carried on. A scientist would, I think, wonder not so much at the method as at the lateness of philosophy's conversion to what has made science what it is. Nevertheless it is impossible to forecast the intellectual change that would proceed from carrying the method sincerely and unreservedly into all fields of inquiry. Leaving philosophy out of account, what a change would be wrought in the historical and social sciences—in the conceptions of politics and law and political economy! Mr. James does not claim too much when he says: "The center of gravity of philosophy must alter its place. The earth of things, long thrown into shadow by the glories of the upper ether, must resume its rights.... It will be an alteration in the 'seat of authority' that reminds one almost of the Protestant Reformation" (p. 123).

I can imagine that many would not accept this method in philosophy for very diverse reasons, perhaps among the most potent of which is lack of faith in the power of the elements and processes of experience and life to guarantee their own security and prosperity; because, that is, of the feeling that the world of experience is so unstable, mistaken, and fragmentary that it must have an absolutely permanent, true, and complete ground. I cannot imagine, however, 307
that so much uncertainty and controversy as actually exists should arise about the content and import of the doctrine on the basis of the general formula. It is when the method is applied to special points that questions arise. Mr. James

[3]Vol. IV, p. 547.

reminds us in his preface that the pragmatic movement has found expression "from so many points of view, that much unconcerted statement has resulted." And speaking of his lectures he goes on to say: "I have sought to unify the picture as it presents itself to my own eyes, dealing in broad strokes." The "different points of view" here spoken of have concerned themselves with viewing pragmatically a number of different things. And it is, I think, Mr. James's effort to combine them, as they stand, which occasions misunderstanding among Mr. James's readers. Mr. James himself applied it, for example, in 1898 to philosophic controversies to indicate what they mean in terms of practical issues at stake. Before that, Mr. Peirce himself (in 1878) had applied the method to the proper way of *conceiving* and defining objects. Then it has been applied to *ideas* in order to find out what they mean in terms of what they intend, and what and how they must intend in order to be true. Again, it has been applied to *beliefs*, to what men actually accept, hold to, and affirm. Indeed, it lies in the nature of pragmatism that it should be applied as widely as possible; and to things as diverse as controversies, beliefs, truths, ideas, and objects. But yet the situa- 308
tions and problems *are* diverse; so much so that, while the meaning of each may be told on the basis of "last things," "fruits," "consequences," "facts," *it is quite certain that the specific last things and facts will be very different in the diverse cases, and that very different types of meaning will stand out*. "Meaning" will itself *mean* something quite different in the case of "objects" from what it will mean in the case of "ideas," and for "ideas" something different from "truths." Now the explanation to which I have been led of the unsatisfactory condition of contemporary pragmatic discussion is that in composing these "different points of view" into a single pictorial whole, the distinct type of consequence and hence of meaning of "practical" appropriate to each has not been sufficiently emphasized.

1. When we consider separately the subjects to which the pragmatic method has been applied, we find that Mr. James has provided the necessary formula for each—with his never-failing instinct for the concrete. We take first the question of the significance of an object: the meaning which should properly be contained in its conception or definition. "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 re-
actions we must prepare" (pp. 46-47). Or, more shortly, as it is quoted from 309
Ostwald, "All realities influence our practice, and that influence is their meaning for us" (p. 48). Here it will be noted that the start is from objects already empirically given or presented, existentially vouched for, and the question is as to their proper conception—What is the proper meaning, or idea, of an object? And the meaning is the effects *these given objects produce*. One might doubt the correctness of this theory, but I do not see how one could doubt its import, or could accuse it of subjectivism or idealism, since the object with its power to produce effects is assumed. Meaning is expressly distinguished from objects, not confused with them (as in idealism), and is said to consist in the practical reactions objects exact of us or impose upon us. When, then, it is a question of an object, "meaning" signifies its *conceptual content or connotation, and "practical" means the future responses which an object requires of us or commits us*

to.

2. But we may also start from a given idea, and ask what the *idea* means. Pragmatism will, of course, look to future consequences, but they will clearly be of a different sort when we start from an idea as idea, than when we start from an object. For what an idea as idea means, is precisely that an object is *not* given. The pragmatic procedure here is to set the idea "at work within the stream of experience. It appears less as a solution than as a program for more work, and particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities 310
may be changed. Theories, thus, become instruments.... We don't lie back on them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid" (p. 53). In other words, an idea is a draft drawn upon existing things, and intention to act so as to arrange them in a certain way. From which it follows that if the draft is honored, if existences, following upon the actions, rearrange or readjust themselves in the way the idea intends, the idea is true. When, then, it is a question of an idea, it is the idea itself which is practical (being an intent) and its *meaning* resides in the existences which, as changed, it intends. While the meaning of an object is the changes it requires in our attitude,[4] the meaning of an idea is the changes it, as our attitude, effects in objects.

3. Then we have another formula, applicable not to objects nor ideas as objects and ideas, but to *truths*—to things, that is, where the meaning of the object and of the idea is assumed to be already ascertained. It reads: "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" (p. 45). There can be "no difference in abstract truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in 311
concrete fact, and in conduct consequent upon the fact, imposed on somebody" (p. 50).[5] Now when we start with something which is already a truth (or taken to be truth), and ask for its meaning in terms of its consequences, it is implied that the conception, or conceptual significance, is already clear, and that the existences it refers to are already in hand. Meaning here, then, can be neither the connotative nor denotative reference of a term; they are covered by the two prior formulae. Meaning here means *value*, importance. The practical factor is, then, the worth character of these consequences: they are good or bad; desirable or undesirable; or merely *nil*, indifferent, in which latter case belief is idle, the controversy a vain and conventional, or verbal, one.

The term "meaning" and the term "practical" taken in isolation, and without explicit definition from their specific context and problem, are triply ambiguous. The meaning may be the conception or definition of an *object*; it may be the denotative existential reference of an *idea*; it may be actual value or *importance*. So practical in the corresponding cases may mean the attitudes and conduct exacted of us by objects; or the capacity and tendency of an idea to effect changes 312

[4]Only those who have already lost in the idealistic confusion of existence and meaning will take this to mean that the object is those changes in our reactions.

[5]I assume that the reader is sufficiently familiar with Mr. James's book not to be misled by the text into thinking that Mr. James himself discriminates as I have done these three types of problems from one another. He does not; but, none the less, the three formulae for the three situations are there.

in prior existences; or the desirable and undesirable quality of certain ends. The general pragmatic attitude, none the less, is applied in all cases.

If the differing problems and the correlative diverse significations of the terms "meaning" and "practical" are borne in mind, not all will be converted to pragmatism, but the present uncertainty as to what pragmatism is, anyway, and the present constant complaints on both sides of misunderstanding will, I think, be minimized. At all events, I have reached the conclusion that what the pragmatic movement just now wants is a clear and consistent bearing in mind of these different problems and of what is meant by practical in each. Accordingly the rest of this paper is an endeavor to elucidate from the standpoint of pragmatic method the importance of enforcing these distinctions.

II

First, as to the problems of philosophy when pragmatically approached, Mr. James says: "The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be true" (p. 50). Here the world-formula is assumed as already given; it is there, defined and constituted, and the question is as to its import if believed. But from the second standpoint, that of idea as working hypothesis, the chief function of philosophy is not to find out what difference ready-made formulae make, *if true*, but to arrive at and to clarify their 313
meaning as programs of behavior for modifying the existent world. From this standpoint, the meaning of a world-formula is practical and moral, not merely in the consequences which flow from accepting a certain conceptual content as true, but as regards that content itself. And thus at the very outset we are compelled to face this question: Does Mr. James employ the pragmatic method to discover the value in terms of consequences in life of some formula which has its logical content already fixed; or does he employ it to criticize and revise and, ultimately, to constitute the meaning of that formula? If it is the first, there is danger that the pragmatic method will be employed only to vivify, if not validate, doctrines which in themselves are pieces of rationalistic metaphysics, not inherently pragmatic. If the last, there is danger that some readers will think old notions are being confirmed, when in truth they are being translated into new and inconsistent notions.

Consider the case of design. Mr. James begins with accepting a ready-made notion, to which he then applies the pragmatic criterion. The traditional notion is that of a "seeing force that runs things." This is rationalistically and retrospectively empty; its being there makes no difference. (This seems to overlook the fact that the past world may be just what it is in virtue of the difference which a blind force or a seeing force has already made in it. A pragmatist as well as 314
a rationalist may reply that it makes no difference retrospectively only because we leave out the most important retrospective difference). But "returning with it into experience, we gain a more confiding outlook on the future. If not a blind force, but a seeing force, runs things, we may reasonably expect better issues. *This vague confidence in the future is the sole pragmatic meaning at present dis-*

cernible in the terms design and designer" (p. 115, italics mine). Now is this meaning intended to *replace* the meaning of a "seeing force which runs things"? Or is it intended to superadd a pragmatic value and validation to that concept of a seeing force? Or does it mean that, irrespective of the existence of any such object, a belief in it has that value? Strict pragmatism would seem to require the first interpretation.

The same difficulties arise in the discussion of spiritualistic theism *versus* materialism. Compare the two following statements: "The notion of God ... guarantees an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved" (p. 106). "Here, then, in these different emotional and practical appeals, in these adjustments of our attitudes of hope and expectation, and all the delicate consequences which their differences entail, *lie the real meanings of materialism and spiritualism*" (p. 107, italics mine). Does the latter method of determining the meaning of, say, a spiritual God afford the substitute for the conception of him as a "superhuman power" effecting the eternal preservation of something; does it, that 315
is, define God, supply the content for our notion of God? Or does it merely superadd a value to a meaning already fixed? And, if the latter, does the object, God as defined, or the notion, or the belief (the acceptance of the notion) effect these consequent values? In either of the latter alternatives, the good or valuable consequences cannot clarify the meaning or conception of God; for, by the argument, they proceed from a prior definition of God. They cannot prove, or render more probable, the existence of such a being, for, by the argument, these desirable consequences depend upon accepting such an existence; and not even pragmatism can prove an existence from desirable consequences which themselves exist only when and if that other existence is there. On the other hand, if the pragmatic method is not applied simply to tell the value of a belief or controversy, but to fix the meaning of the terms involved in the belief, resulting consequences would serve to constitute the entire meaning, intellectual as well as practical, of the terms; and hence the pragmatic method would simply abolish the meaning of an antecedent power which will perpetuate eternally some existence. For that consequence flows not from the belief or idea, but from the existence, the power. It is not pragmatic at all.

Accordingly, when Mr. James says: "Other than this *practical* significance, the words God, free will, design, *have none*. Yet dark though they be in themselves, 316
or intellectualistically taken, when we bear them on to life's thicket with us, the darkness then grows light about us" (p. 121, italics mine), what is meant? Is it meant that when we take the intellectualistic notion and employ it, it gets value in the way of results, and hence then has some value of its own; or is it meant that the intellectual content itself must be determined in terms of the changes effected in the ordering of life's thicket? An explicit declaration on this point would settle, I think, not merely a point interesting in itself, but one essential to the determination of what is pragmatic method. For myself, I have no hesitation in saying that it seems unpragmatic for pragmatism to content itself with finding out the value of a conception whose own inherent significance pragmatism has not first determined; a fact which entails that it be taken not as a truth but simply as a working hypothesis. In the particular

case in question, moreover, it is difficult to see how the pragmatic method could possibly be applied to a notion of "eternal perpetuation," which, by its nature, can never be empirically verified, or cashed in any particular case.

This brings us to the question of truth. The problem here is also ambiguous in advance of definition. Does the problem of what is truth refer to discovering the "true meaning" of something; or to discovering what an idea has to effect, and how, in order to be true; or to discovering what the value of truth is 317
when it is an existent and accomplished fact? (1) We may, of course, find the "true meaning" of a thing, as distinct from its incorrect interpretation, without thereby establishing the truth of the "true meaning"—as we may dispute about the "true meaning" of a passage in the classics concerning Centaurs, without the determination of its true sense establishing the truth of the notion that there are Centaurs. Occasionally this "true meaning" seems to be what Mr. James has in mind, as when, after the passage upon design already quoted, he goes on: "But if cosmic confidence is right, not wrong, better, not worse, that [vague confidence in the future] is a most important meaning. That much at least of possible 'truth' the terms will then have in them" (p. 115). "Truth" here seems to mean that design has a genuine, not merely conventional or verbal, meaning: that something is at stake. And there are frequently points where "truth" seems to mean just meaning that is genuine as distinct from empty or verbal. (2) But the problem of the meaning of truth may also refer to the meaning or value of truths that already exist as truths. We have them; they exist; now what do they mean? The answer is: "True ideas lead us into useful verbal and conceptual quarters as well as directly up to useful sensible termini. They lead to consistency, stability, and flowing human intercourse" (p. 215). This, referring to things already true, I do not suppose the most case-hardened rationalist would question; and even if he questions the pragmatic contention that 318
these consequences define the meaning of truth, he should see that here is not given an account of what it means for an idea to *become true*, but only of what it means *after* it has become true, truth as *fait accompli*. It is the meaning of truth as *fait accompli* which is here defined.

Bearing this in mind, I do not know why a mild-tempered rationalist should object to the doctrine that truth is valuable not *per se*, but because, when given, it leads to desirable consequences. "The true thought is useful here because the home which is its object is useful. The practical value of true ideas is thus primarily derived from the practical importance of their objects to us" (p. 203). And many besides confirmed pragmatists, any utilitarian, for example, would be willing to say that our duty to pursue "truth" is conditioned upon its leading to objects which upon the whole are valuable. "The concrete benefits we gain are what we mean by calling the pursuit a duty" (p. 231, compare p. 76). (3) Difficulties have arisen chiefly because Mr. James is charged with converting simply the foregoing proposition, and arguing that since true ideas are good, any idea if good in any way is true. Certainly transition from one of these conceptions to the other is facilitated by the fact that ideas are tested as to their validity by a certain goodness, viz., whether they are good for accomplishing what they intend, for what they claim to be good for, that is, certain modifica- 319

tions in prior given existences. In this case, it is the idea which is practical, since it is essentially an intent and plan of altering prior existences in a specific situation, which is indicated to be unsatisfactory by the very fact that it needs or suggests a specific modification. Then arises the theory that ideas as ideas are always working hypotheses concerning the attaining of particular empirical results, and are tentative programs (or sketches of method) for attaining them. If we stick consistently to this notion of ideas, only *consequences which are actually produced by the working of the idea in co-operation with, or application to, prior existences are good consequences in the specific sense of good which is relevant to establishing the truth of an idea*. This is, at times, unequivocally recognized by Mr. James. (See, for example, the reference to veri-*fication*, on p. 201; the acceptance of the idea that verification means the advent of the object intended, on p. 205.)

But at other times any good which flows from acceptance of a belief is treated as if it were an evidence, *in so far*, of the truth of the idea. This holds particularly when theological notions are under consideration. Light would be thrown upon how Mr. James conceives this matter by statements on such points as these: If ideas terminate in good consequences, but yet the goodness of the consequences was no part of the intention of an idea, does the goodness have any verifying force? If the goodness of consequences arises from the context of the idea in 320
belief rather than from the idea itself, does it have any verifying force?[6] If an idea leads to consequences which are good in the *one* respect only of fulfilling the intent of the idea (as when one drinks a liquid to test the idea that it is a poison), does the badness of the consequences in every other respect detract from the verifying force of consequences?

Since Mr. James has referred to me as saying "truth is what gives satisfaction" (p. 234), I may remark (apart from the fact that I do not think I ever said that truth is what *gives* satisfaction) that I have never identified any satisfaction with the truth of an idea, save *that* satisfaction which arises when the idea as working hypothesis or tentative method is applied to prior existences in such a way as to fulfil what it intends.

My final impression (which I cannot adequately prove) is that upon the whole Mr. James is most concerned to enforce, as against rationalism, two conclusions about the character of truths as *faits accomplis*: namely, that they are made, not a priori, or eternally in existence,[7] and that their value or importance is 321
not static, but dynamic and practical. The special question of *how* truths are made is not particularly relevant to this anti-rationalistic crusade, while it is

[6]The idea of immortality, or the traditional theistic idea of God, for example, may produce its good consequences, not in virtue of the idea as idea, but from the character of the person who entertains the belief; or it may be the idea of the supreme value of ideal considerations, rather than that of their temporal duration, which works.

[7]"Eternal truth" is one of the most ambiguous phrases that philosophers trip over. It may mean eternally in existence; or that a statement which is ever true is always true (if it is true a fly is buzzing, it is eternally true that just now a fly buzzed); or it may mean that some truths, *in so far as wholly conceptual*, are irrelevant to any particular time determination, since they are non-existential in import—e.g., the truth of geometry dialectically taken—that is, without asking whether any particular existence exemplifies them.

the chief question of interest to many. Because of this conflict of problems, what Mr. James says about the value of truth when accomplished is likely to be interpreted by some as a criterion of the truth of ideas; while, on the other hand, Mr. James himself is likely to pass lightly from the consequences that determine the worth of a belief to those which decide the worth of an idea. When Mr. James says the function of giving "satisfaction in marrying previous parts of experience with newer parts" is necessary in order to establish truth, the doctrine is unambiguous. The satisfactory character of consequences is itself measured and defined by the conditions which led up to it; the inherently satisfactory quality of results is not taken as validating the antecedent intellectual operations. But when he says (not of his own position, but of an opponent's[8]) of the idea of an absolute, "so far as it affords such comfort it surely is not ster- 322
ile, it has that amount of value; it performs a concrete function. As a good pragmatist I myself ought to call the absolute true *in so far forth* then; and I unhesitatingly now do so" (p. 73), the doctrine seems to be as unambiguous in the other direction: that any good, consequent upon acceptance of a belief is, in so far forth,[9] a warrant of truth. In such passages as the following (which are of the common type) the two notions seem blended together: "Ideas become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other 323
parts of our experience" (p. 58); and, again, on the same page: "Any idea that will carry us *prosperously* from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things *satisfactorily*, working securely, simplifying, saving labor, is true for just so much" (italics mine). An explicit statement as to whether the carrying function, the linking of things, is satisfactory and prosperous and hence true in so far as it executes the intent of an idea; or whether the satisfaction and prosperity reside in the material consequences on their own account and in that aspect make the idea true, would, I am sure, locate the point at issue and economize and fructify future discussion. At present pragmatism is accepted by those whose own notions are thoroughly rationalistic in make-up as a means of refurbishing, galvanizing, and justifying those very notions. It is rejected by non-rationalists (empiricists and naturalistic idealists) because it seems to

[8]Such statements, it ought in fairness to be said, generally come when Mr. James is speaking of a doctrine which he does not himself believe, and arise, I think, in that fairness and frankness of Mr. James, so unusual in philosophers, which cause him to lean over backward—unpragmatically, it seems to me. As to the claim of his own doctrine, he consistently sticks to his statement: "Pent in, as the pragmatist, more than any one, sees himself to be, between the whole body of funded truths squeezed from the past and the coercions of the world of sense about him, who, so well as he, feels the immense pressure of objective control under which our minds perform their operations? If anyone imagines that this law is lax, let him keep its commandments one day, says Emerson" (p. 233).

[9]Of course, Mr. James holds that this "in so far" goes a very small way. See pp. 77-79. But even the slightest concession is, I think, non-pragmatic unless the satisfaction is relevant to the idea as intent. Now the satisfaction in question comes not from the idea as *idea*, but from its acceptance as *true*. Can a satisfaction dependent on an assumption that an idea is already true be relevant to testing the truth of an idea? And can an idea, like that of the absolute, which, if true, "absolutely" precludes any appeal to consequences as test of truth, be confirmed by use of the pragmatic test without sheer self-contradiction? In other words, we have a confusion of the test of an idea as idea, with that of the value of a belief as belief. On the other hand, it is quite possible that all Mr. James intends by truth here is true (i.e., genuine) meaning at stake in the issue—true not as distinct from false, but from meaningless or verbal.

them identified with the notion that pragmatism holds that the desirability of certain beliefs overrides the question of the meaning of the ideas involved in them and the existence of objects denoted by them. Others (like myself), who believe thoroughly in pragmatism as a method of orientation, as defined by Mr. James, and who would apply the method to the determination of the meaning of objects, the intent and worth of ideas as ideas, and to the human and moral value of beliefs, when these various problems are carefully distinguished from 324
one another, do not know whether they are pragmatists in some other sense, because they are not sure whether the practical, in the sense of desirable facts which define the worth of a belief, is confused with the practical as an attitude imposed by objects, and with the practical as a power and function of ideas to effect changes in prior existences. Hence the importance of knowing which one of the three senses of practical is conveyed in any given passage.

It would do Mr. James an injustice, however, to stop here. His real doctrine is that a belief is true when it satisfies both personal needs and the requirements of objective things. Speaking of pragmatism, he says, "Her only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of *leading us*, what fits every part of life best and *combines with the collectivity of experience's demands*, nothing being omitted" (p. 80, italics mine). And again, "That new idea is truest which performs most felicitously its function of satisfying *our double urgency*" (p. 64). It does not appear certain from the context that this "double urgency" is that of the personal and the objective demands, respectively, but it is probable (see, also, p. 217, where "consistency with previous truth and novel fact" is said to be "always the most imperious claimant"). On this basis, the "in so far forth" of the truth of the absolute because of the comfort it supplies, means that one of the two conditions which need to be satisfied has been met, so that if the idea 325
of the absolute met the other one also, it would be quite true. I have no doubt this is Mr. James's meaning, and it sufficiently safeguards him from the charge that pragmatism means that anything which is agreeable is true. At the same time, I do not think, in logical strictness, that satisfying one of two tests, when satisfaction of both is required, can be said to constitute a belief true even "in so far forth."

III

At all events this raises a question not touched so far: the place of the personal in the determination of truth. Mr. James, for example, emphasizes the doctrine suggested in the following words: "We say this theory solves it [the problem] more satisfactorily than that theory; but that means more satisfactorily *to ourselves*, and individuals will emphasize their points of satisfaction differently" (p. 61, italics mine). This opens out into a question which, in its larger aspects—the place of the personal factor in the constitution of knowledge systems and of reality—I cannot here enter upon, save to say that a synthetic pragmatism such as Mr. James has ventured upon will take a very different form according as the point of view of what he calls the "Chicago School" or that of humanism is taken as a basis for interpreting the nature of the personal. According to the

latter view, the personal appears to be ultimate and unanalyzable, the meta- 326
physically real. Associations with idealism, moreover, give it an idealistic turn, a translation, in effect, of monistic intellectualistic idealism into pluralistic, voluntaristic idealism. But, according to the former, the personal is not ultimate, but is to be analyzed and defined, biologically on its genetic side, ethically on its prospective and functioning side.

There is, however, one phase of the teaching illustrated by the quotation which is directly relevant here. Because Mr. James recognizes that the personal element enters into judgments passed upon whether a problem has or has not been satisfactorily solved, he is charged with extreme subjectivism, with encouraging the element of personal preference to run rough-shod over all objective controls. Now the question raised in the quotation is primarily one of fact, not of doctrine. Is or is not a personal factor found in truth evaluations? If it is, pragmatism is not responsible for introducing it. If it is not, it ought to be possible to refute pragmatism by appeal to empirical fact, rather than by reviling it for subjectivism. Now it is an old story that philosophers, in common with theologians and social theorists, are as sure that personal habits and interests shape their opponents' doctrines as they are that their own beliefs are "absolutely" universal and objective in quality. Hence arises that dishonesty, that insincerity characteristic of philosophic discussion. As Mr. James says (p. 8), "The most potential of all our premises is never mentioned." Now the moment the complicity of the 327
personal factor in our philosophic valuations is recognized, is recognized fully, frankly, and generally, that moment a new era in philosophy will begin. We shall have to discover the personal factors that now influence us unconsciously, and begin to accept a new and moral responsibility for them, a responsibility for judging and testing them by their consequences. So long as we ignore this factor, its deeds will be largely evil, not because *it* is evil, but because, flourishing in the dark, it is without responsibility and without check. The only way to control it is by recognizing it. And while I would not prophesy of pragmatism's future, I would say that this element which is now so generally condemned as intellectual dishonesty (perhaps because of an uneasy, instinctive recognition of the searching of hearts its acceptance would involve) will in the future be accounted unto philosophy for righteousness' sake.

So much in general. In particular cases, it is possible that Mr. James's language occasionally leaves the impression that the fact of the inevitable involution of the personal factor in every belief gives some special sanction to some special belief. Mr. James says that his essay on the *right* to believe was unluckily entitled the "*Will* to believe" (p. 258). Well, even the term "right" is unfortunate, if the personal or belief factor is inevitable—unfortunate because it seems to indicate a privilege which might be exercised in special cases, in religion, for 328
example, though not in science; or, because it suggests to some minds that the fact of the personal complicity involved in belief is a warrant for this or that special personal attitude, instead of being a warning to locate and define it so as to accept responsibility for it. If we mean by "will" not something deliberate and consciously intentional (much less, something insincere), but an active personal participation, then belief *as* will, rather than either the right or the will

to believe seems to phrase the matter correctly.

I have attempted to review not so much Mr. James's book as the present status of the pragmatic movement which is expressed in the book; and I have selected only those points which seem to bear directly upon matters of contemporary controversy. Even as an account of this limited field, the foregoing pages do an injustice to Mr. James, save as it is recognized that his lectures were "popular lectures," as the title-page advises us. We cannot expect in such lectures the kind of explicitness which would satisfy the professional and technical interests that have inspired this review. Moreover, it is inevitable that the attempt to compose different points of view, hitherto unco-ordinated, into a single whole should give rise to problems foreign to any one factor of the synthesis, left to itself. The need and possibility of the discrimination of various elements in the pragmatic meaning of "practical," attempted in this review, would hardly have 329
been recognized by me were it not for by-products of perplexity and confusion which Mr. James's combination has effected. Mr. James has given so many evidences of the sincerity of his intellectual aims, that I trust to his pardon for the injustice which the character of my review may have done *him*, in view of whatever service it may render in clarifying the problem to which he is devoted.

As for the book itself, it is in any case beyond a critic's praise or blame. It is more likely to take place as a philosophical classic than any other writing of our day. A critic who should attempt to appraise it would probably give one more illustration of the sterility of criticism compared with the productiveness of creative genius. Even those who dislike pragmatism can hardly fail to find much of profit in the exhibition of Mr. James's instinct for concrete facts, the breadth of his sympathies, and his illuminating insights. Unreserved frankness, lucid imagination, varied contacts with life digested into summary and trenchant conclusions, keen perceptions of human nature in the concrete, a constant sense of the subordination of philosophy to life, capacity to put things into an English which projects ideas as if bodily into space till they are solid things to walk around and survey from different sides—these things are not so common in philosophy that they may not smell sweet even by the name of pragmatism.

An Added Note as to the "Practical"

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It is easier to start a legend than to prevent its continued circulation. No misconception of the instrumental logic has been more persistent than the belief that it makes knowledge merely a means to a practical end, or to the satisfaction of practical needs—practical being taking to signify some quite definite utilities of a material or bread-and-butter type. Habitual associations aroused by the word "pragmatic" have been stronger than the most explicit and emphatic statements which any pragmatist has been able to make. But I again affirm that the term "pragmatic" means only the rule of referring all thinking, all reflective considerations, to *consequences* for final meaning and test. Nothing is said about the nature of the consequences; they may be aesthetic, or moral, or political, or religious in quality—anything you please. All that the theory requires is that

they be in some way consequences of thinking; not, indeed, of it alone, but of it acted upon in connection with other things. This is no after-thought inserted to lessen the force of objections. Mr. Peirce explained that he took the term "pragmatic" from Kant, in order to denote empirical consequences. When he refers to their practical character it is only to indicate a criterion by which to avoid 331
purely verbal disputes. Different consequences are alleged to constitute rival meanings of a term. Is a difference more than merely one of formulation? The way to get an answer is to ask whether, if realized, these consequences would exact of us different modes of behavior. If they do not make such a difference in conduct the difference between them is conventional. It is not that consequences are themselves practical, but that practical consequences from them may at times be appealed to in order to decide the specific question of whether two proposed meanings differ save in words. Mr. James says expressly that what is important is that the consequences should be specific, not that they should be active. When he said that general notions must "cash in," he meant of course that they must be translatable into verifiable specific things. But the words "cash in" were enough for some of his critics, who pride themselves upon a logical rigor unattainable by mere pragmatists.

In the logical version of pragmatism termed instrumentalism, action or practice does indeed play a fundamental rôle. But it concerns not the nature of consequences but the nature of knowing. To use a term which is now more fashionable (and surely to some extent in consequence of pragmatism) than it was earlier, instrumentalism means a behaviorist theory of thinking and knowing. It means that knowing is literally something which we do; that analysis is 332
ultimately physical and active; that meanings in their logical quality are standpoints, attitudes, and methods of behaving toward facts, and that active experimentation is essential to verification. Put in another way it holds that thinking does not mean any transcendent states or acts suddenly introduced into a previously natural scene, but that the operations of knowing are (or are artfully derived from) natural responses of the organism, which constitute knowing in virtue of the situation of doubt in which they arise and in virtue of the uses of inquiry, reconstruction, and control to which they are put. There is no warrant in the doctrine for carrying over *this* practical quality into the consequences in which action culminates, and by which it is tested and corrected. A knowing as an act is instrumental to the resultant controlled and more significant situation; this does not imply anything about the intrinsic or the instrumental character of the consequent situation. That is whatever it may be in a given case.

There is nothing novel nor heterodox in the notion that thinking is instrumental. The very word is redolent of an *Organum*—whether *novum* or *veterum*. The term "instrumentality," applied to thinking, raises at once, however, the question of whether thinking as a tool falls within or without the subject-matter which it shapes into knowledge. The answer of formal logic (adopted moreover by Kant and followed in some way by all neo-Kantian logics) is unambiguous. To 333
call logic "formal" means precisely that mind or thought supplies forms foreign to the original subject-matter, but yet required in order that it should have the

appropriate form of knowledge. In this regard it deviates from the Aristotelian *Organon* which it professes to follow. For according to Aristotle, the processes of knowing—of teaching and learning—which lead up to knowledge are but the actualization through the potentialities of the human body of the *same* forms or natures which are previously actualized in Nature through the potentialities of extra-organic bodies. Thinking which is not instrumental to truth, which is merely formal in the modern sense, would have been a monstrosity inconceivable to him. But the discarding of the metaphysics of form and matter, of cyclic actualizations and eternal species, deprived the Aristotelian "thought" of any place within the scheme of things, and left it an activity with forms alien to subject-matter. To conceive of thinking as instrumental to truth or knowledge, and as a tool shaped out of the same subject-matter as that to which it is applied, is but to return to the Aristotelian tradition about logic. That the practice of science has in the meantime substituted a logic of experimental discovery (of which definition and classification are themselves but auxiliary tools) for a logic of arrangement and exposition of what is already known, necessitates, however, a very different sort of *Organon*. It makes necessary the 334
conception that the object of knowledge is not something with which thinking sets out, but something with which it ends: something which the processes of inquiry and testing, that constitute thinking, themselves produce. Thus the object of knowledge is practical in the sense that it depends upon a specific kind of practice for its existence—for its existence as an object of knowledge. How practical it may be in any other sense than this is quite another story. The *object of knowledge* marks an achieved triumph, a secured control—that holds by the very nature of knowledge. What other uses it may have depends upon its own inherent character, not upon anything in the nature of knowledge. We do not know the origin and nature and the cure of malaria till we can both produce and eliminate malaria; the *value* of either the production or the removal depends upon the character of malaria in relation to other things. And so it is with mathematical knowledge, or with knowledge of politics or art. Their respective objects are not known till they are made in course of the process of experimental thinking. Their usefulness when made is whatever, from infinity to zero, experience may subsequently determine it to be.