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## PRAGMATISM AND THEOLOGY

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That branch of philosophy known as the theory of knowledge is not generally conceived to be either the most humanly interesting or the most practical part. Yet to religious belief, and to the general ethical temper of individuals and of generations, it is shown by historical experience to have, after all, very close and pregnant relations. Theoretically, epistemology, since it professes to determine the criteria of truth and the scope of real knowledge and legitimate affirmation, should affect natural science as vitally as theology. But in practice it has usually not done so. Natural science has gone on its way, using the working hypotheses that it found empirically serviceable, without greatly caring about their ultimate foundations or their precise logical status and implications; and it has perhaps more often shaped the epistemological tendencies of a period than been shaped by them. But theology has been less able to be indifferent to what the epistemologists were saying. The reasons for this are various and for the most part obvious. Religion, dealing largely with supersensible realities and involving affirmations usually not susceptible of empirical testing and verification, has occupied intellectual territory requiring a title-deed of a different sort from those provisional ones that served the purposes of science adequately enough. The success of the procedure of science has itself often suggested a question as to the possibility of the acquisition of real truth in fields so remote, and by methods of mental action so different from those which characterized the scientific investigation of nature; and such doubts, once raised, made inevitable for the serious religious consciousness some attempt to find, by a more profound examination of the nature and limits of knowledge than was indispensable for science alone, a proper and defensible place for itself in the mental world. Constituting, also, a more ultimate

and decisive human reaction upon life than does scientific curiosity and inquiry, religion has naturally been brought into contact with more ultimate issues respecting the intrinsic character and the degree of actual accessibility of truth; and the craving for certitude, for a mental quietude and confidence that no imaginable doubt could shake, may be considered a peculiarly religious need. This assurance has often been sought in the way of the mystic; but mysticism itself is only a form of rather impatient epistemology.

Such being the relations of the theory of knowledge to theology, the appearance and rapid spread of a comparatively new and ostensibly revolutionary epistemological doctrine is necessarily an occurrence of moment to the theologian. Few such doctrines, certainly, have spread so rapidly or got themselves talked about so universally in so brief a time, as that known as pragmatism; and none appear to have more direct bearings upon religious issues. Unfortunately, it is more the diffusion of a name than of a theory that has to be recognized in a good deal of the current talk about the pragmatists' opinions. The term pragmatism, like "transcendentalism" before it, has far outrun any precise ideas which might be supposed to be its proper traveling companions. Even those who profess themselves pragmatists do not invariably appear to have an altogether clear apprehension of the exact meaning of their theory, or to agree with one another as to its bearing upon specific metaphysical and theological problems. In view of this prevalent confusion and uncertainty as to the import and ulterior implications of the doctrine, perhaps the most serviceable thing that can just now be done is to attempt to discriminate the several fairly distinguishable contentions—of which the most important is much more than an epistemological theory—which appear to be concealed under the one name; to set aside those that appear to be lacking in consistency with themselves or with demonstrable facts, or destitute of any important application; and only after the completion of this analysis, to seek to determine the significance and value for theology of the residuum that remains. Fortunately, the distinguished American philosopher to whom we owe both the name and the origination of the whole

movement has just published a volume<sup>1</sup> in which he attempts, more systematically than ever before, both to clarify and to justify the pragmatistic doctrine. Any consideration of pragmatism at the present juncture is likely to touch the point most nearly, and to serve the reader best, if it takes Professor James's book for its text.

One broad distinction, and a consequent limitation of the scope of this paper, must be made at the outset. The word pragmatism has been applied not only to quite dissimilar theories, but to theories bearing upon two entirely separate questions in epistemology. As first employed by Professor James, and as still often used by him, the term designates a doctrine about the *meaning of propositions*—about the conditions under which a proposition can be said to have real meaning, and the way in which the genuine and vital issue in the case of any controverted question, theological or other, can be made clear. As used by many others, and frequently by James, the word indicates a certain theory as to the nature of truth or the *criterion of validity* in propositions—the theory, namely, that what, in general, entitles a proposition to be regarded as true is its functional value as an instrument to the satisfaction of a vital need or to the accomplishment of indispensable activities; in other words, the theory that (I quote these phrases with their ambiguities all upon them) a proposition is true “in so far as it will work,” and that “ideas become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience.” Now these two doctrines—the doctrine about meaning and the doctrine about truth—are not only distinct but independent. A proposition which is found to have definite meaning, according to the first sort of pragmatism, is not therefore held to be true, by the second sort of pragmatism. And it is perfectly possible to accept the first sort without being logically compelled thereby to accept the second. To all who care anything for clear thinking it must appear a misfortune that two conceptions which—though they, of course, have elements in common—are essentially different in meaning, and possibly in value, should have come to be called by the same name.

<sup>1</sup> *Pragmatism*, by William James, New York, 1907.

It is impossible within the limits of a single paper to discuss adequately both sorts of pragmatism in their relation to theology. Here, therefore, I shall undertake to deal only with the first sort. It is the one more strictly entitled to the name. It is in some respects more fundamental—for a theory telling us whether any given proposition has any real meaning, and what its meaning is, begins, so to say, farther back than does a theory telling us which, among the propositions that possess meaning, are true. The first kind of pragmatism, moreover—James's theory of the import of propositions—is relatively more novel, and has been a good deal less discussed. The pragmatic theory of truth—pragmatism in the second sense—so far as it relates to theology, is a variant, or a more generalized statement, of a type of doctrine tolerably familiar in the religious thought of the past century—the type which makes a thoroughgoing theoretical skepticism the preliminary to—and the justification of—the postulation of whatever propositions are held to be called for by one or another sort of “practical” consideration. For these reasons, and because, in philosophy as in other serious business, it is well to clear up one thing at a time, and to take time to try to do so thoroughly, I shall here ask the reader to consider primarily—and as exclusively as the logic of the matter itself permits—the pragmatic theory in the first of the two senses which have been indicated.

## I

Pragmatism, first of all, then, is a doctrine which undertakes to provide us with a criterion by which we can judge, not what beliefs are true, but what differences between beliefs contain enough of significant meaning to be legitimate and intelligible subjects of discussion. As a theory concerning the meaning of propositions, it has no power either to sanction or to condemn any particular meaningful proposition; the function which it professes is simply to put out of court, as unfit for consideration, a large class of propositions which it declares to be really destitute of meaning. It asserts, essentially, that the import of any proposition framed by our minds consists in some reference to the future—as it is usually added, to “concrete future experience,

whether active or passive." We are characteristically temporal, active, purposing, willing creatures, with our faces toward the future; the whole significance and interest of that ever-vanishing pin-point of time which we call the present lies in its transitive character. If that present is engendered of the past, it is fed out of the future; it is in the vital sense of such transition and of purposeful control and direction of it, that we really feel our life. And our intellectual faculty of judgment, like all the rest of our organic functions, is adapted to this forward-looking process of conscious life and instrumental to it. To judge is not to mirror things as they are, but to forecast things as they are to be and to make adjustments for dealing with them. A judgment, accordingly—says the pragmatist—which contains or implies no such reference to the future has no meaning at all; and the meaning of propositions which have this reference is precisely and fully stated when you have made clear what that specific and concrete future experience is to which they point.

It was, as has been said, in this sense that the term was originally used by Professor James when he first gave it to the world as a name for a short and easy method in philosophy, in a now celebrated address delivered at Berkeley in 1898; and although he has also contributed notably to the development of the other sort of pragmatism, hereafter to be discussed, this theory about the meaning of propositions, which others of the school have a good deal neglected, may be regarded as peculiarly James's form of the doctrine. It is copiously illustrated in his newly published volume.

To obtain perfect clearness [he says, p. 46] in our thoughts of an object, 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 any positive significance at all.

And the application of this criterion of meaning to a special case is exemplified by the controversy between the materialistic and the theistic conceptions of the nature and source of the world. That controversy has meaning, says Professor James, only because,

and in so far as, theism implies the expectation of future possibilities in the world different from those implied by materialism. Suppose the world to have no future; and then (p. 96), let a theist and a materialist apply their rival explanations to its history. The theist shows how a God made it; the materialist shows, and we will suppose with equal success, how it resulted from blind physical forces. Then let the pragmatist be asked to choose between their theories. How can he apply his test if a world is already completed? Concepts for him are things to come back into experience with, things to make us look for differences. But by hypothesis there is to be no experience and no possible differences can now be looked for. . . . The pragmatist must consequently say that the two theories, in spite of their different-sounding names, mean exactly the same thing, and that the dispute is purely verbal. . . . If no future detail of experience or conduct is to be deduced from our hypothesis, the debate between materialism and theism becomes quite idle and insignificant. *Matter and God in that event mean exactly the same thing*—the power, namely, neither more nor less, that could make just this completed world—and the wise man is he who in such a case would turn his back upon such a supererogatory discussion.<sup>2</sup>

With the spirit that engendered this doctrine—and, in particular, with the temper and purpose of Professor James's latest book—it is impossible, for any save the most crabbed of scholastic metaphysicians, not to feel a great deal of sympathy. The book is a sharp and emphatic demand—enforced with wonderful humor, with an unequalled insight into human nature, and with a sense for concrete realities rare among philosophers—for a philosophy and theology that shall be in touch with the life of human beings who live in a temporal world, who hope and fear and strive and achieve. And one of the primary aims of it, though not the only one, seems to be to put an end to the waste of energy and the needless discord that results, in a world so full of real business to be done, from the jangling and (as the author considers them) the purely verbal and sterile controversies of many of the philosophical and theological schools. One could not, indeed, con-

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of accuracy of citation, it is necessary to mention that James adds in brackets at this point the following proviso: "I am supposing, of course, that the theories *have* been equally successful in their explanations of what is." The proviso is a rather peculiar one. It seems to mean that if the theories had *not* been equally successful in their purely retrospective explanation of the sources of the supposed moribund world, there *would* be a difference of meaning between them. And this is equivalent to admitting that the pragmatic doctrine asserted in the same paragraph is untrue. But one must, doubtless, regard this, not as a retraction, but as a momentary and unintentional lapse.

vincingly call the book an eirenicon. Professor James's usual method of peacemaking is to try to annihilate both combatants in the quarrels of which he disapproves, using his pragmatic formula as a bludgeon to that end. But this betokens at least so much of the spirit of the peacemaker as is implied by a strong dislike for the spectacle of avoidable quarrels. And it is perhaps this militant part of that spirit which, as human nature goes, is assured of the most general sympathy. But it neither befits the philosophic temper, nor is it pragmatically safe, to permit one's sympathy with the general spirit of a doctrine, or one's respect for the practical purposes of its author, to absolve one from a patient and analytical examination of its precise meaning, and of the validity of it in the specific form in which its author has expressed it. The pragmatic theory of the meaning of propositions is put forward primarily as a contribution to logic or epistemology; it implies that a correct view upon the logical question which it raises is worth having; and it purports to give a coherent and true account of a certain matter that is not intrinsically unverifiable. The coherency and truth, therefore, of that account we ought now to examine more closely. For the success of Professor James's somewhat aggressive peacemaking depends entirely upon the solidity of his weapon.

Now, in examining into the truth of the pragmatist theory, in this first of its two senses, we must first of all ask how the validity of a theory concerning the meaning of propositions is to be tested. There appears to be no imaginable way of testing it, except by ascertaining what we do in point of fact mean by our propositions—in other words, by introspection. If a certain philosopher contends that no judgment made by a human mind ever contains any meaning beyond—let us put it algebraically— $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$ , we do well to look into our judgments; and if we find in some of them certain elements of meaning which do not seem to be quite satisfactorily described as either  $x$  or  $y$  or  $z$ , we are justified in concluding that the philosopher's contention, as a generalization, is simply not true. Now applying this kind of test to Professor James's pragmatism, it is easy to find at least two classes of propositions, either of which constitutes a negative

instance fatal to the theory as it is formulated. It is, indeed, so easy, that I find it scarcely conceivable that a great master of psychological analysis can ever have set up a general rule to which the exceptions are so obvious; and I go back and read again and again all the ways in which James states his theory, with a feeling that they must mean something other than that which they, none the less, appear explicitly and unambiguously to affirm.

In order that, in presenting our negative instances, we may avoid all difficulty over the question of idealism, let us confine ourselves, first, to one class of judgments: those, namely, concerning the real existence, *für sich*, not of things, but of persons. My belief that Professor James now consciously exists, and is probably at this moment engaged in writing about pragmatism, certainly (whether true or false) means, for me and for anyone who is unwilling to call himself a "solipsist," a good deal more than the mere expectation that I shall in the future have evidence of Professor James's existence, and shall continue to be instructed and stimulated by further profoundly interesting contributions to philosophy and psychology. The belief, for one thing, refers primarily, not to the future at all, but to something conceived as strictly contemporaneous with the moment at which the belief itself arises. And something similar is, in fact, true of all beliefs which have either a contemporaneous or a retrospective reference. The pragmatist seems to forget so commonplace a circumstance as that most of our beliefs refer to matters that have a date, and that the date is not always future. When I try to imagine what Galileo's state of mind was while he was recanting, at least the temporal part of my meaning, the "pastness" of the incident with which it is concerned, cannot be identified with any "future practical consequences in my experience" or anybody's else. Yet one cannot suppose that the pragmatists intend to deny the validity of the temporal distinction—they are the last philosophers in the world who could be expected to do so. As little do they seem actually to reject that other non-predictive element in my meaning, in the instances cited—namely, the "externality" of the mental state referred to, the fact that what my mind is trying in some degree to reproduce is the conscious state of another, numeri-

cally distinct, mind. *Some* objective practical consequences are usually (by no means invariably) implied by propositions of this sort; but they are implied only mediately or inferentially. These implied future aspects of the judgment's meaning constitute, not its essence, but only the means to its verification. The complete *verification* of most judgments about concrete matters of fact is, indeed, usually subsequent to the making of them; and beliefs about past facts which contain no incidental implications as to possible future experience are (except in one important class of cases, to be noted) not in the strictest sense verifiable at all. If somebody has a theory that Queen Elizabeth was married to Leicester, but makes it a part of the same hypothesis that all possible evidence bearing upon the point has been completely destroyed, he says what is foolish and unimportant, because by his own admission no one can ever find out whether it is true or not. But he is not saying a thing that has no distinct and intelligible meaning. To maintain, then, that a belief which is empirically unverifiable is *ipso facto* meaningless, appears not only unwarranted but absurd.

## II

Our pragmatist seems, in fact, to have confused these two quite different things: the meaning or import of a judgment, and the means to its verification. Recognizing this confusion, it seems advisable—in order that we may not take advantage of a mere infelicity in the formulation of the doctrine—that we restate the theory in a corrected and more promising form. What it, so far, appears to reduce to, is the contention that propositions are *verifiable* only in so far as they imply anticipated future practical experiences. The pragmatist might offer this corrected principle as a criterion of the limits—not, indeed, of the meaningful, but of the verifiable; and, by implication, therefore, as a means of distinguishing the properly debatable from the undebatable. And in so doing the pragmatist would, if his criterion were sound, be at length doing something practically useful. He would, in effect, be setting up a sort of practical syllogism, which should have the function of regulating controversy, theological

or other, and quieting the strife of tongues. The syllogism would run:

1. It is foolish and immoral to dispute about matters the truth of which cannot be verified.

2. All dispute about propositions that do not contain the implication of specific future practical experiences resulting from their truth is dispute about matters which cannot be verified.

3. Therefore, all dispute about such propositions is foolish and immoral.

No one is likely to quarrel with the major premise. The point now at issue is whether the minor premise (2)—the revised version of the first sort of pragmatism—is admissible. In one of the later chapters (chap. vi) of Professor James's book his theory—though confused, more or less, with another quite different doctrine—seems substantially to have assumed the form of this minor premise. All verification, we are there told, in the last analysis consists in the comparison of a concrete experience with a judgment of anticipation which had preceded it and had pointed or led to it. There are, indeed, certain indirect verification-processes that appear to lack this character; but they are merely provisional substitutes for the real thing. "All roads lead to Rome, and in the end and eventually all true processes must lead to the face of directly verifying sensible experiences *somewhere*, which somebody's ideas have copied."<sup>3</sup>

Now a full discussion of this point would involve us at once in a consideration of pragmatism in its second sense as a theory of the criterion of truth. For you cannot tell what propositions are verifiable and what are not, until you know in what the verification of a proposition consists; and you cannot know this without knowing the generic nature of the mark or quality which distinguishes all "true" judgments from all false ones. Upon that larger discussion I do not now wish to enter. But one or two observations may be introduced here which will not necessarily bring up the broader epistemological problem. In the first place it should be evident that—whatever others may say—no one who admits that there are such things as "necessities of thought"—or "external

<sup>3</sup>*Pragmatism*, p. 215.

truths," or "self-evident propositions," or "*a-priori* knowledge" —can consistently hold the view under consideration, that only empirically predictive judgments are verifiable, and that all verification consists in the comparison of an anticipation with a subsequent concrete experience. For a "necessary" truth, an axiom, is, by hypothesis, precisely the kind of thing that is automatically self-verifying. It may imply a prediction; all general propositions do so, since they profess to apply to all future, as well as past and present, cases of the kind of thing you may be talking about. But if they are really self-evident propositions their verification does not depend nor wait upon the realization of the future facts which happen to come within their scope; their truth is known, as the jargon of the logicians implies, "from beforehand." And, further, there appears no reason why there should not be truths of this character which do not point to any subsequent, concrete, sensible verification. "Eternal" truths seem likely sometimes to deal with eternal matters; or they may deal with past matters, the necessity for the reality of which is involved in the necessity of some general truth which covers them. The elaborate systems of metaphysics and rational theology built up by the whole series of post-Kantian idealists constitute affirmations which do not imply the possibility of their own verification, for our minds, by any future sensible experience. But the pragmatist (though he may dissent from their actual arguments) cannot rule these systems out of court at the outset as by their very nature unverifiable, unless he refuses to admit the existence of necessities of thought. For what each of these systems professes and (however unsuccessfully) strives to be, is a sequence of necessary and inter-connected truths which leads from some common and admitted fact of experience to the discovery of the ulterior and unescapable implications of that fact. Here again, then, the pragmatic contention can only be maintained at the cost of a further and very questionable doctrine—that of the non-existence of any *a-priori* and necessary truth. Some may be prepared to pay this cost, and with them we must deal hereafter. But many—and Professor James, in particular—are not of their number. The author of *Pragmatism* gives very full and liberal

recognition to the reality of eternal truths, which constrain the mind to assent in advance of experience and independently of any comparison of an anticipation with a subsequent sensible verification.

Our ready-made ideal framework for all sorts of possible objects follows from the very structure of our thinking. We can no more play fast and loose with these abstract relations than we can do so with our sense-experiences. They coerce us; we must treat them consistently, whether or not we like the results.

These observations appear to be true, but they do not appear to be consistent with the doctrine about the nature and limits of the verifiable which constitutes the restated form of the pragmatic theory.

It could be shown, if space permitted, that, even apart from the restricted field of necessary truths, we have ways of reaching conclusions which, though not absolutely coercive, we regard as convincing, about matters concerning which, at the moment when we make the judgment, we have no anticipation whatever of any subsequent experience, on our own part or that of any other person. But it is needless to multiply negative instances. A single class of exceptions to a generalization is as effective as a multitude in showing the generalization to be untrue. The second formulation, then, of James's sort of pragmatism seems also to break down. We can as little maintain that verifiability is limited to the reference in judgments to future sensible experience, as we can that the meaning of propositions is so limited.

### III

There still, however, is left something of the original pragmatist contention; there is a residuum to which the pragmatist would cling—and to which, so far, he is entitled to cling—even after his first two more imposing affirmations have successively been abandoned. This is the assertion that, even if propositions lacking a reference to “concrete future experience” may have both meaning and verifiability, they can at all events have no importance or practical interest or religious value. It is to this and no more than this, I think, that a great part of the argument of James's book

reduces. The substance of his pragmatic doctrine is to be found in this view which defines what constitutes, not the intellectual meaning nor the logical validity, but the moral worth and human significance of propositions. It is impossible to suppose that the author of this first form of pragmatism really thinks that, if the world had no future, there would be no difference of meaning (in the popular and the logical sense of that word) between the materialistic and the theistic accounts of the world's origin and past operation—when the very sentence in which he enunciates this paradox betrays that the author himself, irrespective of any future reference, very clearly contrasts the meaning of the one account with that of the other. It is equally impossible to suppose that he fundamentally and consistently thinks that all verification depends upon the *ex post facto* comparison of a prediction with an experience predicted, when in the same discussion he sets forth, with characteristic felicity in exposition, certain modes of verification of a wholly different character. But there can be no doubt that he thinks that propositions which have no bearing either upon future experience or future conduct have no useful function in human life.<sup>4</sup> What, he constantly asks, shall it profit us—creatures whose connatural business is to act and whose treasure is in that concrete future that our desires or our ideals foreshadow and our choices may help to form—what shall it profit such as we to hold beliefs which define no expectation and prescribe no action? Unless a proposition put before man's volitional nature the promise of some hope realized, the possibility of some risk to be faced, the means that may be seized upon for some desirable consummation,

<sup>4</sup>This doctrine is, of course, not particularly new. I find, for example, in a forgotten German logician of the eighteenth century, whom, by coincidence, I chance to be reading just after writing this paragraph, the following distinction between "dead" and "living" knowledge: "Whenever a piece of philosophical knowledge (*eine gelehrte Erkenntnis*) is capable of putting in motion man's appetitive or volitional faculty, and actually does so, it contains grounds of action (*Bewegungsgründe*) and is *living*. Any knowledge which can, or does, have no influence upon the will, is a *dead* knowledge. . . . There are three things requisite in order that any piece of knowledge may be called living: (1) it must be perceptual [by this he means, not abstract or symbolical]; (2) it must arouse some rational feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (*Vergnügen oder Missvergnügen*); (3) it must at the same time rationally represent this satisfaction as not only future, but also as capable of being furthered or hindered by our own powers" (Meier, *Vernunftlehre*, 1752, §§ 263, 266). Meier goes on to reason that only "living" knowledge is truly important. This comes near to making a pragmatist of the logician whose book (from which the quotation comes) was used by Kant as the textbook for his university classes.

what does it humanly signify whether the proposition be affirmed or rejected?

It is really upon such considerations as these, I think, that James chiefly relies, when he tries to justify even his technically logical theory; it is, in the last analysis, by means of this practical test that he seeks to distinguish the legitimate from the illegitimate subject of controversy in theology or elsewhere. Thus the issue between a spiritualistic or theistic, and a materialistic, conception of the world, *may* be of great importance, a question upon which we have every reason for employing the best energies of our minds. But it is so only if you mean by theism a belief which justifies you in hopes and expectancies to which the other view gives no sanction.

Give us a matter that promises *success*, that is bound by its laws to lead our world ever nearer to perfection, and any rational man will worship that matter as readily as Mr. Spencer worships his own unknowable power. . . . Doing all that a God can do, it is equivalent to God, its function is a God's function, and in a world in which a God would be superfluous; from such a world a God could never be lawfully missed.

This, it will be noted, is very far from saying that the idea of self-evolving matter and the idea of divine personal agency are—even in their past relations—ideas of identical logical import; it implies, in fact, quite the contrary. It says merely that, if the materialistic and theistic hypotheses pointed to identical and equally valuable cosmic futures we should have no serious motive for caring to know which is the true hypothesis. But since, in reality, “materialism means the denial that the moral order is eternal, and the cutting off of ultimate hopes,” while “spiritualism means the affirmation of an eternal moral order and the letting loose of hope,” our moral interests and the sanction of our forward-looking emotions are at stake in the matter; and it is for that reason that “we have here a genuine issue, which as long as men are men will yield matter for serious philosophic debate.”

In its “pragmatic” residuum, then, the first sort of pragmatistic doctrine must be regarded as essentially a practical and ethical attitude; James's attempt to convert it into an epistemological theory is an untenable and a superfluous exaggeration. He has

apparently been led by enthusiasm, and by an instinct for the effective and emphatic way of putting things, to translate a strong conviction concerning the relative importance of propositions into a logical doctrine concerning the import of propositions. The value of this third transformation of pragmatism we have now to consider. We shall find it open to a very different sort of objection from those which it was necessary to urge against the preceding two.

It must be borne in mind that we are not now concerned with the analysis of the meaning of a proposition nor with the verification of the assertion contained in it; we are now interested in its functional value, *its relation to the future in any way*. In order, therefore, to come up to the requirements of our present pragmatist formula, a proposition need not be expressly predictive; its reference to the future need not be a verbal or even a logical part of its own content. So long as it actually bears upon, affects, or predetermines the future, and can be apprehended by us in advance as capable of doing so, it must escape the pragmatist's condemnation. In his original statement,<sup>5</sup> even of his doctrine about meaning, James explicitly made his pragmatic criterion take in every kind of future consequences of a proposition's being true—"active or passive, direct or indirect, express or implied;" and certainly, when the criterion drops its masquerade as a logical theory, and presents itself now purely as a means of discriminating practically significant from practically trivial differences of opinion, it must necessarily be taken with this latitude of meaning. Any judgment, then, which by being true, and known as true, entails

<sup>5</sup>There is, however, in James's recent book a radical ambiguity in the statement of the pragmatic criterion. The "future consequences in experience of the proposition's being true," in which the meaning or the importance of any proposition is declared to consist, may either (a) include only the future experiences which the proposition predicts as about to occur, no matter whether it is believed or not; or (b) it may also include the future experiences which will follow if the proposition is believed. James applies the formula sometimes in one sense, sometimes in the other, and his results vary accordingly. When he takes the formula in sense (a), it tends to exclude a variety of beliefs—or all except certainly restricted elements in those beliefs—from consideration, as meaningless or unimportant. It is, for example, applied in this sense in the passage cited, referring to the issue between materialism and spiritualism. More usually, the criterion is applied in sense (b); and then it appears able to exclude no belief that anyone really cares about. It does not, for example, permit the relegation of either the Vedantist, or the modern idealistic monism to the limbo of non-significant issues. Neither doctrine is in any concrete way predictive; but, as James recognizes, the holding of either makes a difference in the life of the believer; and both, therefore, are acknowledged to have pragmatic value.

future consequences in any way different from those which would follow upon its falsity, is as "pragmatic" as need be, and fully meets all the demands that our pragmatist can ever make of any judgment.

This being recognized, I do not see how anyone can question the entire truth of the formula. A belief which turned an absolutely blind eye, a dead face, to the future in which alone value still remains possible for us, would be a thing itself utterly and inexpressibly valueless and unimportant. But just the obviousness of this fact suggests to us the question which may still be asked about the present pragmatic principle—one concerning, not at all its truth, but its applicability. Doubtless, no beliefs that neither enable us to prognosticate any future experience nor prescribe any future behavior, can be useful or interesting or morally or religiously serviceable. But *are there any such beliefs?* Do judgments of this sort exist in nature? Assuredly, we must answer, they must be few in number and of a wholly peculiar character. *For any belief which I am supposed to be capable of carrying with me into the future, ipso facto constitutes an item of my future experience; it will in that future engender its own concomitant states of thought and feeling and call for its appropriate reactions, and it will therefore have importance and efficacy corresponding to the degree of interest and of influence which there attaches to it*—no belief, while held, being wholly destitute of such interest and influence. This is the consideration which compels me unwillingly to conclude that the pragmatic enterprise of ruling out a whole class of propositions in advance, on the ground of their non-functional character, is a completely hopeless, or rather a completely redundant undertaking.

That this is no verbal and sterile quibble may be seen by reverting to Professor James's own chosen illustration and using that once more as a test case. Suppose that a theistic and a materialistic account of the source and essential nature of the world both implied in all other respects exactly the same futures; suppose, for example, that we *could* put a thoroughly optimistic construction upon materialism, and infer from it the "success" of all our highest ideals of social good or of individual perfection.

There would still inevitably remain one difference between the two views, arising precisely from the fact that they are two views and not one. If the theistic view be true, and accepted as true, then our future will contain an additional item of fact; our sensible experiences, even though no other than those which the materialistic theory might have led us to expect, will be construed by us as the expression of a personal consciousness behind them; and this will give to them a re-interpretation, and will awaken in us a sense of communion, which may very well come to seem the most significant element in our whole universe of discourse. A future world with a God in it will, both for our intellectual modes of representation and for our feeling, be incommensurably different from a world with no God in it, even though all the choir of heaven and furniture of earth be the same in the latter as in the former world. From no standpoint save that of a shop-keeping sort of utilitarianism—which is the last attitude that anyone could regard as characteristic of the originator of the pragmatist movement—can it be maintained that my experience, when I have a set of physical sensations which I ascribe to the working of unconscious automata, is “equivalent” to my experience when, having the same sensations, I ascribe them to the agency and purpose of conscious, feeling, loving, or hating minds analogous to my own. And between a theistic and a non-theistic way of construing the facts of experience—even the facts up to date—there is, at least for a large class of minds, a far more pregnant difference. There is an eloquent and familiar passage in Romanes’s early writing, *A Candid Examination of Theism*, in which he gives expression to his sense of all that he had lost out of the universe through that abandonment of theistic faith to which he found himself constrained; and it was as much in the vanishing of a spiritual presence from Nature, as in the quenching of hopes of personal immortality or cosmic “success,” that the tragedy of his intellectual illumination seemed to him to consist. Throughout the reflective poetry of the nineteenth century there sounds an often recurrent cry of protest or of lamentation before the seemingly irresistible march of a purely mechanistic conception of the world; and the expected consequence of that threatened triumph which

these poets have bemoaned has been, not usually the darkening of the hopes of the future, but the disenchantment of the present, through the baffling of man's imaginative craving for meaning, purpose, fellowship, and kinship in the outer world of physical phenomena. Better—the modern poet has sometimes cried, reversing the argument of Lucretius—the somewhat disorderly and capricious, but responsive and essentially personal Nature of paganism, than a cosmos never so neat and regular in its behavior, but empty of any consciousness either of our existence or of its own.

We yearn for fellowship with lake and mountain;  
Our conscious souls seek conscious sympathy—  
Nymphs in the forest, naiads in the fountain,  
Gods on the craggy height and roaring sea.

We find but soulless sequences of matter,  
Fact linked to fact by adamantine rods;  
Eternal bonds of former sense and latter;  
Dead laws for living gods.<sup>6</sup>

It is from entirely the same point of view that the melancholy preacher in James Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night* brings to his pessimistic and despairing congregation, as the first and deepest consolation remaining to them, an assurance that the evil universe in which they suffer has at least no purpose nor personality behind it. "The facts of experience"—this is the burden of his message—"are as bad as you think them; but it is not necessary to make that evil intolerable by conceiving it as the expression of a conscious will."

There is no God: no fiend with names divine  
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,  
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

In neither of these cases does the idea of a divine presence imply any change in the facts external to itself; yet both to the poet who finds those facts in themselves beautiful and to the poet who finds them monstrous, that idea is what, by his personal rejection of it, chiefly gives the coloring to his total experience and determines his emotional reaction upon life. The belief in God thus,

<sup>6</sup>Grant Allen: "Magdalen Chapel," in *The Lower Slopes*.

even where it predicts no future experiences that might not have equally been predicted by the negative of that belief, still pre-determines a difference in experience. It is the difference in the belief that *makes* the experience different.

The question of theism, considered apart from its prophetic implications, is doubtless the most important example of the existence of real issues which turn upon propositions that have of themselves neither a predictive nor a prescriptive reference to the future. But it is not a unique example. Any non-predictive proposition whatever will possess, in greater or less degree, the same kind of *pregnancy* of future differences in experience, if any strong feeling or any lively need of the human imagination chance to be implicated in it. Logically speaking, the difference between a proposition's truth or falsity is always, in this sense, a pregnant one, since, once more, the experience even of the vaguest and mildest affirmation of the proposition is bound to be different from the experience of its negation. The presence of the associated emotions or special interests determines only the degree of the difference, not its existence. When we look about us, or turn the pages of history, we find scarcely any limit to the number and variety of the affirmations which different minds have been desirous of carrying along into the future with them, though none of the other elements entering into that future were thereby deducible. Occasionally we find men caring in this way about purely past matters of fact—for example, the aristocratic origin of their own family, or the saintliness of the character of Jeanne D'Arc, the historicity of Moses, or the reality of the miraculous conception. In some of these cases such purely historical beliefs appear significant merely because they are supposed to be inextricably involved in some complex body of truths that has a predictive side to it. But examples are not wanting of retrospective judgments that have of their own force taken a singular hold upon the imaginations of great masses of men. More usually, however, the pregnant sort of non-predictive belief relates to some permanent or non-temporal element or aspect of the world, that does not manifest itself in any specific, efficacious relation to the other phenomena of experience. Of these purely descriptive or

interpretative beliefs, the provinces of metaphysics and religion afford an inexhaustible supply of illustrations. Many persons, for example—as Professor James has himself remarked, in a passage that is an admirable example of sympathetic humor—find great inward satisfaction, and even a very practical sort of relief from unhealthy mental perturbation and restlessness, in simply being able to apply the numerical adjective “one” to the world with considerable frequency. It is not any particular or working kind of oneness that they care about; the vaguer it be, the better it is able to arouse those subtle reactions that seem to be especially associated with the idea of unity. Others, again, are analogously affected by the number three—for there is a trinitarianism that is much wider than orthodox Christianity—and are strongly sensible of the need of representing the general nature of things under the form of a triad. Perhaps the great majority of mankind find some sense of an ultimate mystery and ineffableness in things almost indispensable, and therefore resent any doctrine which conceives the universe as nothing more than a neat system of regularly moving atoms, completely calculable by a sufficiently good mathematician. It is for this reason that Mr. Spencer and those of like mind cling to their “unknowable power,” and are not content with even the most serviceable and “successful” matter.

Now, we are, of course, accustomed to recognize that not all of these “needs” are equally legitimate and serious; and it is generally agreed that the question of truth or falsity is more urgent and more important in the case of some of these non-predictive but pregnant beliefs than in the case of others. It is, indeed, questionable whether any belief that a considerable part of mankind have cared about is unimportant, if true. We should be somewhat shy of any doctrine which proposes to deny to even the most outlaw sort of belief its day in court—its opportunity to be tested by the two ultimate questions: First, does the proposition expressing it have any definite, intelligible and consistent, *logical* meaning? Second, is it in any way verifiably true? Still, it would doubtless be an advantage to have some canon whereby we could arrange these purely descriptive and interpretative judg-

ments according to their relative seriousness and significance, in advance of any consideration of the evidence for their truth. It should, however, by this time be entirely clear that pragmatism, even in its amended form, is incapable of providing us with such a canon. It has no facilities for either excluding from consideration, or even for subordinating, any proposition. Every affirmation that is not pure nonsense is either true or false. If true, and if its truth be verifiable, the acceptance of it will be a fact which alters the future of somebody. Thus every belief that actually waits at the gates of anyone's mind wears at least some shreds of the pragmatic wedding garment. A doctrine which confines itself to the distinction between propositions that have, and those that have not, future consequences, can furnish no criterion for distinguishing, *within the limits of the former class*, the important from the unimportant. And virtually all propositions, we have seen, fall within those limits. The pragmatic principle itself, indeed, comes very near to being an exception. But it is not really one. It cannot, it is true, perform its chosen rôle of extinguisher of controversy. But (in the diminished sense to which we have now seen it reduce itself) it is undoubtedly true; and it expresses a certain descriptive generalization about a common characteristic of our judgments, that may conceivably awaken some obscure emotional reverberations in some minds.

#### IV

Our results thus far appear to be chiefly negative. But after this clearing of the much-incumbered ground, it is possible to discover the more clearly in the philosophy of James an insight more profound and much less questionable than any of these variations of pragmatism. It is not properly an epistemological insight at all, but a directly metaphysical one; and it is not reducible to any of the pragmatist formulas. But it springs, none the less, I think, from the same root as they, and is the substance of an idea of which they are vague adumbrations. Those who have followed Professor James's writings from the beginning must have long since seen what aspect of human experience, what sort of moment in life, has presented itself to him always as the central

and illuminating fact, the fixed datum to which any philosophy that could be considered sound must be required to do justice, the point at which we have most reason to suppose that the inner and ineffable nature of reality is directly revealed to us. This is the moment of voluntary choice—the moment in which, in the presence of alternative real possibilities, and with the consciousness that some actual content of the future now truly hangs trembling in the balances of volition, the mind somehow reaches its fiat, and, by the “dumb turning of the will,” performs the daily miracle of excluding one of those real possibilities thereafter and eternally *from* reality. And it is to this sort of experience as a touchstone that James comes back in his latest book, when he attempts finally to settle what he himself declares to be the gravest and most momentous of philosophical issues—the issue, in general, between monism and pluralism. He is, confessedly, not in the least helped to his own settlement of this issue by his pragmatic criterion, in the first sense; for both of the opposing views are recognized as having pragmatic meaning and potential value in experience. Nor is it upon any merely general application of pragmatism in the second sense—of the conception of the true as simply the morally or practically serviceable—that he bases the main outcome of his reflection. It is rather upon a more original and an entirely specific principle (which has this in common with the first sort of pragmatism, that it, too, is the expression of a sense of the necessity of maintaining the vital significance of the relation of present action to future experience) that James rests his characteristic metaphysical doctrine. This principle may be expressed thus: no proposition is to be accepted as legitimate which, directly or by implication, *denies to the future the genuine character of futurity and contradicts the reality of open possibilities* at any present moment of conscious choice between alternatives. It appears to be a reasonable, a natural, and even a necessary, presupposition of all action and of all reflection, that future time is future; that in the act of choice something is chosen; that in the process of deliberation there *is* a process and there is something determined thereby; that possibilities, before decision, have just that kind of reality which it is, *at the moment of deci-*

*sion, impossible to think of them as not having;* and that at the moment after decision one bit of this kind of reality is extinguished forever. This is for James, at the least of it, a hypothesis which has the right of way in philosophy, and one which no conflicting doctrine can show to be illogical or untrue. "Our acts, our turning-places, where we seem to ourselves to make ourselves and to grow, are the parts of the world to which we are closest, the parts of which our knowledge is most intimate and complete. Why may they not be the actual turning-places and growing-places which they seem to be, of the world—why not the workshop of being, where we catch fact in the making, so that nowhere may the world grow in any other kind of way than this?"<sup>7</sup>

This presupposition is, indeed, so natural to every man, that it may seem to many a mere commonplace. But the implications of it, for philosophy and theology, are, on the contrary, revolutionary. In particular, it leads to the rejection of a mode of religious thought that has influenced many minds—and minds of a high order—in our time. This is the doctrine—which has received its most systematic and persuasive presentation at the hands of Professor Royce, but is to be found also in many other and less coherent forms—that all which enters, or has entered, or shall enter, into the experience of any conscious life is eternally embraced in one Absolute Experience. This all-including Divine Life, we are told for our comfort, is itself, in its timeless existence, eternally triumphant; the world that is, is the world that the Absolute wills and finds very good; even our suffering and sin and shame are, every single jot of them, indispensable elements in the bliss and glory of the Universal Self who alone sees and understands the whole. This doctrine is, by its philosophical defenders, declared to express only what is necessarily implied by the very conception of the existence of such a thing as truth; its technical basis, in other words, is epistemological,<sup>8</sup> and the rejection of it involves the denial of the soundness of its epistemological premises. But apart from all purely dialectical considerations, it

<sup>7</sup> *Pragmatism*, p. 287.

<sup>8</sup> One form of a kindred epistemological argument for a supratemporal and eternally perfect Self, manifesting itself in the temporal experiences of humanity, is familiar in the writings of Thomas Hill Green.

has seemed to many to possess profound religious value. Thus an anonymous correspondent, whom James quotes, finds that the thought of the limitations, failures, and sufferings of himself and others becomes endurable "only on one condition; namely, that through the construction, in imagination and by reasoning, of a rational unity of all things, I can conceive of my acts and my thoughts and my troubles as supplemented [not merely to be supplemented] by all the other phenomena of the world, and as forming—when thus supplemented—a scheme which I can adopt and approve as my own." Such a conception of all evil as completely taken up into, and required by, the total plan of things—and of this total plan as eternally willed and approved by a timeless Consciousness that knows and possesses all the content of it from the beginning—may be said, indeed, to be necessarily involved in any thoroughly optimistic view of the world. Whoever says that the universe of our experience is through and through, and in all its items, rational, the expression of a single Reason and a single Will—whoever intends to maintain literally that because God's in his Heaven, *all's* well with the world—implies some such doctrine as this to which the philosophers of idealistic monism have given systematic and logical expression.

Now, Professor James's aversion to this type of theology is not, apparently, due solely to the fact that such a doctrine conflicts with the fundamental presupposition of which I have spoken. There is another characteristic conviction of his—also appearing in some of his earliest papers—which, if it does not serve of itself to confute the monistic theology, at least establishes, on both ethical and logical grounds, a serious presumption against it. This is the conviction that the rather prevalent fashion of intellectually playing fast and loose with evil—of calling in the religious consciousness to bless what the moral consciousness has pronounced accursed—is not, in the long run, compatible with either logical or moral integrity. Especially since the time of Hegel, and partly as a result of the diffusion of Hegelian ideas, this sort of bookkeeping by double entry has become exceedingly common, even among those having little acquaintance with philosophical systems; the very essence of religion has seemed to some to con-

sist in the affirmation that there is a higher point of view, a superior plane of insight, at which the stubborn differences of things—and, among others, the difference between the good and the bad—disappear in a transcendent synthesis where all is unity and all is good. Of this tendency Professor James has been the lifelong opponent; he has stood stoutly as the defender of what he has called “the chastity of the intellect,” insisting that differences do not disappear by being ignored, and that, in particular, evil is neither annulled nor absolutely compensated by being—as it happily may be—passed beyond or even utilized to further future good. The point has been well expressed by a sane and admirable humanist of our time, who makes small pretensions to technical philosophy:

Evil comes from the gods, no doubt; but so do all things; and to extract good from it—the great Prometheus-feat of man—is not to evil’s credit, but to the credit of good. The contrary doctrine is a poison to the spirit, though a poison of medicinal use in moments of anguish, a bromide or an opiate.<sup>9</sup>

To a mind thus deeply impressed with the necessity of keeping distinct things distinct, and above all of honestly facing the irresolvable evilness of evil, and loyally maintaining the rigorous dualism of the moral judgment—the monistic system must inevitably appear suspect. For in that system the point of view represented as highest—the point of view of the Absolute Consciousness—transcends and confounds the ethical distinction. The sinner, if he be also a monist clear-headed enough to see the implications of his own metaphysical belief, may always have the consolation of considering that he in his sin, no less than the saint in his virtue, is contributing an indispensable ingredient in that strange compound of Being which his God has from all eternity willed and in which is his everlasting delight.

But the ultimate ground of objection to the monistic theology lies, I think, for the philosopher of pragmatism, in the fact that—if it be construed literally—it takes away from our “present” moments of action that character of real, determinative responsibility, and from the future that character of possessing real and

<sup>9</sup> Vernon Lee in *Hortus Vitae*, 1907.

undetermined possibilities, the presupposition of which is inex-pugnably implicit in the act of conscious and purposive volition. "The essential contrast," he writes, "between pragmatism and rationalism [really between the opposing metaphysical conceptions of pluralism and monism] is that for rationalism reality is ready-made and complete from all eternity, while for pragmatism it is still in the making, and awaits part of its complexion from the future." According to the latter view, in our cognitive as well as our active life we are creative. "We *add*, both to the subject and to the predicate part of reality. The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands. Like the kingdom of heaven, it suffers violence willingly. Man *engenders* truths upon it."<sup>10</sup>

The conception of the universe which is implied by this doctrine is radically new in at least this sense, that it has rarely been taken seriously and whole-heartedly by either theology or the general religious consciousness. It runs counter to what is perhaps the strongest and most characteristic religious tendency of the present generation—the craving for the consolations and the mystical intoxications of thoroughgoing monism and unqualified optimism. It is, for example, essentially uncongenial to what appears to be the metaphysical side of that somewhat confused medley of conceptions now exercising the minds of the English churches under the name of the New Theology. And it is almost as little in harmony with what may be considered the dominant (though far from the unique) strain in the greater part of the theological thought of the past. For (as a paper in this *Journal* by the present writer sought to show several years ago<sup>11</sup>) theology has rarely taken the reality of the time-process, of the temporal aspect of human experience, seriously; it has always been in haste to fix itself upon the eternities. But the doctrine of the pragmatistic philosopher takes the time-process so seriously as to imply that all the reality of which we have any possible knowledge is strictly temporal and

<sup>10</sup> *Pragmatism*. pp. 257, 256.—The philosophical reader will observe that this doctrine, though not really based upon the pragmatist epistemology as formulated by James, does undoubtedly imply a reconstruction of certain parts of epistemology. That, however, is a matter lying beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>11</sup> Vol. VI, 3, 1902, p. 439.

processive in character. Religious emotion, too, in the past (even when most conjoined with the ethical temper) has often been prone to seek the opiate of an eventual optimism, to demand a final assurance against all real loss, to cultivate the confidence that all things (even their own sins) work together for good to them that love God. The doctrine of the pragmatist, if it has its encouraging and its bracing aspect, has also its drastic aspect; and it is unable to give any such assurance. There are, in its universe, indefensible evils and uncompensated losses. Our business with these is not to harmonize them, or even to explain how they came to be there; our business is to get rid of them, and devote our powers to eliminating them from the world that is to be. And even in that future we may expect obstacles and we must face risks. The salvation of the world, says James, is no absolutely predictable certainty. So far as we have knowledge, it appears to be a world "the perfection of which is potential merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own 'level best.' . . . The world's safety is unwarranted. It is a real adventure, with real danger, yet it may win through. It is a social scheme of co-operative work genuinely to be done."

Such a doctrine, while it rejects the arguments for theism offered by the monistic philosophy, finds the theistic faith a reasonable and a needful postulate. It has a natural affinity for the belief in a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness, and from whose abounding supplies we may, in the ways known to religious experience, draw reinforcement of our own spiritual energies. It is, perhaps, in this hidden and mysterious source of moral power empirically known in the inner life of men, that James himself is chiefly interested. But from his general doctrine there follow certain consequences in regard to the conception of God, in so far as that relates, not only to a power that functions in our experience, but also to a being of whom we may have some sort of intellectual representation. Such a philosophy as that of the pragmatist sees no reason for belief in the reality of an idle perfection, however sublime, having no real contact with the mud and dust of things, no truly militant part and no vital stake in the battle which for us is often so full of hazard and of desperate seriousness. Its God

must be a God having an existence in the temporal world which alone is real to us, and therefore one having his own perfection of being and his own triumph still to achieve—with us, and through our loyalty in that vast, co-operative work in which we have every reason to think that the universe consists.

It must suffice for the present to have recapitulated this conception, and to have disengaged it from the ambiguous and unconvincing epistemological theories with which it has needlessly been involved. The conception, it is fairly manifest, is still far from being fully worked out; and it suggests some serious questions which it does not answer. It is doubtless something less than the whole truth of the rational theology of the future. But it contains, I think, truth to which the theology of the future will find it necessary to give a place among the fundamentals. The greater number of the theologians and the philosophers of the past have sought the solution of their problems by taking the considerations that lead to the monistic type of thought as their starting-point. By this time, any who will consent to think clearly may, as it seems to me, see that the result of these efforts is, and must be, a doctrine struck through with inevitable self-contradiction, on its logical side, and, on its ethical side, tending to the eventual divorce of the religious from the moral consciousness. In this situation, it is from the way of thinking that has as yet scarcely ever been fairly tried, that we have most reason to expect light.