
Pragmatism, according to Dr. James, is both an "attitude of orientation" and a theory of truth. As an attitude of orientation it is "the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, categories, supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, traits, consequences, facts" (p. 54).

The first part of the book describes Dr. James's position, while the second describes the position of every philosophy without exception. Pragmatism is itself a principle, the author's explanation of it involves categories, and the course of the argument continually rests on asserted necessities. On the other hand, all philosophers deal with first things, as well as last, and all philosophers deal with last things as well as first.

We pass to Pragmatism as a theory of truth. And, this being the central part of the book, the difficulties of criticism are increased by the fact that Dr. James, though always a thoughtful critic, is very far from heedful. We find on page 49: "The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the observations mean practically the same thing; and all dispute is idle." On the next page it is said: "Mr. James, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that, to develop a doctrine, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce; that conduct is for us the sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve; what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all."

It does not seem clear from this whether "I have a bad headache" means practically the same thing as "I have not a bad headache" in the case where my conduct would remain the same with and without a headache. The one hand, we are told that the conduct of a belief is itself to produce is its sole significance. The difference there, it would seem, would have no significance. On the other hand, it would certainly make a difference to me whether I had a headache or not, and the "sensations I am to expect" would be different. And this seems to indicate that the difference has some significance.

If all this ambiguity were cleared up we should know in what case one position can be said to be true and another to be false. But which of them is true, and which false?

Truth, according to Dr. James, is a quality of nothing but beliefs. The "facts" themselves are not true. They simply are. Truth is the function of the beliefs that start and terminate among them" (p. 225).

No one ever supposed that truth was a quality of facts in the sense in which Dr. James employs the word "facts" — a sense which seems to be the most convenient use of the word. But when he continues truth to beliefs he denies the existence between the facts and the beliefs of an independent relation, called propositions, some of which are true and some false. The reality of these "propositions" has been discussed by Mr. Russell and Mr. Moore.

My own opinion is that Dr. James is right in rejecting them, but the question is very difficult, and it seems unfortunate that he should have assumed his conclusion without attempting to meet the arguments on the other side. Perhaps, however, he regarded them as "unauthorized" for a popular exposition.

What, then, is the difference between a true belief and one which is not true? "Truth is one species of good, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good, and co-ordinate with it. The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite assignable reasons" (p. 75).

This first sketch is worked out in the chapter on The Notion of Truth. Here we read: "Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their agreement in falsity means their disagreement, with 'reality'. Pragmatists and intellectualists both accept this definition as a matter of course. They begin to quarrel only after the question is raised as to what may precisely be meant by the term 'agreement' and what by the term 'reality', when reality is taken as something for our ideas to agree with" (p. 139).

The first thing that we learn as to the nature of agreement is that it is, in some cases, though not in all, a process of copying. Our true ideas of sensible things do indeed copy them. Shut
real, and this agreement is the belief of the belief. And when we require that we should learn by knowing that the belief that God
is powerful, and turn to the definitions on pages 210 and 212, we find that we should be open to a great deal about the belief but
nothing about God or about power. Thus Dr. James' position leads
to the singular consequence that an assertion about anything is
never an assertion about that thing, but about something quite
different.

And this singularity holds to difficulties. "God is powerful" is
ture. This, according to Dr. James, is the belief that God
is powerful, and from the definition of the belief is not cause or
end, nor the effect or consequence of the truth. It is not con-
ected with any belief in the belief, but it is the truth. Then what I mean when I say that God is powerful is that the
belief that God is powerful. My assertion is changed into an
assertion about my belief.

But an assertion about a belief, like any other, will mean that a
belief about it will work. So my assertion has now changed into
an assertion that the belief, the belief that God is powerful works
does itself work. We are now making an assertion about the second
belief. And this assertion is again an assertion that the belief "the
second belief works" does itself work, and so on. It's a question. No
assertion can any meaning. For, according to the theory
before us, it had a meaning it would not mean that meaning, but
something about the belief in that meaning.

With regard to "ideas of sensible things" no obscurity arises.
Suppose that X sees a lion on the point of devouring, as he sup-
poses, a stranger. X is about to shoot the lion, when he recognises
that the victim is not a stranger, but his dearest friend. In his
increased agitation his hand trembles, and the bullet kills his friend,
instead of the lion. Is his recognition of his friend a true belief or
not? On the one hand it would seem that his perception of his
friend's features is what Dr. James would call a copy of a sensible
thing, and so the belief would be true. But there seems to be no
"agreeable leading" in such a belief, and X certainly does not
"handle either" his friend "or something connected with" his
friend better than if he had not had the belief. On the contrary
the belief causes him to fall in a purpose in which he wishes to
succeed and in which it would be generally admitted that it would
be well that he should succeed. Does the belief "work" then,
according to either definition? And, if it does not work, is it true?

Dr. James offers two arguments for his position. The first is that
certain other systems have broken down. One of the "copy theory"
holds that it is true in some cases and only in some. It seems
to me, though the subject is too wide to discuss here— that he
conceals too much. The "copy theory" has seized a very
important element of all truth, and seems to me, in every case much
closer to a correct solution than the theories either of Dr. James or
of Dr. Baillie. But in no case can it be accepted as actually the correct solution.

For the most, Dr. James critiques, rather casually, two systems which, if his view of them is correct, share the fundamental vice of his own system, since they endeavor to reduce truth to an ethical conception. And he notes that Dr. Johnstone is completely satisfied with his own position. But, even supposing that the "copy-theory," Prof. Taylor, Prof. Royce, and Mr. Jaensch had all been proved wrong, we should not have got much nearer to proving that Dr. James was right.

This second argument, if I understand him rightly, is an appeal to the common belief that truth is good. "Surely," he says (p. 76), "you must admit this, that if there were no good for life in true ideas, or if the knowledge of them were positively disadvantageous, and false ideas the only useful ones, then, the current notion of truth is divided and prejudiced, and its pursuit a duty, could never have grown up to become a dogma. What would be better for us to believe? This sounds very like a definition of truth. It comes very near saying, 'What we ought to believe' and in that definition none of you would find any ability. Ought we ever not to believe what it is better for us to believe? And can we then keep the notion of what is better for us, and what is true, and permanently apart?"

So far, however, from the general sense of mankind accepting what would be better for us to believe as a definition of truth, they do not even accept it as a proposition universally true about truth. (It seems worth while to point out that not every proposition which universally holds of a subject can be taken as a definition of that subject.) "Smith is a fool, but happily his wife thinks him a wise man." "That boy is exceptionally clever, and unfortunately he knows it." All of us are continually hearing judgments of this type, and most—if not all—are continually making them. And they affirm that in certain cases it is better not to believe the truth, and even better, sometimes, to believe the contrary falsehood.

True beliefs are indeed in most cases considered good. But when they are considered good it is always for a reason. Either they are held to be good for a reason unconnected with their truth, as when a man says, "God exists, and, even if he did not, it would be well that we should believe he did." The reason here, whatever it may be, has no relation to the truth of the belief. Or else their truth is the reason, or an essential part of the reason. "The world is very evil, and, since it is so, I am glad that I have found it out." It is desirable to know that that chair is in a draught, since it is in a draught. Such statements as these last two imply that if the world were not evil, or the chair were in a draught, the belief in a question would not be good.

Such judgments that true beliefs are good, are so far from confirm-

William James, Pragmatism.