Pragmatism

WILLIAM JAMES

1842–1910

Pragmatism

The 1907 text

Rendered into modern English with AI (Claude) and edited



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INTRODUCTION

Does the squirrel go round the man? In *Pragmatism* (1907), eight public lectures given in Boston and New York, William James settles that camp-fire dispute in a sentence—it depends on what you practically mean by "going round"—and draws a philosophy out of it: to find what an idea means, ask what difference it would make in someone's experience if it were true.

Philosophy, James argues, is a clash of temperaments, the "tender-minded" rationalist and the "tough-minded" empiricist, and pragmatism is a way of keeping faith with the facts without giving up religion. He tests the method on old puzzles—substance, free will, design, the one and the many—then offers its most famous and most contested doctrine: that the true is "only the expedient in the way of our thinking," and that an idea "becomes true, is made true by events."

The right-hand column is James in lightly modernized English; the left is the text of the first edition.

Lecture I: The Present Dilemma in Philosophy

Dedication and Preface, then James's portrait of philosophy as a clash of temperaments—the tender-minded and the tough-minded—and pragmatism as a way between them.

DEDICATION

Ded.1 To the memory of John Stuart Mill, from whom I first learned the pragmatic openness of mind, and whom my fancy likes to picture as our leader were he alive today.[1]

PREFACE

James explains where the lectures were given, recommends further reading, and separates pragmatism from radical empiricism.

Pref.1 The lectures that follow were delivered at the Lowell Institute in Boston in November and December 1906, and in January 1907 at Columbia University in New York. They are printed as delivered, without developments or notes. The pragmatic movement, so-called—I do not like the name, but apparently it is too late to change it—seems to have rather suddenly precipitated itself out of the air. A number of tendencies that have always existed in philosophy have all at once become conscious of themselves collectively, and of their combined mission. This has happened in so many countries, and from so many different points of view, that a great deal of uncoordinated statement has

1 John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), English philosopher of empiricism and utilitarianism.

resulted. I have tried to unify the picture as it presents itself to my own eyes, dealing in broad strokes and avoiding minute controversy. Much futile controversy might have been avoided, I believe, if our critics had been willing to wait until we got our message fairly out. If my lectures interest any reader in the general subject, he will no doubt want to read further. I therefore give him a few references.

Pref.2 In America, John Dewey's "Studies in Logical Theory" are the foundation. Read also Dewey's articles in the *Philosophical Review*, vol. xv, pp. 113 and 465, in *Mind*, vol. xv, p. 293, and in the *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. iv, p. 197.[2]

Pref.3 Probably the best statements to begin with, however, are F. C. S. Schiller's in his "Studies in Humanism," especially the essays numbered i, v, vi, vii, xviii and xix. His earlier essays, and the polemical literature of the subject in general, are fully referred to in his footnotes.[3]

Pref.4 See also J. Milhaud, *le Rationnel*, 1898, and the fine articles by Le Roy in the *Revue de Métaphysique*, vols. 7, 8 and 9. Also articles by Blondel and de Sailly in the *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne*, 4me Série, vols. 2 and 3. Papini announces a book on Pragmatism, in French, to be published very soon.[4]

Pref.5 To head off at least one misunderstanding, let me say that there is no logical connection between pragmatism, as I understand it, and a doctrine I have recently set out under the name "radical empiricism." The latter stands on its own feet. One may reject it entirely and still be a pragmatist.

Pref.6 Harvard University, April 1907.

2 John Dewey (1859–1952), American philosopher; *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903) was a collective volume from the University of Chicago.

3 F. C. S. Schiller (1864–1937), Oxford philosopher who called his version of pragmatism "humanism."

4 Giovanni Papini (1881–1956), Italian writer and leader of the Florentine pragmatists.

PHILOSOPHY AND TEMPERAMENT

James argues that a philosopher's temperament shapes his conclusions more than his stated reasons do.

1.1 In the preface to that admirable collection of his essays called "Heretics," Mr. Chesterton writes these words: "There are some people—and I am one of them—who think that the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe. We think that for a landlady considering a lodger it is important to know his income, but still more important to know his philosophy. We think that for a general about to fight an enemy it is important to know the enemy's numbers, but still more important to know the enemy's philosophy. We think the question is not whether the theory of the cosmos affects matters, but whether in the long run anything else affects them."[5]

1.2 I think with Mr. Chesterton in this matter. I know that you, ladies and gentlemen, have a philosophy, each and every one of you, and that the most interesting and important thing about you is the way it determines the perspective in your several worlds. You know the same about me. And yet I confess to a certain tremor at the audacity of the enterprise I am about to begin. For the philosophy that is so important in each of us is not a technical matter; it is our more or less inarticulate sense of what life honestly and deeply means. It is only partly got from books; it is our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos. I have no right to assume that many of you are students of the cosmos in the classroom sense, yet here I stand, wanting to interest you in a philosophy that to no small extent has to be treated technically. I want to fill you with sympathy for a contemporary tendency in which I profoundly believe, and yet I have to talk like a professor to you who are not students. Whatever universe a professor believes in must at any rate be a universe that lends itself to lengthy discourse. A uni-

5 G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), English essayist and novelist; *Heretics* appeared in 1905.

verse definable in two sentences is something the professorial intellect has no use for. No faith in anything that cheap! I have heard friends and colleagues try to popularize philosophy in this very hall, but they soon grew dry, and then technical, and the results were only partly encouraging. So my enterprise is a bold one. The founder of pragmatism himself recently gave a course of lectures at the Lowell Institute with that very word in its title—flashes of brilliant light set against Cimmerian darkness! None of us, I imagine, understood *all* that he said—yet here I stand, making a very similar venture.[6]

1.3 I risk it because the very lectures I speak of *drew*—they brought good audiences. There is, it must be confessed, a curious fascination in hearing deep things talked about, even though neither we nor the disputants understand them. We get the problematic thrill; we feel the presence of the vastness. Let a controversy start up in a smoking room anywhere, about free will or God's omniscience, or good and evil, and see how everyone in the place pricks up their ears. Philosophy's results concern us all most vitally, and philosophy's queerest arguments agreeably tickle our sense of subtlety and ingenuity.

1.4 Believing devoutly in philosophy myself, and believing also that a kind of new dawn is breaking upon us philosophers, I feel impelled, *per fas aut nefas,* to try to give you some news of the situation.[7]

1.5 Philosophy is at once the most sublime and the most trivial of human pursuits. It works in the tiniest crannies and it opens out the widest vistas. It "bakes no bread," as has been said, but it can inspire our souls with courage; and however repugnant its manners—its doubting and challenging, its quibbling and dialectics—often are to ordinary people, none of us can get along without the far-flashing beams of light it sends over the world's perspectives. These illuminations at least, and the contrasting

6 The founder is Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), whose Lowell lectures on pragmatism were given in 1903. The Cimmerians, in Homer, live in perpetual darkness.

7 *Per fas aut nefas*: Latin, "by fair means or foul."

effects of darkness and mystery that accompany them, give what it says an interest that is much more than professional.

1.6 The history of philosophy is to a great extent the history of a certain clash of human temperaments. Undignified as such a treatment may seem to some of my colleagues, I shall have to take account of this clash and explain a good many of the disagreements among philosophers by it. Whatever his temperament, a professional philosopher tries, when philosophizing, to sink the fact of it. Temperament is not a conventionally recognized reason, so he urges only impersonal reasons for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises. It loads the evidence for him one way or the other, making for a more sentimental or a more hard-hearted view of the universe, just as this fact or that principle would. He *trusts* his temperament. Wanting a universe that suits it, he believes in any picture of the universe that does suit it. He feels that people of the opposite temper are out of key with the world's character, and in his heart considers them incompetent and "not in it" in the philosophic business, even though they may far surpass him in dialectical ability.

1.7 Yet in public debate he can make no claim, on the bare ground of his temperament, to superior discernment or authority. So a certain insincerity arises in our philosophic discussions: the most potent of all our premises is never mentioned. I am sure it would make for clarity if in these lectures we broke this rule and mentioned it, and so I feel free to do so.

1.8 Of course I am talking here about very strongly marked individuals, people of radical idiosyncrasy, who have set their stamp and likeness on philosophy and figure in its history. Plato, Locke, Hegel, Spencer are such temperamental thinkers. Most of us, of course, have no very definite intellectual temperament; we are a mixture of opposite ingredients, each present in a very moderate dose. We hardly know our own preferences in abstract matters; some of us are easily talked out of them, and end up following the fashion or taking up the beliefs of the most impressive philosopher in our neighborhood, whoever he may

be. But the one thing that has *counted* so far in philosophy is that a man should *see* things, see them straight in his own peculiar way, and be dissatisfied with any opposite way of seeing them. There is no reason to suppose that this strong temperamental vision will from now on cease to count in the history of human beliefs.

1.9 Now the particular difference of temperament I have in mind in making these remarks is one that has counted in literature, art, government and manners as well as in philosophy. In manners we find formalists and free-and-easy people. In government, authoritarians and anarchists. In literature, purists or academics, and realists. In art, classicists and romantics. You recognize these contrasts as familiar; well, in philosophy we have a very similar contrast expressed in the pair of terms "rationalist" and "empiricist"—"empiricist" meaning your lover of facts in all their crude variety, "rationalist" meaning your devotee of abstract and eternal principles. No one can live an hour without both facts and principles, so it is really a difference of emphasis; yet it breeds the most pungent antipathies between those who place the emphasis differently. And we shall find it extraordinarily convenient to express a certain contrast in people's ways of taking their universe by talking of the "empiricist" and the "rationalist" temper. These terms make the contrast simple and massive.

1.10 More simple and massive than the people to whom the terms are applied usually are. For every sort of permutation and combination is possible in human nature; and if I now go on to define more fully what I mean when I speak of rationalists and empiricists, by adding some secondary qualifying characteristics to each of those titles, I ask you to regard my procedure as to some extent arbitrary. I select types of combination that nature offers very often, but by no means always, and I select them solely because they are convenient for my further purpose of characterizing pragmatism. Historically we find the terms "intellectualism" and "sensationalism" used as synonyms of "rationalism" and "empiricism." Well, nature seems most often

to combine an idealistic and optimistic tendency with intellectualism. Empiricists, on the other hand, are not uncommonly materialistic, and their optimism is apt to be decidedly conditional and tremulous. Rationalism is always monistic. It starts from wholes and universals, and makes much of the unity of things. Empiricism starts from the parts, and makes the whole a collection—so it is not averse to calling itself pluralistic. Rationalism usually considers itself more religious than empiricism, but there is much to say about this claim, so I merely mention it. It is a true claim when the individual rationalist is what is called a man of feeling, and when the individual empiricist prides himself on being hard-headed. In that case the rationalist will usually also be in favor of what is called free will, and the empiricist will be a fatalist—I am using the terms in their most popular current sense. Finally, the rationalist will be dogmatic in temper in his affirmations, while the empiricist may be more skeptical and open to discussion.

TENDER-MINDED AND TOUGH-MINDED

James sets out the traits of the two opposed types of mind in two columns.

1.11 I will write these traits down in two columns. I think you will practically recognize the two types of mental make-up I mean if I head the columns "tender-minded" and "tough-minded" respectively.

1.12 *The Tender-minded:* Rationalistic (going by "principles"), Intellectualistic, Idealistic, Optimistic, Religious, Free-willist, Monistic, Dogmatic. / *The Tough-minded:* Empiricist (going by "facts"), Sensationalistic, Materialistic, Pessimistic, Irreligious, Fatalistic, Pluralistic, Skeptical.

1.13 Please put off for a moment the question whether the two contrasting mixtures I have written down are each internally coherent and self-consistent—I shall very soon have a good deal to say on that point. For our immediate purpose it is enough that tender-minded and tough-minded people, as I have character-

ized them, do both exist. Each of you probably knows some well-marked example of each type, and you know what each example thinks of the example on the other side of the line. They have a low opinion of each other. Their antagonism, whenever their individual temperaments have been intense, has formed in every age a part of the philosophic atmosphere of the time. It forms a part of the philosophic atmosphere today. The tough think of the tender as sentimentalists and softheads. The tender feel the tough to be unrefined, callous, or brutal. Their reaction to each other is very much like what happens when Bostonian tourists mingle with a population like that of Cripple Creek. Each type believes the other to be inferior to itself; but in the one case the disdain is mingled with amusement, in the other it has a dash of fear.[8]

1.14 Now, as I have already insisted, few of us are tenderfoot Bostonians pure and simple, and few are typical Rocky Mountain toughs, in philosophy. Most of us hanker after the good things on both sides of the line. Facts are good, of course—give us lots of facts. Principles are good—give us plenty of principles. The world is undoubtedly one if you look at it one way, but just as undoubtedly it is many if you look at it another. It is both one and many—let us adopt a sort of pluralistic monism. Everything of course is necessarily determined, and yet of course our wills are free: a sort of free-will determinism is the true philosophy. The evil of the parts is undeniable, but the whole can't be evil: so practical pessimism may be combined with metaphysical optimism. And so forth—your ordinary philosophic layman never being a radical, never straightening out his system, but living vaguely in one plausible compartment of it or another to suit the temptations of the passing hour.

1.15 But some of us are more than mere laymen in philosophy. We deserve the name of amateur athletes, and we are bothered by too much inconsistency and vacillation in our creed. We can-

8 Cripple Creek: a rough gold-mining boomtown in the Colorado Rockies in the 1890s.

not keep a good intellectual conscience so long as we go on mixing incompatibles from opposite sides of the line.

THE PRESENT DILEMMA

The modern amateur wants both facts and religion, but empiricism is irreligious and rationalism remote from facts.

1.16 And now I come to the first really important point I want to make. Never have there been as many people of a decidedly empiricist bent as there are today. Our children, one may say, are almost born scientific. But our esteem for facts has not neutralized all religiousness in us. It is itself almost religious. Our scientific temper is devout. Now take a man of this type, and let him also be a philosophic amateur, unwilling to mix up a hodgepodge system after the fashion of a common layman—what does he find his situation to be, in this blessed year of our Lord 1906? He wants facts; he wants science; but he also wants a religion. And being an amateur and not an independent originator in philosophy, he naturally looks for guidance to the experts and professionals he finds already in the field. A very large number of you here, possibly a majority of you, are amateurs of just this sort.

1.17 Now what kinds of philosophy do you find actually on offer to meet your need? You find an empirical philosophy that is not religious enough, and a religious philosophy that is not empirical enough for your purpose. If you look to the quarter where facts count most, you find the whole tough-minded program in operation, and the "conflict between science and religion" in full blast. Either it is that Rocky Mountain tough of a Haeckel, with his materialistic monism, his ether-god, and his jibe at your God as a "gaseous vertebrate"; or it is Spencer, treating the world's history as nothing but a redistribution of matter and motion, and politely bowing religion out at the front door—

she may indeed go on existing, but she must never show her face inside the temple.[9]

1.18 For the past hundred and fifty years the progress of science has seemed to mean the enlargement of the material universe and the diminishing of man's importance. The result is what one may call the growth of naturalistic or positivistic feeling. Man is no lawgiver to nature; he is an absorber. It is she who stands firm; it is he who must accommodate himself. Let him record truth, inhuman though it may be, and submit to it! The romantic spontaneity and courage are gone; the vision is materialistic and depressing. Ideals appear as inert by-products of physiology; what is higher is explained by what is lower and treated forever as a case of "nothing but"—nothing but something else of a quite inferior sort. You get, in short, a materialistic universe, in which only the tough-minded feel congenially at home.

1.19 If now, on the other hand, you turn to the religious quarter for consolation, and take counsel of the tender-minded philosophies, what do you find?

1.20 Religious philosophy in our day and generation, among us English-reading people, is of two main types. One is more radical and aggressive; the other has more the air of fighting a slow retreat. By the more radical wing of religious philosophy I mean the so-called transcendental idealism of the Anglo-Hegelian school, the philosophy of such men as Green, the Cairds, Bosanquet and Royce. This philosophy has greatly influenced the more studious members of our Protestant ministry. It is pantheistic, and it has undoubtedly already blunted the edge of traditional theism in Protestantism at large.[10]

1.21 That theism remains, however. It is the direct descendant, through one stage of concession after another, of the dogmatic scholastic theism still rigorously taught in the seminaries of the

9 Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), German biologist and popularizer of Darwinism; Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), English evolutionary philosopher.

10 T. H. Green, Edward and John Caird, and Bernard Bosanquet were British idealists; Josiah Royce (1855–1916) was James's Harvard colleague and friendly opponent.

Catholic Church. For a long time it used to be called, among us, the philosophy of the Scottish school. It is what I meant by the philosophy that has the air of fighting a slow retreat. Between the encroachments of the Hegelians and other philosophers of the "Absolute" on the one hand, and those of the scientific evolutionists and agnostics on the other, the men who give us this kind of philosophy—James Martineau, Professor Bowne, Professor Ladd and others—must feel themselves rather tightly squeezed.[11] Fair-minded and candid as you like, this philosophy is not radical in temper. It is eclectic, a thing of compromises, which seeks a *modus vivendi* above all things. It accepts the facts of Darwinism and the facts of brain physiology, but it does nothing active or enthusiastic with them. It lacks the victorious and aggressive note. As a result it lacks *prestige*; whereas absolutism has a certain *prestige* owing to its more radical style.[12]

1.22 These two systems are what you have to choose between if you turn to the tender-minded school. And if you are the lovers of facts I have supposed you to be, you find the trail of the serpent of rationalism, of intellectualism, over everything on that side of the line. You do escape the materialism that goes with the reigning empiricism; but you pay for your escape by losing contact with the concrete parts of life. The more absolutistic philosophers dwell on so high a level of abstraction that they never even try to come down. The absolute mind they offer us, the mind that makes our universe by thinking it, might, for all they show us to the contrary, have made any one of a million other universes just as well as this one. You can deduce no single actual particular from the notion of it. It is compatible with any state of things whatever being true here below. And the theistic God is almost as sterile a principle. You have to go to the world he has created to get any inkling of his actual character: he is the kind of god that has once and for all made that kind of a

11 James Martineau (1805–1900), English Unitarian theologian; Borden Parker Bowne (Boston) and George Trumbull Ladd (Yale), American theistic philosophers.
12 *Modus vivendi*: Latin, "way of living"; a workable compromise between opposed parties.

world. The God of the theistic writers lives on heights as purely abstract as the Absolute does. Absolutism has a certain sweep and dash about it, while the usual theism is more insipid, but both are equally remote and vacuous. What *you* want is a philosophy that will not only exercise your powers of intellectual abstraction, but will make some positive connection with this actual world of finite human lives.

1.23 You want a system that will combine both things: the scientific loyalty to facts and willingness to take account of them—the spirit of adaptation and accommodation, in short—but also the old confidence in human values and the spontaneity that comes from it, whether of the religious or of the romantic type. And this, then, is your dilemma: you find the two parts of what you are looking for hopelessly separated. You find empiricism with inhumanism and irreligion; or else you find a rationalistic philosophy that may indeed call itself religious, but that keeps out of all definite touch with concrete facts and joys and sorrows.

1.24 I am not sure how many of you live close enough to philosophy to realize fully what I mean by this last reproach, so I will dwell a little longer on that unreality in all rationalistic systems which so readily repels your serious believer in facts.

1.25 I wish I had kept the first couple of pages of a thesis a student handed me a year or two ago. They illustrated my point so clearly that I am sorry I cannot read them to you now. This young man, a graduate of some Western college, began by saying that he had always taken for granted that when you entered a philosophy classroom you had to open relations with a universe entirely distinct from the one you left behind you in the street. The two were supposed, he said, to have so little to do with each other that you could not possibly occupy your mind with both at the same time. The world of concrete personal experiences to which the street belongs is multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed. The world your philosophy professor introduces you to is simple, clean and noble. The contradictions of real life are absent from

it. Its architecture is classical. Principles of reason trace its outlines; logical necessities cement its parts. Purity and dignity are what it expresses most. It is a kind of marble temple shining on a hill.

1.26 In point of fact it is far less an account of this actual world than a clear addition built on top of it, a classical sanctuary in which the rationalist fancy may take refuge from the intolerably confused and gothic character that mere facts present. It is no *explanation* of our concrete universe; it is another thing altogether, a substitute for it, a remedy, a way of escape.

1.27 Its temperament, if I may use the word temperament here, is utterly alien to the temperament of existence in the concrete. *Refinement* is what characterizes our intellectualist philosophies. They exquisitely satisfy that craving for a refined object of contemplation which is so powerful an appetite of the mind. But I ask you in all seriousness to look out on this colossal universe of concrete facts, on their awful bewilderments, their surprises and cruelties, on the wildness they show, and then tell me whether "refined" is the one inevitable descriptive adjective that springs to your lips.

1.28 Refinement has its place in things, true enough. But a philosophy that breathes out nothing but refinement will never satisfy the empiricist temper of mind. It will seem rather a monument of artificiality. So we find men of science preferring to turn their backs on metaphysics as something altogether cloistered and spectral, and practical men shaking philosophy's dust off their feet and following the call of the wild.

LEIBNIZ AND THE DAMNED

James sets Leibniz's cheerful sums about the damned against Swift's newspaper reports of real suffering.

1.29 There really is something a little ghastly in the satisfaction with which a pure but unreal system will fill a rationalist mind. Leibniz was a rationalist mind, with infinitely more interest in facts than most rationalist minds can show. Yet if you want

superficiality incarnate, you have only to read that charmingly written "Théodicée" of his, in which he sought to justify the ways of God to man, and to prove that the world we live in is the best of possible worlds. Let me quote a specimen of what I mean.[13]

1.30 Among other obstacles to his optimistic philosophy, Leibniz has to consider the number of the eternally damned. That it is infinitely greater, in our human case, than the number of the saved, he takes as a premise from the theologians, and then goes on to argue like this. Even so, he says:

1.31 "The evil will appear as almost nothing in comparison with the good, if we once consider the real magnitude of the City of God. Coelius Secundus Curio has written a little book, 'De Amplitudine Regni Coelestis,' which was reprinted not long ago. But he failed to grasp the extent of the kingdom of the heavens. The ancients had small ideas of the works of God... It seemed to them that only our earth had inhabitants, and even the notion of our antipodes gave them pause. The rest of the world for them consisted of some shining globes and a few crystalline spheres.[14] But today, whatever limits we may grant or refuse to the Universe, we must recognize in it a countless number of globes, as big as ours or bigger, which have just as much right as it has to support rational inhabitants, though it does not follow that these need all be men. Our earth is only one among the six principal satellites of our sun. As all the fixed stars are suns, one sees how small a place among visible things our earth takes up, since it is only a satellite of one among them. Now all these suns may be inhabited by none but happy creatures; and nothing obliges us to believe that the number of damned persons is very great; for *a very few instances and samples suffice for the utility which good draws from evil.* Moreover, since there is no reason to suppose that there are stars everywhere, may there not be a

13 G. W. Leibniz (1646–1716), German philosopher and mathematician; his *Théodicée* (1710) defends God's goodness in the face of evil.

14 Celio Secondo Curione (1503–1569), Italian Protestant humanist; his book's title means "On the Breadth of the Heavenly Kingdom."

great space beyond the region of the stars? And this immense space, surrounding all this region,... may be filled with happiness and glory... What now becomes of the consideration of our Earth and its inhabitants? Does it not dwindle to something incomparably less than a physical point, since our Earth is but a point compared with the distance of the fixed stars? Thus the part of the Universe which we know is almost lost in nothingness compared with the part which is unknown to us, but which we are nevertheless obliged to admit; and all the evils that we know lie in this almost-nothing. It follows that the evils may be almost-nothing in comparison with the goods that the Universe contains."

1.32 Leibniz continues elsewhere:

1.33 "There is a kind of justice which aims neither at the reform of the criminal, nor at setting an example to others, nor at repairing the injury. This justice is founded in pure fitness, which finds a certain satisfaction in the expiation of a wicked deed. The Socinians and Hobbes objected to this punitive justice, which is properly vindictive justice, and which God has reserved for himself at many junctures... It is always founded in the fitness of things, and satisfies not only the offended party but all wise onlookers, just as beautiful music or a fine piece of architecture satisfies a well-constituted mind.[15] It is thus that the torments of the damned continue, even though they no longer serve to turn anyone away from sin, and that the rewards of the blessed continue, even though they confirm no one in good ways. The damned draw ever new penalties upon themselves by their continuing sins, and the blessed attract ever fresh joys by their unceasing progress in good. Both facts are founded on the principle of fitness,... for God has made all things harmonious in perfection, as I have already said."

1.34 Leibniz's feeble grasp of reality is too obvious to need comment from me. It is evident that no realistic image of the experience of a damned soul had ever come near the doors of his

15 The Socinians were a rationalist, anti-Trinitarian Protestant movement of the 16th–17th centuries.

mind. Nor had it occurred to him that the smaller the number of "samples" of the genus "lost soul" whom God throws as a sop to the eternal fitness, the more inequitably grounded is the glory of the blessed. What he gives us is a cold literary exercise, whose cheerful substance not even hellfire can warm.

1.35 And do not tell me that to show the shallowness of rationalist philosophizing I have had to go back to a shallow, bewigged age. The optimism of present-day rationalism sounds just as shallow to the fact-loving mind. The actual universe is a thing wide open, but rationalism makes systems, and systems must be closed. For people in practical life, perfection is something far off and still in the process of being achieved. For rationalism this is only the illusion of the finite and relative: the absolute ground of things is a perfection eternally complete.

1.36 I find a fine example of revolt against the airy and shallow optimism of current religious philosophy in a publication by that valiant anarchist writer Morrison I. Swift. Mr. Swift's anarchism goes a little further than mine does, but I confess that I sympathize a good deal—and some of you, I know, will sympathize heartily—with his dissatisfaction with the idealistic optimisms now in vogue. He begins his pamphlet "Human Submission" with a series of city reporters' items from newspapers (suicides, deaths from starvation, and the like) as specimens of our civilized regime. For instance:[16]

1.37 "After trudging through the snow from one end of the city to the other in the vain hope of finding work, and with his wife and six children without food and ordered to leave their home in an Upper East Side tenement for non-payment of rent, John Corcoran, a clerk, today ended his life by drinking carbolic acid. Corcoran lost his position three weeks ago through illness, and during the period without work his scanty savings disappeared. Yesterday he got work with a gang of city snow-shovelers, but he was too weak from illness, and was forced to quit after an hour's trial with the shovel. Then the weary task of looking for work

16 Morrison I. Swift (1856–1946), American social reformer and radical pamphleteer.

was taken up again. Thoroughly discouraged, Corcoran returned home last night to find his wife and children without food and the eviction notice on the door. The next morning he drank the poison.

1.38 "The records of many more such cases lie before me [Mr. Swift goes on]; an encyclopedia could easily be filled with their kind. These few I cite as an interpretation of the Universe. 'We are aware of the presence of God in his world,' says a writer in a recent English review. [The very presence of ill in the temporal order is the condition of the perfection of the eternal order, writes Professor Royce (The World and the Individual, ii, 385).] 'The Absolute is the richer for every discord and for all the diversity which it embraces,' says F. H. Bradley (Appearance and Reality, 204). He means that these slain men make the universe richer, and that is philosophy.[17] But while Professors Royce and Bradley and a whole host of guileless, well-fed thinkers are unveiling Reality and the Absolute and explaining away evil and pain, this is the condition of the only beings known to us anywhere in the universe with a developed consciousness of what the universe is. What these people experience *is* Reality. It gives us an absolute phase of the universe. It is the personal experience of those best qualified within our circle of knowledge to *have* experience, to tell us *what is*. Now what does *thinking about* the experience of these people amount to, compared with directly and personally feeling it as they feel it? The philosophers are dealing in shadows, while those who live and feel know truth. And the mind of mankind—not yet the mind of philosophers and of the propertied class, but of the great mass of silently thinking and feeling men—is coming round to this view. They are judging the universe as they have so far allowed the high priests of religion and learning to judge *them*...

1.39 "This Cleveland workingman, killing his children and himself [another of the cited cases], is one of the elemental, stupendous facts of this modern world and of this universe. It can-

17 F. H. Bradley (1846–1924), leading English absolute idealist, author of *Appearance and Reality* (1893).

not be glossed over or minimized away by all the treatises on God, and Love, and Being, helplessly existing in their monumental emptiness. This is one of the simple irreducible elements of this world's life, after millions of years of opportunity and twenty centuries of Christ. It is in the mental world what atoms or sub-atoms are in the physical: primary, indestructible. And what it blazons to man is the imposture of all philosophy that does not see in such events the consummate factor of all conscious experience. These facts invincibly prove religion a nullity. Man will not give religion two thousand centuries or twenty centuries more to try itself out and waste human time. Its time is up; its probation is over; its own record ends it. Mankind has no eons and eternities to spare for trying out discredited systems."[18]

1.40 Such is the reaction of an empiricist mind to the rationalist menu. It is an absolute "No, thank you." "Religion," says Mr. Swift, "is like a sleepwalker to whom actual things are blank." And such, though perhaps less intensely charged with feeling, is the verdict of every seriously inquiring amateur in philosophy today who turns to the philosophy professors for the means to satisfy the full range of his nature's needs. Empiricist writers give him a materialism; rationalists give him something religious, but to that religion "actual things are blank." So he becomes the judge of us philosophers. Tender or tough, he finds us wanting. None of us may treat his verdicts with disdain, for after all his is the typically perfect mind, the mind whose sum of demands is greatest, the mind whose criticisms and dissatisfactions are fatal in the long run.

1.41 It is at this point that my own solution begins to appear. I offer the oddly named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts. I hope I may leave many of you with as favorable an opinion of it as I hold myself.

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18 JAMES'S NOTE. Morrison I. Swift, *Human Submission*, Part Second, Philadelphia, Liberty Press, 1905, pp. 4–10.

Yet, as I am near the end of my hour, I will not introduce pragmatism bodily now. I will begin with it on the stroke of the clock next time. For the moment I prefer to go back a little over what I have said.

PHILOSOPHIES AS PERSONAL VISIONS

James defends his rough sketch: we finally judge each system by the total flavor it leaves.

1.42 If any of you here are professional philosophers, and I know some of you are, you will no doubt have felt that my talk so far has been crude to an unpardonable, even an almost incredible, degree. Tender-minded and tough-minded—what a barbaric disjunction! And in general, when philosophy is all made up of delicate intellectualities and subtleties and scruples, and when every possible sort of combination and transition exists within its bounds, what a brutal caricature and reduction of the highest things to their lowest possible expression it is to represent its field of conflict as a sort of rough-and-tumble fight between two hostile temperaments! What a childishly external view! And again, how stupid it is to treat the abstractness of rationalist systems as a crime, and to damn them because they offer themselves as sanctuaries and places of escape rather than as extensions of the world of facts. Aren't all our theories just remedies and places of escape? And if philosophy is to be religious, how can she be anything other than a place of escape from the crassness of reality's surface? What better thing can she do than raise us out of our animal senses and show us another and nobler home for our minds in that great framework of ideal principles underlying all reality, which the intellect divines? How can principles and general views ever be anything but abstract outlines? Was Cologne Cathedral built without an architect's plan on paper? Is refinement in itself an abomination? Is concrete crudeness the only thing that's true?

1.43 Believe me, I feel the full force of the charge. The picture I have given is indeed monstrously oversimplified and crude. But

like all abstractions, it will prove to have its use. If philosophers can treat the life of the universe abstractly, they must not complain of an abstract treatment of the life of philosophy itself. In point of fact, the picture I have given is, however coarse and sketchy, literally true. Temperaments, with their cravings and refusals, do determine people in their philosophies, and always will. The details of systems may be reasoned out piecemeal, and when the student is working at a system he may often lose sight of the forest for the single tree. But when the labor is done, the mind always performs its big summarizing act, and the system at once stands before us like a living thing. It has that strange, simple note of individuality which haunts our memory, like the ghost of the man, when a friend or enemy of ours has died.

1.44 Walt Whitman is not the only one who could write "who touches this book touches a man." The books of all the great philosophers are like so many men. Our sense of an essential personal flavor in each of them, typical but indescribable, is the finest fruit of our own completed philosophical education. What the system claims to be is a picture of the great universe of God. What it is—and oh, so flagrantly!—is the revelation of how intensely odd the personal flavor of some fellow creature is. Once reduced to these terms (and all our philosophies get reduced to them in minds made critical by learning), our dealings with the systems revert to the informal, to the instinctive human reaction of satisfaction or dislike.[19] We become as peremptory in rejecting or accepting them as when a person presents himself as a candidate for our favor; our verdicts are expressed in equally simple adjectives of praise or blame. We measure the total character of the universe as we feel it against the flavor of the philosophy offered us, and one word is enough.

1.45 "Instead of the living nature," we say, "into which God made men"—that nebulous concoction, that wooden, that straitlaced thing, that crabbed artificiality, that musty schoolroom

19 Echoing Whitman's poem "So Long!" in *Leaves of Grass*: "Camerado, this is no book, / Who touches this touches a man."

product, that sick man's dream! Away with it. Away with all of them! Impossible! Impossible![20]

1.46 Our work over the details of his system is indeed what gives us our resulting impression of the philosopher, but it is to the resulting impression itself that we react. Expertness in philosophy is measured by the definiteness of our summarizing reactions, by the immediate perceptive epithet with which the expert sums up such complex objects. But great expertness is not needed for the epithet to come. Few people have definitely articulated philosophies of their own. But almost everyone has his own peculiar sense of a certain total character in the universe, and of how the particular systems he knows fail to match it fully. They don't exactly cover *his* world. One will be too dapper, another too pedantic, a third too much of a grab bag of opinions, a fourth too morbid, a fifth too artificial, or what not. At any rate, he and we know offhand that such philosophies are out of plumb and out of key and out of "whack," and have no business speaking up in the universe's name. Plato, Locke, Spinoza, Mill, Caird, Hegel—I prudently avoid names nearer home!—I am sure that to many of you, my hearers, these names are little more than reminders of so many curious personal ways of falling short. It would be an obvious absurdity if such ways of taking the universe were actually true.

1.47 We philosophers have to reckon with such feelings on your part. In the last resort, I repeat, it is by them that all our philosophies will ultimately be judged. The finally victorious way of looking at things will be the one most completely *impressive* to the normal run of minds.

1.48 One word more—about philosophies necessarily being abstract outlines. There are outlines and outlines. There are outlines of buildings that are *fat*, conceived in three dimensions by their planner, and outlines of buildings invented flat on paper with the aid of ruler and compass. These remain skinny and emaciated even when set up in stone and mortar, and the out-

20 The German words are from Goethe's Faust, Part I, where Faust laments his study cluttered with dusty learning.

line already suggests that result. An outline in itself is meager, true, but it does not necessarily suggest a meager thing. It is the essential meagerness of *what is suggested* by the usual rationalistic philosophies that moves empiricists to their gesture of rejection. The case of Herbert Spencer's system is very much to the point here. Rationalists feel his fearful array of shortcomings. His dry schoolmaster temperament, the hurdy-gurdy monotony of him, his preference for cheap makeshifts in argument, his lack of education even in mechanical principles, and in general the vagueness of all his fundamental ideas, his whole system wooden, as if knocked together out of cracked hemlock boards—and yet half of England wants to bury him in Westminster Abbey.[21]

1.49 Why? Why does Spencer call forth so much reverence in spite of his weakness in rationalistic eyes? Why should so many educated people who feel that weakness—you and I, perhaps—wish to see him in the Abbey all the same?

1.50 Simply because we feel his heart to be *in the right place* philosophically. His principles may be all skin and bone, but at any rate his books try to mold themselves to the particular shape of this particular world's carcass. The noise of facts resounds through all his chapters, the citations of fact never stop; he emphasizes facts, turns his face in their direction; and that is enough. It means the right *kind* of thing for the empiricist mind.

1.51 The pragmatist philosophy I hope to begin talking about in my next lecture keeps as cordial a relation with facts. And, unlike Spencer's philosophy, it neither begins nor ends by throwing positive religious constructions out of doors—it treats them cordially as well.

1.52 I hope I may lead you to find it just the mediating way of thinking that you need.

21 After Spencer's death in 1903, admirers proposed a memorial to him in Westminster Abbey.

Lecture II: What Pragmatism Means

The squirrel dispute, Peirce's principle, pragmatism as a method for settling disputes by their practical consequences, and a first sketch of its theory of truth.

LECTURE II. WHAT PRAGMATISM MEANS

2.1 Some years ago, when I was with a camping party in the mountains, I returned from a solitary ramble to find everyone engaged in a ferocious metaphysical dispute. The *corpus* of the dispute was a squirrel—a live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of a tree trunk—while a human being was imagined to be standing on the opposite side of the tree. This human witness tries to catch sight of the squirrel by moving rapidly round the tree, but no matter how fast he goes, the squirrel moves just as fast in the opposite direction, and always keeps the tree between himself and the man, so that the man never catches a glimpse of him. The resulting metaphysical problem is this: *Does the man go round the squirrel or not?* He goes round the tree, sure enough, and the squirrel is on the tree; but does he go round the squirrel? In the unlimited leisure of the wilderness, the discussion had been worn threadbare. Everyone had taken sides and was obstinate, and the numbers on both sides were even. So when I appeared, each side appealed to me to make it a majority. Mindful of the scholastic saying that whenever you meet a contradiction you must make a distinction, I immediately looked for one and found it, as follows: "Which party is right," I said, "depends on what you *practically mean* by 'going round' the squirrel. If you mean passing from the north of him to the east, then to the south, then to the west, and then to the north of him again, obvi-

ously the man does go round him, for he occupies these successive positions. But if on the contrary you mean being first in front of him, then on his right, then behind him, then on his left, and finally in front again, it is just as obvious that the man fails to go round him. By the compensating movements the squirrel makes, he keeps his belly turned toward the man all the time, and his back turned away. Make the distinction, and there is no reason for any further dispute. You are both right and both wrong, depending on whether you conceive the verb 'to go round' in one practical fashion or the other."

2.2 One or two of the hotter disputants called my speech a shuffling evasion, saying they wanted no quibbling or scholastic hair-splitting but meant just plain honest English "round." But the majority seemed to think that the distinction had calmed the dispute.

THE PRAGMATIC METHOD

Pragmatism settles disputes by asking what practical difference it would make if one side or the other were true.

2.3 I tell this trivial anecdote because it is a particularly simple example of what I now want to speak of as *the pragmatic method*. The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable. Is the world one or many?—fated or free?—material or spiritual?—here are notions either of which may or may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right.

PEIRCE'S PRINCIPLE

James traces the word and the principle to Peirce and shows chemists and philosophers using it.

2.4 A glance at the history of the idea will show you still better what pragmatism means. The term is derived from the same Greek word *πράγμα*, meaning action, from which our words "practice" and "practical" come. It was first introduced into philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878, in an article entitled "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in the "Popular Science Monthly" for January of that year.[1] Mr. Peirce, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that to develop a thought's meaning we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our distinctions of thought, however subtle, is that none of them is 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

2.5 effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from

2.6 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.

2.7 This is the principle of Peirce, the principle of pragmatism. It went entirely unnoticed by anyone for twenty years, until I brought it forward again in an address before Professor Howison's philosophical union at the University of California, and applied it specifically to religion. By that date (1898) the times seemed ripe for its reception. The word "pragmatism" spread, and at present it fairly spots the pages of the philosophical journals. On all sides we find the "pragmatic movement" spoken of, sometimes with respect, sometimes with contempt, seldom

1 JAMES'S NOTE. Translated in the *Revue Philosophique* for January 1879 (vol. vii).

with clear understanding. It is evident that the term applies conveniently to a number of tendencies that have so far lacked a collective name, and that it has "come to stay."[2]

2.8 To grasp the importance of Peirce's principle, one must get used to applying it to concrete cases. I found a few years ago that Ostwald, the illustrious Leipzig chemist, had been making perfectly distinct use of the principle of pragmatism in his lectures on the philosophy of science, though he had not called it by that name.[3]

2.9 "All realities influence our practice," he wrote to me, "and that influence is their meaning for us. I am accustomed to put questions to my classes in this way: In what respects would the world be different if this alternative or that were true? If I can find nothing that would become different, then the alternative has no sense."

2.10 That is, the rival views mean practically the same thing, and for us there is no meaning other than practical meaning. In a published lecture Ostwald gives this example of what he means. Chemists have long wrangled over the inner constitution of certain substances called "tautomerous." Their properties seemed equally consistent with the notion that an unstable hydrogen atom oscillates inside them, or that they are unstable mixtures of two substances. Controversy raged but was never decided. "It would never have begun," says Ostwald, "if the combatants had asked themselves what particular experimental fact could have been made different by one or the other view being correct. For it would then have appeared that no difference of fact could possibly follow; and the quarrel was as unreal as if, theorizing in primitive times about the raising of dough by

2 James's Berkeley address of 1898 was "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results."

3 Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932), German chemist, a founder of physical chemistry.

yeast, one party had invoked a 'brownie,' while another insisted on an 'elf' as the true cause of the phenomenon."[4]

2.11 It is astonishing to see how many philosophical disputes collapse into insignificance the moment you subject them to this simple test of tracing a concrete consequence. There can be no difference anywhere that doesn't make a difference elsewhere—no difference in abstract truth that doesn't express itself in a difference in concrete fact, and in conduct following from that fact, imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere, and somewhen. The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite moments of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula is the true one.

2.12 There is absolutely nothing new in the pragmatic method. Socrates was an adept at it. Aristotle used it methodically. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume made momentous contributions to truth by means of it. Shadworth Hodgson keeps insisting that realities are only what they are "known as." But these forerunners of pragmatism used it in fragments: they were only preluders. Not until our own time has it generalized itself, become conscious of a universal mission, laid claim to a conquering destiny. I believe in that destiny, and I hope I may end by inspiring you with my belief.[5]

2.13 Pragmatism represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empiricist attitude, but it represents it, as it seems to me, in both a more radical and a less objectionable form than it has ever yet taken. A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once and for all on a lot of ingrained habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and

4 JAMES'S NOTE. "Theorie und Praxis," *Zeitsch. des Oesterreichischen Ingenieur u. Architecten-Vereines*, 1905, Nr. 4 u. 6. I find a still more radical pragmatism than Ostwald's in an address by Professor W. S. Franklin: "I think that the sickliest notion of physics, even if a student gets it, is that it is 'the science of masses, molecules, and the ether.' And I think that the healthiest notion, even if a student does not wholly get it, is that physics is the science of the ways of taking hold of bodies and pushing them!" (*Science*, January 2, 1903.)

5 Shadworth Hodgson (1832–1912), English philosopher whom James admired.

insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns toward concreteness and adequacy, toward facts, toward action and toward power. That means the empiricist temper reigning and the rationalist temper sincerely given up. It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality, and the pretense of finality in truth.

2.14 At the same time it does not stand for any special results. It is a method only. But the general triumph of that method would mean an enormous change in what I called in my last lecture the "temperament" of philosophy. Teachers of the ultra-rationalistic type would be frozen out, much as the courtier type is frozen out in republics, or the ultramontane type of priest in Protestant lands. Science and metaphysics would come much closer together, would in fact work absolutely hand in hand.[6]

THEORIES AS INSTRUMENTS

Solving words give way to cash-value; theories become instruments, and pragmatism is a corridor between them.

2.15 Metaphysics has usually pursued a very primitive kind of quest. You know how people have always hankered after forbidden magic, and you know what a great part words have always played in magic. If you have his name, or the formula of incantation that binds him, you can control the spirit, genie, afrit, or whatever the power may be. Solomon knew the names of all the spirits, and, having their names, he held them subject to his will. So the universe has always appeared to the natural mind as a kind of enigma, the key to which must be sought in the shape of some illuminating or power-bringing word or name. That word names the universe's *principle*, and to possess it is, after a fashion, to possess the universe itself. "God," "Matter," "Reason," "the Absolute," "Energy," are so many solving names. You can rest when you have them. You are at the end of your metaphysical quest.

6 "Ultramontane": upholding the supreme authority of the pope.

2.16 But if you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any such word as closing your quest. You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it to work within the stream of your experience. It then appears less as a solution than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*.

2.17 *Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest.* We don't lie back on them; we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again with their help. Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories, limbers them up and sets each one to work. Being nothing essentially new, it harmonizes with many ancient philosophical tendencies. It agrees with nominalism, for instance, in always appealing to particulars; with utilitarianism in emphasizing practical aspects; with positivism in its disdain for verbal solutions, useless questions, and metaphysical abstractions.

2.18 All these, you see, *are anti-intellectualist* tendencies. Against rationalism as a pretension and a method, pragmatism is fully armed and militant. But, at the outset at least, it stands for no particular results. It has no dogmas, and no doctrines except its method. As the young Italian pragmatist Papini has well said, it lies in the midst of our theories, like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable rooms open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith and strength; in a third a chemist investigating a substance's properties. In a fourth a system of idealistic metaphysics is being worked out; in a fifth the impossibility of metaphysics is being shown. But they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it if they want a practicable way of getting into or out of their respective rooms.

2.19 No particular results, then, so far, but only an attitude of orientation, is what the pragmatic method means. *The attitude of looking away from first things, principles, "categories," supposed necessities; and of looking toward last things, fruits, consequences, facts.*

A FIRST SKETCH OF TRUTH

Following Schiller and Dewey, James describes truth as what marries old opinions to new experience.

2.20 So much for the pragmatic method! You may say that I have been praising it rather than explaining it to you, but I shall shortly explain it abundantly enough by showing how it works on some familiar problems. Meanwhile the word pragmatism has come to be used in a still wider sense, as meaning also a certain *theory of truth*. I mean to give a whole lecture to stating that theory, after first paving the way, so I can be very brief now. But brevity is hard to follow, so I ask for your redoubled attention for a quarter of an hour. If much remains obscure, I hope to make it clearer in the later lectures.

2.21 One of the most successfully cultivated branches of philosophy in our time is what is called inductive logic, the study of the conditions under which our sciences have evolved. Writers on this subject have begun to show a remarkable unanimity as to what the laws of nature and elements of fact mean, when formulated by mathematicians, physicists, and chemists. When the first mathematical, logical, and natural uniformities, the first *laws*, were discovered, men were so carried away by the clearness, beauty, and simplification that resulted that they believed they had authentically deciphered the eternal thoughts of the Almighty. His mind also thundered and reverberated in syllogisms. He also thought in conic sections, squares and roots and ratios, and geometrized like Euclid. He made Kepler's laws for the planets to follow; he made velocity increase in proportion to the time in falling bodies; he made the law of sines for light to obey when refracted; he established the classes, orders, families, and genera of plants and animals, and fixed the distances between them. He thought the archetypes of all things, and devised their variations; and when we rediscover any one of these wondrous institutions of his, we seize his mind in its very literal intention.

2.22 But as the sciences have developed further, the notion has gained ground that most, perhaps all, of our laws are only approximations. The laws themselves, moreover, have grown so numerous that there is no counting them. And so many rival formulations are proposed in all the branches of science that investigators have become used to the notion that no theory is absolutely a transcript of reality, but that any one of them may from some point of view be useful. Their great use is to summarize old facts and to lead to new ones. They are only a man-made language, a conceptual shorthand, as someone calls them, in which we write our reports of nature; and languages, as is well known, tolerate much choice of expression and many dialects.

2.23 Thus human arbitrariness has driven divine necessity out of scientific logic. If I mention the names of Sigwart, Mach, Ostwald, Pearson, Milhaud, Poincaré, Duhem, Ruyssen, those of you who are students will easily identify the tendency I speak of, and will think of additional names.

2.24 Riding now on the crest of this wave of scientific logic, Messrs. Schiller and Dewey appear with their pragmatist account of what truth everywhere signifies. Everywhere, these teachers say, "truth" in our ideas and beliefs means the same thing that it means in science. It means, they say, nothing but this, *that ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience*, to summarize them and get about among them by conceptual shortcuts instead of following the interminable succession of particular phenomena.[7] Any idea on which we can ride, so to speak; 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—that idea is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally. This is the "instrumental" view of truth taught so successfully at Chicago, the view that truth in

7 Schiller taught at Oxford and Dewey at the University of Chicago—hence "Chicago" and "Oxford" below.

our ideas means their power to "work," promulgated so brilliantly at Oxford.

2.25 Messrs. Dewey, Schiller, and their allies, in reaching this general conception of all truth, have only followed the example of geologists, biologists, and philologists. In establishing these other sciences, the successful stroke was always to take some simple process actually observable in operation—erosion by weather, say, or variation from the parental type, or change of dialect through the incorporation of new words and pronunciations. They then generalized it, making it apply to all times, and produced great results by adding up its effects through the ages.

2.26 The observable process that Schiller and Dewey particularly singled out for generalization is the familiar one by which any individual settles into *new opinions*. The process here is always the same. The individual already has a stock of old opinions, but he meets a new experience that puts them under strain. Somebody contradicts them; or in a reflective moment he discovers that they contradict each other; or he hears of facts with which they are incompatible; or desires arise in him which they cease to satisfy. The result is an inward trouble to which his mind had until then been a stranger, and from which he seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions. He saves as much of it as he can, for in this matter of belief we are all extreme conservatives. So he tries to change first this opinion, and then that (for they resist change in very different degrees). At last some new idea comes up which he can graft onto the ancient stock with a minimum of disturbance to it, some idea that mediates between the stock and the new experience and runs them into one another most felicitously and expediently.

2.27 This new idea is then adopted as the true one. It preserves the older stock of truths with a minimum of modification, stretching them just enough to make them admit the novelty, but conceiving that in ways as familiar as the case allows. An *outré* explanation, violating all our preconceptions, would never pass for a true account of a novelty. We should scratch around

industriously until we found something less eccentric. The most violent revolutions in an individual's beliefs leave most of his old order standing. Time and space, cause and effect, nature and history, and one's own biography remain untouched. New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as always to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity. We hold a theory true just in proportion to its success in solving this "problem of maxima and minima." But success in solving this problem is eminently a matter of approximation. We say this theory solves it on the whole more satisfactorily than that theory; but that means more satisfactorily to ourselves, and individuals will emphasize their points of satisfaction differently. To a certain degree, therefore, everything here is plastic.

2.28 The point I now urge you to notice particularly is the part played by the older truths. Failure to take account of it is the source of much of the unjust criticism leveled against pragmatism. Their influence is absolutely controlling. Loyalty to them is the first principle—in most cases it is the only principle. Take phenomena so novel that they would call for a serious rearrangement of our preconceptions: by far the most usual way of handling them is to ignore them altogether, or to abuse those who bear witness for them.

2.29 You no doubt want examples of this process of truth's growth, and the only trouble is their superabundance. The simplest case of new truth is of course the mere numerical addition of new kinds of facts, or of new single facts of old kinds, to our experience—an addition that involves no alteration in the old beliefs. Day follows day, and its contents are simply added. The new contents themselves are not true, they simply *come* and *are*. Truth is *what we say about* them, and when we say that they have come, truth is satisfied by the plain additive formula.

2.30 But often the day's contents oblige a rearrangement. If I should now utter piercing shrieks and act like a maniac on this platform, it would make many of you revise your ideas as to the probable worth of my philosophy. "Radium" came the other day

as part of the day's content, and seemed for a moment to contradict our ideas of the whole order of nature, that order having come to be identified with what is called the conservation of energy. The mere sight of radium paying out heat indefinitely from its own pocket seemed to violate that conservation. What to think? If the radiations from it were nothing but an escape of unsuspected "potential" energy, pre-existing inside the atoms, the principle of conservation would be saved. The discovery of "helium" as the radiation's outcome opened a way to this belief. So Ramsay's view is generally held to be true, because, although it extends our old ideas of energy, it causes a minimum of alteration in their nature.[8]

2.31 I need not multiply instances. A new opinion counts as "true" just in proportion as it gratifies the individual's desire to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock. It must both lean on old truth and grasp new fact; and its success in doing this (as I said a moment ago) is a matter for the individual's appreciation. When old truth grows, then, by the addition of new truth, it is for subjective reasons. We are in the process and obey the reasons. That new idea is truest which performs most felicitously its function of satisfying our double urgency. It makes itself true, gets itself classed as true, by the way it works. It then grafts itself onto the ancient body of truth, which thus grows much as a tree grows by the activity of a new layer of cambium.

2.32 Now Dewey and Schiller proceed to generalize this observation and to apply it to the most ancient parts of truth. They too were once plastic. They too were called true for human reasons. They too mediated between still earlier truths and what in those days were novel observations. Purely objective truth—truth in whose establishment the function of giving human satisfaction, by marrying previous parts of experience with newer parts, played no role whatever—is nowhere to be found. The reason

8 Sir William Ramsay (1852–1916), British chemist, who with Frederick Soddy showed in 1903 that radium gives off helium.

why we call things true is the reason why they are true, for "to be true" *means* only to perform this marriage-function.

2.33 The trail of the human serpent is thus over everything. Truth independent; truth that we merely *find*; truth no longer malleable to human need; truth incorrigible, in a word—such truth exists indeed superabundantly, or is supposed to exist by rationalistically minded thinkers. But then it means only the dead heart of the living tree, and its being there means only that truth also has its paleontology, and its "prescription," and may grow stiff with years of veteran service and petrified in men's regard by sheer antiquity. Yet how plastic even the oldest truths really are has been vividly shown in our day by the transformation of logical and mathematical ideas, a transformation which seems even to be invading physics. The ancient formulas are reinterpreted as special expressions of much wider principles, principles that our ancestors never caught a glimpse of in their present shape and formulation.

2.34 Mr. Schiller still gives this whole view of truth the name of "Humanism," but for this doctrine too the name of pragmatism seems fairly to be in the ascendant, so I will treat it under the name of pragmatism in these lectures.

2.35 Such, then, would be the scope of pragmatism—first, a method; and second, a genetic theory of what is meant by truth. And these two things must be our future topics.

2.36 What I have said of the theory of truth will, I am sure, have seemed obscure and unsatisfactory to most of you because of its brevity. I shall make up for that later. In a lecture on "common sense" I shall try to show what I mean by truths grown petrified by antiquity. In another lecture I shall enlarge on the idea that our thoughts become true in proportion as they successfully exert their go-between function. In a third I shall show how hard it is to distinguish subjective from objective factors in Truth's development. You may not follow me wholly in these lectures; and if you do, you may not wholly agree with me. But you will, I know, at least regard me as serious, and treat my effort with respectful consideration.

2.37 You will probably be surprised to learn, then, that Messrs. Schiller's and Dewey's theories have suffered a hailstorm of contempt and ridicule. All rationalism has risen against them. In influential quarters Mr. Schiller in particular has been treated like an impudent schoolboy who deserves a spanking. I should not mention this, except that it throws so much sidelight on that rationalistic temper to which I have opposed the temper of pragmatism. Pragmatism is uncomfortable away from facts. Rationalism is comfortable only in the presence of abstractions. This pragmatist talk about truths in the plural, about their utility and satisfactoriness, about the success with which they "work," etc., suggests to the typical intellectualist mind a sort of coarse, lame, second-rate, makeshift article of truth. Such truths are not real truth. Such tests are merely subjective. As against this, objective truth must be something non-utilitarian, haughty, refined, remote, august, exalted. It must be an absolute correspondence of our thoughts with an equally absolute reality. It must be what we *ought* to think unconditionally. The conditioned ways in which we *do* think are so much irrelevance and matter for psychology. Down with psychology, up with logic, in this whole question!

2.38 See the exquisite contrast of the types of mind! The pragmatist clings to facts and concreteness, observes truth at its work in particular cases, and generalizes. Truth, for him, becomes a class-name for all sorts of definite working-values in experience. For the rationalist it remains a pure abstraction, to the bare name of which we must defer. When the pragmatist undertakes to show in detail just *why* we must defer, the rationalist is unable to recognize the concrete cases from which his own abstraction is taken. He accuses us of *denying* truth; whereas we have only tried to trace exactly why people follow it and always ought to follow it. Your typical ultra-abstractionist fairly shudders at concreteness: other things being equal, he positively prefers the pale and spectral. If the two universes were offered, he would always choose the skinny outline rather

than the rich thicket of reality. It is so much purer, clearer, nobler.

2.39 I hope that as these lectures go on, you will come to see the concreteness and closeness to facts of the pragmatism they advocate as its most satisfying feature. Here it only follows the example of the sister sciences, interpreting the unobserved by the observed. It brings old and new harmoniously together. It converts the absolutely empty notion of a static relation of "correspondence" (what that may mean we must ask later) between our minds and reality into that of a rich and active commerce (which anyone may follow in detail and understand) between particular thoughts of ours and the great universe of other experiences in which they play their parts and have their uses.

PRAGMATISM AND RELIGION

Pragmatism allows the Absolute its truth as a warrant for moral holidays, and weighs religious ideas by their fruits.

2.40 But enough of this for now. The justification of what I say must be postponed. I want now to add a word in further explanation of the claim I made at our last meeting, that pragmatism may be a happy harmonizer of empiricist ways of thinking with the more religious demands of human beings.

2.41 Men who are strongly of the fact-loving temperament, you may remember my saying, are liable to be kept at a distance by how little sympathy with facts the present-day fashionable philosophy of idealism offers them. It is far too intellectualistic. Old-fashioned theism was bad enough, with its notion of God as an exalted monarch made up of a lot of unintelligible or preposterous "attributes." But so long as it held firmly to the argument from design, it kept some touch with concrete realities. Since, however, Darwinism has once and for all displaced design from the minds of the "scientific," theism has lost that foothold. If any deity is recommended to our contemporary imagination, it is some kind of immanent or pantheistic deity, working in things rather than above them. People who aspire to a philosophic reli-

gion nowadays turn, as a rule, more hopefully toward idealistic pantheism than toward the older dualistic theism, even though the latter still has able defenders.

2.42 But, as I said in my first lecture, the brand of pantheism on offer is hard for them to assimilate if they are lovers of facts, or empirically minded. It is the absolutistic brand, spurning the dust and built on pure logic. It keeps no connection whatever with concreteness. It affirms the Absolute Mind, which is its substitute for God, to be the rational presupposition of all particular facts, whatever they may be. It therefore remains supremely indifferent to what the particular facts in our world actually are. Be they what they may, the Absolute will father them. Like the sick lion in Aesop's fable, all footprints lead into his den, but *nulla vestigia retrorsum*.[9] You cannot get back down into the world of particulars with the Absolute's help. Nor can you deduce from your idea of his nature any necessary consequences of detail that matter for your life. He does indeed assure you that all is well with *Him*, and for his eternal way of thinking. But then he leaves you to be finitely saved by your own temporal devices.

2.43 Far be it from me to deny the majesty of this conception, or its capacity to give religious comfort to a most respectable class of minds. But from the human point of view, no one can pretend that it doesn't suffer from the faults of remoteness and abstractness. It is preeminently a product of what I have ventured to call the rationalistic temper. It disdains empiricism's needs. It substitutes a pallid outline for the real world's richness. It is dapper. It is noble in the bad sense, the sense in which to be noble is to be unfit for humble service. In this real world of sweat and dirt, it seems to me that when a view of things is "noble," that ought to count as a presumption against its truth, and as a philosophic disqualification. The prince of darkness may be a gentleman, as we are told he is, but whatever the God of earth and heaven is, he can surely be no gentleman. His

9 Latin: "no footprints lead back out." The phrase comes from Horace's retelling of Aesop's fable of the sick lion, whose visitors never return from his cave.

menial services are needed in the dust of our human trials even more than his dignity is needed in the empyrean.[10]

2.44 Now pragmatism, devoted though she is to facts, has no such materialistic bias as ordinary empiricism labors under. Moreover, she has no objection whatever to realizing abstractions, so long as they help you get about among particulars and actually carry you somewhere. She is interested in no conclusions but those that our minds and our experiences work out together, so she has no *a priori* prejudices against theology. *If theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be true, for pragmatism, in the sense of being good for so much. How much more than that they are true will depend entirely on their relations to the other truths that also have to be acknowledged.*

2.45 What I said just now about the Absolute of transcendental idealism is a case in point. First I called it majestic and said it gave religious comfort to a class of minds, and then I accused it of remoteness and sterility. But so far as it affords such comfort, it surely is not sterile. It has that amount of value; it performs a concrete function. As a good pragmatist, then, I myself ought to call the Absolute true "in so far forth," and I now unhesitatingly do so.

2.46 But what does *true in so far forth* mean in this case? To answer, we need only apply the pragmatic method. What do believers in the Absolute mean by saying that their belief gives them comfort? They mean this: in the Absolute, finite evil is already "overruled." We may therefore, whenever we wish, treat the temporal as if it were potentially the eternal and be sure that we can trust its outcome. We may, without sin, dismiss our fear and drop the worry of our finite responsibility. In short, they mean that we have a right every now and then to take a moral holiday, to let the world go its own way, feeling that its outcomes are in better hands than ours and are none of our business.

2.47 The universe is a system whose individual members may relax their anxieties occasionally, in which the don't-care mood

10 "The prince of darkness is a gentleman" is spoken by Edgar in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (3.4).

is also right for men, and in which moral holidays are in order. That, if I am not mistaken, is at least part of what the Absolute is "known-as." That is the great difference in our particular experiences which his being true makes for us. That is his cash-value when he is pragmatically interpreted. The ordinary lay reader in philosophy who thinks favorably of absolute idealism does not venture to sharpen his conceptions any further than that. He can use the Absolute for so much, and so much is very precious. He is therefore pained to hear you speak incredulously of the Absolute. He disregards your criticisms because they deal with aspects of the conception that he doesn't follow.

2.48 If the Absolute means this, and means no more than this, who can possibly deny its truth? To deny it would be to insist that men should never relax, and that holidays are never in order.

2.49 I am well aware how odd it must seem to some of you to hear me say that an idea is "true" so long as believing it is profitable to our lives. That it is *good*, insofar as it profits, you will gladly admit. If what we do with its help is good, you will allow the idea itself to be good in so far forth, for we are the better for having it. But isn't it a strange misuse of the word "truth," you will say, to call ideas "true" as well for this reason?

2.50 At this stage of my account it is impossible to answer this difficulty fully. You touch here on the very central point of Schiller's, Dewey's, and my own doctrine of truth, which I cannot discuss in detail until my sixth lecture. Let me now say only this: truth is *one species of good*. It is not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good and coordinate with it. *The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons.* Surely you must admit this much. Suppose there were no good for life in true ideas, or knowing them were positively disadvantageous and false ideas were the only useful ones. Then the current notion that truth is divine and precious, and its pursuit a duty, could never have grown up or become a dogma. In a world like that, our duty would rather be to *shun* truth. But in this world, certain foods

are not only agreeable to our taste but good for our teeth, our stomach, and our tissues. In the same way, certain ideas are not only agreeable to think about, or agreeable as supporting other ideas we are fond of, but also helpful in life's practical struggles. If there is any life that it is really better for us to lead, and if there is any idea which, if believed, would help us lead that life, then it would be really *better for us* to believe that idea, *unless, indeed, belief in it incidentally clashed with other greater vital benefits*.

2.51 "What would be better for us to believe"! This sounds very like a definition of truth. It comes very close to saying "what we *ought* to believe," and none of you would find anything odd in *that* definition. 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 the notion of what is true for us permanently apart?

2.52 Pragmatism says no, and I fully agree with her. You probably agree too, so far as the abstract statement goes, but you suspect that if we did in practice believe everything that made for good in our own personal lives, we would find ourselves indulging all kinds of fancies about this world's affairs, and all kinds of sentimental superstitions about a world hereafter. Your suspicion here is undoubtedly well founded. Clearly, something happens when you pass from the abstract to the concrete that complicates the situation.

2.53 I said just now that what is better for us to believe is true *unless the belief incidentally clashes with some other vital benefit*. Now in real life, what vital benefits is any particular belief of ours most liable to clash with? What indeed but the vital benefits yielded by *other beliefs*, when these prove incompatible with the first ones? In other words, the greatest enemy of any one of our truths may be the rest of our truths. Truths have, once and for all, this desperate instinct of self-preservation and this desire to extinguish whatever contradicts them. My belief in the Absolute, based on the good it does me, must run the gauntlet of all my other beliefs. Grant that it may be true in giving me a moral holiday. Nevertheless, as I conceive it (and let me now

speak confidentially, as it were, and merely as a private person), it clashes with other truths of mine whose benefits I hate to give up on its account. It happens to be associated with a kind of logic of which I am the enemy. I find that it entangles me in unacceptable metaphysical paradoxes, and so on. But I have enough trouble in life already without adding the trouble of carrying these intellectual inconsistencies, so I personally just give up the Absolute. I just *take* my moral holidays; or else, as a professional philosopher, I try to justify them by some other principle.

2.54 If I could restrict my notion of the Absolute to its bare holiday-giving value, it wouldn't clash with my other truths. But we cannot easily restrict our hypotheses like that. They carry surplus features, and it is these that clash so. My disbelief in the Absolute, then, means disbelief in those other surplus features, for I fully believe in the legitimacy of taking moral holidays.

2.55 You can see from this what I meant when I called pragmatism a mediator and reconciler and said, borrowing the word from Papini, that she "unstiffens" our theories. She has in fact no prejudices whatever, no obstructive dogmas, no rigid canons of what shall count as proof. She is completely genial. She will entertain any hypothesis; she will consider any evidence. It follows that in the religious field she has a great advantage both over positivistic empiricism, with its anti-theological bias, and over religious rationalism, with its exclusive interest in the remote, the noble, the simple, and the abstract in the way of conception.

2.56 In short, she widens the field of search for God. Rationalism sticks to logic and the empyrean. Empiricism sticks to the external senses. Pragmatism is willing to take anything, to follow either logic or the senses, and to count the humblest and most personal experiences. She will count mystical experiences if they have practical consequences. She will take a God who lives in the very dirt of private fact, if that should seem a likely place to find him.

2.57 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 whole collection of experience's demands, nothing being left out. If theological ideas should do this, and if the notion of God in particular should prove to do it, how could pragmatism possibly deny God's existence? She could see no meaning in treating as "not true" a notion that was pragmatically so successful. For her, what other kind of truth could there be than all this agreement with concrete reality?

2.58 In my last lecture I shall return to the relations of pragmatism with religion. But you can see already how democratic she is. Her manners are as various and flexible, her resources as rich and endless, and her conclusions as friendly as those of mother nature.

Lecture III: Some Metaphysical Problems Pragmatically Considered

Substance, materialism versus theism, design and free will, each tested by asking what difference it would make.

LECTURE III. SOME METAPHYSICAL PROBLEMS PRAGMATICALLY CONSIDERED

3.1 I am now going to make the pragmatic method more familiar by giving you some illustrations of how it applies to particular problems. I will begin with what is driest, and the first thing I shall take up is the problem of *Substance*. Everyone uses the old distinction between substance and attribute. It is enshrined in the very structure of human language, in the difference between grammatical subject and predicate. Here is a bit of blackboard chalk. Its modes, attributes, properties, accidents, or affections (use whichever term you like) are whiteness, crumbliness, cylindrical shape, insolubility in water, and so on. But the bearer of these attributes is so much *chalk*, which is then called the substance in which they inhere. So the attributes of this desk inhere in the substance "wood," those of my coat in the substance "wool," and so forth. Chalk, wood, and wool, in spite of their differences, again show common properties, and in so far forth they are themselves counted as modes of a still more primal substance, *matter*, whose attributes are occupying space and impenetrability. Similarly, our thoughts and feelings are affections or properties of our several *souls*. These are substances, but again not wholly in their own right, for they are modes of the still deeper substance "spirit."

3.2 Now it was seen very early that all we know of the chalk is the whiteness, crumbliness, and so on, and all we know of the wood is its combustibility and fibrous structure. A group of attributes is what each substance here is known-as; they form its sole cash-value for our actual experience. In every case the substance is revealed through *them*. If we were cut off from *them*, we would never suspect its existence. Suppose God kept sending them to us in an unchanged order, but at a certain moment miraculously annihilated the substance that supported them. We could never detect the moment, for our experiences themselves would be unaltered. Nominalists accordingly hold that substance is a spurious idea, due to our inveterate human trick of turning names into things. Phenomena come in groups (the chalk-group, the wood-group, etc.), and each group gets its name. We then treat the name as in a way supporting the group of phenomena. The low thermometer today, for instance, is supposed to come from something called the "climate." Climate is really only the name for a certain group of days, but it is treated as if it lay *behind* the day. In general, we place the name, as if it were a being, behind the facts it is the name of. But the phenomenal properties of things, nominalists say, surely do not really inhere in names, and if not in names, then they do not inhere in anything. Rather, they *ad*here, or *co*here, *with each other*. We think that a substance inaccessible to us accounts for such cohesion by supporting it, as cement might support the pieces of a mosaic, but that notion must be abandoned. The fact of the bare cohesion itself is all that the notion of substance signifies. Behind that fact is nothing.

3.3 Scholasticism took the notion of substance from common sense and made it very technical and articulate. Few things would seem to have fewer pragmatic consequences for us than substances, cut off as we are from every contact with them. Yet in one case scholasticism has proved the importance of the substance-idea by treating it pragmatically. I mean certain disputes about the mystery of the Eucharist. Here substance would appear to have momentous pragmatic value. The accidents of

the wafer don't change in the Lord's Supper, and yet it has become the very body of Christ. So the change must be in the substance alone. The bread-substance must have been withdrawn and the divine substance miraculously substituted, without altering the immediate sensible properties. But though these don't alter, a tremendous difference has been made: no less a one than this, that we who take the sacrament now feed on the very substance of divinity. So the substance-notion breaks into life with tremendous effect, once you allow that substances can separate from their accidents and exchange them.

3.4 This is the only pragmatic application of the substance-idea that I know of; and obviously it will be taken seriously only by those who already believe in the "real presence" on independent grounds.

MATTER AND THE SOUL

Berkeley on matter and Locke on personal identity show earlier philosophers already reasoning pragmatically.

3.5 *Material substance* was criticized by Berkeley with such telling effect that his name has echoed through all later philosophy. Berkeley's treatment of the notion of matter is so well known that it hardly needs more than a mention. Far from denying the external world that we know, Berkeley corroborated it. What he attacked was the scholastic notion of a material substance *behind* the external world: unapproachable by us, deeper and more real than that world, and needed to support it. That notion, Berkeley maintained, was the most effective of all reducers of the external world to unreality. Abolish that substance, he said. Believe that God, whom you can understand and approach, sends you the sensible world directly, and you confirm that world and back it up by his divine authority. Berkeley's criticism of "matter" was consequently absolutely pragmatic. Matter is known as our sensations of color, figure, hardness, and the like. They are the cash-value of the term. The difference matter makes to us by truly being is that we then get such sensa-

tions; by not being, that we lack them. These sensations, then, are its sole meaning. So Berkeley doesn't deny matter. He simply tells us what it consists of. It is a true name for just so much in the way of sensations.

3.6 Locke, and later Hume, applied a similar pragmatic criticism to the notion of *spiritual substance*. I will mention only Locke's treatment of our "personal identity." He immediately reduces this notion to its pragmatic value in terms of experience. It means, he says, so much "consciousness": namely, the fact that at one moment of life we remember other moments, and feel them all as parts of one and the same personal history. Rationalism had explained this practical continuity in our life by the unity of our soul-substance. But Locke says: suppose that God should take away the consciousness. Would *we* be any the better for still having the soul-principle? Suppose he attached the same consciousness to different souls. Would *we*, as we realize *ourselves*, be any the worse for that fact? In Locke's day the soul was chiefly a thing to be rewarded or punished. See how Locke, discussing it from this point of view, keeps the question pragmatic:

3.7 "Suppose," he says, "someone thinks himself to be the same *soul* that once was Nestor or Thersites. Can he think their actions his own any more than the actions of any other man who ever existed? But let him once find himself conscious of any of the actions of Nestor, and he then finds himself the same person as Nestor.... In this personal identity is founded all the right and justice of reward and punishment. It may be reasonable to think that no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of, but shall receive his doom, his consciousness accusing or excusing him.[1] Supposing a man punished now for what he had done in another life, of which he could be made to have no consciousness at all, what difference is there between that punishment and being created miserable?"

1 From Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, book II, chapter 27. Nestor, the wise old counselor, and Thersites, the ugly railer, are figures from Homer's *Iliad*.

3.8 For Locke, then, our personal identity consists solely in pragmatically definable particulars. Whether, apart from these verifiable facts, it also inheres in a spiritual principle is merely a curious speculation. Locke, compromiser that he was, passively tolerated belief in a substantial soul behind our consciousness. But his successor Hume, and most empirical psychologists after him, have denied the soul, except as the name for verifiable cohesions in our inner life. They take it back down into the stream of experience and cash it into so much small-change value in the way of "ideas" and their peculiar connections with one another. As I said of Berkeley's matter, the soul is good or "true" for just *so much*, but no more.

MATERIALISM OR THEISM

Looking back, materialism and theism mean the same; looking forward, one promises a moral order and the other does not.

3.9 The mention of material substance naturally suggests the doctrine of "materialism." But philosophical materialism is not necessarily bound up with belief in "matter" as a metaphysical principle. One may deny matter in that sense as strongly as Berkeley did, and one may be a phenomenalist like Huxley. Yet one may still be a materialist in the wider sense, explaining higher phenomena by lower ones and leaving the destinies of the world at the mercy of its blinder parts and forces. It is in this wider sense of the word that materialism is opposed to spiritualism or theism. The laws of physical nature are what run things, materialism says.[2] Someone with complete knowledge of the facts might work out the highest productions of human genius from their physiological conditions. This would hold whether or not nature exists only for our minds, as idealists contend. In any case our minds would have to record the kind of nature it is, and write it down as operating through blind laws of physics. That is

2 Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), English biologist and defender of Darwin. "Spiritualism" here and below means the philosophical view that mind governs the world, not séance-spiritualism.

the character of present-day materialism, which may better be called naturalism. Over against it stands "theism," or what in a wide sense may be termed "spiritualism." Spiritualism says that mind not only witnesses and records things but also runs and operates them, so that the world is guided not by its lower element but by its higher one.

3.10 Treated as it often is, this question becomes little more than a conflict between aesthetic preferences. Matter is gross, coarse, crass, muddy; spirit is pure, elevated, noble. It is more in keeping with the dignity of the universe to give primacy in it to what appears superior, so spirit must be affirmed as the ruling principle. The great rationalist failing is to treat abstract principles as final, as things before which our intellects may come to rest in a state of admiring contemplation. Spiritualism, as it is often held, may be simply a state of admiration for one kind of abstraction and of dislike for another. I remember a worthy spiritualist professor who always referred to materialism as the "mud-philosophy," and considered it thereby refuted.

3.11 To such spiritualism as this there is an easy answer, and Mr. Spencer makes it effectively. In some well-written pages at the end of the first volume of his Psychology, he shows us that a "matter" so infinitely subtle, performing motions as inconceivably quick and fine as those which modern science postulates in its explanations, has no trace of grossness left. He shows that the conception of spirit, as we mortals have so far framed it, is itself too gross to cover the exquisite tenuity of nature's facts. Both terms, he says, are only symbols, pointing to that one unknowable reality in which their oppositions cease.[3]

3.12 To an abstract objection an abstract rejoinder is enough. So far as one's opposition to materialism springs from one's disdain of matter as something "crass," Mr. Spencer cuts the ground from under one. Matter is indeed infinitely and incredibly refined. For anyone who has ever looked on the face of a dead child or parent, the mere fact that matter *could* have taken that precious form for a time ought to make matter sacred ever after.

3 The reference is to Spencer's *Principles of Psychology* (1855; revised 1870–1872).

It makes no difference what the *principle* of life may be, material or immaterial. Matter at any rate cooperates and lends itself to all life's purposes. That beloved incarnation was among matter's possibilities.

3.13 But now, instead of resting in principles in this stagnant intellectualist fashion, let us apply the pragmatic method to the question. What do we *mean* by matter? What practical difference can it make *now* whether the world is run by matter or by spirit? I think we find that the problem then takes on a rather different character.

3.14 And first of all I call your attention to a curious fact. As far as the *past* of the world goes, it makes not a single jot of difference whether we consider it to have been the work of matter or think a divine spirit was its author.

3.15 Imagine, in fact, that the entire contents of the world are given once and for all, irrevocably. Imagine it ending this very moment and having no future. Then 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? For him, concepts are things to come back into experience with, things to make us look for differences. But by hypothesis there is to be no more experience, and no possible differences can now be looked for. Both theories have shown all their consequences, and by the hypothesis we are adopting, these are identical. 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. [I am supposing, of course, that the theories have been equally successful in their explanations of what is.]

3.16 For just consider the case sincerely, and say what a God would be *worth* if he were there, with his work accomplished and his world run down. He would be worth no more than just that world was worth. His creative power could attain to that

amount of result, with its mixed merits and defects, but go no further. And there is to be no future. The whole value and meaning of the world has already been paid in and actualized in the feelings that went with it in the passing, and now go with it in the ending. It draws no supplemental significance (such as our real world draws) from its function of preparing something yet to come. So by it we take God's measure, as it were. He is the Being who could once and for all do *that*; and for that much we are thankful to him, but for nothing more. But now take the contrary hypothesis: that the bits of matter, following their laws, could make that world and do no less. Should we not be just as thankful to them? Where would we suffer any loss, then, if we dropped God as a hypothesis and made matter alone responsible? Where would any special deadness, or crassness, come in? And, experience being what it is once and for all, how would God's presence in it make it any more living or richer?

3.17 Candidly, it is impossible to give any answer to this question. The actually experienced world is supposed to be the same in its details on either hypothesis, "the same, for our praise or blame," as Browning says. It stands there indefeasibly: a gift that can't be taken back. Calling matter its cause retracts not a single one of the items that have made it up, nor does calling God its cause add to them. They are the God or the atoms, respectively, of just that world and no other. The God, if there, has been doing just what atoms could do (appearing in the character of atoms, so to speak) and earning such gratitude as is due to atoms, and no more. If his presence gives no different turn or outcome to the performance, it surely can give it no increase of dignity. Nor would any indignity come to it if he were absent and the atoms remained the only actors on the stage. When a play is over and the curtain is down, you really make it no better by claiming an illustrious genius for its author, just as you make it no worse by calling him a common hack.

3.18 Thus 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. In that event

matter and God mean exactly the same thing: namely, the power, neither more nor less, that could make just this completed world. The wise man is the one who in such a case would turn his back on so superfluous a discussion. Accordingly, most men instinctively, and positivists and scientists deliberately, do turn their backs on philosophical disputes from which nothing in the way of definite future consequences can be seen to follow. The charge that philosophy is verbal and empty is surely one we are all too familiar with. If pragmatism is true, that is a perfectly sound reproach, unless the theories under fire can be shown to have alternative practical outcomes, however delicate and distant these may be. The common man and the scientist say they discover no such outcomes. If the metaphysician can discern none either, then the others are certainly in the right as against him. His science is then only pompous trifling, and endowing a professorship for such a being would be silly.

3.19 Accordingly, in every genuine metaphysical debate some practical issue, however conjectural and remote, is involved. To see this, go back with me to our question, and this time place yourselves in the world we live in: the world that *has* a future, that is still uncompleted as we speak. In this unfinished world the choice of "materialism or theism?" is intensely practical, and it is worth our while to spend some minutes of our hour seeing that it is so.

3.20 How, indeed, does the program differ for us, depending on which view we take? On one view, the facts of experience up to date are purposeless configurations of blind atoms moving according to eternal laws. On the other, they are due to the providence of God. As far as the past facts go, there is indeed no difference. Those facts are in, are bagged, are captured; and the good that's in them is gained, whether the atoms or the God be their cause. There are accordingly many materialists around us today who ignore altogether the future and practical aspects of the question. They seek to remove the odium attached to the word materialism, and even to get rid of the word itself. They do this by showing that if matter could give birth to all these gains,

then matter, functionally considered, is just as divine an entity as God. In fact it coalesces with God; it is what you mean by God. Stop using either of these terms, with their outgrown opposition, these people advise us. Use a term free of clerical connotations on the one hand, and of any suggestion of grossness, coarseness, or ignobility on the other. Talk of the primal mystery, of the unknowable energy, of the one and only power, instead of saying either God or matter. This is the course Mr. Spencer urges on us; and if philosophy were purely retrospective, he would thereby prove himself an excellent pragmatist.

3.21 But philosophy is also prospective. After finding what the world has been and done and yielded, it still asks the further question: "What does the world *promise*?" 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 so-called unknowable power. Not only has it made for righteousness up to now, but it will make for righteousness forever; and that is all we need. Doing practically all that a God can do, it is equivalent to God. Its function is a God's function, in a world in which a God would be superfluous; from such a world a God could never rightly be missed. Here "cosmic emotion" would be the right name for religion.

3.22 But *is* the matter that carries on Mr. Spencer's process of cosmic evolution any such principle of never-ending perfection as this? Indeed it is not. Science foretells that the future end of every cosmically evolved thing or system of things is death and tragedy. Mr. Spencer confines himself to the aesthetic side of the controversy and ignores the practical side, and so he has really contributed nothing serious to settling it. But now apply our principle of practical results, and see what vital significance the question of materialism or theism immediately acquires.

3.23 Theism and materialism, so indifferent when taken retrospectively, point to wholly different outlooks of experience when we take them prospectively. Consider the theory of mechanical evolution. According to it, we certainly have the laws of

redistribution of matter and motion to thank for all the good hours our organisms have ever given us, and for all the ideals our minds now frame. Yet those laws are fatally certain to undo their work again and to redissolve everything they have once evolved. You all know the picture of the last state of the universe that evolutionary science foresees. I cannot state it better than in Mr. Balfour's words: "The energies of our system will decay, the glory of the sun will be dimmed, and the earth, tideless and inert, will no longer tolerate the race which has for a moment disturbed its solitude. Man will go down into the pit, and all his thoughts will perish. The uneasy consciousness which in this obscure corner has for a brief space broken the contented silence of the universe will be at rest. Matter will know itself no longer. 'Imperishable monuments' and 'immortal deeds,' death itself, and love stronger than death, will be as if they had not been.[4] Nor will anything that is be better or worse for all that the labor, genius, devotion, and suffering of man have striven through countless ages to effect."[5]

3.24 That is the sting of it: in the vast driftings of the cosmic weather, though many a jeweled shore appears, and many an enchanted cloud-bank floats away, lingering long before it dissolves—just as our world now lingers, for our joy—yet when these passing products are gone, nothing, absolutely *nothing* remains to represent those particular qualities, those elements of preciousness which they may have enshrined. Dead and gone are they, gone utterly from the very sphere and room of being. Without an echo; without a memory; without an influence on anything that may come after, to make it care for similar ideals. This utter final wreck and tragedy is of the essence of scientific materialism as it is presently understood. The lower and not the higher forces are the eternal forces, or the last surviving forces within the only cycle of evolution that we can definitely see. Mr. Spencer believes this as much as anyone; so why should he

4 Arthur James Balfour (1848–1930), British philosopher-statesman and prime minister 1902–1905.

5 JAMES'S NOTE. *The Foundations of Belief*, p. 30.

argue with us as if we were making silly aesthetic objections to the "grossness" of "matter and motion," the principles of his philosophy, when what really dismays us is the bleakness of its ultimate practical results?

3.25 No, the true objection to materialism is not positive but negative. It would be farcical nowadays to complain of it for what it *is*, for "grossness." Grossness is what grossness *does*—we now know *that*. We complain of it, on the contrary, for what it is *not*—not a permanent guarantee for our more ideal interests, not a fulfiller of our remotest hopes.

3.26 The notion of God, on the other hand, however inferior it may be in clearness to those mathematical notions so current in mechanical philosophy, has at least this practical superiority over them: it guarantees an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved. A world with a God in it to say the last word may indeed burn up or freeze, but we then think of him as still mindful of the old ideals and sure to bring them to fruition elsewhere; so that, where he is, tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution are not the absolutely final things. This need of an eternal moral order is one of the deepest needs of our hearts. And those poets, like Dante and Wordsworth, who live on the conviction of such an order, owe to that fact the extraordinary tonic and consoling power of their verse. Here, then, in these different emotional and practical appeals, in these adjustments of our concrete attitudes of hope and expectation, and in all the delicate consequences that their differences entail, lie the real meanings of materialism and spiritualism—not in hair-splitting abstractions about matter's inner essence, or about the metaphysical attributes of God. Materialism means simply the denial that the moral order is eternal, and the cutting off of ultimate hopes; spiritualism means the affirmation of an eternal moral order and the letting loose of hope. Surely here is an issue genuine enough for anyone who feels it; and as long as men are men, it will provide matter for serious philosophic debate.

3.27 But possibly some of you may still rally to their defense. Even while admitting that spiritualism and materialism make different prophecies of the world's future, you may yourselves pooh-pooh the difference as something so infinitely remote as to mean nothing to a sane mind. The essence of a sane mind, you may say, is to take shorter views, and to feel no concern about such chimeras as the final end of the world. Well, I can only say that if you say this, you do injustice to human nature. Religious melancholy is not disposed of by a simple flourish of the word insanity. The absolute things, the last things, the overlapping things, are the truly philosophic concerns; all superior minds feel seriously about them, and the mind with the shortest views is simply the mind of the shallower man.

3.28 The issues of fact at stake in the debate are of course only vaguely conceived by us at present. But spiritualistic faith in all its forms deals with a world of *promise*, while materialism's sun sets in a sea of disappointment. Remember what I said of the Absolute: it grants us moral holidays. Any religious view does this. It not only spurs on our more strenuous moments, but it also takes our joyous, careless, trustful moments and justifies them. It paints the grounds of justification vaguely enough, to be sure. The exact features of the saving future facts that our belief in God ensures will have to be worked out by the endless methods of science: we can *study* our God only by studying his Creation. But we can *enjoy* our God, if we have one, in advance of all that labor. I myself believe that the evidence for God lies primarily in inner personal experiences. Once they have given you your God, his name means at least the benefit of the holiday. You remember what I said yesterday about the way in which truths clash and try to "down" each other. The truth of "God" has to run the gauntlet of all our other truths. It is on trial by them, and they are on trial by it. Our *final* opinion about God can be settled only after all the truths have straightened themselves out together. Let us hope that they will find a *modus vivendi*!

DESIGN IN NATURE

After Darwin the bare word "design" explains nothing, but faith in a divine designer is a term of promise.

3.29 Let me pass to a closely related philosophic problem, the *question of design in nature*. Since time immemorial God's existence has been held to be proved by certain natural facts. Many facts appear as if expressly designed with a view to one another. Thus the woodpecker's bill, tongue, feet, tail, and so on, fit him wonderfully for a world of trees, with grubs hidden in their bark to feed on. The parts of our eye fit the laws of light to perfection, guiding its rays to a sharp picture on our retina. Such mutual fitting of things diverse in origin argued design, it was held; and the designer was always treated as a man-loving deity.

3.30 The first step in these arguments was to prove that the design *existed*. Nature was ransacked for results obtained through separate things being adapted to each other. Our eyes, for instance, originate in the darkness of the womb, and the light originates in the sun, yet see how they fit each other. They are evidently made *for* each other. Vision is the end designed, light and eyes the separate means devised for attaining it.

3.31 It is strange, considering how unanimously our ancestors felt the force of this argument, to see how little it has counted for since the triumph of the Darwinian theory. Darwin opened our minds to the power of chance happenings to bring forth "fit" results if only they have time to add themselves together. He showed the enormous waste of nature in producing results that get destroyed because of their unfitness. He also emphasized the number of adaptations which, if designed, would argue an evil rather than a good designer. *Here*, everything depends on the point of view. To the grub under the bark, the exquisite fitness of the woodpecker's organism for extracting him would certainly argue a diabolical designer.

3.32 Theologians have by now stretched their minds so as to embrace the Darwinian facts and yet interpret them as still

showing divine purpose. It used to be a question of purpose against mechanism, of one or the other. It was as if one were to say, "My shoes are evidently designed to fit my feet, hence it is impossible that they should have been produced by machinery." We know that they are both: they are made by a machinery itself designed to fit the feet with shoes. Theology need only stretch God's designs in a similar way. The aim of a football team is not merely to get the ball to a certain goal (if that were so, they would simply get up some dark night and put it there), but to get it there by a fixed *machinery of conditions*—the game's rules and the opposing players. In the same way, the aim of God is not merely, let us say, to make men and to save them, but rather to get this done through the sole agency of nature's vast machinery. Without nature's stupendous laws and counter-forces, man's creation and perfection, we might suppose, would be achievements too insipid for God to have proposed them.

3.33 This saves the form of the design argument at the expense of its old easy human content. The designer is no longer the old manlike deity. His designs have grown so vast as to be incomprehensible to us humans. The *what* of them so overwhelms us that establishing the mere *that* of a designer for them becomes of very little consequence in comparison. We can comprehend only with difficulty the *character* of a cosmic mind whose purposes are fully revealed by the strange mixture of goods and evils that we find in the particulars of this actual world. Or rather, we cannot possibly comprehend it. The mere word "design" by itself has no consequences and explains nothing. It is the most barren of principles. The old question of *whether* there is design is idle. The real question is what the world is, whether or not it has a designer—and that can be revealed only by the study of all nature's particulars.

3.34 Remember that *no matter what* nature may have produced or may be producing, the means must necessarily have been adequate, must have been *fitted to that production*. The argument from fitness to design would therefore always apply, whatever the product's character. The recent eruption of Mont Pelée, for

example, required all previous history to produce that exact combination of ruined houses, human and animal corpses, sunken ships, volcanic ash, and so on, in just that one hideous configuration of positions. France had to be a nation and colonize Martinique. Our country had to exist and send our ships there. *If* God aimed at just that result, the means by which the centuries bent their influences toward it showed exquisite intelligence.[6] And so with any state of things whatever, in nature or in history, that we find actually realized. For the parts of things must always make *some* definite resultant, be it chaotic or harmonious. When we look at what has actually come about, the conditions must always appear perfectly designed to ensure it. We can always say, therefore, of any conceivable world, of any conceivable character, that the whole cosmic machinery *may* have been designed to produce it.

3.35 Pragmatically, then, the abstract word "design" is a blank cartridge. It carries no consequences, it does no execution. *What* design? and *what* designer? are the only serious questions, and the study of facts is the only way of getting even approximate answers. Meanwhile, pending the slow answer from facts, anyone who insists that there *is* a designer, and who is sure he is a divine one, gets a certain pragmatic benefit from the term—the same, in fact, that we saw the terms God, Spirit, or the Absolute yield us. "Design," worthless though it is as a mere rationalistic principle set above or behind things for our admiration, becomes, if our faith makes it concrete as something theistic, a term of *promise*. Returning with it into experience, we gain a more trusting outlook on the future. If not a blind force but a seeing force runs things, we may reasonably expect better outcomes. This vague confidence in the future is the only pragmatic meaning at present discernible in the terms design and designer. But if cosmic confidence is right, not wrong, better, not worse, that is a most important meaning. That much at least of possible "truth" the terms will then have in them.

6 The 1902 eruption of Mont Pelée on Martinique destroyed the town of Saint-Pierre and killed nearly 30,000 people.

FREE WILL

James sets aside arguments about blame and treats free will as the hope that the future may be better.

3.36 Let me take up another well-worn controversy, *the free-will problem*. Most people who believe in what is called their free will do so in the rationalistic fashion. It is a principle, a positive faculty or virtue added to man, by which his dignity is mysteriously increased. He ought to believe it for this reason. Determinists, who deny it, who say that individual men originate nothing but merely transmit to the future the whole push of the past cosmos of which they are so small an expression, diminish man. He is less admirable, stripped of this creative principle. I imagine that more than half of you share our instinctive belief in free will, and that admiration of it as a principle of dignity has much to do with your loyalty to it.

3.37 But free will has also been discussed pragmatically, and, strangely enough, the same pragmatic interpretation has been put on it by both sides of the dispute. You know how large a part questions of *accountability* have played in ethical controversy. To hear some people, one would suppose that all ethics aims at is a code of merits and demerits. Thus the old legal and theological leaven, the interest in crime and sin and punishment, stays with us. "Who's to blame? whom can we punish? whom will God punish?"—these preoccupations hang like a bad dream over man's religious history.

3.38 So both free will and determinism have been railed against and called absurd, because each, in the eyes of its enemies, has seemed to prevent the "imputability" of good or bad deeds to their authors. A strange antinomy, this! Free will means novelty, the grafting onto the past of something not contained in it. If our acts were predetermined, if we merely transmitted the push of the whole past, the free-willists say, how could we be praised or blamed for anything? We should be "agents" only, not "prin-

cipals," and where then would be our precious imputability and responsibility?

3.39 But where would it be if we *had* free will? reply the determinists. If a "free" act is a sheer novelty, one that comes not *from* me, the previous me, but *ex nihilo,* and simply tacks itself on to me, how can *I*, the previous I, be responsible? How can I have any permanent *character* that will stand still long enough for praise or blame to be awarded? The chaplet of my days tumbles into a heap of disconnected beads as soon as the thread of inner necessity is pulled out by the preposterous indeterminist doctrine. Messrs. Fullerton and McTaggart have recently laid about them valiantly with this argument.[7]

3.40 It may be good *ad hominem,* but otherwise it is pitiful. For I ask you, quite apart from other reasons, whether any man, woman, or child with a sense for realities ought not to be ashamed to plead such principles as either dignity or imputability. Instinct and utility between them can safely be trusted to carry on the social business of punishment and praise. If a man does good acts we shall praise him, if he does bad acts we shall punish him—in any case, and quite apart from theories as to whether the acts result from what was previous in him or are novelties in a strict sense. To make our human ethics revolve around the question of "merit" is a pitiful unreality—God alone can know our merits, if we have any. The real ground for supposing free will is indeed pragmatic, but it has nothing to do with this contemptible right to punish which has made such a noise in past discussions of the subject.

3.41 Free will pragmatically means *novelties in the world*, the right to expect that in its deepest elements as well as in its surface phenomena, the future may not identically repeat and imitate the past. That imitation *en masse* is there, who can deny? The general "uniformity of nature" is presupposed by every lesser law. But nature may be only approximately uniform; and people in whom knowledge of the world's past has bred pessimism (or

7 *Ex nihilo*: Latin, "out of nothing." George Stuart Fullerton (1859–1925), American philosopher, and J. M. E. McTaggart (1866–1925), Cambridge idealist.

doubts as to the world's good character, which become certainties if that character is supposed to be eternally fixed) may naturally welcome free will as a *melioristic* doctrine. It holds up improvement as at least possible; whereas determinism assures us that our whole notion of possibility is born of human ignorance, and that necessity and impossibility between them rule the destinies of the world.

3.42 Free will is thus a general cosmological theory of *promise*, just like the Absolute, God, Spirit, or Design. Taken abstractly, none of these terms has any inner content, none of them gives us any picture, and none of them would keep the least pragmatic value in a world whose character was obviously perfect from the start. Elation at mere existence, pure cosmic emotion and delight, would, it seems to me, quench all interest in those speculations, if the world were already nothing but a lazy paradise of happiness. Our interest in religious metaphysics arises from the fact that our empirical future feels unsafe to us, and needs some higher guarantee. If the past and present were purely good, who could wish that the future might possibly not resemble them? Who could desire free will? Who would not say, with Huxley, "Let me be wound up every day like a watch, to go right fatally, and I ask no better freedom"? "Freedom" in a world already perfect could only mean freedom to *be worse*, and who could be so insane as to wish for that? To be necessarily what it is, to be incapable of being anything else, would put the last touch of perfection on optimism's universe. Surely the only *possibility* that one can rationally claim is the possibility that things may be *better*. That possibility, I need hardly say, is one that, as the actual world goes, we have ample grounds for desiring.

3.43 Free will thus has no meaning unless it is a doctrine of *relief*. As such, it takes its place with other religious doctrines. Between them, they build up the old wastes and repair the former desolations. Our spirit, shut within this courtyard of sense-experience, is always saying to the intellect on the tower:

"Watchman, tell us of the night, if it aught of promise bear," and the intellect then gives it these terms of promise.[8]

3.44 Other than this practical significance, the words God, free will, design, and so on, have none. Yet dark though they are in themselves, or taken intellectualistically, when we carry them with us into life's thicket, the darkness *there* grows light around us. If, in dealing with such words, you stop at their definition, thinking that to be an intellectual finality, where are you? Stupidly staring at a pretentious sham! "Deus est Ens, a se, extra et supra omne genus, necessarium, unum, infinite perfectum, simplex, immutabile, immensum, aeternum, intelligens," etc.—in what way is such a definition really instructive? It means less than nothing, in its pompous robe of adjectives.[9] Pragmatism alone can read a positive meaning into it, and for that she turns her back on the intellectualist point of view altogether. "God's in his heaven; all's right with the world!"—*That's* the real heart of your theology, and for that you need no rationalist definitions.[10]

3.45 Why shouldn't all of us, rationalists as well as pragmatists, confess this? Pragmatism, far from keeping her eyes fixed on the immediate practical foreground, as she is accused of doing, dwells just as much on the world's remotest perspectives.

3.46 See, then, how all these ultimate questions turn, as it were, on their hinges; and from looking backward at principles—at an *erkenntnisstheoretische Ich*, a God, a *Kausalitätsprinzip*, a Design, a Free-will, taken in themselves, as something august and exalted above facts—see, I say, how pragmatism shifts the emphasis and looks forward into facts themselves. The really vital question for us all is, What is this world going to be? What is life eventually to make of itself? The center of gravity of philosophy must therefore change its place. The earth of things, long thrown into shadow by the glories of the upper ether, must resume its

8 "Build up the old wastes" echoes Isaiah 61:4; "Watchman, tell us of the night" is from John Bowring's hymn (1825), after Isaiah 21:11.

9 A scholastic definition: "God is Being, existing of itself, outside and above every genus, necessary, one, infinitely perfect, simple, unchangeable, immeasurable, eternal, intelligent."

10 From Robert Browning's verse drama *Pippa Passes* (1841).

rights.[11] To shift the emphasis in this way means that philosophic questions will come to be treated by minds of a less abstractionist type than hitherto, minds more scientific and individualistic in their tone, yet not irreligious either. It will be a change in "the seat of authority" that reminds one almost of the Protestant Reformation. And as, to papal minds, Protestantism has often seemed a mere mess of anarchy and confusion, so, no doubt, will pragmatism often seem to ultra-rationalist minds in philosophy. It will seem so much sheer trash, philosophically. But life wags on all the same, and reaches its ends, in Protestant countries. I venture to think that philosophic Protestantism will reach a not dissimilar prosperity.

11 German philosophical jargon: "epistemological ego" (the knowing self of Kantian theory of knowledge) and "principle of causality."

Lecture IV: The One and the Many

In what practical senses the world is one and in what senses many; against absolute monism.

LECTURE IV. THE ONE AND THE MANY

4.1 We saw in the last lecture that the pragmatic method, in its dealings with certain concepts, instead of ending with admiring contemplation, plunges forward with them into the river of experience and extends the perspective by their means. Design, free will, the absolute mind, spirit instead of matter, have for their sole meaning a better promise as to this world's outcome. Be they false or be they true, their meaning is this meliorism. I have sometimes thought of the phenomenon called "total reflection" in optics as a good symbol of the relation between abstract ideas and concrete realities, as pragmatism conceives it. Hold a tumbler of water a little above your eyes and look up through the water at its surface—or, better still, look in the same way through the flat wall of an aquarium. You will then see an extraordinarily brilliant reflected image of, say, a candle flame, or any other clear object, situated on the opposite side of the vessel. No ray, under these circumstances, gets beyond the water's surface: every ray is totally reflected back into the depths again. Now let the water represent the world of sensible facts, and let the air above it represent the world of abstract ideas. Both worlds are real, of course, and interact; but they interact only at their boundary, and the *locus* of everything that lives and happens to us, so far as full experience goes, is the water. We are like fishes swimming in the sea of sense, bounded above by the higher element, but unable to breathe it pure or

penetrate it. We get our oxygen from it, however; we touch it incessantly, now in this part, now in that, and every time we touch it, we turn back into the water with our course redetermined and re-energized. The abstract ideas of which the air consists are indispensable for life, but unbreathable by themselves, as it were, and active only in their redirecting function. All similes are halting, but this one rather takes my fancy. It shows how something not sufficient for life in itself may nevertheless be an effective determinant of life elsewhere.

THE ONE AND THE MANY

James calls this the most central of philosophic problems and asks what the world's oneness is known as.

4.2 In this present hour I wish to illustrate the pragmatic method by one more application. I wish to turn its light on the ancient problem of "the one and the many." I suspect that very few of you have had sleepless nights over this problem, and I should not be astonished if some of you told me it had never troubled you at all. I myself have come, by long brooding over it, to consider it the most central of all philosophic problems—central because so pregnant. I mean by this that if you know whether a man is a decided monist or a decided pluralist, you perhaps know more about the rest of his opinions than if you give him any other name ending in *ist*. To believe in the one or in the many—that is the classification with the maximum number of consequences. So bear with me for an hour while I try to inspire you with my own interest in this problem.

4.3 Philosophy has often been defined as the quest for, or the vision of, the world's unity. Few people ever challenge this definition, which is true as far as it goes, for philosophy has indeed shown its interest in unity above all things. But what about the *variety* in things? Is that such an irrelevant matter? If instead of using the term philosophy we talk in general of our intellect and its needs, we quickly see that unity is only one of them. Acquaintance with the details of fact is always reckoned, along

with their reduction to system, an indispensable mark of mental greatness. Your "scholarly" mind, of the encyclopedic, philological type, your man essentially of *learning*, has never lacked praise alongside your philosopher. What our intellect really aims at is neither variety nor unity taken singly, but *totality*.[1] In this, acquaintance with reality's diversities is as important as understanding their connection. Curiosity goes hand in hand with the systematizing passion.

4.4 In spite of this obvious fact, the unity of things has always been considered more *illustrious*, as it were, than their variety. When a young man first conceives the notion that the whole world forms one great fact, with all its parts moving abreast, as it were, and interlocked, he feels as if he were enjoying a great insight, and looks down superciliously on all who still fall short of this sublime conception. Taken abstractly like this, as it first comes to one, the monistic insight is so vague as hardly to seem worth defending intellectually. Yet probably everyone in this audience cherishes it in some way. A certain abstract monism, a certain emotional response to the character of oneness, as if it were a feature of the world not coordinate with its manyness but vastly more excellent and eminent, is so prevalent in educated circles that we might almost call it a part of philosophic common sense. Of *course* the world is One, we say. How else could it be a world at all? Empiricists, as a rule, are as stout monists of this abstract kind as rationalists are.

4.5 The difference is that the empiricists are less dazzled. Unity doesn't blind them to everything else, doesn't quench their curiosity about special facts; whereas there is a kind of rationalist who is sure to interpret abstract unity mystically and to forget everything else, to treat it as a principle, to admire and worship it, and thereupon to come to a full stop intellectually.

4.6 "The world is One!"—the formula may become a sort of number-worship. "Three" and "seven" have, it is true, been reckoned sacred numbers; but, taken abstractly, why is "one"

1 JAMES'S NOTE. Compare A. Bellanger: *Les concepts de Cause, et l'activité intentionelle de l'Esprit*. Paris, Alcan, 1905, p. 79 ff.

more excellent than "forty-three," or than "two million and ten"? In this first vague conviction of the world's unity there is so little to take hold of that we hardly know what we mean by it.

4.7 The only way to get forward with our notion is to treat it pragmatically. Granting that the oneness exists, what facts will be different in consequence? What will the unity be known as? The world is One—yes, but *how* one? What is the practical value of the oneness for *us*?

4.8 Asking such questions, we pass from the vague to the definite, from the abstract to the concrete. Many distinct ways come into view in which a oneness predicated of the universe might make a difference. I will note the more obvious of these ways one after another.

WAYS THE WORLD IS ONE

James lists the practical senses in which the world is one: discourse, continuity, influence, kind, purpose, story.

4.9 1. First, the world is at least *one subject of discourse*. If its manyness were so irremediable as to permit *no* union whatever of its parts, not even our minds could "mean" the whole of it at once: they would be like eyes trying to look in opposite directions. But in point of fact we mean to cover the whole of it by our abstract term "world" or "universe," which expressly intends that no part shall be left out. Such unity of discourse obviously carries no further monistic specifications. A "chaos," once so named, has as much unity of discourse as a cosmos. It is an odd fact that many monists consider it a great victory scored for their side when pluralists say "the universe is many." "'The Universe'!" they chuckle—"his speech betrays him. He stands convicted of monism out of his own mouth." Well, let things be one in so far forth! You can then fling such a word as universe at the whole collection of them, but what does it matter? It still remains to be ascertained whether they are one in any further or more valuable sense.

4.10 2. Are they, for example, *continuous*? Can you pass from one to another, always staying in your one universe without any danger of falling out? In other words, do the parts of our universe *hang together*, instead of being like detached grains of sand?

4.11 Even grains of sand hang together through the space in which they are embedded, and if you can in any way move through such space, you can pass continuously from number one of them to number two. Space and time are thus vehicles of continuity by which the world's parts hang together. The practical difference to us that results from these forms of union is immense. Our whole motor life is based on them.

4.12 3. There are innumerable other paths of practical continuity among things. Lines of *influence* can be traced by which they hang together. Following any such line, you pass from one thing to another until you may have covered a good part of the universe's extent. Gravity and heat conduction are such all-uniting influences, so far as the physical world goes. Electric, luminous, and chemical influences follow similar lines of influence. But opaque and inert bodies interrupt the continuity here, so that you have to step around them, or change your mode of progress, if you wish to get farther that day. Practically, you have then lost your universe's unity, *so far as it was constituted by those first lines of influence*.

4.13 There are innumerable kinds of connection that special things have with other special things; and the ensemble of any one of these connections forms one sort of *system* by which things are conjoined. Thus men are conjoined in a vast network of *acquaintanceship*. Brown knows Jones, Jones knows Robinson, and so on; and by *choosing your further intermediaries rightly* you may carry a message from Jones to the Empress of China, or the Chief of the African Pygmies, or to anyone else in the inhabited world. But you are stopped short, as by a non-conductor, when you choose one man wrong in this experiment. What may be called love-systems are grafted onto the acquaintance-system. A loves (or hates) B; B loves (or hates) C, and so on. But these sys-

tems are smaller than the great acquaintance-system that they presuppose.

4.14 Human efforts are daily unifying the world more and more in definite systematic ways. We found colonial, postal, consular, commercial systems, all the parts of which obey definite influences that propagate themselves within the system but not to facts outside it. The result is innumerable little hangings-together of the world's parts within the larger hangings-together —little worlds, not only of discourse but of operation, within the wider universe. Each system exemplifies one type or grade of union, its parts being strung on that peculiar kind of relation, and the same part may figure in many different systems, as a man may hold various offices and belong to several clubs. From this "systematic" point of view, therefore, the pragmatic value of the world's unity is that all these definite networks actually and practically exist. Some are more enveloping and extensive, some less so; they are superimposed on each other; and between them all they let no individual elementary part of the universe escape. Enormous as the amount of disconnection among things is (for these systematic influences and conjunctions follow rigidly exclusive paths), everything that exists is influenced in *some* way by something else, if you can only pick out the way rightly. Loosely speaking, and in general, it may be said that all things cohere and adhere to each other *somehow*, and that the universe exists practically in reticulated or concatenated forms that make it a continuous or "integrated" affair. Any kind of influence whatever helps to make the world one, so far as you can follow it from next to next. You may then say that "the world *is* One"—meaning in these respects, that is, and just so far as they hold. But just as definitely is it *not* One, so far as they do not hold; and there is no species of connection that will not fail if, instead of choosing conductors for it, you choose non-conductors. You are then stopped at your very first step and have to write the world down as a pure *many* from that particular point of view. If our intellect had been as much interested in disjunct-

ive as it is in conjunctive relations, philosophy would have celebrated the world's *disunion* just as successfully.

4.15 The great point is to notice that the oneness and the manyness are absolutely coordinate here. Neither is primordial or more essential or excellent than the other. Just as with space, whose separating of things seems exactly on a par with its uniting of them, though sometimes one function and sometimes the other is what comes home to us most, so, in our general dealings with the world of influences, we now need conductors and now need non-conductors, and wisdom lies in knowing which is which at the appropriate moment.

4.16 4. All these systems of influence or non-influence may be listed under the general problem of the world's *causal unity*. If the minor causal influences among things should converge toward one common causal origin of them in the past, one great first cause for all that is, one might then speak of the absolute causal unity of the world. God's *fiat* on creation's day has figured in traditional philosophy as such an absolute cause and origin. Transcendental Idealism, translating "creation" into "thinking" (or "willing to think"), calls the divine act "eternal" rather than "first"; but the union of the many here is absolute just the same —the many would not *be*, but for the One. Against this notion of the unity of origin of all things there has always stood the pluralistic notion of an eternal self-existing many, in the shape of atoms or even of spiritual units of some sort. The alternative doubtless has a pragmatic meaning, but perhaps, as far as these lectures go, we had better leave the question of unity of origin unsettled.

4.17 5. The most important sort of union that holds among things, pragmatically speaking, is their *generic unity*. Things exist in kinds, there are many specimens of each kind, and what the "kind" implies for one specimen, it implies also for every other specimen of that kind. We can easily conceive that every fact in the world might be singular, that is, unlike any other fact and the only one of its kind. In such a world of singulars our logic would be useless, for logic works by predicating of the

single instance what is true of all its kind. With no two things alike in the world, we should be unable to reason from our past experiences to our future ones. The existence of so much generic unity in things is thus perhaps the most momentous pragmatic specification of what it may mean to say "the world is One." Absolute generic unity would hold if there were one *summum genus* under which all things without exception could eventually be subsumed. "Beings," "thinkables," "experiences" would be candidates for this position. Whether the alternatives expressed by such words have any pragmatic significance or not is another question, which I prefer to leave unsettled just now.[2]

4.18 6. Another thing the phrase "the world is one" may mean is *unity of purpose*. An enormous number of things in the world serve a common purpose. All the man-made systems, administrative, industrial, military, or whatever, each exist for their controlling purpose. Every living being pursues its own particular purposes. Depending on how far they have developed, they cooperate in collective or tribal purposes, larger ends enveloping lesser ones, until we might conceivably reach an absolutely single, final and culminating purpose that all things without exception serve. Needless to say, the appearances conflict with such a view. Any result, as I said in my third lecture, *may* have been intended in advance, but in fact none of the results we actually know in this world were intended in advance in all their details. Men and nations start with a vague notion of being rich, or great, or good. Each step they take brings unforeseen chances into sight and shuts out older vistas, and the details of the general purpose have to be changed daily. What is reached in the end may be better or worse than what was planned, but it is always more complex and different.

4.19 Our different purposes are also at war with each other. Where one can't crush the other out, they compromise; and the result is again different from what anyone distinctly planned beforehand. Vaguely and in general, much of what was intended

2 *Summum genus*: Latin, "highest kind," the most general class that includes all others.

may be gained; but everything points strongly to the view that our world is incompletely unified teleologically and is still trying to get its unification better organized.

4.20 Whoever claims *absolute* teleological unity, saying that there is one purpose that every detail of the universe serves, dogmatizes at his own risk. Theologians who dogmatize in this way find it more and more impossible, as our knowledge of the warring interests of the world's parts grows more concrete, to imagine what the one culminating purpose could possibly be like. We do see that certain evils contribute to further goods, that the bitter makes the cocktail better, and that a bit of danger or hardship pleasantly puts us on our mettle. We can vaguely generalize this into the doctrine that all the evil in the universe is only a means to its greater perfection. But the scale of the evil actually in sight defies all human tolerance; and transcendental idealism, in the pages of a Bradley or a Royce, gets us no further than the book of Job did—God's ways are not our ways, so let us put our hands over our mouths. A God who can relish such excesses of horror is no God for human beings to appeal to. His animal spirits are too high. In other words, the "Absolute" with his one purpose is not the manlike God of ordinary people.

4.21 7. *Aesthetic union* among things also exists, and is very analogous to teleological union. Things tell a story. Their parts hang together so as to work up to a climax. They play into each other's hands expressively. Looking back, we can see that although no definite purpose presided over a chain of events, the events still fell into a dramatic form, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. In fact all stories end; and here again the point of view of a many is the more natural one to take. The world is full of partial stories that run parallel to one another, beginning and ending at odd times. They interlace and interfere with each other at points, but we cannot unify them completely in our minds. In following your life story, I must temporarily turn my attention away from my own. Even a biographer of twins would have to press them on his reader's attention one at a time.

4.22 It follows that whoever says that the whole world tells one story is uttering another of those monistic dogmas that a man believes at his own risk. It is easy to see the world's history pluralistically, as a rope in which each fiber tells a separate tale; but to conceive of each cross-section of the rope as an absolutely single fact, and to sum up the whole lengthwise series into one being living an undivided life, is harder. We do have the analogy of embryology to help us. The microscopist makes a hundred flat cross-sections of a given embryo, and mentally unites them into one solid whole. But the ingredients of the great world, so far as they are beings, seem, like the rope's fibers, to be discontinuous crosswise, and to hold together only in the lengthwise direction. Followed in that direction they are many. Even the embryologist, when he follows the *development* of his object, has to treat the history of each single organ in turn. *Absolute* aesthetic union is thus another merely abstract ideal. The world appears as something more epic than dramatic.

4.23 So far, then, we see how the world is unified by its many systems, kinds, purposes, and dramas. That there is more union in all these ways than openly appears is certainly true. That there *may* be one sovereign purpose, system, kind, and story is a legitimate hypothesis. All I say here is that it is rash to affirm this dogmatically without better evidence than we have at present.

THE ONE KNOWER

James treats an all-knowing mind as a hypothesis on a par with the view that no one knows everything.

4.24 8. The *great* monistic *denkmittel* for the past hundred years has been the notion of *the one Knower*. The many exist only as objects for his thought—exist in his dream, as it were; and *as he knows* them, they have one purpose, form one system, tell one tale for him. This notion of an *all-enveloping noetic unity* in things is the most sublime achievement of intellectualist philosophy. Those who believe in the Absolute, as the all-knower is called,

usually say that they do so for compelling reasons, which clear thinkers cannot evade. The Absolute has far-reaching practical consequences, to some of which I drew attention in my second lecture. Many kinds of difference that matter to us would surely follow from its being true.[3] I cannot go into all the logical proofs of such a Being's existence here, beyond saying that none of them seem sound to me. I must therefore treat the notion of an All-Knower simply as a hypothesis, logically on exactly the same footing as the pluralist notion that there is no point of view, no existing center of information, from which the entire content of the universe is visible at once. "God's consciousness," says Professor Royce,[4] "forms in its wholeness one luminously transparent conscious moment"—this is the type of noetic unity that rationalism insists on. Empiricism, on the other hand, is satisfied with the type of noetic unity that is familiar to humans. Everything gets known by some knower along with something else; but the knowers may in the end be irreducibly many, and the greatest knower of them all may still not know the whole of everything, or even know what he does know in one single stroke:—he may be liable to forget. Whichever type held, the world would still be a universe noetically. Its parts would be joined by knowledge, but in the one case the knowledge would be absolutely unified, in the other it would be strung along and overlapping.

4.25 The notion of one instantaneous or eternal Knower—either adjective means the same thing here—is, as I said, the great intellectualist achievement of our time. It has practically driven out the conception of "Substance" that earlier philosophers set such store by, and that used to do so much unifying work—universal substance, which alone has being in and from itself, and of which all the particulars of experience are only forms that it supports. Substance has given way under the pragmatic criticisms of the English school. It now appears only as another name for the fact that phenomena as they come are actually

3 *Denkmittel*: German, "means (or instrument) of thought."

4 JAMES'S NOTE. *The Conception of God*, New York, 1897, p. 292.

grouped and given in coherent forms, the very forms in which we finite knowers experience or think them together.[5] These forms of conjunction are as much parts of the tissue of experience as the terms they connect; and it is a great pragmatic achievement of recent idealism to have made the world hang together in these directly representable ways, instead of drawing its unity from the "inherence" of its parts—whatever that may mean—in an unimaginable principle behind the scenes.

4.26 "The world is One," therefore, just so far as we experience it to be concatenated, One by as many definite conjunctions as appear. But then also *not* One by just as many definite *dis*junctions as we find. Its oneness and its manyness thus hold in respects that can be named separately. It is neither a universe pure and simple nor a multiverse pure and simple. And its various ways of being One suggest, if we are to establish them accurately, so many distinct programs of scientific work. Thus the pragmatic question "What is the oneness known as? What practical difference will it make?" saves us from all feverish excitement over it as a principle of sublimity and carries us forward into the stream of experience with a cool head. The stream may indeed reveal far more connection and union than we now suspect, but on pragmatic principles we are not entitled to claim absolute oneness in any respect in advance.

4.27 It is so difficult to see definitely what absolute oneness can mean that probably most of you are satisfied with the sober attitude we have reached. Nevertheless there are possibly some radically monistic souls among you who are not content to leave the one and the many on an equal footing. Union of various grades, union of diverse types, union that stops at non-conductors, union that merely goes from next to next, and in many cases means only outer nextness and not a more internal bond—union of concatenation, in short: all that sort of thing seems to you a halfway stage of thought. The oneness of things, being superior to their manyness, must also, you think, be more

5 The "English school": the British empiricists Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, who criticized the notion of substance.

deeply true, must be the more real aspect of the world. The pragmatic view, you are sure, gives us a universe that is imperfectly rational. The real universe must form an unconditional unit of being, something consolidated, with its parts implicated in one another through and through. Only then could we consider our condition completely rational.

4.28 There is no doubt whatever that this ultra-monistic way of thinking means a great deal to many minds. "One Life, One Truth, one Love, one Principle, One Good, One God"—I quote from a Christian Science leaflet that today's mail has brought into my hands—beyond doubt such a confession of faith has an emotional value pragmatically, and beyond doubt the word "one" contributes to that value quite as much as the other words. But if we try to grasp *intellectually* what we can possibly *mean* by such a glut of oneness, we are thrown right back on our pragmatic definitions again.[6] It means either the mere name One, the universe of discourse; or it means the sum total of all the ascertainable particular conjunctions and concatenations; or, finally, it means some one vehicle of conjunction treated as all-inclusive, like one origin, one purpose, or one knower. In fact it always means one *knower* to those who take it intellectually today. The one knower, they think, involves the other forms of conjunction. His world must have all its parts implicated in one another in the one logical-aesthetic-teleological unit-picture that is his eternal dream.

MYSTICAL MONISM

James quotes Vivekananda to show the emotional and religious power of absolute oneness.

4.29 The character of the absolute knower's picture, however, is so impossible for us to represent clearly that we may fairly suppose that the authority absolute monism undoubtedly has, and probably always will have, over some people draws its strength far

6 Christian Science: the religious movement founded by Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910).

less from intellectual than from mystical grounds. To interpret absolute monism worthily, be a mystic. History shows that mystical states of mind of every degree usually, though not always, favor the monistic view. This is not the proper occasion to go into the general subject of mysticism, but I will quote one mystical pronouncement to show just what I mean. The model of all monistic systems is the Vedanta philosophy of India, and the model of Vedantist missionaries was the late Swami Vivekananda, who visited our country some years ago. The method of Vedantism is the mystical method. You do not reason, but after going through a certain discipline *you see*, and having seen, you can report the truth. This is how Vivekananda reports the truth in one of his lectures here:[7]

4.30 "Where is there any more misery for him who sees this Oneness in the universe, this Oneness of life, Oneness of everything?...This separation between man and man, man and woman, man and child, nation from nation, earth from moon, moon from sun, this separation between atom and atom is really the cause of all the misery, and the Vedanta says this separation does not exist, it is not real. It is merely apparent, on the surface. In the heart of things there is unity still. If you go inside you find that unity between man and man, women and children, races and races, high and low, rich and poor, the gods and men: all are One, and animals too, if you go deep enough, and he who has attained to that has no more delusion...Where is there any more delusion for him? What can delude him? He knows the reality of everything, the secret of everything. Where is there any more misery for him? What does he desire? He has traced the reality of everything to the Lord, that center, that Unity of everything, and that is Eternal Bliss, Eternal Knowledge, Eternal Existence. Neither death nor disease nor sorrow nor misery nor discontent is There... In the Center, the reality, there is no one to be mourned for, no one to be sorry for. He has penetrated

7 Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), Indian monk who lectured widely in the United States from 1893 on and died in 1902. Vedanta is the school of Hindu philosophy based on the Upanishads.

everything, the Pure One, the Formless, the Bodiless, the Stainless, He the Knower, He the great Poet, the Self-Existent, He who gives everyone what he deserves."

4.31 Notice how radical the monism is here. Separation is not simply overcome by the One, it is denied to exist. There is no many. We are not parts of the One; It has no parts; and since in a sense we undeniably *are*, it must be that each of us is the One, indivisibly and totally. *An Absolute One, and I that One*,—surely we have here a religion that, considered emotionally, has a high pragmatic value; it gives a perfectly sumptuous sense of security. As our Swami says in another place:

4.32 "When man has seen himself as One with the infinite Being of the universe, when all separateness has ceased, when all men, all women, all angels, all gods, all animals, all plants, the whole universe has been melted into that oneness, then all fear disappears. Whom is there to fear? Can I hurt myself? Can I kill myself? Can I injure myself? Do you fear yourself? Then all sorrow will disappear. What can cause me sorrow? I am the One Existence of the universe. Then all jealousies will disappear; of whom is there to be jealous? Of myself? Then all bad feelings disappear. Against whom shall I have this bad feeling? Against myself? There is no one in the universe but me...kill out this differentiation, kill out this superstition that there are many. 'He who, in this world of many, sees that One; he who, in this mass of insentience, sees that One Sentient Being; he who in this world of shadow catches that Reality, to him belongs eternal peace, to none else, to none else.'"

4.33 We all have some ear for this monistic music: it elevates and reassures. We all have at least the germ of mysticism in us. And when our idealists recite their arguments for the Absolute, saying that the slightest union admitted anywhere logically carries absolute Oneness with it, and that the slightest separation admitted anywhere logically carries disunion that is complete and beyond remedy, I cannot help suspecting that the obvious weak places in the intellectual reasoning they use are protected from their own criticism by a mystical feeling that, logic or no

logic, absolute Oneness must somehow, at any cost, be true. Oneness overcomes *moral* separateness, at any rate. In the passion of love we have the mystic germ of what might mean a total union of all sentient life. This mystical germ wakes up in us when we hear the monistic utterances, acknowledges their authority, and gives intellectual considerations a secondary place.

4.34 I will dwell no longer on these religious and moral aspects of the question in this lecture. When I come to my final lecture there will be something more to say.

WHERE PRAGMATISM STANDS

The world is one in some ways and many in others, so pragmatism sides with pluralism for now.

4.35 So leave out of consideration for the moment the authority that mystical insights may be supposed eventually to have; treat the problem of the One and the Many in a purely intellectual way; and we see clearly enough where pragmatism stands. With her criterion of the practical differences that theories make, we see that she must renounce absolute monism and absolute pluralism alike. The world is One just so far as its parts hang together by some definite connection. It is many just so far as any definite connection fails to hold. And finally it is growing more and more unified, at least by those systems of connection that human energy keeps building as time goes on.

4.36 It is possible to imagine alternative universes to the one we know, in which the most varied grades and types of union would be embodied. Thus the lowest grade of universe would be a world of mere *withness*, whose parts were strung together only by the conjunction "and." Even now, the collection of our several inner lives is such a universe. The spaces and times of your imagination, the objects and events of your daydreams, are not only more or less incoherent among themselves, but are wholly out of definite relation with the similar contents of anyone else's mind. Our various reveries, as we sit here now, interpenetrate

idly without influencing or interfering with each other. They coexist, but in no order and in no container, being the nearest approach to an absolute "many" that we can conceive. We cannot even imagine any reason why they *should* be known all together, and we can imagine even less how, if they were known together, they could be known as one systematic whole.

4.37 But add our sensations and bodily actions, and the union rises to a much higher grade. Our *audita et visa* and our acts fall into those containers of time and space in which each event finds its date and place. They form "things" and are of "kinds" too, and can be classified. Yet we can imagine a world of things and of kinds in which the causal interactions we are so familiar with did not exist. Everything there might be inert toward everything else, and refuse to pass on its influence. Or crude mechanical influences might pass, but no chemical action. Such worlds would be far less unified than ours.[8] Again, there might be complete physical and chemical interaction, but no minds; or minds, but altogether private ones, with no social life; or social life limited to acquaintance, but no love; or love, but no customs or institutions to systematize it. None of these grades of universe would be absolutely irrational or disintegrated, however inferior it might appear when looked at from the higher grades. For instance, if our minds should ever become "telepathically" connected, so that each of us knew immediately, or could under certain conditions know immediately, what the other was thinking, the world we now live in would appear to the thinkers in that world to have been of an inferior grade.

4.38 With the whole of past eternity open for our conjectures to range in, it may be permissible to wonder whether the various kinds of union now realized in the universe we inhabit may not possibly have evolved one after another, in the way we now see human systems evolving in response to human needs. If such a hypothesis were legitimate, total oneness would appear at the end of things rather than at their origin. In other words, the notion of the "Absolute" would have to be replaced by that of the

8 *Audita et visa*: Latin, "things heard and seen."

"Ultimate." The two notions would have the same content—namely, the maximally unified content of fact—but their relations in time would be exactly reversed.[9]

4.39 After this pragmatic discussion of the unity of the universe, you should see why I said in my second lecture, borrowing the word from my friend G. Papini, that pragmatism tends to *unstiffen* all our theories. The world's oneness has generally been affirmed only abstractly, and as if anyone who questioned it must be an idiot. The temper of monists has been so vehement as at times to be almost convulsive; and this way of holding a doctrine does not go easily with reasonable discussion and the drawing of distinctions. The theory of the Absolute, in particular, has had to be an article of faith, affirmed dogmatically and exclusively. The One and All, first in the order of being and of knowing, logically necessary in itself, and uniting all lesser things in the bonds of mutual necessity—how could it allow any softening of its inner rigidity? The slightest suspicion of pluralism, the tiniest wiggle of independence of any one of its parts from the control of the totality, would ruin it. Absolute unity allows no degrees,—you might as well claim absolute purity for a glass of water because it contains only a single little cholera germ. The independence of a part, however small, however infinitesimal, would be as fatal to the Absolute as a cholera germ.

4.40 Pluralism, on the other hand, has no need of this dogmatic, rigorist temper. Provided you grant *some* separation among things, some tremor of independence, some free play of parts on one another, some real novelty or chance, however minute, she is amply satisfied, and will allow you any amount of real union, however great. How much union there may be is a question she thinks can only be decided empirically. The amount may be enormous, colossal; but absolute monism is shattered if, along with all the union, we have to grant the slight-

9 JAMES'S NOTE. On the Ultimate, compare Mr. Schiller's essay "Activity and Substance," in his book entitled *Humanism*, p. 204.

est scrap, the faintest beginning, or the last lingering trace, of a separation that is not "overcome."

4.41 Pragmatism, until it has been finally established empirically just what the balance of union and disunion among things may be, must obviously range herself on the pluralistic side. Some day, she admits, even total union, with one knower, one origin, and a universe consolidated in every conceivable way, may turn out to be the most acceptable of all hypotheses. Meanwhile the opposite hypothesis, of a world still imperfectly unified, and perhaps always to remain so, must be sincerely entertained. This latter hypothesis is pluralism's doctrine. Since absolute monism forbids its even being seriously considered, branding it as irrational from the start, it is clear that pragmatism must turn its back on absolute monism and follow pluralism's more empirical path.

4.42 This leaves us with the common-sense world, in which we find things partly joined and partly disjoined. "Things," then, and their "conjunctions"—what do such words mean, handled pragmatically? In my next lecture I will apply the pragmatic method to the stage of philosophizing known as Common Sense.

Lecture V: Pragmatism and Common Sense

How knowledge grows, and how the concepts of common sense, science and philosophy each earn their keep.

5.1 In the last lecture we turned away from the usual way of talking about the universe's oneness as a principle, sublime in all its blankness, toward a study of the special kinds of union that the universe contains. We found many of these to coexist with kinds of separation that are equally real. "How far am I verified?" is the question each kind of union and each kind of separation asks us here, so as good pragmatists we have to turn our faces toward experience, toward "facts."

5.2 Absolute oneness remains, but only as a hypothesis, and that hypothesis is reduced nowadays to that of an all-knowing knower who sees all things without exception as forming one single systematic fact. But the knower in question may still be conceived either as an Absolute or as an Ultimate; and against the hypothesis of him in either form we may legitimately hold the counter-hypothesis that the widest field of knowledge that ever was or will be still contains some ignorance. Some bits of information may always escape.

5.3 This is the hypothesis of *noetic pluralism*, which monists consider so absurd. Since we are bound to treat it as respectfully as noetic monism until the facts have tipped the scale, we find that our pragmatism, though originally nothing but a method, has forced us to be friendly to the pluralistic view. It *may* be that

some parts of the world are connected so loosely with some other parts that they are strung along by nothing but the copula *and*. They might even come and go without those other parts suffering any internal change. This pluralistic view, of a world with an *additive* constitution, is one that pragmatism cannot rule out of serious consideration. But this view leads us to the further hypothesis that the actual world, instead of being complete "eternally," as the monists assure us, may be eternally incomplete, and at all times open to addition or liable to loss.

5.4 It *is* incomplete in one respect, at any rate, and glaringly so. The very fact that we debate this question shows that *our knowledge* is incomplete at present and open to addition. With respect to the knowledge it contains, the world does genuinely change and grow. Some general remarks on the way our knowledge completes itself—when it does complete itself—will lead us very conveniently into our subject for this lecture, which is "Common Sense."

HOW KNOWLEDGE GROWS

Knowledge grows in spots, and new truths are cooked in the sauce of old ones.

5.5 To begin with, our knowledge grows *in spots*. The spots may be large or small, but knowledge never grows all over: some old knowledge always remains what it was. Suppose your knowledge of pragmatism is growing now. Later, its growth may involve considerable modification of opinions you previously held to be true. But such modifications tend to be gradual. To take the nearest possible example, consider these lectures of mine. What you first get from them is probably a small amount of new information, a few new definitions, or distinctions, or points of view. But while these particular ideas are being added, the rest of your knowledge stands still, and only gradually will you "line up" your previous opinions with the novelties I am trying to instill, and modify their mass to some slight degree.

5.6 You are listening to me now, I suppose, with certain preconceptions about my competence, and these affect how you take what I say; but if I were suddenly to break off lecturing and begin to sing "We won't go home till morning" in a rich baritone voice, not only would that new fact be added to your stock, but it would force you to define me differently, and that might alter your opinion of the pragmatic philosophy, and in general bring about a rearrangement of a number of your ideas. In such processes your mind is strained, sometimes painfully, between its older beliefs and the novelties that experience brings along.[1]

5.7 Our minds thus grow in spots; and like grease spots, the spots spread. But we let them spread as little as possible: we keep as much of our old knowledge, as many of our old prejudices and beliefs, unaltered as we can. We patch and tinker more than we renew. The novelty soaks in; it stains the old mass; but it is also tinged by what absorbs it. Our past takes it in and cooperates; and in the new equilibrium in which each step forward in the process of learning ends, it happens relatively seldom that the new fact is added *raw*. More usually it is embedded cooked, as one might say, or stewed down in the sauce of the old.

5.8 New truths, then, are the result of new experiences and old truths combined and modifying one another. And since this is how opinions change today, there is no reason to assume it has not been so at all times. It follows that very ancient modes of thought may have survived through all the later changes in people's opinions. The most primitive ways of thinking may not yet be wholly erased. Like our five fingers, our ear-bones, our rudimentary tail, or our other "vestigial" peculiarities, they may remain as indelible tokens of events in the history of our race. At certain moments our ancestors may have struck out into ways of thinking that they might conceivably never have found. But once they did, and after the fact, the inheritance continues. When you begin a piece of music in a certain key, you must keep

1 "We Won't Go Home Till Morning": a popular drinking song, sung to the tune of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

the key to the end. You may alter your house as much as you like, but the ground plan of the first architect persists—you can make great changes, but you cannot change a Gothic church into a Doric temple. You may rinse and rinse the bottle, but you can't get the taste of the medicine or whiskey that first filled it wholly out.

THE CATEGORIES OF COMMON SENSE

James suggests that our common-sense concepts were discoveries of remote ancestors that proved lastingly useful.

5.9 My thesis now is this: that *our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves through the experience of all later time*. They form one great stage of equilibrium in the development of the human mind, the stage of *common sense*. Other stages have grafted themselves onto this stage, but have never succeeded in displacing it. Let us consider this common-sense stage first, as if it might be final.

5.10 In practical talk, a man's common sense means his good judgment, his freedom from eccentricity, his *gumption*, to use the everyday word. In philosophy it means something entirely different: it means his use of certain intellectual forms or categories of thought. If we were lobsters, or bees, our makeup might have led us to use quite different ways from these of grasping our experiences. It *might* also be (we cannot dogmatically deny it) that such categories, unimaginable to us today, would have proved on the whole as useful for handling our experiences mentally as the ones we actually use.

5.11 If this sounds paradoxical to anyone, let him think of analytical geometry. The very same figures that Euclid defined by their internal relations, Descartes defined by the relations of their points to externally added coordinates, and the result was an absolutely different and vastly more powerful way of handling curves. All our conceptions are what the Germans call *Denkmittel*, means by which we handle facts by thinking them.

Experience merely as such doesn't come ticketed and labeled; we first have to discover what it is. Kant speaks of it as being, in its first form, a *Gewühl der Erscheinungen*, a *Rhapsodie der Wahrnehmungen*, a mere jumble that we have to unify by our wits. What we usually do is first to frame[2] some system of concepts mentally classified, arranged in series, or connected in some intellectual way, and then to use this as a tally by which we "keep tabs" on the impressions that present themselves. When each is referred to some possible place in the conceptual system, it is thereby "understood." This notion of parallel "manifolds" with their elements standing in one-to-one relations with each other is proving so convenient nowadays in mathematics and logic that it is increasingly replacing the older classificatory conceptions. There are many conceptual systems of this sort; and the manifold of the senses is also such a system. Find a one-to-one relation for your sense impressions *anywhere* among the concepts, and in so far forth you rationalize the impressions. But obviously you can rationalize them by using various conceptual systems.

5.12 The old common-sense way of rationalizing them is by a set of concepts, of which the most important are these:

5.13 Thing;
The same or different;
Kinds;
Minds;
Bodies;
One Time;
One Space;
Subjects and attributes;
Causal influences;
The fancied;
The real.

5.14 We are now so familiar with the order that these notions have woven for us out of the everlasting weather of our percep-

2 Kant's phrases: "a swarm of appearances," "a rhapsody of perceptions."

tions that we find it hard to realize how little of a fixed routine the perceptions follow when taken by themselves. The word weather is a good one to use here. In Boston, for example, the weather has almost no routine, the only law being that if you have had any one weather for two days, you will probably, but not certainly, have another weather on the third. Weather experience as it comes to Boston is thus discontinuous and chaotic. In temperature, wind, rain or sunshine, it *may* change three times a day. But the Washington weather bureau intellectualizes this disorder by making each successive bit of Boston weather *episodic*. It refers it to its place and moment in a continental cyclone, on whose history the local changes everywhere are strung like beads on a cord.

5.15 Now it seems almost certain that young children and the lower animals take all their experiences very much as uninstructed Bostonians take their weather. They know no more of time or space as world-containers, or of permanent subjects and changing predicates, or of causes, or kinds, or thoughts, or things, than ordinary people know of continental cyclones. A baby's rattle drops out of his hand, but the baby doesn't look for it. It has "gone out" for him, as a candle flame goes out; and it comes back, when you put it back in his hand, as the flame comes back when relit. The idea of its being a "thing," whose permanent existence by itself he might fill in between its successive appearances, has evidently not occurred to him. It is the same with dogs. Out of sight, out of mind, with them. It is pretty evident that they have no *general* tendency to fill in "things." Let me quote here a passage from my colleague G. Santayana's book.[3]

5.16 "If a dog, while sniffing about contentedly, sees his master arriving after a long absence...the poor brute asks for no reason why his master went, why he has come again, why he should be loved, or why presently, while lying at his feet, you forget him and begin to grunt and dream of the chase—all that is an utter

3 George Santayana (1863–1952), philosopher and James's former student, then his colleague at Harvard.

mystery, utterly unconsidered. Such experience has variety, scenery, and a certain vital rhythm; its story might be told in dithyrambic verse. It moves wholly by inspiration; every event is providential, every act unpremeditated. Absolute freedom and absolute helplessness have met together: you depend wholly on divine favor, yet that unfathomable agency cannot be distinguished from your own life...[But] the figures even of that disordered drama have their exits and their entrances; and their cues can gradually be discovered by a being capable of fixing his attention and retaining the order of events...As such understanding advances, each moment of experience becomes consequential and prophetic of the rest. The calm places in life are filled with power and its spasms with resource. No emotion can overwhelm the mind, for the basis or outcome of none is wholly hidden; no event can disconcert it altogether, because it sees beyond. Means can be looked for to escape from the worst predicament; and whereas each moment had formerly been filled with nothing but its own adventures and surprised emotion, each now makes room for the lesson of what went before and guesses at what the plot of the whole may be."[4]

5.17 Even today science and philosophy are still laboriously trying to separate fancies from realities in our experience; and in primitive times they made only the most rudimentary distinctions of this kind. People believed whatever they thought with any liveliness, and they mixed their dreams with their realities inextricably. The categories of "thought" and "things" are indispensable here: we now call certain experiences only "thoughts," instead of realities. There is not a category, among those listed, whose use we cannot imagine to have originated historically in this way and only gradually spread.

5.18 That one Time which we all believe in and in which each event has its definite date, that one Space in which each thing has its position: these abstract notions unify the world incomparably. But in their finished shape as concepts, how different they are from the loose, unordered time-and-space experiences

4 JAMES'S NOTE. The Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense, 1905, p. 59.

of people in their natural state! Everything that happens to us brings its own duration and extension, and both are vaguely surrounded by a marginal "more" that runs into the duration and extension of the next thing that comes. But we soon lose all our definite bearings. Our children make no distinction between yesterday and the day before yesterday, the whole past being churned up together, and we adults still do the same whenever the stretches of time are large. It is the same with spaces. On a map I can clearly see the relation of London, Constantinople, and Peking to the place where I am; in reality I utterly fail to *feel* the facts which the map symbolizes. The directions and distances are vague, confused and mixed. Cosmic space and cosmic time, far from being the intuitions that Kant said they were, are constructions as obviously artificial as any that science can show.[5] The great majority of the human race never use these notions, but live in plural times and spaces, interpenetrating and *durcheinander*.[6]

5.19 Permanent "things," again; the "same thing" and its various "appearances" and "alterations"; the different "kinds" of thing; with the "kind" used finally as a "predicate," of which the thing remains the "subject." What a straightening of the tangle of our experience's immediate flux and sensible variety this list of terms suggests! And it is only the smallest part of their experience's flux that anyone actually does straighten out by applying these conceptual instruments to it. Of all these, our lowest ancestors probably used only the notion of "the same again," and used even that most vaguely and inaccurately. But even then, if you had asked them whether the same was a "thing" that had endured throughout the unseen interval, they would probably have been at a loss, and would have said that they had never asked that question, or considered matters in that light.

5.20 Kinds, and sameness of kind: what colossally useful *denkmittel* for finding our way among the many! The manyness

5 Kant held in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) that space and time are pure forms of intuition, given prior to experience.

6 *Durcheinander*: German, "all jumbled together."

might conceivably have been absolute. Experiences might all have been singulars, none of them occurring twice. In such a world logic would have had no application, for kind and sameness of kind are logic's only instruments. Once we know that whatever is of a kind is also of that kind's kind, we can travel through the universe as if with seven-league boots. Animals surely never use these abstractions, and civilized people use them in widely varying amounts.

5.21 Causal influence, again! This, if anything, seems to have been an antediluvian conception, for we find early peoples thinking that almost everything is significant and can exert influence of some sort. The search for the more definite influences seems to have started with the question: "Who, or what, is to blame?" That is, for any illness, or disaster, or unfortunate thing. From this center the search for causal influences has spread. Hume and "Science" together have tried to eliminate the whole notion of influence, substituting the entirely different *denkmittel* of "law." But law is a comparatively recent invention, and influence reigns supreme in the older realm of common sense.

5.22 The "possible," as something less than the actual and more than the wholly unreal, is another of these masterful notions of common sense. Criticize them as you may, they persist, and we fly back to them the moment critical pressure lets up. "Self," "body," in the substantial or metaphysical sense: no one escapes subjection to *those* forms of thought. In practice, the common-sense *denkmittel* are uniformly victorious. Everyone, however educated, still thinks of a "thing" in the common-sense way, as a permanent unit-subject that "supports" its attributes interchangeably. No one steadily or sincerely uses the more critical notion of a group of sense-qualities united by a law. With these categories in hand, we make our plans and plot together, and connect all the remoter parts of experience with what lies before our eyes. Our later and more critical philosophies are mere fads and fancies compared with this natural mother-tongue of thought.

5.23 Common sense thus appears as a perfectly definite stage in our understanding of things, a stage that serves the purposes for which we think with extraordinary success. "Things" do exist, even when we do not see them. Their "kinds" also exist. Their "qualities" are what they act by and what we act on, and these exist too. These lamps shed their quality of light on every object in this room. We intercept it on its way whenever we hold up an opaque screen. It is the very sound that my lips emit that travels into your ears. It is the sensible heat of the fire that migrates into the water in which we boil an egg, and we can change the heat into coolness by dropping in a lump of ice. All non-European peoples without exception have remained at this stage of philosophy. It is enough for all the necessary practical ends of life; and even among our own race, it is only the highly sophisticated specimens, the minds debauched by learning, as Berkeley calls them, who have ever so much as suspected that common sense is not absolutely true.

5.24 But when we look back and speculate about how the common-sense categories may have achieved their wonderful supremacy, there is no reason why it may not have been by a process just like the one by which the conceptions due to Democritus, Berkeley, or Darwin achieved their similar triumphs in more recent times. In other words, they may have been successfully *discovered* by prehistoric geniuses whose names the night of antiquity has covered up. They may have been verified by the immediate facts of experience which they first fitted. And then from fact to fact and from person to person they may have *spread*, until all language rested on them and we are now incapable of thinking naturally in any other terms. Such a view would only follow the rule that has proved so fertile elsewhere: assuming that the vast and remote conforms to the laws of formation that we can observe at work in the small and near.

5.25 For all utilitarian practical purposes these conceptions are amply sufficient. But that they began at special points of discovery and only gradually spread from one thing to another seems proved by the extremely doubtful limits of their application

today. For certain purposes we assume one "objective" Time that *aequabiliter fluit*, but we don't livingly believe in or realize any such equally-flowing time. "Space" is a less vague notion; but "things," what are they? Is a constellation properly a thing? Or an army? Or is an *ens rationis* such as space or justice a thing? Is a knife whose handle and blade have both been changed the "same"? Is the "changeling," whom Locke discusses so seriously, of the human "kind"? Is "telepathy" a "fancy" or a "fact"?[7] The moment you pass beyond the practical use of these categories (a use usually suggested well enough by the circumstances of the particular case) to a merely curious or speculative way of thinking, you find it impossible to say within exactly what limits of fact any one of them should apply.

SCIENCE AND CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Science and critical philosophy go beyond common sense, and none of the three levels is simply the truest.

5.26 The Peripatetic philosophy, obeying rationalist tendencies, has tried to make the common-sense categories eternal by treating them in a highly technical and articulated way. A "thing," for instance, is a being, or *ens*. An *ens* is a subject in which qualities "inhere." A subject is a substance. Substances come in kinds, and the kinds are definite in number, and discrete. These distinctions are fundamental and eternal. As terms of *discourse* they are indeed magnificently useful, but what they mean, apart from their use in steering our discourse to profitable outcomes, does not appear. If you ask a scholastic philosopher what a substance may be in itself, apart from its being the support of attributes, he simply says that your intellect knows perfectly well what the word means.[8]

7 *Aequabiliter fluit*, "flows equably," is Newton's description of absolute time in the *Principia* (1687). *Ens rationis*: Latin, "a being of reason," something that exists only in thought. Locke discusses whether a "changeling" (a severely disabled child) is a man in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).

8 The Peripatetic philosophy is Aristotle's, as developed by the medieval Scholastics.

5.27 But what the intellect knows clearly is only the word itself and its steering function. So it has come about that intellects *sibi permissi*, intellects that are merely curious and idle, have abandoned the common-sense level for what may in general terms be called the "critical" level of thought. And not merely *such* intellects, your Humes and Berkeleys and Hegels; practical observers of facts too, your Galileos, Daltons, Faradays, have found it impossible to treat the naive sense-termini of common sense as ultimately real. Just as common sense interpolates her constant "things" between our intermittent sensations, so science *extra*polates her world of "primary" qualities, her atoms, her ether, her magnetic fields, and the like, beyond the common-sense world.[9] The "things" are now invisible, impalpable things, and the old visible common-sense things are supposed to result from the mixture of these invisibles. Or else the whole naive conception of a thing gets superseded, and a thing's name is interpreted as denoting only the law or *regel der verbindung* by which certain of our sensations habitually follow one another or coexist.[10]

5.28 Science and critical philosophy thus burst the bounds of common sense. With science, naive realism ceases: "secondary" qualities become unreal; primary ones alone remain. With critical philosophy, havoc is made of everything. The common-sense categories, one and all, cease to represent anything in the way of *being*; they are only sublime tricks of human thought, our ways of escaping bewilderment in the midst of sensation's irremediable flow.

5.29 But the scientific tendency in critical thought, though inspired at first by purely intellectual motives, has opened an entirely unexpected range of practical uses to our astonished view. Galileo gave us accurate clocks and accurate artillery practice; the chemists flood us with new medicines and dyes; Ampère and Faraday have endowed us with the New York subway and with Marconi telegrams. The hypothetical things that

9 *Sibi permissi*: Latin, "left to themselves."
10 *Regel der Verbindung*: German, "rule of connection."

such men have invented, defined as they have defined them, are showing an extraordinary fertility in consequences verifiable by sense. Our logic can deduce from them a consequence due under certain conditions; we can then bring about the conditions, and presto, the consequence is there before our eyes. The scope of the practical control over nature newly put into our hands by scientific ways of thinking vastly exceeds the scope of the old control grounded in common sense. Its rate of increase is accelerating so that no one can trace the limit. One may even fear that the *being* of man may be crushed by his own powers, that his fixed nature as an organism may not prove equal to the strain of the ever more tremendous functions, almost divine creative functions, which his intellect will increasingly enable him to wield. He may drown in his wealth like a child in a bathtub who has turned on the water and cannot turn it off.

5.30 The philosophic stage of criticism, much more thorough in its negations than the scientific stage, has so far given us no new range of practical power. Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Kant, Hegel have all been utterly sterile as far as shedding any light on the details of nature goes. I can think of no invention or discovery that can be directly traced to anything peculiar to their thought, for neither Berkeley's tar-water nor Kant's nebular hypothesis had anything to do with their respective philosophical doctrines. The satisfactions they give their disciples are intellectual, not practical; and even there we have to confess that there is a large minus side to the account.[11]

5.31 There are thus at least three well-defined levels, stages or types of thought about the world we live in, and the notions of one stage have one kind of merit, those of another stage another kind. It is impossible, however, to say that any stage yet in sight is absolutely more *true* than any other. Common sense is the more *consolidated* stage, because it had its turn first and made all language its ally. Whether it or science is the more *august* stage may be left to private judgment. But neither consolidation nor

11 Berkeley promoted tar-water as a cure-all in *Siris* (1744); Kant proposed that the solar system formed from a nebula in his *Universal Natural History* (1755).

augustness is a decisive mark of truth. If common sense were true, why should science have had to brand as false the secondary qualities, to which our world owes all its living interest, and to invent instead an invisible world of points and curves and mathematical equations? Why should it have needed to transform causes and activities into laws of "functional variation"? In vain did scholasticism, common sense's college-trained younger sister, try to stereotype the forms the human family had always talked in, to make them definite and fix them for eternity. Substantial forms (in other words our secondary qualities) hardly outlasted the year of our Lord 1600. People were already tired of them then; and Galileo, and Descartes with his "new philosophy," gave them their *coup de grâce* only a little later.

5.32 But now, if the new kinds of scientific "thing," the corpuscular and etheric world, were essentially more "true," why should they have provoked so much criticism within the body of science itself? Scientific logicians are saying on every side that these entities and their determinations, however definitely conceived, should not be taken as literally real. It is *as if* they existed; but in reality they are like coordinates or logarithms, only artificial shortcuts for taking us from one part of experience's flux to another. We can calculate fruitfully with them; they serve us wonderfully; but we must not be their dupes.

5.33 No *ringing* conclusion is possible when we compare these types of thinking with a view to telling which is the more absolutely true. Their naturalness, their intellectual economy, their fruitfulness for practice all spring up as distinct tests of their truthfulness, and as a result we get confused. Common sense is *better* for one sphere of life, science for another, philosophic criticism for a third; but whether any one of them is *truer* absolutely, Heaven only knows. Just now, if I understand the matter rightly, we are witnessing a curious return to the common-sense way of looking at physical nature, in the philosophy of science

favored by such men as Mach, Ostwald and Duhem.[12] According to these teachers, no hypothesis is truer than any other in the sense of being a more literal copy of reality. They are all only ways of talking on our part, to be compared solely from the point of view of their *use*. The only literally true thing is *reality*; and the only reality we know is, for these logicians, sensible reality, the flux of our sensations and emotions as they pass. "Energy" is the collective name (according to Ostwald) for the sensations just as they present themselves (the movement, heat, magnetic pull, or light, or whatever it may be) when they are measured in certain ways. By measuring them this way, we are able to describe the correlated changes they show us in formulas unmatched for their simplicity and their fruitfulness for human use. They are sovereign triumphs of economy in thought.

5.34 No one can fail to admire the "energetic" philosophy. But the hypersensible entities, the corpuscles and vibrations, hold their own with most physicists and chemists, in spite of its appeal. It seems too economical to be all-sufficient. Profusion, not economy, may after all be reality's keynote.

5.35 I am dealing here with highly technical matters, hardly suitable for popular lecturing, and in which my own competence is small. All the better for my conclusion, however, which at this point is this. The whole notion of truth, which we naturally and without reflection assume to mean the simple duplication by the mind of a ready-made and given reality, proves hard to understand clearly. There is no simple test available for judging offhand between the various types of thought that claim to possess it. Common sense, common science or corpuscular philosophy, ultra-critical science or energetics, and critical or idealistic philosophy all seem insufficiently true in some respect and leave some dissatisfaction. It is evident that the conflict of these widely differing systems obliges us to overhaul the very

12 Ernst Mach (1838–1916), Austrian physicist, and Pierre Duhem (1861–1916), French physicist, who with Ostwald treated scientific theories as economical descriptions rather than literal pictures of reality.

idea of truth, for at present we have no definite notion of what the word may mean. I shall face that task in my next lecture, and will add only a few words in finishing the present one.

5.36 There are only two points that I want you to retain from this lecture. The first relates to common sense. We have seen reason to suspect it. For all that its categories are so venerable, so universally used and built into the very structure of language, they may after all be only a collection of extraordinarily successful hypotheses, historically discovered or invented by single individuals but gradually communicated and used by everybody. By means of them our forefathers have from time immemorial unified and straightened out the discontinuity of their immediate experiences, and put themselves into an equilibrium with the surface of nature so satisfactory for ordinary practical purposes that it certainly would have lasted forever, but for the excessive intellectual liveliness of Democritus, Archimedes, Galileo, Berkeley, and other eccentric geniuses whom the example of such men inflamed. Retain, I beg you, this suspicion about common sense.

5.37 The other point is this. We have reviewed various types of thinking, each splendid for certain purposes, yet all still in conflict, and none of them able to support a claim of absolute truth. Ought not their existence to awaken a presumption in favor of the pragmatist view that all our theories are *instrumental*, are mental modes of *adaptation* to reality, rather than revelations or gnostic answers to some divinely instituted world-enigma? I expressed this view as clearly as I could in the second of these lectures. Certainly the restlessness of the present theoretical situation, the value of each thought-level for some purposes, and the inability of any of them to drive the others out decisively, suggest this pragmatist view, which I hope the next lectures may soon make entirely convincing. May there not, after all, be a possible ambiguity in truth?

Lecture VI: Pragmatism's Conception of Truth

Truth as what we can assimilate, validate and verify: an idea "becomes true, is made true by events."

LECTURE VI. PRAGMATISM'S CONCEPTION OF TRUTH

6.1 It is recorded that when Clerk Maxwell was a child he had a mania for having everything explained to him, and that when people put him off with vague verbal accounts of any phenomenon, he would interrupt them impatiently, saying, "Yes; but I want you to tell me the *particular go* of it!" Had his question been about truth, only a pragmatist could have told him the particular go of it. I believe that our contemporary pragmatists, especially Mr. Schiller and Mr. Dewey, have given the only tenable account of this subject. It is a very ticklish subject, sending subtle rootlets into all kinds of crannies, and hard to treat in the sketchy way that alone suits a public lecture.[1] But the Schiller-Dewey view of truth has been so ferociously attacked by rationalist philosophers, and so abominably misunderstood, that here, if anywhere, is the place where a clear and simple statement should be made.

6.2 I fully expect to see the pragmatist view of truth run through the classic stages of a theory's career. First, you know, a new theory is attacked as absurd; then it is admitted to be true, but obvious and insignificant; finally it is seen to be so important that its adversaries claim that they themselves discovered it.

1 James Clerk Maxwell (1831–1879), Scottish physicist, founder of the theory of electromagnetism.

Our doctrine of truth is at present in the first of these three stages, with symptoms of the second stage having begun in certain quarters. I wish that this lecture might help it beyond the first stage in the eyes of many of you.

TRUTH AS AGREEMENT

Everyone defines truth as agreement with reality; the quarrel is over what agreement means.

6.3 Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their agreement with "reality," as falsity means their disagreement with it. Pragmatists and intellectualists both accept this definition as a matter of course. They begin to quarrel only once the question is raised of what exactly is meant by the term "agreement," and what by the term "reality," when reality is taken as something for our ideas to agree with.

6.4 In answering these questions the pragmatists are more analytic and painstaking, the intellectualists more offhand and unreflective. The popular notion is that a true idea must copy its reality. Like other popular views, this one follows the analogy of the most usual experience. Our true ideas of sensible things do indeed copy them. Shut your eyes and think of that clock on the wall over there, and you get just such a true picture or copy of its dial. But your idea of its "works" (unless you are a clockmaker) is much less of a copy; yet it passes muster, for it in no way clashes with the reality. Even if it should shrink to the mere word "works," that word still serves you truly; and when you speak of the clock's "time-keeping function," or of its spring's "elasticity," it is hard to see exactly what your ideas can be copying.

6.5 You see that there is a problem here. Where our ideas cannot definitely copy their object, what does agreement with that object mean? Some idealists seem to say that our ideas are true whenever they are what God means us to think about that object. Others hold the copy-view all the way through, and speak as if our ideas possessed truth just in proportion as they

come close to being copies of the Absolute's eternal way of thinking.

6.6 These views, you see, invite pragmatist discussion. But the great assumption of the intellectualists is that truth means essentially an inert, static relation. When you've got your true idea of anything, that's the end of the matter. You're in possession; you *know*; you have fulfilled your thinking destiny. You are where you ought to be mentally; you have obeyed your categorical imperative; and nothing more need follow on that climax of your rational destiny. Epistemologically you are in stable equilibrium.

6.7 Pragmatism, on the other hand, asks its usual question. "Grant an idea or belief to be true," it says, "what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would occur if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?"

TRUTH HAPPENS TO AN IDEA

True ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify, and verification is a process.

6.8 The moment pragmatism asks this question, it sees the answer: *True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot*. That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as.

6.9 This is the thesis I have to defend. The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: namely, the process of its verifying itself, its veri-*fication*. Its validity is the process of its valid-*ation*.

6.10 But what do the words verification and validation themselves mean pragmatically? They in turn signify certain practical consequences of the verified and validated idea. It is hard to find any one phrase that characterizes these consequences

better than the ordinary agreement-formula, since just such consequences are what we have in mind whenever we say that our ideas "agree" with reality. Through the acts and other ideas which they prompt, they lead us into or up to, or toward, other parts of experience with which we feel all the while (such feeling being among our potentialities) that the original ideas remain in agreement. The connections and transitions come to us from point to point as progressive, harmonious, satisfactory. This function of agreeable leading is what we mean by an idea's verification. Such an account is vague, and at first it sounds quite trivial, but it has results which it will take the rest of my hour to explain.

6.11 Let me begin by reminding you that possessing true thoughts means, everywhere, possessing invaluable instruments of action; and that our duty to gain truth, far from being a blank command out of the blue, or a "stunt" our intellect imposes on itself, can account for itself by excellent practical reasons.

6.12 The importance to human life of having true beliefs about matters of fact is all too well known. We live in a world of realities that can be infinitely useful or infinitely harmful. Ideas that tell us which of them to expect count as the true ideas in all this primary sphere of verification, and the pursuit of such ideas is a primary human duty. The possession of truth, far from being an end in itself here, is only a preliminary means toward other vital satisfactions. If I am lost in the woods and starving, and find what looks like a cow-path, it is of the utmost importance that I should think of a human dwelling at the end of it, for if I do so and follow it, I save myself. The true thought is useful here because the house 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. Their objects are, indeed, not important at all times. On another occasion I may have no use for the house; and then my idea of it, however verifiable, will be practically irrelevant, and had better remain latent. Yet since almost any object may some day become temporarily import-

ant, the advantage of having a general stock of *extra* truths, of ideas that will be true of merely possible situations, is obvious. We store such extra truths away in our memories, and with the overflow we fill our reference books. Whenever such an extra truth becomes practically relevant to one of our emergencies, it passes out of cold storage to do work in the world, and our belief in it becomes active. You can then say of it either that "it is useful because it is true" or that "it is true because it is useful." Both these phrases mean exactly the same thing: namely, that here is an idea that gets fulfilled and can be verified. True is the name for whatever idea starts the verification-process; useful is the name for its completed function in experience. True ideas would never have been singled out as such, would never have acquired a class-name, least of all a name suggesting value, unless they had been useful in this way from the outset.

6.13 From this simple cue pragmatism gets her general notion of truth as something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us toward other moments which it will be worthwhile to have been led to. Primarily, and on the common-sense level, the truth of a state of mind means this function of *a leading that is worthwhile*. When a moment in our experience, of any kind whatever, inspires us with a thought that is true, that means that sooner or later, guided by that thought, we dip into the particulars of experience again and make advantageous connection with them. This is a vague enough statement, but I beg you to retain it, for it is essential.

6.14 Our experience, meanwhile, is shot through with regularities. One bit of it can warn us to get ready for another bit, can "intend" or be "significant of" that remoter object. The object's arrival is the significance's verification. Truth, in these cases, meaning nothing but eventual verification, is plainly incompatible with waywardness on our part. Woe to anyone whose beliefs play fast and loose with the order which realities follow in his experience; they will lead him nowhere, or else make false connections.

6.15 By "realities" or "objects" here, we mean either things of common sense, sensibly present, or else common-sense relations, such as dates, places, distances, kinds, activities. Following our mental image of a house along the cow-path, we actually come to see the house; we get the image's full verification. *Such simply and fully verified leadings are certainly the originals and prototypes of the truth-process.* Experience does offer other forms of truth-process, but they can all be conceived as primary verifications arrested, multiplied or substituted for one another.

6.16 Take, for instance, that object on the wall over there. You and I consider it to be a "clock," although none of us has seen the hidden works that make it one. We let our notion pass for true without attempting to verify it. If truths mean verification-process essentially, ought we then to call unverified truths such as this one abortive? No, for they make up the overwhelmingly large number of the truths we live by. Indirect as well as direct verifications pass muster. Where circumstantial evidence is sufficient, we can do without eyewitnessing. Just as we here assume that Japan exists without ever having been there, because it *works* to do so, everything we know conspiring with the belief and nothing interfering, so we assume that thing to be a clock. We *use* it as a clock, regulating the length of our lecture by it. The verification of the assumption here means its leading to no frustration or contradiction. Verifi*ability* of wheels and weights and pendulum is as good as verification. For every truth-process completed, there are a million in our lives that function in this nascent state. They turn us toward direct verification; they lead us into the *surroundings* of the objects they envisage; and then, if everything runs on harmoniously, we are so sure that verification is possible that we omit it, and we are usually justified by all that happens.

TRUTH ON A CREDIT SYSTEM

Most truths pass unverified, like banknotes, backed by direct verifications somewhere.

6.17 Truth lives, in fact, for the most part on a credit system. Our thoughts and beliefs "pass," so long as nothing challenges them, just as banknotes pass so long as nobody refuses them. But all this points to direct face-to-face verifications somewhere, without which the fabric of truth collapses like a financial system with no cash basis whatever. You accept my verification of one thing, I accept yours of another. We trade on each other's truth. But beliefs verified concretely by *somebody* are the posts of the whole superstructure.

6.18 Another great reason, besides economy of time, for waiving complete verification in the ordinary business of life is that all things exist in kinds and not singly. Our world is found, once for all, to have that peculiarity. So once we have directly verified our ideas about one specimen of a kind, we consider ourselves free to apply them to other specimens without verification. A mind that habitually discerns the kind of thing before it, and acts by the law of the kind immediately, without pausing to verify, will be a "true" mind in ninety-nine out of a hundred emergencies, proved so by its conduct fitting everything it meets and getting no refutation.

6.19 *Indirectly or only potentially verifying processes may thus be true as well as full verification-processes*. They work as true processes would work, give us the same advantages, and claim our recognition for the same reasons. All this on the common-sense level of matters of fact, which is all we are considering.

6.20 But matters of fact are not our only stock in trade. *Relations among purely mental ideas* form another sphere where true and false beliefs hold, and here the beliefs are absolute, or unconditional. When they are true they bear the name either of definitions or of principles. It is either a principle or a definition that 1 and 1 make 2, that 2 and 1 make 3, and so on; that white differs

less from gray than it does from black; that when the cause begins to act the effect also begins. Such propositions hold of all possible "ones," of all conceivable "whites" and "grays" and "causes." The objects here are mental objects. Their relations are perceptually obvious at a glance, and no sense-verification is necessary. Moreover, once true, always true, of those same mental objects. Truth here has an "eternal" character. If you can find a concrete thing anywhere that is "one" or "white" or "gray" or an "effect," then your principles will everlastingly apply to it. It is just a matter of ascertaining the kind, and then applying the law of its kind to the particular object. You are sure to get truth if only you can name the kind rightly, for your mental relations hold good of everything of that kind without exception. If you nevertheless failed to get truth concretely, you would say that you had classed your real objects wrongly.

6.21 In this realm of mental relations, truth is again a matter of leading. We relate one abstract idea to another, framing in the end great systems of logical and mathematical truth, under whose respective terms the sensible facts of experience eventually arrange themselves, so that our eternal truths hold good of realities too. This marriage of fact and theory is endlessly fertile. What we say here is already true in advance of particular verification, *if we have subsumed our objects rightly*. 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 with our sense-experiences. They coerce us; we must treat them consistently, whether or not we like the results. The rules of addition apply to our debts as rigorously as to our assets. The hundredth decimal of π, the ratio of the circumference to its diameter, is ideally predetermined now, though no one may have computed it. If we should ever need that figure in our dealings with an actual circle, we would need to have it given rightly, calculated by the usual rules; for it is the same kind of truth that those rules calculate elsewhere.

6.22 Between the coercions of the sensible order and those of the ideal order, our mind is thus tightly wedged. Our ideas must agree with realities, whether those realities are concrete or abstract, whether they are facts or principles, on pain of endless inconsistency and frustration.

6.23 So far, intellectualists can raise no protest. They can only say that we have barely touched the surface of the matter.

6.24 Realities mean, then, either concrete facts, or abstract kinds of thing and the relations intuitively perceived between them. Furthermore, and thirdly, they mean the whole body of other truths already in our possession, as things that our new ideas must no less take into account. But now what does "agreement" with such threefold realities mean, to use again the definition that is current?

6.25 This is where pragmatism and intellectualism begin to part company. Primarily, no doubt, to agree means to copy; but we saw that the mere word "clock" would do instead of a mental picture of its works, and that of many realities our ideas can only be symbols and not copies. "Past time," "power," "spontaneity": how can our mind copy such realities?

6.26 To "agree" with a reality, in the widest sense, *can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it that we handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed*. Better either intellectually or practically! And often agreement will only mean the negative fact that nothing contradictory coming from that reality's direction interferes with the way our ideas guide us elsewhere. To copy a reality is, indeed, one very important way of agreeing with it, but it is far from being essential. The essential thing is the process of being guided. Any idea that helps us to *deal*, whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or what belongs to it, that doesn't tangle up our progress in frustrations, that *fits*, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality's whole setting, will agree well enough to meet the requirement. It will hold true of that reality.

6.27 Thus, *names* are just as "true" or "false" as definite mental pictures are. They set up similar verification-processes, and lead to fully equivalent practical results.

6.28 All human thinking gets put into discourse; we exchange ideas; we lend and borrow verifications, getting them from one another through social interaction. All truth thus gets built out in words, stored up, and made available for everyone. Hence we must *talk* consistently just as we must *think* consistently: for both in talk and in thought we deal with kinds. Names are arbitrary, but once understood they must be kept to. We mustn't now call Abel "Cain" or Cain "Abel." If we do, we ungear ourselves from the whole book of Genesis, and from all its connections with the universe of speech and fact down to the present time. We throw ourselves out of whatever truth that entire system of speech and fact may embody.

6.29 The overwhelming majority of our true ideas allow no direct or face-to-face verification—those of past history, for example, such as our ideas of Cain and Abel. The stream of time can be traveled back up only in words, or verified indirectly through the present extensions or effects of what the past contained. Yet if our ideas of the past agree with these words and effects, we can know that they are true. *As true as past time itself was*, so true was Julius Caesar, so true were antediluvian monsters, all in their proper dates and settings. That past time itself was is guaranteed by its coherence with everything that is present. As truly as the present *is*, the past *was* too.

6.30 Agreement thus turns out to be essentially a matter of leading—leading that is useful because it takes us into regions that contain important objects. True ideas lead us into useful verbal and conceptual regions as well as directly up to useful sensible end-points. They lead to consistency, stability and smoothly flowing human interaction. They lead away from eccentricity and isolation, from thwarted and barren thinking. The unhindered flow of the leading-process, its general freedom from clash and contradiction, counts as its indirect verification; but all roads lead to Rome, and in the end, all true processes

must lead to directly verifying sensible experiences *somewhere*, which somebody's ideas have copied.

6.31 Such is the broad, loose way in which the pragmatist interprets the word agreement. He treats it entirely practically. He lets it cover any process of conduction from a present idea to a future end-point, provided only that it runs successfully. Only in this way can "scientific" ideas, soaring as they do beyond common sense, be said to agree with their realities. It is, as I have already said, *as if* reality were made of ether, atoms or electrons, but we mustn't think so literally. The term "energy" doesn't even pretend to stand for anything "objective." It is only a way of measuring the surface of phenomena so as to string their changes on a simple formula.

6.32 Yet in choosing these man-made formulas we cannot be capricious and get away with it, any more than we can on the practical level of common sense. We must find a theory that will *work*; and that means something extremely difficult, for our theory must mediate between all previous truths and certain new experiences. It must disturb common sense and previous belief as little as possible, and it must lead to some sensible end-point or other that can be verified exactly. To "work" means both these things; and the squeeze is so tight that there is little room for play for any hypothesis. Our theories are wedged in and controlled as nothing else is. Yet sometimes alternative theoretical formulas are equally compatible with all the truths we know, and then we choose between them for subjective reasons. We choose the kind of theory we are already partial to; we follow "elegance" or "economy." Clerk Maxwell says somewhere that it would be "poor scientific taste" to choose the more complicated of two equally well-supported conceptions; and you will all agree with him. Truth in science is what gives us the greatest possible sum of satisfactions, taste included, but consistency both with previous truth and with new fact is always the most commanding claimant.

THE RATIONALIST OBJECTION

James answers the claim that truth holds timelessly, before and apart from any verification.

6.33 I have led you through a very sandy desert. But now, if I may be allowed so vulgar an expression, we begin to taste the milk in the coconut. Our rationalist critics open fire on us at this point, and replying to them will take us out of all this dryness into full view of a momentous philosophical alternative.

6.34 Our account of truth is an account of truths in the plural, of processes of leading, realized *in rebus*, and having only this quality in common, that they *pay*. They pay by guiding us into or toward some part of a system that dips at numerous points into sense-percepts, which we may copy mentally or not, but with which in any case we are now in the kind of dealings vaguely called verification. Truth for us is simply a collective name for verification-processes, just as health, wealth, strength, etc., are names for other processes connected with life, and also pursued because it pays to pursue them. Truth is *made*, just as health, wealth and strength are made, in the course of experience.[2]

6.35 Here rationalism instantly rises up in arms against us. I can imagine a rationalist talking as follows:

6.36 "Truth is not made," he will say; "it holds absolutely, being a unique relation that does not wait on any process, but shoots straight over the head of experience and hits its reality every time. Our belief that that thing on the wall is a clock is true already, even though no one in the whole history of the world should verify it. The bare quality of standing in that transcendent relation is what makes any thought that possesses it true, whether or not there is verification. You pragmatists put the cart before the horse in making truth's being consist in verification-processes. These are merely signs of its being, merely our lame ways of finding out after the fact which of our ideas already pos-

2 *In rebus*: Latin, "in things," i.e. realized within particular things.

sessed the wondrous quality. The quality itself is timeless, like all essences and natures. Thoughts share in it directly, as they share in falsity or irrelevance. It can't be analyzed away into pragmatic consequences."

6.37 The whole plausibility of this rationalist tirade comes from the fact to which we have already paid so much attention. In our world, namely, which abounds in things of similar kinds similarly associated, one verification serves for others of its kind, and one great use of knowing things is to be led not so much to them as to their associates, especially to human talk about them. The quality of truth, holding *ante rem*, pragmatically means, then, the fact that in such a world countless ideas work better through their indirect or possible verification than through their direct and actual verification.[3] Truth *ante rem* means only verifiability, then; or else it is a case of the stock rationalist trick of treating the *name* of a concrete phenomenal reality as an independent, prior entity, and placing it behind the reality as its explanation. Professor Mach quotes somewhere an epigram of Lessing's:[4]

6.38 Says Clever Hans to Cousin Fritz,
"How does it happen, Cousin Fritz,
That just the richest people in the world
Possess the most money?"

6.39 Clever Hans here treats the principle "wealth" as something distinct from the facts denoted by the man's being rich. It comes before them; the facts become only a sort of secondary coincidence with the rich man's essential nature.

6.40 In the case of "wealth" we all see the fallacy. We know that wealth is only a name for concrete processes in which certain men's lives play a part, and not a natural excellence found in Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Carnegie but not in the rest of us.[5]

6.41 Like wealth, health also lives *in rebus*. It is a name for processes, such as digestion, circulation, sleep, etc., that go on hap-

3 *Ante rem*: Latin, "before the thing," i.e. existing prior to and independently of particular things.
4 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), German dramatist and critic.

pily—though in this case we are more inclined to think of it as a principle and to say the man digests and sleeps so well *because* he is so healthy.

6.42 With "strength" we are, I think, more rationalistic still, and decidedly inclined to treat it as an excellence that exists in the man beforehand and explains the herculean performances of his muscles.

6.43 With "truth" most people cross the border entirely, and treat the rationalistic account as self-evident. But really all these words ending in *th* are exactly alike. Truth exists *ante rem* just as much and as little as the other things do.

6.44 The scholastics, following Aristotle, made much of the distinction between habit and act. Health *in actu* means, among other things, sleeping and digesting well. But a healthy man need not always be sleeping, or always digesting, any more than a wealthy man need always be handling money, or a strong man always lifting weights. All such qualities sink to the status of "habits" between their times of exercise; and similarly truth becomes a habit of certain of our ideas and beliefs in their intervals of rest from their verifying activities. But those activities are the root of the whole matter, and the condition of there being any habit to exist in the intervals.

THE EXPEDIENT IN THINKING

The true is the expedient in thinking, and absolute truth is an ideal that must still be made.

6.45 *"The true," to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as "the right" is only the expedient in the way of our behaving*. Expedient in almost any fashion; and expedient in the long run and on the whole, of course; for what meets all the experience in sight expediently won't necessarily meet all further experiences equally satisfactorily. Experience, as we know,

5 John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, the two richest American industrialists of the day.

has ways of *boiling over*, and making us correct our present formulas.

6.46 The "absolutely" true, meaning what no further experience will ever alter, is that ideal vanishing-point toward which we imagine all our temporary truths will some day converge. It stands on the same footing as the perfectly wise man and the absolutely complete experience; and if these ideals are ever realized, they will all be realized together. Meanwhile we have to live today by what truth we can get today, and be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood. Ptolemaic astronomy, Euclidean space, Aristotelian logic, scholastic metaphysics were expedient for centuries, but human experience has boiled over those limits, and we now call these things only relatively true, or true within those borders of experience. "Absolutely" they are false; for we know that those limits were accidental, and might have been gone beyond by past theorists just as they are by present thinkers.

6.47 When new experiences lead to retrospective judgments, using the past tense, what these judgments state *was* true, even though no past thinker had been led there. We live forwards, a Danish thinker has said, but we understand backwards. The present sheds a backward light on the world's previous processes. They may have been truth-processes for the actors in them. They are not so for someone who knows the later revelations of the story.[6]

6.48 This regulative notion of a potential better truth to be established later—possibly to be established some day absolutely—and having powers of retroactive legislation, turns its face, like all pragmatist notions, toward concreteness of fact and toward the future. Like the half-truths, the absolute truth will have to be *made*, made as a relation incidental to the growth of a mass of verification-experience, to which the half-true ideas are all along contributing their share.

6.49 I have already insisted on the fact that truth is made largely out of previous truths. Men's beliefs at any time are so

6 Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855); the saying comes from his journals.

much experience *funded*. But the beliefs are themselves parts of the sum total of the world's experience, and therefore become material for the next day's funding operations. So far as reality means experienceable reality, both it and the truths men gain about it are forever in process of change—change toward a definite goal, it may be—but still change.

6.50 Mathematicians can solve problems with two variables. On the Newtonian theory, for instance, acceleration varies with distance, but distance also varies with acceleration. In the realm of truth-processes, facts come independently and determine our beliefs provisionally. But these beliefs make us act, and as fast as they do so, they bring into sight or into existence new facts which re-determine the beliefs accordingly. So the whole coil and ball of truth, as it rolls up, is the product of a double influence. Truths emerge from facts; but they dip forward into facts again and add to them; and these facts again create or reveal new truth (the word makes no difference), and so on indefinitely. The "facts" themselves meanwhile are not *true*. They simply *are*. Truth is the function of the beliefs that start and end among them.

6.51 The case is like the growth of a snowball, which is due to the distribution of the snow on the one hand and to the successive pushes of the boys on the other, with these factors constantly co-determining each other.

6.52 The most fateful point of difference between being a rationalist and being a pragmatist is now fully in sight. Experience is changing, and our psychological findings of truth are changing—so much rationalism will allow; but never that either reality itself or truth itself is changeable. Reality stands complete and ready-made from all eternity, rationalism insists, and the agreement of our ideas with it is that unique, unanalyzable virtue in them which she has already told us about. As that intrinsic excellence, their truth has nothing to do with our experiences. It adds nothing to the content of experience. It makes no difference to reality itself; it is supervenient, inert, static, merely a reflection. It doesn't *exist*, it *holds* or *obtains*; it

belongs to another dimension from that of either facts or relations between facts—belongs, in short, to the epistemological dimension—and with that big word rationalism closes the discussion.

6.53 Thus, just as pragmatism faces forward to the future, so rationalism here again faces backward to a past eternity. True to her ingrained habit, rationalism reverts to "principles," and thinks that once an abstraction is named, we possess an oracular solution.

6.54 How enormously rich in consequences for life this radical difference of outlook is will only become apparent in my later lectures. Meanwhile I wish to close this lecture by showing that rationalism's sublimity does not save it from inanity.

RATIONALIST DEFINITIONS OF TRUTH

James finds the rationalists' definitions of truth empty and shows our duty to truth is conditional.

6.55 When, namely, you ask rationalists—instead of accusing pragmatism of desecrating the notion of truth—to define it themselves by saying exactly what *they* understand by it, the only positive attempts I can think of are these two:

6.56 1. "Truth is the system of propositions which have an unconditional claim to be recognized as valid."[7]

6.57 2. "Truth is a name for all those judgments which we find ourselves under obligation to make by a kind of imperative duty."[8]

6.58 The first thing that strikes one about such definitions is their unspeakable triviality. They are absolutely true, of course, but absolutely insignificant until you handle them pragmatic-

7 JAMES'S NOTE. A. E. Taylor, *Philosophical Review*, vol. xiv, p. 288.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. A. E. Taylor (1869–1945), British philosopher, then close to Bradley's idealism.

8 JAMES'S NOTE. H. Rickert, *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntniss*, chapter on "Die Urtheilsnothwendigkeit."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936), German neo-Kantian; the title means "The Object of Knowledge," the chapter "The Necessity of Judgment."

ally. What do you mean by "claim" here, and what do you mean by "duty"? As summary names for the concrete reasons why thinking in true ways is overwhelmingly expedient and good for mortal men, it is all right to talk of claims on reality's part to be agreed with, and of obligations on our part to agree. We feel both the claims and the obligations, and we feel them for just those reasons.

6.59 But the rationalists who talk of claim and obligation *expressly say that they have nothing to do with our practical interests or personal reasons*. Our reasons for agreeing are psychological facts, they say, relative to each thinker and to the accidents of his life. They are merely his evidence; they are no part of the life of truth itself. That life goes on in a purely logical or epistemological dimension, as distinguished from a psychological one, and its claims come before and exceed all personal motivations whatsoever. Even if neither man nor God should ever ascertain truth, the word would still have to be defined as that which *ought* to be ascertained and recognized.

6.60 There never was a more exquisite example of an idea abstracted from the concrete facts of experience and then used to oppose and negate what it was abstracted from.

6.61 Philosophy and common life abound in similar instances. The "sentimentalist fallacy" is to shed tears over abstract justice and generosity, beauty, etc., and never to recognize these qualities when you meet them in the street, because the circumstances make them vulgar. Thus I read in the privately printed biography of an eminently rationalistic mind: "It was strange that with such admiration for beauty in the abstract, my brother had no enthusiasm for fine architecture, for beautiful painting, or for flowers." And in almost the last philosophical work I have read, I find passages such as the following: "Justice is ideal, solely ideal. Reason conceives that it ought to exist, but experience shows that it cannot.... Truth, which ought to be, cannot be.... Reason is deformed by experience. As soon as reason enters experience it becomes contrary to reason."

6.62 The rationalist's fallacy here is exactly like the sentimentalist's. Both extract a quality from the muddy particulars of experience, and find it so pure when extracted that they contrast it with each and all of its muddy instances as an opposite and higher nature. All the while it is *their* nature. It is the nature of truths to be validated, verified. It pays for our ideas to be validated. Our obligation to seek truth is part of our general obligation to do what pays. The payments true ideas bring are the sole why of our duty to follow them. The very same whys exist in the case of wealth and health.

6.63 Truth makes no other kind of claim and imposes no other kind of ought than health and wealth do. All these claims are conditional; the concrete benefits we gain are what we mean by calling the pursuit a duty. In the case of truth, untrue beliefs work as harmfully in the long run as true beliefs work beneficially. Talking abstractly, the quality "true" may thus be said to become absolutely precious, and the quality "untrue" absolutely damnable: the one may be called good, the other bad, unconditionally. We ought to think the true, we ought to shun the false, imperatively.

6.64 But if we take all this abstraction literally and set it against its mother soil in experience, see what an absurd position we work ourselves into.

6.65 We cannot then take a step forward in our actual thinking. When shall I acknowledge this truth and when that? Shall the acknowledgment be loud?—or silent? If sometimes loud, sometimes silent, which *now*? When may a truth go into cold storage in the encyclopedia? and when shall it come out for battle? Must I constantly be repeating the truth "twice two are four" because of its eternal claim on recognition? or is it sometimes irrelevant? Must my thoughts dwell night and day on my personal sins and blemishes, because I truly have them?—or may I sink and ignore them in order to be a decent social unit, and not a mass of morbid melancholy and apology?

6.66 It is quite evident that our obligation to acknowledge truth, far from being unconditional, is tremendously condi-

tioned. Truth with a big T, and in the singular, claims abstractly to be recognized, of course; but concrete truths in the plural need be recognized only when their recognition is expedient. A truth must always be preferred to a falsehood when both relate to the situation; but when neither does, truth is as little a duty as falsehood. If you ask me what time it is and I tell you that I live at 95 Irving Street, my answer may indeed be true, but you don't see why it is my duty to give it. A false address would be just as much to the purpose.[9]

6.67 With this admission that there are conditions limiting the application of the abstract imperative, *the pragmatist treatment of truth sweeps back upon us in its fullness*. Our duty to agree with reality is seen to be grounded in a perfect jungle of concrete expediencies.

6.68 When Berkeley had explained what people meant by matter, people thought he denied matter's existence. When Mr. Schiller and Mr. Dewey now explain what people mean by truth, they are accused of denying *its* existence. These pragmatists destroy all objective standards, critics say, and put foolishness and wisdom on one level. A favorite formula for describing Mr. Schiller's doctrines and mine is that we are people who think that by saying whatever you find it pleasant to say and calling it truth, you fulfill every pragmatist requirement.

6.69 I leave it to you to judge whether this is not an impudent slander. Hemmed in as the pragmatist sees himself to be, more than anyone else, between the whole body of funded truths squeezed from the past and the coercions of the world of sense around him, who feels as well as he does 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 commandment one day, says Emerson. We have heard much lately about the uses of the imagination in science. It is high time to urge the use of a little imagination in philosophy.[10] The unwillingness of some of our critics to read any but the silliest

9 James's own house in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

10 The Emerson line is from his essay "Self-Reliance" (1841).

possible meanings into our statements is as discreditable to their imaginations as anything I know of in recent philosophical history. Schiller says the true is that which "works." Thereupon he is treated as one who limits verification to the lowest material utilities. Dewey says truth is what gives "satisfaction." He is treated as one who believes in calling everything true which, if it were true, would be pleasant.

6.70 Our critics certainly need more imagination of realities. I have honestly tried to stretch my own imagination and to read the best possible meaning into the rationalist conception, but I have to confess that it still completely baffles me. The notion of a reality calling on us to "agree" with it, and that for no reasons, but simply because its claim is "unconditional" or "transcendent," is one I can make neither head nor tail of. I try to imagine myself as the sole reality in the world, and then to imagine what more I would "claim" if I were allowed to. If you suggest that I might claim that a mind should come into being out of the empty void and stand there and *copy* me, I can indeed imagine what the copying might mean, but I can conjure up no motive. What good it would do me to be copied, or what good it would do that mind to copy me, if further consequences are expressly and in principle ruled out as motives for the claim (as they are by our rationalist authorities), I cannot fathom. When the Irishman's admirers carried him along to the banquet in a sedan chair with no bottom, he said, "Faith, if it wasn't for the honor of the thing, I might as well have come on foot." So here: but for the honor of the thing, I might as well have remained uncopied. Copying is one genuine mode of knowing (which for some strange reason our contemporary transcendentalists seem to be tumbling over one another to repudiate); but when we get beyond copying, and fall back on unnamed forms of agreeing that are expressly said to be neither copyings nor leadings nor fittings, nor any other processes pragmatically definable, the *what* of the "agreement" claimed becomes as unintelligible as the

why of it. Neither content nor motive can be imagined for it. It is an absolutely meaningless abstraction.[11]

6.71 Surely in this field of truth it is the pragmatists and not the rationalists who are the more genuine defenders of the universe's rationality.

11 JAMES'S NOTE. I am not forgetting that Professor Rickert long ago gave up the whole notion of truth being founded on agreement with reality. Reality, according to him, is whatever agrees with truth, and truth is founded solely on our primal duty. This fantastic flight, together with Mr. Joachim's candid confession of failure in his book *The Nature of Truth,* seems to me to mark the bankruptcy of rationalism in dealing with this subject. Rickert deals with part of the pragmatist position under the heading of what he calls "Relativismus." I cannot discuss his text here. Suffice it to say that his argument in that chapter is so feeble as to seem almost incredible in so generally able a writer.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Harold H. Joachim (1868–1938), Oxford idealist; *The Nature of Truth* appeared in 1906. "Relativismus" is German for relativism.

Lecture VII: Pragmatism and Humanism

Schiller's humanism, the human contribution to every truth, and a world still in the making.

LECTURE VII. PRAGMATISM AND HUMANISM

7.1 What hardens the heart of everyone I approach with the view of truth sketched in my last lecture is that typical idol of the tribe, the notion of *the* Truth, conceived as the one answer, determinate and complete, to the one fixed riddle which the world is believed to pose. For popular tradition, it is all the better if the answer is oracular, so that it itself awakens wonder as a second-order riddle, veiling rather than revealing what its depths are supposed to contain.[1] All the great single-word answers to the world's riddle, such as God, the One, Reason, Law, Spirit, Matter, Nature, Polarity, the Dialectic Process, the Idea, the Self, the Oversoul, draw the admiration that men have lavished on them from this oracular role. By amateurs in philosophy and professionals alike, the universe is represented as a strange sort of petrified sphinx whose appeal to men consists in a monotonous challenge to their powers of divination. *The* Truth: what a perfect idol of the rationalistic mind! I read in an old letter—from a gifted friend who died too young—these words: "In everything, in science, art, morals and religion, there *must* be one system that is right and *every* other wrong." How characteristic of the enthusiasm of a certain stage of youth! At twenty-one we rise to such a challenge and expect to find the

1 "Idols of the tribe": Francis Bacon's term (*Novum Organum*, 1620) for errors rooted in human nature itself.

system. It never occurs to most of us, even later, that the question "what is *the* truth?" is no real question (being unrelated to all conditions), and that the whole notion of *the* truth is an abstraction from the fact of truths in the plural, a mere useful summarizing phrase like *the* Latin Language or *the* Law.

7.2 Common-law judges sometimes talk about the law, and schoolmasters talk about the Latin tongue, in a way that makes their hearers think they mean entities existing before the decisions or before the words and syntax, determining them unequivocally and requiring them to obey. But the slightest exercise of reflection makes us see that, instead of being principles of this kind, both law and Latin are results. Distinctions between the lawful and the unlawful in conduct, or between the correct and incorrect in speech, have grown up incidentally out of the interactions of men's experiences in detail; and in no other way do distinctions between the true and the false in belief ever grow up. Truth grafts itself onto previous truth, modifying it in the process, just as idiom grafts itself onto previous idiom, and law onto previous law. Given previous law and a new case, the judge will twist them into fresh law. Previous idiom, plus new slang or metaphor or oddity that hits the public taste—and presto, a new idiom is made. Previous truth, plus fresh facts—and our mind finds a new truth.

7.3 All the while, however, we pretend that the eternal is unrolling, that the one previous justice, grammar or truth is simply flashing forth and not being made. But imagine a youth in the courtroom trying cases with his abstract notion of "the" law, or a censor of speech let loose among the theaters with his idea of "the" mother tongue, or a professor setting out to lecture on the actual universe with his rationalistic notion of "the Truth" with a big T—what progress do they make? Truth, law, and language fairly boil away from them at the least touch of new fact. These things *make themselves* as we go. Our rights, wrongs, prohibitions, penalties, words, forms, idioms, beliefs are so many new creations that add themselves as fast as history proceeds. Far from being prior principles that animate the pro-

cess, law, language and truth are only abstract names for its results.

SCHILLER'S HUMANISM

Schiller's humanism holds that our truths are partly human products, shaped against resisting reality.

7.4 Laws and languages at any rate are thus seen to be man-made things. Mr. Schiller applies the analogy to beliefs, and proposes the name "Humanism" for the doctrine that, to an extent we cannot determine, our truths are man-made products too. Human motives sharpen all our questions, human satisfactions lurk in all our answers, all our formulas have a human twist. This element is so tangled into the products that Mr. Schiller sometimes seems almost to leave it an open question whether there is anything else. "The world," he says, "is essentially *ὕλη*, it is what we make it. It is fruitless to define it by what it originally was or by what it is apart from us; it is what is made of it.[2] Hence...the world is *plastic*."[3] He adds that we can learn the limits of the plasticity only by trying, and that we ought to start as if it were wholly plastic, acting methodically on that assumption, and stopping only when we are decisively rebuked.

7.5 This is Mr. Schiller's butt-end-first statement of the humanist position, and it has exposed him to severe attack. I mean to defend the humanist position in this lecture, so I will slip in a few remarks at this point.

7.6 Mr. Schiller admits as emphatically as anyone the presence of resisting factors in every actual experience of truth-making, which the newly made special truth must take account of, and with which it necessarily has to "agree." All our truths are beliefs about "Reality"; and in any particular belief the reality acts as something independent, as a thing *found*, not manufactured. Let me here recall a bit of my last lecture.

2 *Hylē*: Greek for "matter," the raw material that receives form.
3 JAMES'S NOTE. *Personal Idealism*, p. 60.

7.7 *"Reality" is in general what truths have to take account of*;[4] and the *first* part of reality from this point of view is the flux of our sensations. Sensations are forced upon us, coming we know not from where. Over their nature, order and quantity we have as good as no control. *They* are neither true nor false; they simply *are*. It is only what we say about them, only the names we give them, our theories of their source and nature and remote relations, that may be true or not.

7.8 The *second* part of reality, as something that our beliefs must also obediently take account of, is the *relations* that hold between our sensations or between their copies in our minds. This part falls into two sub-parts: (1) the relations that are changeable and accidental, such as those of date and place; and (2) those that are fixed and essential because they are grounded in the inner natures of their terms. Both sorts of relation are matters of immediate perception. Both are "facts." But it is the latter kind of fact that forms the more important sub-part of reality for our theories of knowledge. Inner relations, namely, are "eternal," are perceived whenever their sensible terms are compared; and our thought—so-called mathematical and logical thought—must eternally take account of them.

7.9 The *third* part of reality, additional to these perceptions (though largely based on them), is the *previous truths* which every new inquiry takes into account. This third part is a much less stubbornly resisting factor: it often ends by giving way. In speaking of these three portions of reality as at all times controlling the formation of our beliefs, I am only reminding you of what we heard in our last hour.

7.10 Now however fixed these elements of reality may be, we still have a certain freedom in our dealings with them. Take our sensations. *That* they are is undoubtedly beyond our control; but *which* of them we attend to, note, and make emphatic in our conclusions depends on our own interests; and according as we lay the emphasis here or there, quite different formulations of truth

4 JAMES'S NOTE. Mr. Taylor in his *Elements of Metaphysics* uses this excellent pragmatic definition.

result. We read the same facts differently. "Waterloo," with the same fixed details, spells "victory" for an Englishman; for a Frenchman it spells "defeat." So, for an optimist philosopher the universe spells victory, for a pessimist, defeat.

7.11 What we say about reality thus depends on the perspective into which we throw it. The *that* of it is its own; but the *what* depends on the *which*; and the which depends on *us*. Both the sensational and the relational parts of reality are mute; they say absolutely nothing about themselves. It is we who have to speak for them. This muteness of sensations has led such intellectualists as T. H. Green and Edward Caird to shove them almost beyond the pale of philosophical recognition, but pragmatists refuse to go so far. A sensation is rather like a client who has handed his case to a lawyer and then has to listen passively in the courtroom to whatever account of his affairs, pleasant or unpleasant, the lawyer finds it most expedient to give.

7.12 Hence, even in the field of sensation, our minds exercise a certain arbitrary choice. By what we include and omit we trace the field's extent; by our emphasis we mark its foreground and its background; by our ordering we read it in this direction or that. We receive, in short, the block of marble, but we carve the statue ourselves.

7.13 This applies to the "eternal" parts of reality as well: we shuffle our perceptions of intrinsic relation and arrange them just as freely. We read them in one serial order or another, classify them this way or that, treat one or another as more fundamental, until our beliefs about them form those bodies of truth known as logics, geometries, or arithmetics, in each and all of which the form and order in which the whole is cast is flagrantly man-made.

7.14 Thus, to say nothing of the new *facts* which men add to the matter of reality by the acts of their own lives, they have already stamped their mental forms on that whole third of reality which I have called "previous truths." Every hour brings its new percepts, its own facts of sensation and relation, to be truly taken account of; but the whole of our past dealings with such facts is

already funded in the previous truths. It is therefore only the smallest and most recent fraction of the first two parts of reality that comes to us without the human touch, and that fraction must immediately become humanized, in the sense of being squared with, assimilated to, or in some way adapted to the humanized mass already there. As a matter of fact we can hardly take in an impression at all without some preconception of what impressions there may possibly be.

7.15 When we talk of reality "independent" of human thinking, then, it seems a thing very hard to find. It comes down to the notion of what is just entering into experience and has yet to be named, or else to some imagined original presence in experience, before any belief about that presence had arisen, before any human conception had been applied. It is what is absolutely mute and fleeting, the merely ideal limit of our minds. We may glimpse it, but we never grasp it; what we grasp is always some substitute for it which previous human thinking has predigested and cooked for our consumption. If so vulgar an expression were allowed us, we might say that wherever we find it, it has already been *faked*. This is what Mr. Schiller has in mind when he calls independent reality a mere unresisting *ὕλη*, which *is* only there to be made over by us.

7.16 That is Mr. Schiller's belief about the sensible core of reality. We "encounter" it (in Mr. Bradley's words) but don't possess it. On the surface this sounds like Kant's view; but between categories hurled down before nature began, and categories gradually forming themselves in nature's presence, the whole chasm between rationalism and empiricism yawns. To the genuine "Kantianer" Schiller will always be to Kant as a satyr to Hyperion.[5]

7.17 Other pragmatists may reach more positive beliefs about the sensible core of reality. They may hope to get at it in its independent nature, by peeling off the successive man-made wrappings. They may make theories that tell us where it comes from

5 *Kantianer*: German, a devoted Kantian. "Hyperion to a satyr" is Hamlet's comparison of his father to Claudius.

and all about it; and *if these theories work satisfactorily they will be true*. The transcendental idealists say there is no core, the finally completed wrapping being reality and truth in one. Scholasticism still teaches that the core is "matter." Professor Bergson, Heymans, Strong, and others believe in the core and bravely try to define it. Messrs.[6] Dewey and Schiller treat it as a "limit." Which is the truer of all these different accounts, or of others comparable with them, unless it is the one that finally proves the most satisfactory? On the one hand there will stand reality, on the other an account of it which it proves impossible to improve or to alter. If the impossibility proves permanent, the truth of the account will be absolute. Other content of truth than this I can find nowhere. If the anti-pragmatists have any other meaning, let them for heaven's sake reveal it, let them grant us access to it!

7.18 Not *being* reality, but only our belief *about* reality, it will contain human elements, but these will *know* the non-human element, in the only sense in which there can be knowledge of anything. Does the river make its banks, or do the banks make the river? Does a man walk more essentially with his right leg or with his left? It may be just as impossible to separate the real from the human factors in the growth of our cognitive experience.

7.19 Let this stand as a first brief indication of the humanistic position. Does it seem paradoxical? If so, I will try to make it plausible by a few illustrations, which will lead to a fuller acquaintance with the subject.

THE HUMAN CONTRIBUTION

Numbers, constellations and things are carved out to suit our purposes, so the human part cannot be removed.

7.20 In many familiar objects everyone will recognize the human element. We conceive a given reality in this way or in that, to

6 Henri Bergson (French), Gerard Heymans (Dutch) and Charles A. Strong (American) were contemporary philosophers.

suit our purpose, and the reality passively submits to the conception. You can take the number 27 as the cube of 3, or as the product of 3 and 9, or as 26 *plus* 1, or 100 *minus* 73, or in countless other ways, any one of which will be just as true as another. You can take a chessboard as black squares on a white ground, or as white squares on a black ground, and neither conception is a false one.

7.21 You can treat the figure shown here as a star, as two big triangles crossing each other, as a hexagon with legs set up on its angles, as six equal triangles hanging together by their tips, and so on.[7]

7.22 All these treatments are true treatments—the sensible *that* on the paper resists none of them. You can say of a line that it runs east, or you can say that it runs west, and the line *per se* accepts both descriptions without rebelling at the inconsistency.

7.23 We carve out groups of stars in the heavens, and call them constellations, and the stars patiently let us do so—though if they knew what we were doing, some of them might be very surprised at the partners we had given them. We name the same constellation in different ways, as Charles's Wain, the Great Bear, or the Dipper. None of the names will be false, and one will be as true as another, for all are applicable.[8]

7.24 In all these cases we humanly make an *addition* to some sensible reality, and that reality tolerates the addition. All the additions "agree" with the reality; they fit it, while they build it out. None of them is false. Which may be treated as the *more* true depends altogether on the human use of it. If the 27 is a number of dollars which I find in a drawer where I had left 28, it is 28 minus 1. If it is the number of inches in a board which I wish to insert as a shelf into a cupboard 26 inches wide, it is 26 plus 1. If I wish to ennoble the heavens by the constellations I see there, "Charles's Wain" would be more true than "Dipper." My friend Frederick Myers was humorously indignant that that

7 The original prints a six-pointed star (hexagram) at this point.

8 Charles's Wain ("wain" = wagon) is the traditional British name for the seven stars Americans call the Big Dipper.

prodigious star-group should remind us Americans of nothing but a kitchen utensil.[9]

7.25 What shall we call a *thing* anyhow? It seems quite arbitrary, for we carve out everything, just as we carve out constellations, to suit our human purposes. For me, this whole "audience" is one thing, which grows now restless, now attentive. I have no use at present for its individual units, so I don't consider them. The same goes for an "army," or a "nation." But in your own eyes, ladies and gentlemen, to call you "audience" is an accidental way of taking you. The permanently real things for you are your individual persons. To an anatomist, again, those persons are only organisms, and the real things are the organs. Not the organs so much as the cells that make them up, say the histologists; not the cells, but their molecules, say the chemists in turn.

7.26 We break the flux of sensible reality into things, then, at our will. We create the subjects of our true as well as of our false propositions.

7.27 We create the predicates too. Many of the predicates of things express only the relations of the things to us and to our feelings. Such predicates of course are human additions. Caesar crossed the Rubicon, and was a menace to Rome's freedom. He is also an American schoolroom pest, made into one by the reaction of our schoolboys to his writings. The added predicate is as true of him as the earlier ones.[10]

7.28 You see how naturally one comes to the humanistic principle: you can't weed out the human contribution. Our nouns and adjectives are all humanized heirlooms, and in the theories we build them into, the inner order and arrangement is wholly dictated by human considerations, intellectual consistency being one of them. Mathematics and logic themselves are fermenting with human rearrangements; physics, astronomy and biology follow massive cues of preference. We plunge forward

9 Frederic W. H. Myers (1843–1901), English classicist and psychical researcher, a close friend of James.

10 Caesar's *Gallic War* was the standard first Latin text in American schools.

into the field of fresh experience with the beliefs our ancestors and we ourselves have already made; these determine what we notice; what we notice determines what we do; what we do in turn determines what we experience; and so from one thing to another. Although the stubborn fact remains that there is a sensible flux, what is *true of it* seems from first to last to be largely a matter of our own creation.

7.29 We build the flux out inevitably. The great question is: does it, with our additions, *rise or fall in value?* Are the additions *worthy* or *unworthy*? Suppose a universe composed of seven stars, and nothing else but three human witnesses and their critic. One witness names the stars "Great Bear"; one calls them "Charles's Wain"; one calls them "the Dipper." Which human addition has made the best universe out of the given stellar material? If Frederick Myers were the critic, he would have no hesitation in "turning down" the American witness.

7.30 Lotze has in several places made a deep suggestion. We naively assume, he says, a relation between reality and our minds which may be just the opposite of the true one. Reality, we naturally think, stands ready-made and complete, and our intellects come along with the one simple duty of describing it as it already is. But may not our descriptions, Lotze asks, be themselves important additions to reality? And may not previous reality itself be there, far less for the purpose of reappearing unaltered in our knowledge, than for the very purpose of stimulating our minds to such additions as shall enhance the universe's total value?[11] *"Die Erhöhung des vorgefundenen Daseins"* is a phrase Professor Eucken uses somewhere, which reminds one of this suggestion by the great Lotze.[12]

7.31 It is identical with our pragmatist conception. In our cognitive as well as in 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

11 Hermann Lotze (1817–1881), German philosopher, much admired by James.
12 German: "the heightening of the existence we find already there." Rudolf Eucken (1846–1926), German idealist philosopher, Nobel Prize in Literature 1908.

hands. Like the kingdom of heaven, it suffers human violence willingly. Man *engenders* truths upon it.[13]

7.32 No one can deny that such a role would add both to our dignity and to our responsibility as thinkers. To some of us it proves a most inspiring notion. Signor Papini, the leader of Italian pragmatism, grows fairly dithyrambic over the view it opens of man's divinely creative functions.

A UNIVERSE STILL IN THE MAKING

For rationalism reality is complete; for pragmatism it is unfinished and waits partly on us.

7.33 The import of the difference between pragmatism and rationalism is now in sight in its whole extent. The essential contrast 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*. On the one side the universe is absolutely secure, on the other it is still pursuing its adventures.

7.34 We have got into rather deep water with this humanistic view, and it is no wonder that misunderstanding gathers around it. It is accused of being a doctrine of caprice. Mr. Bradley, for example, says that a humanist, if he understood his own doctrine, would have to "hold any end, however perverted, to be rational, if I insist on it personally, and any idea, however mad, to be the truth if only someone is resolved that he will have it so." The humanist view of "reality," as something resisting, yet malleable, which controls our thinking as an energy that must be taken "account" of incessantly (though not necessarily merely *copied*), is evidently a difficult one to introduce to novices. The situation reminds me of one that I have gone through personally. I once wrote an essay on our right to believe, which I unluckily called the *Will* to Believe. All the critics, neglecting the essay, pounced on the title. Psychologically it

13 Echoing Matthew 11:12: "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

was impossible, morally it was wicked. The "will to deceive" and the "will to make-believe" were wittily proposed as substitutes for it.[14]

7.35 *The alternative between pragmatism and rationalism, in the shape in which we now have it before us, is no longer a question in the theory of knowledge; it concerns the structure of the universe itself.*

7.36 On the pragmatist side we have only one edition of the universe, unfinished, growing in all sorts of places, especially in the places where thinking beings are at work.

7.37 On the rationalist side we have a universe in many editions: one real one, the infinite folio, or *édition de luxe*, eternally complete; and then the various finite editions, full of false readings, each distorted and mutilated in its own way.

7.38 So the rival metaphysical hypotheses of pluralism and monism come back to us here. I will develop their differences during the rest of our hour.

THE LOOSE UNIVERSE

Rationalists want a guaranteed absolute world behind this one; the tough-minded call it an empty name.

7.39 And first let me say that it is impossible not to see a difference of temperament at work in the choice of sides. The rationalist mind, taken at its most radical, is of a doctrinaire and authoritative complexion: the phrase "*must* be" is always on its lips. The bellyband of its universe must be tight. A radical pragmatist, on the other hand, is a happy-go-lucky, anarchistic sort of creature. If he had to live in a tub like Diogenes he wouldn't mind at all if the hoops were loose and the staves let in the sun.[15]

7.40 Now the idea of this loose universe affects your typical rationalist in much the same way as "freedom of the press" might affect a veteran official in the Russian bureau of censor-

14 "The Will to Believe" (1896), James's essay defending the right to adopt a belief on practical grounds when evidence cannot settle the question.

15 Diogenes the Cynic (4th century BC) was said to live in a large tub or jar in Athens.

ship, or as "simplified spelling" might affect an elderly schoolmistress. It affects him as the swarm of Protestant sects affects a Catholic onlooker. It appears as spineless and unprincipled as "opportunism" in politics appears to an old-fashioned French legitimist, or to a fanatical believer in the divine right of the people.[16]

7.41 For pluralistic pragmatism, truth grows up inside all the finite experiences. They lean on each other, but the whole of them, if there is such a whole, leans on nothing. All "homes" are in finite experience; finite experience as such is homeless. Nothing outside the flux secures its outcome. It can hope for salvation only from its own intrinsic promises and potencies.

7.42 To rationalists this describes a tramp and vagrant world, adrift in space, with neither elephant nor tortoise to plant the sole of its foot on. It is a set of stars hurled into heaven without even a center of gravity to pull against. In other spheres of life, it is true, we have got used to living in a state of relative insecurity. The authority of "the State," and that of an absolute "moral law," have dissolved into expediencies, and holy church has dissolved into "meeting-houses." Not so, as yet, within the philosophy classrooms. A universe with the likes of us helping to create its truth, a world handed over to our opportunisms and our private judgments![17] Home Rule for Ireland would be the millennium by comparison. We're no more fit for such a part than the Filipinos are "fit for self-government." Such a world would not be *respectable* philosophically. It is a trunk without a tag, a dog without a collar, in the eyes of most professors of philosophy.[18]

7.43 What, then, would tighten this loose universe, according to the professors?

16 The simplified-spelling campaign, backed by Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, was in the news; James himself used reformed spellings like "tho." French legitimists supported the senior Bourbon line's claim to the throne.
17 The elephant and tortoise: the Hindu cosmology, a stock example in Locke and later writers, in which the world rests on an elephant standing on a tortoise.
18 Irish Home Rule was a fiercely contested issue in British politics. "Not fit for self-government" was the standard argument for American rule over the Philippines, which James, an anti-imperialist, opposed.

7.44 Something to support the finite many, to tie it to, to unify and anchor it. Something not exposed to accident, something eternal and unalterable. The mutable in experience must be founded on immutability. Behind our *de facto* world, our world in act, there must be a *de jure* duplicate, fixed and prior, with everything that can happen here already there *in posse*, every drop of blood, every smallest item, appointed and provided for, stamped and branded, with no chance of variation. The negatives that haunt our ideals here below must themselves be negated in the absolutely Real. This alone makes the universe solid. This is the resting deep. We live on the stormy surface; but with this our anchor holds, for it grapples rocky bottom. This is Wordsworth's "eternal peace abiding at the heart of endless agitation." This is Vivekananda's mystic One, which I read to you about. This is Reality with a capital R, reality that makes the timeless claim, reality to which defeat can't happen. This is what the men of principles, and in general all the men whom I called tender-minded in my first lecture, think themselves obliged to postulate.[19]

7.45 And this, exactly this, is what the tough-minded of that lecture find themselves moved to call a piece of perverse abstraction-worship. The tough-minded are the men whose alpha and omega are *facts*. Behind the bare phenomenal facts, as my tough-minded old friend Chauncey Wright, the great Harvard empiricist of my youth, used to say, there is *nothing*. When a rationalist insists that behind the facts there is the *ground* of the facts, the *possibility* of the facts, the tougher empiricists accuse him of taking the mere name and nature of a fact and clapping it behind the fact as a duplicate entity to make it possible. That such sham grounds are often invoked is notorious.[20] At a surgical operation I once heard a bystander ask a doctor why the patient was breathing so deeply. "Because ether is a respiratory stimulant," the doctor answered. "Ah!" said the questioner, as if that were a

19 Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IV (paraphrased).

20 Chauncey Wright (1830–1875), American philosopher of science and member of the Cambridge "Metaphysical Club" with James and Peirce.

good explanation. But this is like saying that potassium cyanide kills because it is a "poison," or that it is so cold tonight because it is "winter," or that we have five fingers because we are "pentadactyls." These are only names for the facts, taken from the facts, and then treated as prior and explanatory. The tender-minded notion of an absolute reality is, according to the radically tough-minded, framed on exactly this pattern. It is only our summarizing name for the whole spread-out and strung-along mass of phenomena, treated as if it were a different entity, both one and prior.

7.46 You see how differently people take things. The world we live in exists diffused and distributed, in the form of an indefinitely numerous lot of *eaches*, coherent in all sorts of ways and degrees; and the tough-minded are perfectly willing to keep them at that valuation. They can *stand* that kind of world, their temper being well adapted to its insecurity. Not so the tender-minded party. They must back the world we find ourselves born into with "another and a better" world, in which the eaches form an All and the All a One that logically presupposes, co-implicates, and secures each *each* without exception.

7.47 Must we as pragmatists be radically tough-minded? Or can we treat the absolute edition of the world as a legitimate hypothesis? It is certainly legitimate, for it is thinkable, whether we take it in its abstract or in its concrete shape.

7.48 By taking it abstractly I mean placing it behind our finite life as we place the word "winter" behind tonight's cold weather. "Winter" is only the name for a certain number of days which we find generally marked by cold weather, but it guarantees nothing in that line, for our thermometer tomorrow may soar into the 70s. Nevertheless the word is a useful one to plunge forward with into the stream of our experience. It cuts off certain probabilities and sets up others. You can put away your straw hats; you can unpack your winter overshoes. It is a summary of things to look for. It names a part of nature's habits, and gets you ready for their continuation. It is a definite instrument abstracted from experience, a conceptual reality that you must take

account of, and which sends you straight back into sensible realities. The pragmatist is the last person to deny the reality of such abstractions. They are so much past experience funded.

7.49 But taking the absolute edition of the world concretely means a different hypothesis. Rationalists take it concretely and *oppose* it to the world's finite editions. They give it a particular nature. It is perfect, finished. Everything known there is known along with everything else; here, where ignorance reigns, it is quite otherwise. If there is want there, the satisfaction is provided there too. Here all is process; that world is timeless. Possibilities obtain in our world; in the absolute world, where all that is *not* is from eternity impossible, and all that *is* is necessary, the category of possibility has no application. In this world crimes and horrors are regrettable. In that totalized world there is no regret, for "the existence of ill in the temporal order is the very condition of the perfection of the eternal order."[21]

7.50 Once more, either hypothesis is legitimate in pragmatist eyes, for either has its uses. Abstractly, or taken like the word winter, as a memorandum of past experience that orients us toward the future, the notion of the absolute world is indispensable. Concretely taken, it is also indispensable, at least to certain minds, for it determines them religiously, often being a thing to change their lives by, and, by changing their lives, to change whatever in the outer order depends on them.

7.51 We cannot therefore, as a matter of method, join the tough minds in their rejection of the whole notion of a world beyond our finite experience. One misunderstanding of pragmatism is to identify it with positivistic tough-mindedness, to suppose that it scorns every rationalistic notion as so much jabber and gesticulation, that it loves intellectual anarchy as such and prefers a sort of wolf-world, absolutely unpenned and wild and without a master or a collar, to any philosophy-classroom product whatsoever. I have said so much in these lectures against the overtender forms of rationalism that I am prepared for some misunderstanding here, but I confess that the amount of it I have

21 The quotation is from Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual*.

found in this very audience surprises me, for I have at the same time defended rationalistic hypotheses, so far as these redirect you fruitfully into experience.

7.52 For instance, this morning I received this question on a postcard: "Is a pragmatist necessarily a complete materialist and agnostic?" One of my oldest friends, who ought to know me better, writes me a letter accusing the pragmatism I am recommending of shutting out all wider metaphysical views and condemning us to the most *terre-à-terre* naturalism. Let me read you some extracts from it.[22]

7.53 "It seems to me," my friend writes, "that the pragmatic objection to pragmatism lies in the fact that it might accentuate the narrowness of narrow minds.

7.54 "Your call to reject the namby-pamby and the wishy-washy is of course inspiring. But although it is salutary and stimulating to be told that one should be responsible for the immediate outcomes and bearings of one's words and thoughts, I decline to be deprived of the pleasure and profit of dwelling also on remoter bearings and outcomes, and it is the *tendency* of pragmatism to refuse this privilege.

7.55 "In short, it seems to me that the limitations, or rather the dangers, of the pragmatic tendency are analogous to those which beset the unwary followers of the 'natural sciences.' Chemistry and physics are eminently pragmatic; and many of their devotees, smugly content with the data their weights and measures furnish, feel an infinite pity and disdain for all students of philosophy and metaphysics whatsoever. And of course everything can be expressed—after a fashion, and 'theoretically'—in terms of chemistry and physics, that is, *everything except the vital principle of the whole*, and that, they say, there is no pragmatic use in trying to express; it has no bearings—for *them*. I for my part refuse to be persuaded that we cannot look beyond the obvious pluralism of the naturalist and the pragmatist to a logical unity in which they take no interest."

7.56 How is such a conception of the pragmatism I am advocating possible, after my first and second lectures? I have all along been offering it expressly as a mediator between tough-mindedness and tender-mindedness. If the notion of a world *ante rem*, whether taken abstractly like the word winter, or concretely as the hypothesis of an Absolute, can be shown to have any consequences whatever for our life, it has a meaning. If the meaning works, it will have *some* truth that ought to be held on to through all possible reformulations, for pragmatism.

7.57 The absolutist hypothesis, that perfection is eternal, original, and most real, has a perfectly definite meaning, and it works religiously. To examine how will be the subject of my next and final lecture.

22 *Terre-à-terre*: French, "down-to-earth," pedestrian.

Lecture VIII: Pragmatism and Religion

Whitman's "To You," the uses of the Absolute, meliorism, and a religion for a world whose salvation is possible but not guaranteed.

LECTURE VIII. PRAGMATISM AND RELIGION

8.1 At the close of the last lecture I reminded you of the first one, in which I had opposed tough-mindedness to tender-mindedness and recommended pragmatism as their mediator. Tough-mindedness positively rejects tender-mindedness's hypothesis of an eternal perfect edition of the universe coexisting with our finite experience.

8.2 On pragmatic principles we cannot reject any hypothesis if consequences useful to life flow from it. Universal conceptions, as things to take account of, may be as real for pragmatism as particular sensations are. They have, indeed, no meaning and no reality if they have no use. But if they have any use, they have that amount of meaning. And the meaning will be true if the use squares well with life's other uses.

8.3 Well, the use of the Absolute is proved by the whole course of men's religious history. The eternal arms are then beneath. Remember Vivekananda's use of the Atman—not indeed a scientific use, for we can make no particular deductions from it. It is emotional and spiritual altogether.[1]

1 "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). Atman: in Vedanta, the true Self, identical with the absolute Brahman.

WHITMAN'S "TO YOU"

James reads Whitman's poem and shows how it can be taken monistically or pluralistically.

8.4 It is always best to discuss things with the help of concrete examples. Let me therefore read some of the verses entitled "To You" by Walt Whitman—"You," of course, meaning the reader or hearer of the poem, whoever he or she may be.[2]

8.5 Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you that you be my poem;
I whisper with my lips close to your ear,
I have loved many men and women and men, but I love none better than you.

8.6 O I have been dilatory and silent;
I should have made my way to you long ago;
I should have blabbed nothing but you, I should have chanted nothing but you.
I will leave all and come and make the hymns of you;
None have understood you, but I understand you;
None have done justice to you—you have not done justice to yourself;
None but have found you imperfect—I only find no imperfection in you.
O I could sing such glories and grandeurs about you;
You have not known what you are—you have slumbered upon yourself all your life;
What you have done returns already in mockeries.

2 "To You" appeared in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

8.7 But the mockeries are not you;
Underneath them and within them, I see you lurk;
I pursue you where none else has pursued you.
Silence, the desk, the flippant expression, the night, the accustomed routine, if these conceal you from others, or from yourself, they do not conceal you from me;
The shaved face, the unsteady eye, the impure complexion, if these balk others, they do not balk me;
The pert apparel, the deformed attitude, drunkenness, greed, premature death, all these I part aside.

/ There is no endowment in man or woman that is not tallied in you;
There is no virtue, no beauty, in man or woman, but as good is in you;
No pluck nor endurance in others, but as good is in you;
No pleasure waiting for others, but an equal pleasure waits for you.

8.8 Whoever you are! claim your own at any hazard!
These shows of the east and west are tame, compared with you;
These immense meadows—these interminable rivers—you are immense and interminable as they;
You are he or she who is master or mistress over them,
Master or mistress in your own right over Nature, elements, pain, passion, dissolution.
The hopples fall from your ankles—you find an unfailing sufficiency;
Old or young, male or female, rude, low, rejected by the rest, whatever you are promulges itself;
Through birth, life, death, burial, the means are provided, nothing is scanted;
Through angers, losses, ambition, ignorance, ennui, what you are picks its way.

8.9 Truly a fine and moving poem, in any case; but there are two ways of taking it, both useful.

8.10 One is the monistic way, the mystical way of pure cosmic emotion. The glories and grandeurs are yours absolutely, even in the midst of your defacements. Whatever may happen to you, whatever you may appear to be, inwardly you are safe. Look back, *lie* back, on your true principle of being! This is the famous way of quietism, of indifferentism. Its enemies compare it to a spiritual opium. Yet pragmatism must respect this way, for it has massive historical vindication.

8.11 But pragmatism sees another way that must be respected too, the pluralistic way of interpreting the poem. The you so glorified, to which the hymn is sung, may mean your better possibilities taken phenomenally, or the specific redemptive effects even of your failures, on yourself or others. It may mean your loyalty to the possibilities of others whom you admire and love so much that you are willing to accept your own poor life, for it is that glory's partner. You can at least appreciate, applaud, and furnish the audience for so brave a total world. Forget the low in yourself, then; think only of the high. Identify your life with it; then, through angers, losses, ignorance, ennui, whatever you thus make yourself, whatever you thus most deeply are, picks its way.

8.12 In either way of taking the poem, it encourages fidelity to ourselves. Both ways satisfy; both sanctify the human flux. Both paint the portrait of the *you* on a gold background. But the background of the first way is the static One, while in the second way it means possibles in the plural, genuine possibles, and it has all the restlessness of that conception. Either way of reading the poem is noble enough; but plainly the pluralistic way agrees best with the pragmatic temper, for it immediately suggests to our mind an infinitely larger number of the details of future experience. It sets definite activities in us to work. Although this second way seems prosaic and earthbound compared with the first, no one can accuse it of tough-mindedness in any brutal sense of the term. Yet if, as pragmatists, you were to set up the second way positively *against* the first, you would very likely be misunderstood. You would be accused of denying nobler con-

ceptions, and of being an ally of tough-mindedness in the worst sense.

8.13 You remember the letter from a member of this audience from which I read some extracts at our last meeting. Let me read you a further extract now. It shows a vagueness in grasping the alternatives before us which I think is very widespread.

8.14 "I believe," writes my friend and correspondent, "in pluralism; I believe that in our search for truth we leap from one floating cake of ice to another, on an infinite sea, and that by each of our acts we make new truths possible and old ones impossible; I believe that each man is responsible for making the universe better, and that if he does not do this it will to that extent be left undone.

8.15 "Yet at the same time I am willing to endure that my children should be incurably sick and suffering (as they are not) and I myself stupid and yet with brains enough to see my stupidity, only on one condition, namely, that through the construction, in imagination and by reasoning, of a *rational unity of all things*, I can conceive my acts and my thoughts and my troubles as *supplemented by all the other phenomena of the world, and as forming—when thus supplemented—a scheme which I approve and adopt as my own*; and for my part I refuse to be persuaded that we cannot look beyond the obvious pluralism of the naturalist and pragmatist to a logical unity in which they take no interest or stock."

8.16 Such a fine expression of personal faith warms the heart of the hearer. But how much does it clear his philosophic head? Does the writer consistently favor the monistic or the pluralistic interpretation of the world's poem? His troubles become atoned for *when thus supplemented*, he says—supplemented, that is, by all the remedies that *the other phenomena* may supply. Obviously here the writer faces forward into the particulars of experience, which he interprets in a pluralistic-melioristic way.

8.17 But he believes he is facing backward. He speaks of what he calls the rational *unity* of things, when all the while he really means their possible empirical *unification*. He supposes at the same time that the pragmatist, because he criticizes rational-

ism's abstract One, is cut off from the consolation of believing in the saving possibilities of the concrete many. In short, he fails to distinguish between taking the world's perfection as a necessary principle and taking it only as a possible *terminus ad quem*.[3]

8.18 I regard the writer of the letter as a genuine pragmatist, but as a pragmatist *sans le savoir*. He appears to me to be one of that numerous class of philosophic amateurs whom I spoke of in my first lecture, who wish to have all the good things going, without being too careful about how they agree or disagree. "Rational unity of all things" is so inspiring a formula that he brandishes it offhand, and abstractly accuses pluralism of conflicting with it (for the bare names do conflict), although concretely he means by it just the pragmatically unified and improved world.[4] Most of us remain in this essential vagueness, and it is well that we should; but in the interest of clear-headedness it is well that some of us should go further, so I will now try to focus a little more discriminatingly on this particular religious point.

8.19 Is this you of yous, then, this absolutely real world, this unity that yields the moral inspiration and has the religious value, to be taken monistically or pluralistically? Is it *ante rem* or *in rebus*? Is it a principle or an end, an absolute or an ultimate, a first or a last? Does it make you look forward or lie back? It is certainly worthwhile not to lump the two things together, for if they are distinguished, they have decidedly different meanings for life.

THE POSSIBILITY OF SALVATION

James asks what it means to call the world's salvation possible, and introduces meliorism.

8.20 Please observe that the whole dilemma revolves pragmatically around the notion of the world's possibilities. Intellectually,

3 *Terminus ad quem*: Latin, "the end toward which," a goal rather than a starting point.

rationalism invokes its absolute principle of unity as a ground of possibility for the many facts. Emotionally, it sees it as a container and limiter of possibilities, a guarantee that the upshot will be good. Taken in this way, the absolute makes all good things certain, and all bad things impossible (in the eternal, that is), and may be said to transmute the entire category of possibility into categories more secure. One sees at this point that the great religious difference lies between the men who insist that the world *must and shall be* saved, and those who are content with believing that the world *may be* saved. The whole clash of rationalist and empiricist religion is thus over the validity of possibility. It is necessary, therefore, to begin by focusing on that word. What may the word "possible" definitely mean? To unreflecting people it means a sort of third estate of being, less real than existence, more real than non-existence, a twilight realm, a hybrid status, a limbo into which and out of which realities are every now and then made to pass.

8.21 Such a conception is of course too vague and nondescript to satisfy us. Here, as elsewhere, the only way to extract a term's meaning is to use the pragmatic method on it. When you say that a thing is possible, what difference does it make? It makes at least this difference: that if anyone calls it impossible you can contradict him, if anyone calls it actual you can contradict *him*, and if anyone calls it necessary you can contradict him too.

8.22 But these privileges of contradiction don't amount to much. When you say a thing is possible, doesn't that make some further difference in terms of actual fact?

8.23 It makes at least this negative difference: if the statement is true, it follows that *there is nothing in existence capable of preventing* the possible thing. The absence of any real grounds of interference may thus be said to make things *not impossible*, and therefore possible in the *bare* or *abstract* sense.

8.24 But most possibles are not bare. They are concretely grounded, or well-grounded, as we say. What does this mean

4 *Sans le savoir*: French, "without knowing it"—an echo of Molière's M. Jourdain, who had been speaking prose all his life without knowing it.

pragmatically? It means not only that no preventing conditions are present, but that some of the conditions for producing the possible thing are actually here. Thus a concretely possible chicken means: (1) that the idea of a chicken contains no essential self-contradiction; (2) that no boys, skunks, or other enemies are around; and (3) that at least an actual egg exists. Possible chicken means actual egg—plus an actual sitting hen, or incubator, or what have you. As the actual conditions approach completeness, the chicken becomes a better-and-better-grounded possibility. When the conditions are entirely complete, it ceases to be a possibility and turns into an actual fact.

8.25 Let us apply this notion to the salvation of the world. What does it pragmatically mean to say that this is possible? It means that some of the conditions of the world's deliverance actually exist. The more of them there are in existence, and the fewer preventing conditions you can find, the better-grounded the possibility of salvation is, and the more *probable* the fact of deliverance becomes.

8.26 So much for our preliminary look at possibility.

8.27 Now it would contradict the very spirit of life to say that our minds must be indifferent and neutral on questions like the salvation of the world. Anyone who pretends to be neutral here shows himself to be a fool and a sham. We all do wish to minimize the insecurity of the universe; we are, and ought to be, unhappy when we regard it as exposed to every enemy and open to every life-destroying draft. Nevertheless, there are unhappy people who think the salvation of the world impossible. Theirs is the doctrine known as pessimism.

8.28 Optimism, in turn, would be the doctrine that thinks the world's salvation inevitable.

8.29 Midway between the two stands what may be called the doctrine of meliorism, though so far it has figured less as a doctrine than as an attitude in human affairs. Optimism has always been the reigning *doctrine* in European philosophy. Pessimism was introduced only recently, by Schopenhauer, and as yet has few systematic defenders. Meliorism treats salvation as neither

necessary nor impossible. It treats it as a possibility, which becomes more and more of a probability the more numerous the actual conditions of salvation become.[5]

8.30 It is clear that pragmatism must lean toward meliorism. Some conditions of the world's salvation actually exist, and she cannot possibly close her eyes to this fact; and should the remaining conditions come, salvation would become an accomplished reality. Naturally, the terms I am using here are extremely condensed. You may interpret the word "salvation" in any way you like, and make it as diffuse and distributed, or as climacteric and integral a phenomenon as you please.

8.31 Take, for example, any one of us in this room, with the ideals he cherishes and is willing to live and work for. Every such ideal, once realized, will be one moment in the world's salvation. But these particular ideals are not bare abstract possibilities. They are grounded; they are *live* possibilities, for we are their live champions and pledges, and if the complementary conditions come and add themselves, our ideals will become actual things. Now what are the complementary conditions? They are, first, such a mixture of things as will in the fullness of time give us a chance, a gap that we can spring into; and, finally, *our act*.

8.32 Does our act, then, *create* the world's salvation, so far as it makes room for itself, so far as it leaps into the gap? Does it create, not the whole world's salvation of course, but just as much of it as the act itself covers of the world's extent?

8.33 Here I take the bull by the horns and, in spite of the whole crew of rationalists and monists, whatever their brand, I ask *why not*? Our acts, our turning-places, where we seem to ourselves to make ourselves and grow, are the parts of the world we are closest to, the parts we know most intimately and completely. Why shouldn't we take them at face value? Why may they not be what they seem to be—the actual turning-places and growing-places of the world? Why not the workshop of being,

5 Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), German philosopher whose *The World as Will and Representation* (1819) gave pessimism its first systematic form.

where we catch fact in the making, so that nowhere may the world grow in any other way than this?

8.34 Irrational! we are told. How can new being come in local spots and patches, which add themselves or stay away at random, independently of the rest? There must be a reason for our acts, and where, in the last resort, can any reason be looked for except in the material pressure or the logical compulsion of the total nature of the world? There can be only one real agent of growth, or seeming growth, anywhere, and that agent is the integral world itself. It may grow all over, if there is growth at all, but that single parts should grow *per se* is irrational.

8.35 But if one talks of rationality, and of reasons for things, and insists that they can't just come in spots, what *kind* of reason can there ultimately be for anything to come at all? Talk as you will of logic and necessity and categories and the absolute and the whole contents of the philosophical machine shop; the only *real* reason I can think of why anything should ever come is that *someone wishes it to be here*. It is *demanded*—demanded, it may be, to bring relief to no matter how small a fraction of the world's mass. This is *living reason*, and compared with it material causes and logical necessities are ghostly things.

8.36 In short, the only fully rational world would be the world of wishing-caps, the world of telepathy, where every desire is fulfilled instantly, without having to consider or placate surrounding or intermediate powers. This is the Absolute's own world. He calls upon the phenomenal world to be, and it *is*, exactly as he calls for it, with no other condition required. In our world, the wishes of the individual are only one condition. Other individuals are there with other wishes, and they must be won over first. So Being grows under all sorts of resistance in this world of the many, and, from compromise to compromise, only gradually gets organized into what may be called a secondarily rational shape. We approach the wishing-cap type of organization only in a few departments of life. We want water and we turn a faucet. We want a Kodak picture and we press a button. We want information and we telephone. We want to travel and

we buy a ticket. In these and similar cases we hardly need to do more than the wishing—the world is rationally organized to do the rest.

THE CREATOR'S OFFER

Would you join a world whose salvation is not guaranteed and depends on each agent's best?

8.37 But this talk of rationality is a parenthesis and a digression. What we were discussing was the idea of a world growing not as a whole but piecemeal, through the contributions of its several parts. Take the hypothesis seriously, as a live one. Suppose that the world's author put the case to you before creation, saying: "I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world whose perfection shall be merely conditional, the condition being that each several agent does its own 'level best.' I offer you the chance of taking part in such a world. Its safety, you see, is not guaranteed. 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. Will you join the procession? Will you trust yourself and trust the other agents enough to face the risk?"

8.38 If participation in such a world were proposed to you, would you in all seriousness feel bound to reject it as not safe enough? Would you say that, rather than be part and parcel of so fundamentally pluralistic and irrational a universe, you preferred to sink back into the slumber of nonexistence from which the tempter's voice had momentarily roused you?

8.39 Of course, if you are normally constituted, you would do nothing of the sort. There is a healthy-minded buoyancy in most of us which such a universe would exactly fit. We would therefore accept the offer—"Done! Let's shake on it!" It would be just like the world we practically live in, and loyalty to our old nurse Nature would forbid us to say no. The world proposed would seem "rational" to us in the most living way.[6]

6 James quotes Faust's words sealing his wager with Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*, Part I: "Top! und Schlag auf Schlag!"

8.40 Most of us, I say, would therefore welcome the proposal and add our *fiat* to the *fiat* of the creator. Yet perhaps some would not; for there are morbid minds in every human group, and to them the prospect of a universe with only a fighting chance of safety would probably have no appeal. There are moments of discouragement in all of us, when we are sick of ourselves and tired of striving in vain. Our own life breaks down, and we fall into the attitude of the prodigal son. We mistrust the chances of things. We want a universe where we can just give up, fall on our father's neck, and be absorbed into the absolute life as a drop of water melts into the river or the sea.

8.41 The peace and rest, the security longed for at such moments, is security against the bewildering accidents of so much finite experience. Nirvana means safety from this everlasting round of adventures that the world of sense consists of. The Hindu and the Buddhist—for this is essentially their attitude—are simply afraid: afraid of more experience, afraid of life.

8.42 And to people of this temperament religious monism comes with its consoling words: "All is needed and essential—even you with your sick soul and heart. All are one with God, and with God all is well. The everlasting arms are beneath you, whether in the world of finite appearance you seem to fail or to succeed." There can be no doubt that when people are reduced to their last sick extremity, absolutism is the only saving scheme. Pluralistic moralism simply makes their teeth chatter; it refrigerates the very heart in their breast.

8.43 So we see, concretely, two types of religion in sharp contrast. Using our old terms of comparison, we may say that the absolutist scheme appeals to the tender-minded, while the pluralistic scheme appeals to the tough. Many people would refuse to call the pluralistic scheme religious at all. They would call it moralistic, and would apply the word religious to the monistic scheme alone. Religion in the sense of self-surrender, and moralism in the sense of self-sufficiency, have been pitted against each other as incompatibles often enough in the history of human thought.

8.44 We stand here before the final question of philosophy. I said in my fourth lecture that I believed the alternative between monism and pluralism to be the deepest and most far-reaching question our minds can frame. Can it be that the disjunction is a final one? That only one side can be true? Are pluralism and monism genuinely incompatible? So that, if the world were really pluralistically constituted, if it really existed distributively and were made up of a lot of eaches, it could only be saved piecemeal and *de facto*, as the result of their behavior, and its epic history could in no way be short-circuited by some essential oneness in which the severalness was already "taken up" beforehand and eternally "overcome"? If this were so, we would have to choose one philosophy or the other. We could not say "yes, yes" to both alternatives. There would have to be a "no" in our relations with the possible. We would have to confess an ultimate disappointment: we could not remain healthy-minded and sick-minded in one indivisible act.

8.45 Of course, as human beings we can be healthy minds one day and sick souls the next; and as amateur dabblers in philosophy we may perhaps be allowed to call ourselves monistic pluralists, or free-will determinists, or whatever else of a reconciling kind occurs to us. But as philosophers aiming at clarity and consistency, and feeling the pragmatist need to square truth with truth, we are forced to face the question of frankly adopting either the tender or the robust type of thought. In particular, *this* question has always come home to me: May not the claims of tender-mindedness go too far? May not the notion of a world already saved *in toto*, in any case, be too saccharine to stand? May not religious optimism be too idyllic? Must *all* be saved? Is there *no* price to be paid in the work of salvation? Is the last word sweet? Is everything "yes, yes" in the universe? Doesn't the fact of "no" stand at the very core of life? Doesn't the very "seriousness" we attribute to life mean that inescapable noes and losses form part of it, that there are genuine sacrifices somewhere, and that something permanently drastic and bitter always remains at the bottom of its cup?

8.46 I cannot speak officially as a pragmatist here; all I can say is that my own pragmatism offers no objection to my taking sides with this more moralistic view and giving up the claim of total reconciliation. The possibility of doing so is involved in the pragmatist willingness to treat pluralism as a serious hypothesis. In the end it is our faith and not our logic that decides such questions, and I deny the right of any pretended logic to veto my own faith. I find myself willing to take the universe to be really dangerous and adventurous, without therefore backing out and crying "no play." I am willing to think that the prodigal-son attitude, open to us as it is in many of life's ups and downs, is not the right and final attitude toward the whole of life. I am willing that there should be real losses and real losers, and no total preservation of all that is. I can believe in the ideal as an ultimate, not as an origin, and as an extract, not the whole. When the cup is poured off, the dregs are left behind forever, but the possibility of what is poured off is sweet enough to accept.

8.47 As a matter of fact, countless human imaginations live in this moralistic and epic kind of universe, and find its scattered and strung-along successes sufficient for their rational needs. There is a finely translated epigram in the Greek Anthology which admirably expresses this state of mind, this acceptance of loss as never made good, even though the lost element might be oneself:[7]

8.48 "A shipwrecked sailor, buried on this coast,
Bids you set sail.
Full many a gallant bark, when we were lost,
Weathered the gale."

8.49 Those Puritans who answered "yes" to the question "Are you willing to be damned for God's glory?" were in this objective and magnanimous state of mind. The way of escape from evil on this system is *not* by getting it "aufgehoben," or preserved in the whole as an element that is essential but "overcome." *It is by*

7 The Greek Anthology is a large ancient and Byzantine collection of Greek short poems; this epitaph is usually ascribed to Theodoridas (3rd century BC).

dropping it out altogether, throwing it overboard and getting beyond it, helping to make a universe that shall forget its very place and name.[8]

8.50 It is, then, perfectly possible to accept sincerely a drastic kind of universe from which the element of "seriousness" is not to be expelled. Whoever does so is, it seems to me, a genuine pragmatist. He is willing to live on a scheme of uncertified possibilities which he trusts; willing to pay with his own person, if need be, for the realization of the ideals he frames.

PRAGMATISM AND GOD

James argues that pragmatism allows belief in God as a helper in a pluralistic, melioristic universe.

8.51 Now what actually *are* the other forces he trusts to co-operate with him, in a universe of this type? They are at least his fellow human beings, at the stage of being our actual universe has reached. But are there not also superhuman forces, such as religious people of the pluralistic type we have been considering have always believed in? Their words may have sounded monistic when they said "there is no God but God"; but the original polytheism of mankind has only imperfectly and vaguely refined itself into monotheism, and monotheism itself, so far as it was religious and not a scheme of classroom instruction for the metaphysicians, has always viewed God as only one helper, *primus inter pares*, in the midst of all the shapers of the great world's fate.[9]

8.52 I fear that my previous lectures, confined as they have been to human and humanistic aspects, may have left many of you with the impression that pragmatism means methodically leaving the superhuman out. I have indeed shown little respect for the Absolute, and until this moment I have spoken of no superhuman hypothesis other than that one. But I trust you see

8 *Aufgehoben* is Hegel's term for what is at once cancelled and preserved in a higher unity.

9 *Primus inter pares*: Latin, "first among equals."

well enough that the Absolute has nothing but its superhumanness in common with the theistic God. On pragmatist principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true. Now, whatever its remaining difficulties may be, experience shows that it certainly does work, and that the problem is to build it out and define it so that it will combine satisfactorily with all the other working truths. I cannot launch into a whole theology at the end of this last lecture; but when I tell you that I have written a book on people's religious experience which on the whole has been regarded as making the case for the reality of God, you will perhaps exempt my own pragmatism from the charge of being an atheistic system. I firmly disbelieve, myself, that our human experience is the highest form of experience in existence in the universe.[10] I believe rather that we stand in much the same relation to the whole of the universe as our pet dogs and cats do to the whole of human life. They live in our living rooms and libraries. They take part in scenes whose significance they have no inkling of. They are merely tangent to curves of history whose beginnings and ends and forms lie wholly beyond their grasp. So we are tangent to the wider life of things. But just as many of the dog's and cat's ideals coincide with our ideals, and the dogs and cats have daily living proof of the fact, so we may well believe, on the proofs that religious experience affords, that higher powers exist and are at work to save the world along ideal lines similar to our own.

8.53 You see that pragmatism can be called religious, if you allow that religion can be pluralistic or merely melioristic in type. But whether you will finally settle for that type of religion or not is a question only you yourself can decide. Pragmatism has to postpone any dogmatic answer, for we do not yet know for certain which type of religion is going to work best in the long run. People's various overbeliefs, their several faith-ventures, are in fact what is needed to bring the evidence in. You

10 James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), his Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh.

will probably each make your own ventures. If you are radically tough, the hurly-burly of the sensible facts of nature will be enough for you, and you will need no religion at all. If you are radically tender, you will take up the more monistic form of religion: the pluralistic form, with its reliance on possibilities that are not necessities, will not seem to give you security enough.

8.54 But if you are neither tough nor tender in an extreme and radical sense, but mixed, as most of us are, it may seem to you that the type of pluralistic and moralistic religion I have offered is as good a religious synthesis as you are likely to find. Between the two extremes of crude naturalism on the one hand and transcendental absolutism on the other, you may find that what I take the liberty of calling the pragmatist or melioristic type of theism is exactly what you require.