

III.—PROFESSOR JAMES' "PRAGMATISM."

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MY object in this paper is to discuss some of the things which Professor James says about truth in the recent book, to which he has given the above name.* In Lecture VI he professes to give an account of a theory, which he calls "the pragmatist theory of truth"; and he professes to give a briefer preliminary account of the same theory in Lecture II. Moreover, in Lecture VII, he goes on to make some further remarks about truth. In all these Lectures he seems to me to make statements to which there are very obvious objections; and my main object is to point out, as clearly and simply as I can, what seem to me to be the principal objections to some of these statements.

We may, I think, distinguish three different things, which he seems particularly anxious to assert about truth.

(I) In the first place, he is plainly anxious to assert some connection between truth and "verification" or "utility." Our true ideas, he seems to say, are those that "work," in the sense that they are or can be "verified," or are "useful."

(II) In the second place, he seems to object to the view that truth is something "static" or "immutable." He is anxious to assert that truths are in some sense "mutable."

(III) In the third place, he asserts that "to an unascertainable extent our truths are man-made products" (p. 242).

To what he asserts under each of these three heads there are, I think, serious objections; and I now propose to point out what seem to me to be the principal ones, under each head separately.

(I) Professor James is plainly anxious to assert *some*

* *Pragmatism: A New Name for some Old Ways of Thinking: Popular Lectures on Philosophy.* By William James. Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907.

connection between truth and "verification" or "utility." And that there is *some* connection between them everybody will admit. That *many* of our true ideas are verified; that *many* of them can be verified; and that *many* of them are useful, is, I take it, quite indisputable. But Professor James seems plainly to wish to assert something more than this. And one more thing which he wishes to assert is, I think, pretty plain. He suggests, at the beginning of Lecture VI, that he is going to tell us in what sense it is that our true ideas "agree with reality." Truth, he says, certainly *means* their agreement with reality; the only question is as to what we are to understand by the words "agreement" and "reality" in this proposition. And he first briefly considers the theory that the sense in which our true ideas agree with reality, is that they "copy" some reality. And he affirms that some of our true ideas really do do this. But he rejects the theory, as a theory of what truth means, on the ground that they do not *all* do so. Plainly, therefore, he implies that no theory of what truth *means* will be correct, unless it tells us of some property which belongs to *all* our true ideas without exception. But his own theory is a theory of what truth means. Apparently, therefore, he wishes to assert that not only many but *all* our true ideas are or can be verified; that *all* of them are useful. And it is, I think, pretty plain that this is *one* of the things which he wishes to assert.

Apparently, therefore, Professor James wishes to assert that *all* our true ideas are or can be verified—that *all* are useful. And certainly this is not a truism like the proposition that *many* of them are so. Even if this were all that he meant, it would be worth discussing. But even this, I think, is not all. The very first proposition in which he expresses his theory is the following. "True ideas" he says (p. 201) "are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot." And what does this mean? Let us, for brevity's sake, substitute the word "verify" alone for the four words which Professor James uses, as he himself

subsequently seems to do. He asserts, then, that true ideas are *those which* we can verify. And plainly he does not mean by this merely that *some* of the ideas which we can verify are true, while plenty of others, which we can verify, are not true. The plain meaning of his words is that *all* the ideas which we can verify are true. No one would use them who did not mean this. Apparently, therefore, Professor James means to assert not merely that we can verify all our true ideas; but also that all the ideas, which we can verify, are true. And so, too, with utility or usefulness. He seems to mean not merely that all our true ideas are useful; but that all those which are useful are true. This would follow, for one thing, from the fact that he seems to use the words "verification" or "verifiability" and "usefulness" as if they came to the same thing. But, in this case too, he asserts it in words that have but one plain meaning. "The true" he says (p. 222) "is only the expedient in the way of our thinking." "The true" is *the* expedient: that is, *all* expedient thinking is true. Or again: "An idea is 'true' so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives" (p. 75). That is to say, *every* idea, which is profitable to our lives, is, while it is so, true. These words certainly have a plain enough meaning. Apparently, therefore, Professor James means to assert not merely that all true ideas are useful, but also that all useful ideas are true.

Professor James' words, then, do at least suggest that he wishes to assert all four of the following propositions. He wishes to assert, it would seem—

- (1) That we can verify all those of our ideas, which are true.
- (2) That all those among our ideas, which we can verify, are true.
- (3) That all our true ideas are useful.
- (4) That all those of our ideas, which are useful, are true.

These four propositions are what I propose first to consider. He does mean to assert them, at least. Very likely he wishes to

assert something more even than these. He does, in fact, suggest that he means to assert, in addition, that these properties of "verifiability" and "utility" are the *only* properties (beside that of being properly called "true") which belong to all our true ideas and to none but true ideas. But this obviously cannot be true, unless all these four propositions are true. And therefore we may as well consider them first.

First, then, can we verify all our true ideas ?

I wish only to point out the plainest and most obvious reasons why I think it is doubtful whether we can.

We are very often in doubt as to whether we did or did not do a certain thing in the past. We may have the idea that we did, and also the idea that we did not; and we may wish to find out which idea is the true one. Very often, indeed, I may believe, very strongly, that I did do a certain thing; and somebody else, who has equally good reason to know, may believe equally strongly that I did not. For instance, I may have written a letter, and may believe that I used certain words in it. But my correspondent may believe that I did not. Can we always verify either of these ideas? Certainly sometimes we can. The letter may be produced, and prove that I did use the words in question. And I shall then have verified my idea. Or it may prove that I did not use them. And then we shall have verified my correspondent's idea. But, suppose the letter has been destroyed; suppose there is no copy of it, nor any trustworthy record of what was said in it; suppose there is no other witness as to what I said in it, beside myself and my correspondent? Can we then always verify which of our ideas is the true one? I think it is very doubtful whether we can *nearly* always. Certainly we may often try to discover any possible means of verification, and be quite unable, for a time at least, to discover any. Such cases, in which we are unable, for a time at least, to verify either of two contradictory ideas, occur very commonly indeed. Let us take an even more trivial instance than the last. Bad whist-players often do not notice

at all carefully which cards they have among the lower cards in a suit. At the end of a hand they cannot be certain whether they had or had not the seven of diamonds, or the five of spades. And, after the cards have been shuffled, a dispute will sometimes arise as to whether a particular player had the seven of diamonds or not. His partner may think that he had, and he himself may think that he had not. Both may be uncertain, and the memory of both, on such a point, may be well known to be untrustworthy. And, moreover, neither of the other players may be able to remember any better. Is it always possible to verify which of these ideas is the true one? Either the player did or did not have the seven of diamonds. This much is certain. One person thinks that he did, and another thinks he did not; and both, so soon as the question is raised, have before their minds both of these ideas—the idea that he did, and the idea that he did not. This also is certain. And it is certain that one or other of these two ideas is true. But can they always verify either of them? Sometimes, no doubt, they can, even after the cards have been shuffled. There may have been a fifth person present, overlooking the play, whose memory is perfectly trustworthy, and whose word may be taken as settling the point. Or the players may themselves be able, by recalling other incidents of play, to arrive at such a certainty as may be said to verify the one hypothesis or the other. But very often neither of these two things will occur. And, in such a case, is it always possible to verify the true idea? Perhaps, theoretically, it may be still possible. Theoretically, I suppose, the fact that one player, and not any of the other three, had the card in his hand, may have made some difference to the card, which *might* be discovered by some possible method of scientific investigation. Perhaps some such difference may remain even after the same card has been repeatedly used in many subsequent games. But suppose the same question arises again, a week after the original game was played. Did you, or did you not, last week have the seven of diamonds in that particular

hand? The question has not been settled in the meantime; and now, perhaps, the original pack of cards has been destroyed. Is it still possible to verify either idea? Theoretically, I suppose, it may be still possible. But even this, I think, is very doubtful. And surely it is plain that, humanly and practically speaking, it will often have become quite impossible to verify either idea. In all probability it never will be possible for any man to verify whether I had the card or not on this particular occasion. No doubt we are here speaking of an idea, which some man *could have* verified at one time. But the hypothesis I am considering is the hypothesis that we never have a true idea, which we *can* not verify; that is to say, which we cannot verify *after* the idea has occurred. And with regard to this hypothesis, it seems to me quite plain that *very often indeed* we have two ideas, one or other of which is certainly true; and yet that, in all probability, it is no longer possible and never will be possible for any man to verify either.

It seems to me, then, that we very often have true ideas which we cannot verify; true ideas, which, in all probability, no man ever will be able to verify. And, so far, I have given only comparatively trivial instances. But it is plain that, in the same sense, historians are very frequently occupied with true ideas, which it is doubtful whether they can verify. One historian thinks that a certain event took place, and another that it did not; and both may admit that they cannot verify their idea. Subsequent historians may, no doubt, sometimes be able to verify one or the other. New evidence may be discovered or men may learn to make a better use of evidence already in existence. But is it certain that this will *always* happen? Is it certain that *every* question, about which historians have doubted, will some day be able to be settled by verification of one or the other hypothesis? Surely the probability is that in the case of an immense number of events, with regard to which we should like to know whether they happened or not, it never will be possible for any man to

verify either the one hypothesis or the other. Yet it may be certain that either the events in question did happen or did not. Here, therefore, again, we have a large number of ideas—cases where many men doubt whether a thing did happen or did not, and have therefore the idea both of its having happened and of its not having happened—with regard to which it is certain that half of them are true, but where it seems highly doubtful whether any single one of them will ever be able to be verified. No doubt it is just possible that men will some day be able to verify every one of them. But surely it is very doubtful whether they will. And the theory against which I am protesting is the positive assertion that we *can* verify all our true ideas—that some one some day certainly will be able to verify every one of them. This theory, I urge, has all probability against it.

And so far I have been dealing only with ideas with regard to what happened in the past. These seem to me to be the cases which offer the most numerous and most certain exceptions to the rule that we can verify our true ideas. With regard to particular past events, either in their own lives or in those of other people, men very frequently have ideas, which it seems highly improbable that any man will ever be able to verify. And yet it is certain that a great many of these ideas are true, because in a great many cases we have both the idea that the event did happen and also the idea that it did not, when it is certain that one or other of these ideas is true. And these ideas with regard to past events would by themselves be sufficient for my purpose. If, as seems certain, there are many true ideas with regard to the past, which it is highly improbable that anyone will ever be able to verify, then, obviously, there is nothing in a true idea which makes it certain that we can verify it. But it is, I think, certainly not only in the case of ideas, with regard to the past, that it is doubtful whether we can verify all the true ideas we have. In the case of many generalisations dealing not only with the past

but with the future, it is, I think, obviously doubtful whether we shall ever be able to verify all those which are true; although here, perhaps, in most cases, the probability that we shall not is not so great. But is it quite certain, that in all cases where scientific men have considered hypotheses, one or other of which must be true, either will ever be verified? It seems to be obviously doubtful. Take, for instance, the question whether our actual space is Euclidean or not. This is a case where the alternative has been considered; and where it is certain that, whatever be meant by "our actual space," it either is Euclidean or is not. It has been held, too, that the hypothesis that it is not Euclidean might, conceivably, be verified by observations. But it is doubtful whether it ever will be. And though it would be rash to say that no man ever will be able to verify either hypothesis; it is also rash to assert positively that we shall—that we certainly can verify the true hypothesis. There are, I believe, ever so many similar cases, where alternative hypotheses, one or other of which must be true, have occurred to men of science, and where yet it is very doubtful whether either ever will be verified. Or take, again, such ideas as the idea that there is a God, or the idea that we are immortal. Many men have had not only contradictory ideas, but contradictory beliefs, about these matters. And here we have cases where it is disputed whether these ideas have not actually been verified. But it seems to me doubtful whether they have been. And there is a view, which seems to me to deserve respect, that, in these matters, we never shall be able to verify the true hypothesis. Is it perfectly certain that this view is a false one? I do not say that it is true. I think it is quite possible that we shall some day be able to verify either the belief that we are immortal or the belief that we are not. But it seems to me doubtful whether we shall. And for this reason alone I should refuse to assent to the positive assertion that we certainly can verify all our true ideas.

When, therefore, Professor James tells us that "True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot," there seems to be a serious objection to part of what these words imply. They imply that no idea of ours is true, unless we can verify it. They imply, therefore, that whenever a man wonders whether or not he had the seven of diamonds in the third hand at whist last night, neither of these ideas is true, unless he can verify it. But it seems certain that in this, and an immense number of similar cases, one or other of the two ideas is true. Either he did have the card in his hand, or he did not. If anything is a fact, this is one. Either, therefore, Professor James' words imply the denial of this obvious fact, or else he implies that in *all* such cases we *can* verify one or other of the two ideas. But to this the objection is that, in any obvious sense of the words, it seems very doubtful whether we can. On the contrary, it seems extremely probable that in a *very large* number of such cases no man ever will be able to verify either of the two ideas. There is, therefore, a serious objection to what Professor James' words imply. Whether he himself really means to assert these things which his words imply, I do not know. Perhaps he would admit that, in this sense, we probably cannot verify nearly all our true ideas. All that I have wished to make plain is that there is, at least, an objection to what he says, whether to what he means or not. There is ample reason why we should refuse assent to the statement that none of our ideas are true, except those which we can verify.

But to another part of what he implies by the words quoted above, *there is*, I think, no serious objection. There is reason to object to the statement that we can verify all our true ideas; but to the statement that all ideas, which we can "assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify," are true, I see no serious objection. Here, I think, we might say simply that all ideas which we can verify are true. To this, which is the second

of the four propositions, which I distinguished above (p. 35) as what Professor James seems to wish to assert, there is, I think, no serious objection, if we understand the word "verify" in its proper and natural sense. We may, no doubt, sometimes say that we have verified an idea or an hypothesis, when we have only obtained evidence which proves it to be probable, and does not prove it to be certain. And, if we use the word in this loose sense for incomplete verification, it is obviously the case that we may verify an idea which is not true. But it seems scarcely necessary to point this out. And where we really can *completely* verify an idea or an hypothesis, there, undoubtedly, the idea which we can verify is always true. The very meaning of the word "verify" is to find evidence which does really prove an idea to be true; and where an idea can be really proved to be true, it is, of course, always true.

This is all I wish to say about Professor James' first two propositions, namely:—

- (1) That no ideas of ours are true, except those which we can verify.
- (2) That all those ideas, which we can verify, are true.

The first seems to me extremely doubtful—in fact, almost certainly untrue; the second, on the other hand, certainly true, in its most obvious meaning. And I shall say no more about them. The fact is, I doubt whether either of them expresses anything which Professor James is really anxious to assert. I have mentioned them, only because his words do, in fact, imply them and because he gives those words a very prominent place. But I have already had occasion to notice that he seems to speak as if to say that we can verify an idea came to the same thing as saying that it is useful to us. And it is the connection of truth with usefulness, not its connection with "verification," that he is, I think, really anxious to assert. He talks about "verification" only, I believe, because he thinks that what he says about it will support his main view that

truth is what "works," is "useful," is "expedient," "pays." It is this main view we have now to consider. We have to consider the two propositions:—

(3) That all our true ideas are useful.

(4) That all ideas, which are useful, are true.

First, then: is it the case that all our true ideas are useful? Is it the case that none of our ideas are true, except those which are useful?

I wish to introduce my discussion of this question by quoting a passage in which Professor James seems to me to say something which is indisputably true. Towards the end of Lecture VI, he attacks the view that truths "have an unconditional claim to be recognised." And in the course of his attack the following passage occurs:—

Must I," he says, "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?"

"It is quite evident," he goes on, "that our obligation to acknowledge truth, so far from being unconditional, is tremendously conditional. Truth with a big T, and in the singular, claims abstractly to be recognised, of course; but concrete truths in the plural need be recognised only when their recognition is expedient" (pp. 231—232).

What Professor James says in this passage seems to me so indisputably true as fully to justify the vigour of his language. It is as clear as anything can be that it would not be useful for any man's mind to be *always* occupied with the true idea that he had certain faults and blemishes; or to be *always* occupied with the idea that twice two are four. It is clear, that is, that, if there are times at which a particular true idea is useful, there

certainly are other times at which it would *not* be useful, but positively in the way. This is plainly true of nearly all, if not quite all, our true ideas. It is plainly true with regard to nearly all of them that, even if the occasions on which their occurrence is useful are many, the occasions on which their occurrence would *not* be useful are many more. With regard to most of them it is true that on most occasions they will, as Professor James says elsewhere, "be practically irrelevant, and had better remain latent."

It is, then, quite clear that almost any particular true idea *would* not be useful at all times and that the times at which it would *not* be useful, are many more than the times at which it would. And what we have to consider is whether, in just this sense in which it is so clear that most true ideas would *not* be useful at most times, it is nevertheless true that all our true ideas *are* useful. Is this so? Are all our true ideas useful?

Professor James, we see, has just told us that there are ever so many occasions upon which a particular true idea, such as $2 + 2 = 4$, *would* not be useful—when, on the contrary, it would be positively in the way. And this seems to be indisputably clear. But is not something else almost equally clear? Is it not almost equally clear that cases, such as he says *would* not be useful, do sometimes actually happen? Is it not clear that we do actually sometimes have true ideas, at times when they are not useful, but are positively in the way? It seems to me to be perfectly clear that this does sometimes occur; and not sometimes only, but very commonly. The cases in which true ideas occur at times when they are useful, are, perhaps, far *more* numerous; but, if we look at men in general, the cases in which true ideas occur, at times when they are not useful, do surely make up positively a very large number. Is it not the case that men do sometimes dwell on their faults and blemishes, when it is *not* useful for them to do so? when they would much better be thinking of something

else? Is it not the case that they are often unable to get their minds away from a true idea, when it is harmful for them to dwell on it? Still more commonly, does it not happen that they waste their time in acquiring pieces of information which are no use to them, though perhaps very useful to other people? All this seems to me to be undeniable—just as undeniable as what Professor James himself has said; and, if this is so, then, in one sense of the words, it is plainly not true that all, or nearly all, our true ideas are useful. *In one sense of the words.* For if I have the idea that $2 + 2 = 4$ on one day, and then have it again the next, I may certainly, in a sense, call the idea I have on one day *one* idea, and the idea I have on the next *another*. I have had two ideas that $2 + 2 = 4$, and not one only. Or if two different persons both think that I have faults, there have been two ideas of this truth and not one only. And in asking whether *all* our true ideas are useful, we might mean to ask whether *both* of these ideas were useful and not merely whether one of them was. In this sense, then, it is plainly not true that *all* our true ideas are useful. It is not true, that is, that every true idea is useful, *whenever it occurs*.

In one sense, then, it is plainly not true that all our true ideas are useful. But there still remains a perfectly legitimate sense in which it might be true. It might be meant, that is, not that every *occurrence* of a true idea is useful, but that every true idea is useful on at least one of the occasions when it occurs. But is this, in fact, the case? It seems to me almost as plain that it is not, as that the other was not. We have seen that true ideas are not by any means always useful on every occasion when they occur; though most that do occur many times over and to many different people are, no doubt, useful on some of these occasions. But there seems to be an immense number of true ideas, which occur but once and to one person, and never again either to him or to anyone else. I may, for instance, idly count the number of dots on the back of a card,

and arrive at a true idea of their number ; and yet, perhaps, I may never think of their number again, nor anybody else ever know it. We are all, it seems to me, constantly noticing trivial details, and getting true ideas about them, of which we never think again, and which nobody else ever gets. And is it quite certain that all these true ideas are useful ? It seems to me perfectly clear, on the contrary, that many of them are not. Just as clear as it is that many men sometimes waste their time in acquiring information, which is useful to others but not to them, surely it is clear that they sometimes waste their time in acquiring information which is useful to nobody at all, because nobody else ever acquires it. I do not say that it is never useful idly to count the number of dots on the back of a card. Plainly it is sometimes useful to be idle, and one idle employment may often be as good as another. But surely it is true that men *sometimes* do these things, when their time would have been better employed otherwise ? Surely they sometimes get into the habit of attending to trivial truths, which it is as great a disadvantage that they should attend to as that they should constantly be thinking of their own thoughts and blemishes ? I cannot see my way to deny that this is so ; and therefore I cannot see my way to assert positively that all our true ideas are useful, even so much as on *one* occasion. It seems to me that there are many true ideas which occur but once, and which are not useful when they do occur. And if this be so, then it is plainly not true that *all* our true ideas are useful in any sense at all.

These seem to me to be the most obvious objections to the assertion that all our true ideas are useful. It is clear, we saw to begin with, that true ideas, which are sometimes useful, *would* not be useful at all times. And it seemed almost equally clear that they do sometimes occur at times when they are not useful. Our true ideas, therefore, are not useful at every time when they actually occur. But in just this sense in which it is so clear that true ideas, which are sometimes useful,

nevertheless sometimes occur at times when they are not, it seems pretty plain that true ideas, which occur but once, are, some of them, not useful. If an idea, which is sometimes useful, does sometimes occur to a man at a time when it is irrelevant and in the way, why should not an idea, which occurs but once, occur at a time when it is irrelevant and in the way? It seems hardly possible to doubt that this does sometimes happen. But, if this be so, then it is not true that all our true ideas are useful, even so much as on one occasion. It is not true that none of our ideas are true, except those which are useful.

But now, what are we to say of the converse proposition—the proposition that all those among our ideas, which are useful, are true? That we never have a useful idea, which is not true?

I confess the matter seems to me equally clear here. The assertion should mean that every idea, which is at any time useful, is true; that no idea, which is not true, is ever useful. And it seems hardly possible to doubt that this assertion is false. It is, in the first place, commonly held that it is sometimes right positively to deceive another person. In war, for instance, it is held that one army is justified in trying to give the enemy a false idea as to where it will be at a given time. Such a false idea is sometimes given, and it seems to me quite clear that it is sometimes useful. In such a case, no doubt, it may be said that the false idea is useful to the party who have given it, but not useful to those who actually believe in it. And the question whether it is useful on the whole will depend upon the question which side it is desirable should win. But it seems to me unquestionable that the false idea is sometimes useful on the whole. Take, for instance, the case of a party of savages, who wish to make a night attack and massacre a party of Europeans, but are deceived as to the position in which the Europeans are encamped. It is surely plain that such a false idea is sometimes useful on the whole.

But quite apart from the question whether deception is ever justifiable, it is not very difficult to think of cases where a false idea, not produced by deception, is plainly useful—and useful, not merely on the whole, but to the person who has it as well. A man often thinks that his watch is right, when, in fact, it is slow, and his false idea may cause him to miss his train. And in such cases, no doubt, his false idea is *generally* disadvantageous. But, in a particular case, the train which he would have caught but for his false idea may be destroyed in a railway accident, or something may suddenly occur at home, which renders it much more useful that he should be there, than it would have been for him to catch his train. Do such cases never occur? And is not the false idea sometimes useful in some of them? It seems to me perfectly clear that it is *sometimes* useful for a man to think his watch is right when it is wrong. And such instances would be sufficient to show that it is not the case that every idea of ours, which is ever useful, is a true idea. But let us take cases, not, like these, of an idea, which occurs but a few times or to one man, but of ideas which have occurred to many men at many times. It seems to me very difficult to be sure that the belief in an eternal hell has not been often useful to many men, and yet it may be doubted whether this idea is true. And so, too, with the belief in a happy life after death, or the belief in the existence of a God; it is, I think, very difficult to be sure that these beliefs have not been, and are not still, often useful, and yet it may be doubted whether they are true. These beliefs, of course, are matters of controversy. Some men believe that they are both useful and true; and others, again, that they are neither. And I do not think we are justified in giving them as certain instances of beliefs, which are not true, but, nevertheless, have often been useful. But there is a view that these beliefs, though not true, have, nevertheless, been often useful; and this view seems to me to deserve respect, especially since, as we have

seen, some beliefs, which are not true, certainly are sometimes useful. Are we justified in asserting positively that it is false? Is it perfectly certain that beliefs, which have often been useful to many men, may not, nevertheless, be untrue? Is it perfectly certain that beliefs, which are not true, have not often been useful to many men? The certainty may at least be doubted, and in any case it seems certain that some beliefs, which are not true, are, nevertheless, sometimes useful.

For these reasons, it seems to me almost certain that *both* the assertions which I have been considering are false. It is almost certainly false that all our true ideas are useful, and almost certainly false that all our useful ideas are true. But I have only urged what seem to me to be the most obvious objections to these two statements; I have not tried to sustain these objections by elaborate arguments, and I have omitted elaborate argument, partly because of a reason which I now wish to state. The fact is, I am not at all sure that Professor James would not himself admit that both these statements are false. I think it is quite possible he would admit that they are, and would say that he never meant either to assert or to imply the contrary. He complains that some of the critics of Pragmatism are unwilling to read any but the silliest of possible meanings into the statements of Pragmatists; and, perhaps, he would say that this is the case here. I certainly hope that he would. I certainly hope he would say that these statements, to which I have objected, are silly. For it does seem to me intensely silly to say that we can verify all our true ideas; intensely silly to say that every one of our true ideas is at some time useful; intensely silly to say that every idea which is ever useful is true. I hope Professor James would admit all these things to be silly, for if he and other Pragmatists would admit even as much as this, I think a good deal would be gained. But it by no means follows that because a philosopher would admit

a view to be silly, when it is definitely put before him, he has not himself been constantly holding and implying that very view. He may quite sincerely protest that he never has either held or implied it, and yet he may all the time have been not only implying it but holding it—vaguely, perhaps, but really. A man may assure us, quite sincerely, that he is not angry; he may really think that he is not, and yet we may be able to judge quite certainly from what he says that he really is angry. He may assure us quite sincerely that he never meant anything to our discredit by what he said—that he was not thinking of anything in the least discreditable to us, and yet it may be plain from his words that he was actually condemning us very severely. And so with a philosopher. He may protest, quite angrily, when a view is put before him in other words than his own, that he never either meant or implied any such thing, and yet it may be possible to judge, from what he says, that this very view, wrapped up in other words, was not only held by him but was precisely what made his thoughts seem to him to be interesting and important. Certainly he may quite often imply a given thing which, at another time, he denies. Unless it were possible for a philosopher to do this, there would be very little inconsistency in philosophy, and surely everyone will admit that *other* philosophers are very often inconsistent. And so in this case, even if Professor James would say that he never meant to imply the things to which I have been objecting, yet in the case of two of these things, I cannot help thinking that he does actually imply them—nay more, that he is frequently actually vaguely thinking of them, and that his theory of truth owes its interest, in very great part, to the fact that he is implying them. In the case of the two views that all our true ideas are useful, and that all our useful ideas are true, I think this is so, and I do not mean merely that his *words* imply them. A man's *words* may often imply a thing, when he himself is in no way, however vaguely,

thinking either of that thing or of anything which implies it; he may simply have expressed himself unfortunately. But in the case of the two views that all our true ideas are useful, and all our useful ideas true, I do not think this is so with Professor James. I think that his thoughts seem interesting to him and others, largely because he is thinking, not merely of words, but of things which imply these two views, in the very form in which I have objected to them. And I wish now to give some reasons for thinking this.

Professor James certainly wishes to assert that there is *some* connection between truth and utility. And the connection which I have suggested that he has vaguely before his mind is this: that every true idea is, at some time or other, useful, and conversely that every idea, which is ever useful, is true. And I have urged that there are obvious objections to both these views. But now, supposing Professor James does not mean to assert either of these two things, what else can he mean to assert? What else can he mean, that would account for the interest and importance he seems to attach to his assertion of connection between truth and utility? Let us consider the alternatives.

And, first of all, he might mean that *most* of our true ideas are useful, and *most* of our useful ideas true. He might mean that most of our true ideas are useful at some time or other; and even that most of them are useful, whenever they actually occur. And he might mean, moreover, that if we consider the whole range of ideas, which are useful to us, we shall find that by far the greater number of them are true ones; that true ideas are far more often useful to us, than those which are not true. And all this, I think, may be readily admitted to be true. If this were all that he meant, I do not think that anyone would be very anxious to dispute it. But is it conceivable that this is *all* that he means? Is it conceivable that he should have been so anxious to insist upon this admitted commonplace? Is it conceivable that he should have been offering us this, and

nothing more, as a theory of what truth means, and a theory worth making a fuss about, and being proud of? It seems to me quite inconceivable that this should have been *all* that he meant. He must have had something more than this in his mind. But, if so, what more?

In the passage which I quoted at the beginning, as showing that he does mean to assert that *all* useful ideas are true, he immediately goes on to assert a qualification, which must now be noticed. "The true," he says, "is only the expedient in the way of our thinking" (p. 222). But, he immediately adds: "Expedient in the long run, and on the whole, of course; for what meets expediently all the experience in sight won't necessarily meet all further experiences equally satisfactorily." Here, therefore, we have something else that he might mean. What is expedient *in the long run*, he means to say, is true. And what exactly does this mean? It seems to mean that an idea, which is not true, may be expedient *for some time*. That is to say, it may occur *once*, and be expedient then; and again, and be expedient then; and so on, over a considerable period. But (Professor James seems to prophesy) if it is not true, there will come a time, when it will cease to be expedient. If it occurs again and again over a long *enough* period, there will at last, if it is not true, come a time when it will (for once at least) fail to be useful, and will (perhaps he means) *never* be useful again. This is, I think, what Professor James means in this passage. He means, I think, that though an idea, which is not true, may for some time be repeatedly expedient, there will at last come a time when its occurrence will, perhaps, *never* be expedient again, certainly will, for a time, not be *generally* expedient. And this is a view which, it seems to me, may possibly be true. It is certainly possible that a time may come, in the far future, when ideas, which are not true, will hardly ever, if ever, be expedient. And this is all that Professor James seems here positively to mean. He seems to mean that, if you take time *enough*, false ideas will some day

cease to be expedient. And it is very difficult to be sure that this is not true ; since it is very difficult to prophesy as to what may happen in the far future. I am sure I hope that this prophesy will come true. But in the meantime (Professor James seems to admit) ideas, which are not true, may, for an indefinitely long time, again and again be expedient. And is it conceivable that a theory, which admits this, is *all* that he has meant to assert ? Is it conceivable that what interests him, in his theory of truth, is merely the belief that, some day or other, false ideas will cease to be expedient ? "In the long run, *of course*," he says, as if this were what he had meant all along. But I think it is quite plain that this is *not* all that he has meant. This may be one thing which he is anxious to assert, but it certainly does not explain the whole of his interest in his theory of truth.

And, in fact, there is quite a different theory which he seems plainly to have in his mind in other places. When Professor James says, "in the long run, *of course*," he implies that ideas which are expedient only for a *short* run, are very often not true. But in what he says elsewhere he asserts the very opposite of this. He says elsewhere that a belief is true "*so long as* to believe it is profitable to our lives" (p. 75). That is to say, a belief will be true, *so long as* it is useful, even if it is *not* useful in the long run ! This is certainly quite a different theory ; and, strictly speaking, it implies that an idea, which is useful even *on one occasion*, will be true. But perhaps this is only a verbal implication. I think very likely that here Professor James was only thinking of ideas, which can be said *to have a run*, though only a comparatively short one—of ideas, that is, which are expedient, not merely on one occasion, but *for some time*. That is to say, the theory which he now suggests, is that ideas, which occur again and again, perhaps to one man only, perhaps to several different people, over some space of time are, if they are expedient on most occasions within that space of time, true. This is a view which he is,

I think, really anxious to assert; and, if it were true, it would, I think, be important. And it is difficult to find instances which show, with certainty, that it is false. I believe that it is false; but it is difficult to prove it, because, in the case of some ideas it is so difficult to be certain that they ever were useful, and in the case of others so difficult to be certain that they are not true. A belief such as I spoke of before—the belief in eternal hell—is an instance. I think this belief has been, for a long time, useful, and that yet it is false. But it is, perhaps, arguable that it never has been useful; and many people, on the other hand, would still assert that it is true. It cannot, therefore, perhaps, fairly be used as an instance of a belief, which is certainly not true, and yet has for some time been useful. But whether this view that all beliefs, which are expedient for some time, are true, be true or false; can it be all that Professor James means to assert? Can it constitute the whole of what interests him in his theory of truth?

I do not think it can. I think it is plain that he has in his mind something more than *any* of these alternatives, or than all of them taken together. And I think so partly for the following reason. He speaks from the outset as if he intended to tell us what *distinguishes* true ideas from those which are not true; to tell us, that is to say, not merely of some property which belongs to all our true ideas; nor yet merely of some property which belongs to none but true ideas; but of some property which satisfies *both* these requirements at once—which both belongs to all our true ideas, and *also* belongs to none but true ones. Truth, he says to begin with, means the agreement of our ideas with reality; and he adds “as falsity their disagreement.” And he explains that he is going to tell us what property it is that is meant by these words “agreement with reality.” So again in the next passage which I quoted: “True ideas,” he says “are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify.” But, he also adds, “False ideas are those that we cannot.” And no one, I think, could

possibly speak in this way, who had not in his head the intention of telling us what property it is which *distinguishes* true ideas from those which are not true, and which, therefore, not only belongs to all ideas which are true, but also to none that are not true. And that he has this idea in his head, and thinks that the property of being "useful" or "paying" is such a property, is again clearly shown by a later passage. "Our account of truth" he says (p. 218) "is an account of truths in the plural, of processes of leading, realised *in rebus*, and having only this quality in common, that they *pay*." *Only* this quality in common! If this be so, the quality must obviously be one, which is *not* shared by any ideas which are *not* true; for, if true ideas have any quality in common at all, they must have at least one such quality, which is *not* shared by those which are *not* true. Plainly, therefore, Professor James is intending to tell us of a property which belongs both to *all* true ideas and *only* to true ideas. And this property, he says, is that of "paying." But now let us suppose that he means by "paying," not "paying *once* at least," but, according to the alternations he suggests, "paying in the long run" or "paying for some time." Can he possibly have supposed that these were properties which belonged *both* to all true ideas *and also* to none but true ones? They may, perhaps, be properties which belong to *none but* true ones. I doubt, as I have said, whether the latter does; but still it is difficult to prove the opposite. But even if we granted that they belong to *none but* true ones, surely it is only too obvious that they do *not* fulfil the other requirement—that they do *not* belong to nearly all true ones. Can anyone suppose that *all* our true ideas pay "in the long run" or repeatedly for some time? Surely it is plain that an enormous number do not, for the simple reason that an enormous number of them *have no run at all*, either long or short, but occur but once, and never recur. I believe truly that a certain book is on a particular shelf about 10.15 p.m. on December 21st, 1907; and this true belief serves me well and

helps me to find it. But the belief that that book is there at that particular time occurs to no one else, and never again to me. Surely there are thousands of useful true beliefs which, like this, are useful but once, and never occur again; and it would, therefore, be preposterous to say that every true idea is useful "in the long run" or repeatedly for some time. If, therefore, we supposed Professor James to mean that "paying in the long run" or "paying repeatedly over a considerable period" were properties which belonged to all true ideas and to none but true ones, we should be supposing him to mean something still more monstrous than if we supposed him to mean that "paying at least once" was such a property.

To sum up then :

I think there is no doubt that Professor James' interest in "the pragmatist theory of truth" is largely due to the fact that he thinks it tells us what distinguishes true ideas from those which are not true. And he thinks the distinction is that true ideas "pay," and false ones don't. The most natural interpretation of this view is: That every true idea pays at least once; and that every idea, which pays at least once, is true. These were the propositions I considered first, and I gave reasons for thinking that *both* are false. But Professor James suggested elsewhere that what he means by "paying" is "paying in the long run." And here it seems possibly true that all ideas which "pay in the long run" are true; but it is certainly false that all our true ideas "pay in the long run," if by this be meant anything more than "pay at least once." Again, he suggested that what he meant by paying was "paying for some time." And here, again, even if it is true (and it seems very doubtful) that all ideas which pay for some time are true, it is certainly false that all our true ideas pay for some time, if by this be meant anything more than that they pay "at least once."

This, I think, is the simplest and most obvious objection to Professor James' "instrumental" view of truth—the view

that truth is what "works," "pays," is "useful." He seems certainly to have in his mind the idea that this theory tells us what distinguishes true ideas from false ones, and to be interested in it mainly for this reason. He has vaguely in his mind that he has told us of some property which belongs to all true ideas and to none but true ones; and that this property is that of "paying." And the objection is, that, whatever we understand by "paying," whether "paying at least once," or "paying in the long run," or "paying for some time," it seems certain that none of these properties will satisfy *both* requirements. As regards the first, that of "paying at least once," it seems almost certain that it satisfies *neither*: it is neither true that all our true ideas "pay at least once," nor yet that every idea which pays at least once, is true. On the contrary, many true ideas never pay at all; and many ideas, which are not true, do pay on at least one occasion. And as regards the others, "paying in the long run" and "paying for some time," even if these do belong to none but true ideas (and even this seems very doubtful), they certainly neither of them satisfy the *other* requirement—neither of them belong to *all* our true ideas. For, in order that either of them may belong to an idea, that idea must pay at least once; and, as we have seen, many true ideas do not pay even once, and cannot, therefore, pay either in the long run or for some time. And, moreover, many true ideas, which do pay on one occasion, seem to pay on one occasion and one only.

And, if Professor James does not mean to assert any of these things, what is there left for him to mean? There is left in the first place, the theory that *most* of our true ideas do pay; and that *most* of the ideas which pay are true. This seems to me to be true, and, indeed, to be all that is certainly true in what he says. But is it conceivable that this is all he has meant? Obviously, these assertions tell us of no property at all which belongs to all true ideas, and to none but true ones; and, moreover, it seems impossible that he should have

been so anxious to assert this generally admitted commonplace. What a very different complexion his whole discussion would have worn, had he merely asserted this—this quite clearly, and nothing but this, while admitting openly that many true ideas do not pay, and that many, which do pay, are not true!

And, besides this commonplace, there is only left for him to mean two one-sided and doubtful assertions to the effect that certain properties belong to none but true ideas. There is the assertion that all ideas which pay in the long run are true, and the assertion that all ideas which pay for some considerable time are true. And as to the first, it *may* be true; but it may also be doubted, and Professor James gives us no reason at all for thinking that it is true. Assuming that religious ideas have been useful in the past, is it quite certain that they may not permanently continue to be useful, even though they are false? That, in short, even though they are not true, they nevertheless will be useful, not only for a time, but in the long run? And as for the assertion that all ideas, which pay for a considerable time, are true, this is obviously more doubtful still. Whether certain religious ideas will or will not be useful in the long run, it seems difficult to doubt that many of them have been useful for a considerable time. And why should we be told dogmatically that all of these are true? This, it seems to me, is by far the most interesting assertion, which is left for Professor James to make, when we have rejected the theory that the property of being useful belongs to *all* true ideas, as well as to none but true ones. But he has given no reason for asserting it. He seems, in fact, to base it merely upon the general untenable theory, that utility belongs to *all* true ideas, and to none but true ones; that this is what truth means.

These, then, seem to me the plainest and most obvious objections to what Professor James says about the connection between truth and utility. And there are only two further points, in what he says under this head, that I wish to notice.

In the first place, we have hitherto been considering only whether it is true, as a matter of empirical fact, that all our true ideas are useful, and those which are not true, never. Professor James seems, at least, to mean that, *as a matter of fact*, this is so; and I have only urged hitherto that *as a matter of fact*, it is not so. But, as we have seen, he also asserts something more than this—he also asserts that this property of utility is the *only* one which belongs to all our true ideas. And this further assertion cannot possibly be true, if, as I have urged, there are many true ideas, which do not possess this property; or if, as I have urged, many ideas, which do possess it, are nevertheless not true. The objections already considered are, then, sufficient to overthrow this further assertion also. If there are any true ideas, which are not useful, or if any, which are useful, are not true, it cannot be the case that utility is the *only* property which true ideas have in common. There must be some property, other than utility, which is common to all true ideas; and a correct theory as to what property it is that does belong to all true ideas, and to none but true ones, is still to seek. The empirical objections, hitherto given, are then sufficient objections to this further assertion also; but they are not the only objections to it. There is another and still more serious objection to the assertion that utility is the *only* property which all true ideas have in common. For this assertion does not *merely* imply that, as a matter of fact, all our true ideas and none but true ideas are useful. It does, indeed, imply this; and therefore the fact that these empirical assertions are not true is sufficient to refute it. But it also implies something more. If utility were the *only* property which all true ideas had in common, it would follow not merely that all true ideas are useful, but also that any idea, which was useful, *would* be true, *no matter what other properties it might have or might fail to have*. There can, I think, be no doubt that Professor James does frequently speak as if this were the case; and there is an independent and still

more serious objection to this implication. Even if it were true (as it is not) that all our true ideas and none but true ideas are, as a matter of fact, useful, we should still have a strong reason to object to the statement that any idea, which was useful, *would* be true. For it implies that if such an idea, as mine that Professor James exists, and has certain thoughts, *were* useful, this idea would be true, *even if* no such person as Professor James ever did exist. It implies that, if the idea that I had the seven of diamonds in my hand at cards last night, *were* useful, this idea would be true, even if, in fact, I did not have that card in my hand. And we can, I think, see quite plainly that this is not the case. With regard to some kinds of ideas, at all events—ideas with regard to the existence of other people, or with regard to past experiences of our own—it seems quite plain that they would not be true, unless they “agreed with reality” in some other sense than that which Professor James declares to be the only one in which true ideas must agree with it. Even if my idea that Professor James exists were to “agree with reality,” in the sense that, owing to it, I handled *other* realities better than I should have done without it, it would, I think, plainly not be true, unless Professor James really did exist—unless *he* were a reality. And this, I think, is one of the two most serious objections to what he seems to hold about the connection of truth with utility. He seems to hold that any idea, which was useful, *would* be true, *no matter what other properties it might fail to have*. And with regard to some ideas, at all events, it seems plain that they cannot be true, *unless* they have the property that what they believe to exist, really does or did exist. Beliefs in the existence of other people might be useful to me, even if I alone existed; but, nevertheless, in such a case, they would not be true.

And there is only one other point, in what Professor James says in connection with the “instrumental” view of truth, upon which I wish to remark. We have seen that he seems

sometimes to hold that beliefs are true, *so long as* they are "profitable to our lives." And this implies, as we have seen, the doubtful proposition that any belief, which is useful for some length of time, is true. But this is not all that it implies. It also implies that beliefs are true *only* so long as they are profitable. Nor does Professor James appear to mean by this that they *occur*, only so long as they are profitable. He seems to hold, on the contrary, that beliefs, which are profitable for some time, do sometimes finally occur at a time when they are not profitable. He implies, therefore, that a belief, which occurs at several different times, may be true at some of the times at which it occurs, and yet untrue at others. I think there is no doubt that this view is what he is sometimes thinking of. And this, we see, constitutes a quite new view as to the connection between truth and utility—a view quite different from any that we have hitherto considered. This view asserts not that every true idea is useful at some time, or in the long run, or for a considerable period; but that the truth of an idea may come and go, as its utility comes and goes. It admits that one and the same idea sometimes occurs at times when it is useful, and sometimes at times when it is not; but it maintains that this same idea is true, at those times when it is useful, and not true, at those when it is not. And the fact that Professor James seems to suggest this view constitutes, I think, a second most serious objection to what he says about the connection of truth and utility. It seems so obvious that utility is a property which comes and goes—which belongs to a given idea at one time, and does not belong to it at another, that anyone who says that the true is the useful naturally seems not to be overlooking this obvious fact, but to be suggesting that truth is a property which comes and goes in the same way. It is, in this way, I think, that the "instrumental" view of truth is connected with the view that truth is "mutable." Professor James does, I think, imply that truth

is mutable in just this sense—namely, that one and the same idea may be true at some of the times at which it occurs, and not true at others, and this is the view which I have next to consider.

(II) Professor James seems to hold, generally, that "truth" is mutable. And by this he seems sometimes to mean that an idea which, when it occurs at one time, is true, *may*, when it occurs at another time, not be true. He seems to hold that one and the same idea *may* be true at one time and false at another. That it *may* be, for I do not suppose he means that all ideas do actually undergo this change from true to false. Many true ideas seem to occur but once, and, if so, they, at least, will not actually be true at one time and false at another, though, even with regard to these, perhaps Professor James means to maintain that they *might* be false at another time, if they were to occur at it. But I am not sure that he even means to maintain this with regard to *all* our true ideas. Perhaps he does not mean to say, with regard to *all* of them, even that they *can* change from true to false. He speaks, generally, indeed, as if truth were mutable; but, in one passage, he seems to insist that there is a certain class of true ideas, none of which are mutable in this respect. "*Relations among purely mental ideas*," he says (p. 209), "form another sphere where true and false beliefs obtain, 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 grey than it does from black; that when the cause begins to act the effect also commences. Such propositions hold of all possible 'ones,' of all conceivable 'whites,' 'greys,' 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 'grey' or an 'effect,' then your principles will everlastingly apply to it." Professor James does seem here to hold that there are true ideas, which once true, are always true. Perhaps, then, he does not hold that *all* true ideas are mutable. Perhaps he does not even hold that all true ideas, *except* ideas of this kind, are so. But he does seem to hold at least that *many* of our true ideas are mutable. And even this proposition seems to me to be disputable. It seems to me that there is a sense in which it is the case with *every* true idea that, if once true, it is always true. That is to say, that every idea, which is true once, *would* be true at any other time at which it were to occur; and that every idea which does occur more than once, if true once, *is* true at every time at which it does occur. There seems to me, I say, to be *a sense* in which this is so. And this seems to me to be the sense in which it is most commonly and most naturally maintained that all truths are "immutable." Professor James seems to me to mean to deny it, even in this sense. He seems to me constantly to speak as if there were *no* sense in which *all* truths are immutable. And I only wish to point out what seems to me to be the plainest and most obvious objection to such language.

And, first of all, there is one doctrine, which he seems to connect with this of his that "truths are mutable," with regard to which I fully agree with him. He seems very anxious to insist that reality is mutable: that it does change, and that it is not irrational to hope that in the future it will be different from and much better than it is now. And this seems to me to be quite undeniable. It seems to me quite certain that I do have ideas at one time which I did not have at another; that change, therefore, does really occur. It seems to me quite certain that in the future many things will be different from what they are now: and I see no reason to think that they may not be much better. There is much misery in the world now; and I think

it is quite possible that some day there will really be much less. This view that *reality* is mutable, that *facts* do change, that some things have properties at one time which they do not have at other times, seems to me certainly true. And so far, therefore, as Professor James merely means to assert this obvious fact, I have no objection to his view. Some philosophers, I think, have really implied the denial of this fact. All those who deny the reality of time do seem to me to imply that nothing really changes or can change—that, in fact, reality is wholly immutable. And so far as Professor James is merely protesting against this view, I should, therefore, agree with him.

But I think it is quite plain that he does not mean *merely* this, when he says that truth is mutable. No one would choose this way of expressing himself if he merely meant to say that *some* things are mutable. Truth, Professor James has told us, is a property of certain of our ideas. And those of our ideas, which are true or false, are certainly only a part of the Universe. Other things in the Universe might, therefore, change, even if our ideas never changed in respect of this property. And our ideas themselves do undoubtedly change in some respects. A given idea exists in my mind at one moment and does not exist in it at another. At one moment it is in my mind and not in somebody else's, and at another in somebody else's and not in mine. I sometimes think of the truth that twice two are four when I am in one mood, and sometimes when I am in another. I sometimes think of it in connection with one set of ideas and sometimes in connection with another set. Ideas, then, are constantly changing in some respects. They come and go; and at one time they stand in a given relation to other things or ideas, to which at another time they do not stand in that relation. In this sense, any given idea may certainly have a property at one time which it has not got at another time. All this seems obvious; and all this cannot be admitted, without admitting that reality is mutable—that *some*

things change. But obviously it does not seem to follow from this that there is *no* respect in which ideas are immutable. It does not seem to follow that because ideas, and other things, change some of their properties, they necessarily change that one which we are considering—namely, "truth." It does not follow that a given idea, which has the property of truth at one time, ever exists at any other time without having that property. And yet that this *does* happen seems to be part of what is meant by saying that truth is mutable. Plainly, therefore, to say this is to say something quite different from saying that *some* things are mutable. Even, therefore, if we admit that *some* things are mutable, it is still open to consider whether truth is so. And this is what I want now to consider. Is it the case that an idea which exists at one time, and is true then, ever exists at any other time, without being true? Is it the case that any idea ever changes from true to false? That it has the property of being true on one of the occasions when it exists, and that it has *not* this property, but that of being false instead, on some other occasion when it exists?

In order to answer this question clearly, it is, I think, necessary to make still another distinction. It does certainly seem to be true, *in a sense*, that a given idea may be true on one occasion and false on another. We constantly speak as if there were cases in which a given thing was true on one occasion and false on another; and I think it cannot be denied that, when we so speak, we are often expressing in a perfectly proper and legitimate manner something which is undeniably true. It is true now, I might say, that I am in this room; but to-morrow this will not be true. It is true now that men are often very miserable; but perhaps in some future state of society this will not be true. These are perfectly natural forms of expression, and what they express is something which certainly may be true. And yet what they do apparently assert is that something or other, which is true at one time, will not, or *perhaps* will not, be true at another. We con-

stantly use such expressions, which imply that what is true at one time is not true at another; and it is certainly legitimate to use them. And hence, I think, we must admit that, *in a sense*, it is true that a thing may be true at one time which is not true at another; in that sense, namely, in which we use these expressions. And it is, I think, also plain that these things, which may be true at one time and false at another, may, *in a sense*, be ideas? We might even say: The idea that I am in this room, is true now; but to-morrow it will not be true. We might say this without any strain on language. In any ordinary book—indeed, in any philosophical book, where the subject we are at present discussing was not being expressly discussed—such expressions do, I think, constantly occur. And we should pass them, without any objection. We should at once understand what they meant, and treat them as perfectly natural expressions of things undeniably true. We must, then, I think, admit that, *in a sense*, an idea may be true at one time, and false at another. The question is: In what sense? What is the truth for which these perfectly legitimate expressions stand?

It seems to me that in all these cases, so far as we are not merely talking of *facts*, but of true *ideas*, that the “idea” which we truly say to be true at one time and false at another, is merely the idea of a *sentence*—that is, of certain *words*. And we do undoubtedly call *words* “true.” The words “I am at a meeting of the Aristotelian Society” are true, if I use them now; but, if I used the same words to-morrow, they would not be true. The words “George III. is king of England” were true in 1800, but they are not true now. That is to say, a given set of words may undoubtedly be true at one time, and false at another; and since we may have ideas of words as well as of other things, we may, in this sense, say the same of certain of our “ideas”: we may say that some of our “ideas” (namely those of words) are true at one time and not true at another.

But is it conceivable that Professor James *merely* meant to assert that the same *words* are sometimes true at one time and false at another? Can this be *all* he means by saying that truth is mutable? I do not think it can possibly be so. No one, I think, in definitely discussing the mutability of truth, could say that true ideas were mutable, and yet mean (although he did not say so) that this proposition applied *solely* to ideas of words. Professor James must, I think, have been sometimes thinking that *other* ideas, and not merely ideas of words, do sometimes change from true to false. And this is the proposition which I am concerned to dispute. It seems to me that if we mean by an idea, not merely the idea of certain words, but the kind of idea which words express, it is very doubtful whether such an idea ever changes from true to false—whether any such idea is ever true at one time and false at another.

And plainly, in the first place, the mere fact that the same set of words, as in the instances I have given, really are true at one time and false at another, does not afford any presumption that anything which they stand for is true at one time and false at another. For the same words may obviously be used in different senses at different times; and hence though the same words, which formerly expressed a truth, may cease to express one, that may be because they now express a *different* idea, and not because the idea which they formerly expressed has ceased to be true. And that, in instances such as I have given, the words used *do* change their meaning according to the time at which they are uttered or thought of, is, I think, evident. If I use now the words "I am in this room," these words certainly express (among other things) the idea that my being in this room is contemporary with my present use of the words; and if I were to use the same words to-morrow, they would express the idea that my being in this room was contemporary with the use of them *then*. And since my use of them then would not be the same fact as my use of

them now, they would certainly then express a different idea from that which they express now. And in general, whenever we use the present tense in its primary sense, it seems to me plain that we do mean something different by it, each time we use it. We always mean (among other things) to express the idea that a given event is contemporary with our actual use of it; and since our actual use of it on one occasion is always a different fact from our actual use of it on another, we express by it a different idea each time we use it. And similarly with the past and future tenses. If anybody had said in 1807 "Napoleon is dead," he would certainly have meant by these words something different from what I mean by them when I use them now. He would have meant that Napoleon's death occurred at a time previous to *his* use of those words; and this would not have been true. But in this fact there is nothing to show that if he *had* meant by them what I mean now, his idea would not have been as true then as mine is now. And so, if I say "It will rain to-morrow," these words have a different meaning to-day from what they would have if I used them to-morrow. What we mean by "to-morrow" is obviously a different day, when we use the word on one day, from what we mean by it when we use it on another. But in this there is nothing to show that if the idea, which I *now* mean by "It will rain to-morrow," *were* to occur again to-morrow, it would not be true then, if it is true now. All this is surely very obvious. But, if we take account of it, and if we concentrate our attention not on the words but on what is meant by them, is it so certain that what we mean by them on any one occasion ever changes from true to false? If there were to occur to me to-morrow the very same idea which I now express by the words "I am in this room," is it certain that this idea would not be as true then as it is now? It is perhaps true that the *whole* of what I mean by such a phrase as this never does recur. But part of it does, and that a part which is true. Part of what I mean is certainly identical

with part of what I should mean to-morrow by saying "I *was* in that room last night." And this part would be as true then, as it is now. And is there *any* part, which, if it were to recur at any time, would *not* then be true, though it is true now? In the case of all ideas or parts of ideas, which ever do actually recur, can we find a single instance of one, which is plainly true at one of the times when it occurs, and yet not true at another? I cannot think of any such instance. And on the other hand this very proposition that any idea (other than mere words) which is true once, would be true at any time, seems to me to be one of those truths of which Professor James has spoken as having an "eternal," "absolute," "unconditional" character—as being "perceptually obvious at a glance" and needing "no sense-verification." Just as we know that, if a particular colour differs more from black than from grey at one time, the same colour would differ more from black than from grey at any time, so, it seems to me, we can see that, if a particular idea is true at one time, the same idea would be true at any time.

It seems to me, then, that if we mean by an idea, not mere words, but the kind of idea which words express, any idea, which is true at one time when it occurs, *would* be true at any time when it were to occur; and that this is so, even though it is an idea, which refers to facts which are mutable. My being in this room is a fact which is now, but which certainly has not been at every time and will not be at every time. And the words "I *am* in this room," though they express a truth now, would not have expressed one if I had used them yesterday, and will not, if I use them to-morrow. But if we consider the idea which these words *now* express—namely, the idea of the connection of my being in this room with this particular time—it seems to me evident that anybody who had thought of that connection at any time in the past, would have been thinking truly, and that anybody who were to think of it at any time in the future would be thinking truly. This seems

to me to be the sense in which truths are immutable—in which *no* idea can change from true to false. And I think Professor James means to deny of truths generally, if not of all truths, that they are immutable even in this sense. If he does not mean this there seems nothing left for him to mean, when he says that truths are mutable, except (1) that some *facts* are mutable, and (2) that the same *words* may be true at one time and false at another. And it seems to me impossible that he could speak as he does, if he meant *nothing more* than these two things. I believe, therefore, that he is really thinking that ideas which have been once true (*ideas*, and not merely words) do sometimes afterwards become false: that the very same idea is at one time true and at another false. But he certainly gives no instance which shows that this does ever occur. And how far does he mean his principle to carry him? Does he hold that the idea that Julius Cæsar was murdered in the Senate-House, though true now, may, at some future time cease to be true, if it should be more profitable to the lives of future generations to believe that he died in his bed? Things like this are what his words seem to imply; and, even if he does hold that truths like this are *not* mutable, he never tries to tell us to what kinds of truths he would limit mutability, nor how they differ from such as this.

(III) Finally, there remains the view that “to an unascertainable extent our truths are man-made products.” And the only point I want to make about this view may be put very briefly.

It is noticeable that all the instances which Professor James gives of the ways in which, according to him, “our truths” are “made” are instances of ways in which our *beliefs* come into existence. In many of these ways, it would seem, false beliefs sometimes come into existence as well as true ones; and I take it Professor James does not always wish to deny this. False beliefs, I think he would say, are just as much “man-made products” as true ones: it is sufficient for his purpose if true beliefs do come into existence in the ways he mentions. And

the only point which seems to be illustrated by all these instances, is that in all of them the existence of a true belief does depend in some way or other upon the previous existence of something in some man's mind. They are all of them cases in which we may truly say: This man would not have had just that belief, had not some man previously had such and such experiences, or interests, or purposes. In some cases they are instances of ways in which the existence of a particular belief in a man depends upon *his own* previous experiences or interests or volitions. But this does not seem to be the case in all. Professor James seems also anxious to illustrate the point that one man's beliefs often depend upon the previous experiences or interests or volitions of *other* men. And, as I say, the only point which seems to be definitely illustrated in all cases is that the existence of a true belief does depend, *in some way or other*, upon something which has previously existed in some man's mind. Almost any kind of dependence, it would seem, is sufficient to illustrate Professor James' point.

And as regards this general thesis that almost all our beliefs, true as well as false, depend, in some way or other, upon what has previously been in some human mind, it will, I think, be readily admitted. It is a commonplace, which, so far as I know, hardly anyone would deny. If this is all that is to be meant by saying that our true beliefs are "man-made," it must, I think, be admitted that almost all, if not quite all, really are man-made. And this is all that Professor James' instances seem to me, in fact, to show.

But is this all that Professor James means, when he says that *our truths* are man-made? Is it conceivable that he only means to insist upon this undeniable, and generally admitted, commonplace? It seems to me quite plain that this is not all that he means. I think he certainly means to suggest that, from the fact that we "make" our true beliefs, something *else* follows. And I think it is not hard to see one thing more which he does mean. I think he certainly means to suggest

that we not only make our true beliefs, but also that we *make them true*. At least as much as this is certainly naturally suggested by his words. No one would persistently say that we make *our truths*, unless he meant, at least, not merely that we make our true beliefs, but also that we make them true; unless he meant not merely that the existence of our true beliefs, but also that their *truth*, depended upon human conditions. This, it seems to me, is one consequence which Professor James means us to draw from the commonplace that the *existence* of our true beliefs depends upon human conditions. But does this consequence, in fact, follow from that commonplace? From the fact that we make our true beliefs, does it follow that we *make them true*?

In one sense, undoubtedly, even this does follow. If we say (as we may say) that no belief can be true, unless it exists, then it follows that, in a sense, the truth of a belief must always depend upon any conditions upon which its existence depends. If, therefore, the occurrence of a belief depends upon human conditions, so, too, must its truth. If the belief had never existed, it would never have been true; and therefore its truth must, in a sense, depend upon human conditions in exactly the same degree in which its existence depends upon them. This is obvious. But is this all that is meant? Is this all that would be suggested to us by telling us that we make our beliefs true?

It is easy to see that it is not. I may have the belief that it will rain to-morrow. And I may have "made" myself have this belief. It may be the case that I should not have had it, but for peculiarities in my past experiences, in my interests and my volitions. It may be the case that I should not have had it, but for a deliberate attempt to consider the question whether it will rain or not. This may easily happen. And certainly this particular belief of mine would not have been true, unless it existed. Its truth, therefore, depends, in a sense, upon any conditions upon which its existence depends. And this belief

may be true. It will be true, if it does rain to-morrow. But, in spite of all these reasons, would anyone think of saying that, in case it is true, I had *made* it true? Would anyone say that I had had any hand *at all* in making it true? Plainly no one would. We should say that I had a hand in making it true, if and only if I had a hand in *making the rain fall*. In every case in which we believe in the existence of anything, past or future, we should say that we had helped to make the belief true, if and only if we had helped to cause the existence of the fact which, in that belief, we believed did exist or would exist. Surely this is plain. I may believe that the sun will rise to-morrow. And I may have had a hand in "making" this belief; certainly it often depends for its existence upon what has been previously in my mind. And if the sun does rise, my belief will have been true. I have, therefore, had a hand in making a true belief. But would anyone say that, therefore, I had a hand in *making this belief true*? Certainly no one would. No one would say that anything had contributed to make this belief true, except those conditions (whatever they may be) which contributed to making the sun actually rise.

It is plain, then, that by "making a belief true," we mean something quite different from what Professor James means by "making" that belief. Conditions which have a hand in making a given true belief, may (it appears) have no hand at all in making it true; and conditions which have a hand in making it true may have no hand at all in making *it*. Certainly this is how we use the words. We should never say that we had made a belief true, merely because we had made the belief. But now, which of these two things does Professor James mean? Does he mean *merely* the accepted commonplace that we make our true beliefs, in the sense that almost all of them depend for their existence on what has been previously in some human mind? Or does he mean also that we *make them true*—that their truth also depends on what has been previously in some human mind?

I cannot help thinking that he has the latter, and not only the former, in his mind. But, then, what does this involve? If his instances of "truth-making" are to be anything to the purpose, it should mean that, whenever I have a hand in causing one of my own beliefs, I always have to that extent a hand in making it true. That, therefore, I have a hand in actually making the sun rise, the wind blow, and the rain fall, whenever I cause my beliefs in these things. Nay, more, it should mean that, whenever I "make" a true belief about the past, I must have had a hand in making this true. And if so, then certainly I must have had a hand in causing the French Revolution, in causing my father's birth, in making Professor James write this book. Certainly he implies that some man or other must have helped in causing almost every event, in which any man ever truly believed. That it was we who made the planets revolve round the sun, who made the Alps rise, and the floor of the Pacific sink—all these things, and others like them, seem to be involved. And it is these consequences which seem to me to justify a doubt whether, in fact, "our truths are to an unascertainable extent man-made." That some of our truths are man-made—indeed, a great many—I fully admit. We certainly do make some of our beliefs true. The Secretary probably had a belief that I should write this paper, and I have made his belief true by writing it. Men certainly have the power to alter the world to a certain extent; and, so far as they do this, they certainly "make true" any beliefs, which are beliefs in the occurrence of these alterations. But I can see no reason for supposing that they "make true" *nearly* all those of their beliefs which are true. And certainly the only reason which Professor James seems to give for believing this—namely, that the *existence* of almost all their beliefs depends on them—seems to be no reason for it at all. For unquestionably a man does not "make true" nearly every belief whose *existence* depends on him; and,

if so, the question which of their beliefs and how many, men do "make true," must be settled by quite other considerations.

In conclusion, I wish to sum up what seems to me to be the most important points about this "pragmatist theory of truth," as Professor James represents it. It seems to me that, in what he says about it, he has in his mind some things which are true and others which are false; and I wish to tabulate separately the principal ones which I take to be true, and the principal ones which I take to be false. The true ones seem to me to be these:—

That *most* of our true beliefs are useful to us; and that *most* of the beliefs that are useful to us are true.

That the world really does change in some respects; that facts exist at one time, which didn't and won't exist at others; and that hence the world may be better at some future time than it is now or has been in the past.

That the very same words may be true at one time and false at another—that they may express a truth at one time and a falsehood at another.

That the existence of *most*, if not all, of our beliefs, true as well as false, does depend upon previous events in our mental history; that we should never have had the particular beliefs we do have, had not our previous mental history been such as it was.

That the truth, and not merely the existence, of *some* of our beliefs, does depend upon us. That we really do make some alterations in the world, and that hence we do help to "make true" all those of our beliefs which are beliefs in the existence of these alterations.

To all of these propositions I have no objection to offer. And they seem to me to be generally admitted commonplaces. A certain class of philosophers do indeed, imply the denial of

every one of them—namely, those philosophers who deny the reality of time. And I think that part of Professor James' object is to protest against the views of these philosophers. All of these propositions do constitute a protest against such views; and so far they might be all that Professor James meant to assert. But I do not think that anyone, fairly reading through what he says, could get the impression that these things, and nothing more, were what he had in his mind. What gives colour and interest to what he says seems to be obviously something quite different. And, if we try to find out what exactly the chief things are which give his discussion its colour and interest, it seems to me we may distinguish that what he has in his mind, wrapped up in more or less ambiguous language, are the following propositions, to all of which I have tried to urge what seem to me the most obvious objections:—

That utility is a property which distinguishes true beliefs from those which are not true: that, therefore, *all* true beliefs are useful, and *all* beliefs, which are useful, are true—by “utility” being sometimes meant “utility on at least one occasion,” sometimes “utility in the long run,” sometimes “utility for some length of time.”

That all beliefs which are useful for some length of time are true.

That utility is the *only* property which all true beliefs have in common: that, therefore, *if* it were useful to me to believe in Professor James' existence, this belief *would* be true, even if he didn't exist; and that, *if* it were not useful to me to believe this, the belief *would* be false, even if he did.

That the beliefs, which we express by words, and not merely the words themselves, may be true at one time and *not* true at another; and that this is a general rule, though perhaps there may be some exceptions.

That, whenever the *existence* of a belief depends to some extent on us, then also the *truth* of that belief depends to some

extent on us; in the sense in which this implies, that, when the existence of my belief that a shower will fall depends upon me, then, if this belief is true, I must have had a hand in making the shower fall: that, therefore, men must have had a hand in making to exist almost every fact which they ever believe to exist.
