

William James:

Select Passages from *The Meaning of Truth* (TMOT) &
Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking (P)

Compiled by Hope May – her emphasis added in italicized bold font

[True ideas] lead us, namely, through the acts and other ideas which they instigate, into or up to, or towards, 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 connexions and transitions come to us from point to point as being ***progressive, harmonious, satisfactory***. This function of agreeable leading is what we mean by an idea's verification. [P]

[For the pragmatist "correspondence" means] any process of conduction from a present idea to a future terminus, provided only it run ***prosperously*** [P]

[P]ragmatism gets her general notion of truth as something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us towards other moments which it will be ***worth while*** 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 WORTH WHILE. When a moment in our experience, of any kind whatever, inspires us with a thought that is true, that means that sooner or later we dip by that thought's guidance into the particulars of experience again and make ***advantageous connexion*** with them. [P]

It seems obvious that the pragmatic account of all this routine of phenomenal knowledge is accurate. Truth here is a relation, not of our ideas to non-human realities, but of conceptual parts of our experience to sensational parts. Those thoughts are true which guide us to BENEFICIAL INTERACTION with sensible particulars as they occur, whether they copy these in advance or not. [TMOT]

[If we] ADD OUR THOUGHT TO [another idea/thought]; and if it SUFFERS THE ADDITION, and the whole situation ***harmoniously prolongs and enriches*** itself, the thought will pass for true. [TMOT]

An idea is true so long as to believe it is ***profitable*** to our lives [P]

One of the accusations which I oftenest have had to meet is that of making the truth of our religious beliefs consist in their 'feeling good' to us, and in nothing else. [But] I had supposed it to be matter of common observation that, of two competing views of the universe which in all other respects are equal, but of which the first denies ***some vital human need*** while the second satisfies it, *the second will be favored by sane men for the simple reason that it makes the world seem more rational* (Hope's emphasis). To choose the first view under such circumstances would be an ascetic act, an act of philosophic self-denial of which no normal human being would be guilty. [TMOT]

I had shown the concept of the absolute to MEAN nothing but the holiday giver, the banisher of cosmic fear. One's objective deliverance, when one says 'the absolute exists,' amounted, on my showing, just to this, that 'some justification of a *feeling of security* in presence of the universe,' exists, and that systematically to refuse to cultivate a feeling of security would be to do violence to a tendency in one's emotional life which might well be respected as prophetic. [TMOT]

[A] genuine pragmatist ... 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 which he frames. What now actually are the other forces which he trusts to co-operate with him, in a universe of such a type? They are at least his fellow men, in the stage of being which our actual universe has reached. But are there not superhuman forces also, such as religious men of the pluralistic type we have been considering have always believed in? [P]

James quoting an objector to Pragmatism who writes: "But although it is salutary and stimulating to be told that one should be responsible for the immediate issues and bearings of his words and thoughts, I decline to be deprived of the pleasure and profit of dwelling also on remoter bearings and issues, and it is the TENDENCY of pragmatism to refuse this privilege." [TMOT]

It is obvious that, altho interests strictly practical have been the original starting-point of our search for true phenomenal descriptions, yet an intrinsic interest in the bare describing function has grown up ... Beings acting outside of the thinker explain, not only his actual perceptions, past and future, but his possible perceptions and those of every one else. Accordingly they gratify our theoretic need in a supremely beautiful way. [TMOT]

I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being. **John Stuart Mill, On Liberty**