

Pragmatism and Truth:

William James

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Introduction

Of the three 'classical' American pragmatists - Peirce, James and Dewey - William James is the most vulnerable to Russell's charge, that for pragmatists, truth is whatever it pays to believe. When we look in more detail at James' writings, however, we find a welter of hints and suggestions rather than a clear or hard-edged theory. I shall first document these Jamesian explorations, and then argue that one of them could indeed be developed into an original and radical theory of truth.

James and the pragmatist theory of truth

William James famously explained pragmatism as both a *method* and a *theory*. Lecture 2 of Pragmatism explains that 'the pragmatic method... is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences' N1. However, pragmatism is also 'a genetic theory of what is meant by truth'. What did James mean by 'a genetic theory of what is meant by truth'?

We should begin by distinguishing between two questions:

- 1) is there anything general to be said about how we come to accept hypotheses as true? (which I shall call the theory of acceptance),
- 2) what exactly do we mean when we describe a belief or statement as true? (which I shall call the theory of truth proper).

James' theory of *acceptance* met with an extremely hostile reception, which - I shall eventually conclude - it did not at all deserve, since it says nothing very interesting. But does he have a theory of truth proper, and does it contain anything distinctively pragmatist? I propose to examine James' lectures on Pragmatism first, moving on to other material later. We shall see that the answer to both questions is a heavily qualified yes.

How do we come to accept a hypothesis as true? Following Schiller and Dewey, James says that '*ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience*' (Pragmatism Prometheus Books, 1991, p.28, italics in the original). Or again,

A new opinion counts as 'true' just in proportion as it gratifies the individual's desire to assimilate

the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock; and its success...in doing this, is a matter for the individual's appreciation. When old truth grows, then, by new truth's addition, it is for subjective reasons. (ibid. p.31)

This line of thought led to the notorious and oft-quoted remarks, 'You can say ... either that "it is useful because it is true" or that "it is true because it is useful". Both of these phrases mean exactly the same thing' (p.90), and, 'an idea is true so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives' (p.36), and above all, "'The true", to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as "the right" is only the expedient in the way of our behaving' (ibid. p.98).

Taken in isolation, these remarks certainly seem to say that whatever it pays to believe, is true. And this misinterpretation was reinforced by James' assertion that when we choose between philosophical or 'world-defining' views - as choose we must - we can rationally take into account each view's tendency to produce good effects in real life. James says repeatedly, for example, that the benefits of believing in God count towards the truth of the belief:

On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true (ibid. p.131).

Combine James' genuinely prudential justification of some *philosophical* (or 'world-defining') beliefs, with his apparent statement (about beliefs in general) that whatever it is expedient to believe is true, and we have the pragmatist bogey-man attacked by Russell and others N2.

In fact, what James means by 'satisfactory' or 'expedient' is so respectable as to be dull. It means, in the first place, consistency with as much of our existing belief as possible:

...what is better for us to believe is true *unless the belief incidentally clashes with some other vital benefit*. Now in real life what vital benefits is any particular belief of ours most liable to clash with? What indeed except the vital benefits yielded by *other beliefs* when these prove incompatible with the first ones? (ibid. p.37)

It might be very agreeable to me to believe, for example, that I have just won a large lottery prize. Sadly, this is ruled out by other beliefs of mine, for example, that one has to buy a ticket in order to win, and that I did not buy a ticket. This consistency requirement applies to belief in God too:

If theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be true, for pragmatism, in the sense of being good for so much. For how much more they are true, will depend entirely on their relations to the other truths that also have to be acknowledged (ibid. p.35, italics in the original).

So 'satisfactoriness' and 'expediency' mean consistency with existing belief, rather than fantasy gratification. And there is another requirement to be met. James writes:

The importance to human life of having true beliefs about matters of fact is a thing too notorious. We live in a world of realities that can be infinitely useful or infinitely harmful. Ideas which tell us which of them to expect count as the true ideas in all this primary sphere of verification... (ibid. p.89)

He gives the example of someone lost in the woods, who comes upon a cow-path and surmises that there is a house at the end of it. If this belief should be true, the wanderer lives, otherwise not. The surmise is made true, not by consistency with any of the wanderer's existing beliefs, since this is unfamiliar terrain, nor by the wanderer's heartfelt wish that it should be true. It is made true by the wanderer's discovery of the actual house.

Following our mental image of a house along the cow-path, we actually come to see the house; we get the image's full verification. *Such simply and fully verified leadings are certainly the originals and prototypes of the truth-process.* (ibid. p.91, italics in the original)

Verification of this kind is entirely familiar to common sense: we check our hypothesis, not against our wishes in the matter, but against the facts N3.

James's theory of acceptance, then, apart from its misleading use of terms like 'satisfaction' or 'expediency' holds that we come to accept a hypothesis as true - we tend to call it 'true' - if it answers to experience and fits existing belief (which must itself have answered properly to experience). In *philosophical* disputes, if a decision must be made and if no verifying experiences or existing beliefs tilt the scale, we should prefer the view with the greater benefits for our way of life. To this extent, prudential reasons can be weighed alongside evidential ones. But in matters of empirical belief, experience wins out. If I am on my last legs, and if believing that there is a house at the end of the cow-path will give me enough strength to make one final effort, then believing it is prudentially rational, and this may well lead me, as a matter of fact, to accept the belief. But as James well knew, prudential rationality of this sort has no bearing whatsoever on whether the belief is *true*.

James's theory of acceptance does include conceptual relativity points which complicate the truth-making relationship between reality and judgment. He tends to waver, but he does sometimes allow (unlike Putnam) that there is a primitive level of experience untainted by human categories, and consequently a control on belief, which 'comes to us without the human touch' (p.109). Elsewhere, he had assured us that 'The trail of the human serpent is over everything', (p.31).

But in any case, the 'conceptual relativity' points - about the 'subjective' nature of theory-choice, and the theory-ladenness of our language - do not undermine the distinction between prudential and evidential

reasons. James's remarks on truth were received with outrage because he was taken to be offering a prudential theory of truth proper - that whatever pays is true. In reality, however, his theory of acceptance involves no serious prudentialism (for empirical beliefs). The usefulness of a true belief is our motive for seeking truth (see p.273). But it does not constitute truth: 'The true thought [that there is a house at the end of the cow trail] is useful here because the house which is its object is useful' (p.90). Truth leads us up to objects (see the definition on p.94), and this leading 'is useful because it is into quarters that contain objects that are important' (ibid. p.95). In other words, what makes the belief true - and what makes it useful - *is the house* N4.

James and reality

James has no objection to the word 'reality', or to various correspondence-style locutions such as 'copying reality' or 'agreeing with reality'. He writes:

Truth, as any dictionary will tell you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their "agreement", as falsity means their disagreement, with "reality". Pragmatists and intellectualists both accept this definition as a matter of course. They begin to quarrel only after the question is raised as to what precisely be meant by the term "agreement", and what by the term "reality", when reality is taken as something for our ideas to agree with (ibid. p.87-8 *et passim*)

True beliefs agree with reality, but then the question is, as James says: what is meant by 'agreeing' and 'reality'?

Let's grapple with reality first. In the Pragmatism lectures, James provides two concrete examples, the house at the end of the cow trail, and the clock on the wall of the building in which the lectures took place. So far, this seems unproblematic: reality consists of objects just as common sense tells us it does. But this cannot be quite right. James also insists that 'We break the flux of sensible reality into things, then, at our will'. Houses and cows, clocks and walls, are all human constructions out of a 'sensible flux'. What, then, does James mean by 'sensible flux'?

Here are some things he *might* mean:

- i) he might mean Kantian noumena - things as they are in themselves, which, though unknowable, underlie things as they seem to us,
- ii) he might mean the input we receive from the senses, before our processes of categorisation get to work on it - the blooming buzzing confusion which assails the infant,
- iii) he might mean something less in-the-mind than this - perhaps the Lockean source of our ideas of sense, partly knowable by a supposed resemblance to these ideas,
- iv) he might mean something *more* in-the-mind than ii) - perhaps a Berkeleyan stream of consciousness, not supposed to have any external source in a material world,
- v) he might (interestingly) mean something different from all these, something proprietary, such as the 'pure experience' of James's neutral monism,

vi) he might mean something Deweyan, experience as it is prior to the distinction we draw between subject (of experience) and object.

It seems to me that iv) is the least likely of these possibilities. James says for example,

By "realities" or "objects" here, we mean either things of common sense, sensibly present, or else common sense relations, such as dates, distances, kinds, activities. Following our mental image of a house along the cow-path, we actually come to see the house (ibid. p.91).

It should also be said that i) is unlikely: noumena, precisely, are *not* sensible - though they fit the role insofar as they underlie ordinary sense-experience. But to speak frankly, I do not find in Pragmatism sufficient evidence to decide between i)-vi). Even the evidence against iv) is counter-balanced to some extent by assertions like this...

...truth in our ideas and beliefs means the same thing that it means in science. It means, [Dewey and Schiller] say, nothing but this, *that ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience*' (p. 28, italics in the original).

Here, the truth-maker is experience, which consists of such mental items as ideas and beliefs. In similar vein, James offers a tripartite classification of 'reality':

...the *first* part of reality from this point of view is the flux of our sensations. Sensations are forced upon us, coming we know not whence...

The *second* part of reality, as something that our beliefs must also obediently take account of is the *relations* that obtain between our sensations or between their copies in our minds.

The *third* part of reality... is the previous truths of which every new enquiry takes account (ibid. p.107).

Here we have sensations, (Humean) mental copies of sensations, and existing beliefs. Striking by their absence - from *reality* - are any real external sources of all these.

(For a later statement of this idealistic view see The Meaning of Truth, Dover, 2002 reprint, p.100: 'By 'reality' humanism means nothing more than the other conceptual or perceptual experiences with which a given present experience may find itself in point of fact mixed up'. In the same collection, on p.195, he takes it back, saying that 'Ideas are so much flat psychological surface unless some mirrored matter gives them cognitive lustre. This is why as a pragmatist I have so carefully posited 'reality' *ab initio*'. One has to admire the peculiar brazenness of these Jamesian self-contradictions.)

Near the end of Pragmatism, James advances two further views.

When we talk of reality “independent” of human thinking... it reduces to the notion of what is just entering into experience and yet to be named... before any human conception had been applied. It is... the merely ideal limit of our minds.

...other pragmatists may try to reach more positive beliefs about the sensible core of reality... Messrs Dewey and Schiller treat it as a “limit” (p.109).

Neither of these new ideas is very precisely formulated, but we may sketch them as follows:

vii) reality is whatever the human mind would believe at the ideal limit - a view deriving from Peirce and attributed by James to Dewey and Schiller, and,

viii) an agnostic version of this, which suggests that actually constructing the limit-concept is beyond our powers. James says, ‘it may be impossible to separate the real from the human factors in the growth of our cognitive experience’ (ibid. p.110). Or again,

[Schiller] proposes the name “Humanism” for the doctrine that to an unascertainable extent our truths are man-made products too. Human motives sharpen all our questions, human satisfactions lurk in all our answers, all our formulas have a human twist. This element is so inextricable in the products that Mr Schiller sometimes seems almost to leave it an open question whether there be anything else. “The world,” he says, “...is what we make it” (ibid. p.106).

James continues, ‘I mean to defend the humanist position’ (p.107). The above quotation is not entirely clear, but it obviously contains a strong element of scepticism about our ability to construct the limit-concept and correspondingly, about whether the notion of an external reality is a usable concept for us (‘almost...an open question whether there be anything else’ [besides judgment]). His own kind of pragmatism, he implies, does not try to reach ‘positive beliefs about the sensible core of reality’.

James’s Pragmatism, I think it is fair to conclude, dallies with at least eight different notions of reality, and offers at least some textual encouragement to most of them. But this means that we do not - so far - have any definite pragmatist theory of truth. We have a theory of acceptance which looks much more radical than it really is, and we have a swirling cloud of possible theories of truth proper. It remains to ask, then, whether the last few years of James’s life brought a decision between i) - viii).

Two years after Pragmatism, and a year before his death in 1910, James published a collection of writings on truth, hoping to clarify his intentions and rebut his critics. We could now examine this collection, The Meaning of Truth, in the same detail as Pragmatism, but I am afraid the results would be similarly inconclusive. I propose instead to list three of the more striking ideas from The Meaning of Truth - realism, ‘leading’, and the role of beneficial consequences - and then present a tentative interpretation of James’s monistic attempt to bridge the gap between reality and judgment.

1. Realism. James emphasises again and again, in response to what seem to him the incredible misunderstandings of his critics, that his pragmatism is fully realistic. We have already seen sufficient

evidence of this from Pragmatism, but James evidently means to leave no possible room for doubt:

Altho in various places in this volume I try to refute the slanderous charge that we deny real existence, I will say here again, for the sake of emphasis, that the existence of the object, whenever the idea asserts it 'truly', is the only reason, in innumerable cases, why the idea does work successfully (The Meaning of Truth preface p.xv, and see also p.100, 158, 195, 233 *et passim*).

The examples he gives of the 'objects' forming part of reality are, like the house and clock of Pragmatism, familiar everyday things: a human body (p.25-6), a book (p.36-7), a piece of paper (p.47), a baby's rattle (p.63), a dog (p.129), a desk (p.217), and so on. We have already seen the difficulty of reconciling this with various other things James says.

2. 'Leading'. The claim that a true idea or belief essentially 'leads us up to' the object or into its vicinity is elaborated into the claim that a criterion of reality is the availability of a *continuity* of possible experiences. A true idea or belief facilitates a *continuous* sequence of experiences, or possible experiences, leading from absence of the object to presence:

The relation to its object that makes an idea true in any given instance, is, we say, embodied in intermediate details of reality which lead towards the object, which vary in every instance, and which in every instance can be concretely traced. The chain of workings which an opinion sets up is the opinion's truth (The Meaning of Truth, p.235, and see also p.172-3, p.218-9).

Thus, if my belief 'There's a bear behind that bush' is true, then (if my interest in truth outweighs my interest in survival) I can walk up to the bush and see the bear behind it. I will have a continuous sequence of experiences, in which the bush occupies more and more of my visual field, a growling sound grows gradually louder, and so on.

I think we should agree that this continuity is mostly characteristic of our experience of the macroscopic world, but there are severe problems about elevating it into a definition of reality. Think of the kind of 'portal', beloved of science fiction writers, which transports one instantly to another planet or 'another dimension'. Such things may not in fact exist. But James would have us say that the mere definition of the word 'true' shows that they *could* not exist. There is also the point that according to quantum physics, reality is (at the microscopic level) radically discontinuous. And of course, there are also macroscopic phenomena which seem pretty discontinuous. A lightning flash is discontinuous from preceding and succeeding experience, but it is none the less real for that.

3. Beneficial consequences. Everyone accepts that true beliefs help us, as a general rule, to cope with our environment: true beliefs have survival value. James says:

Good consequences are not proposed by us merely as a sure sign, mark, or criterion, by which

truth's presence is habitually ascertained, tho they may indeed serve on occasion as such a sign; they are proposed rather as the lurking motive inside of every truth-claim... They are proposed as the *causa existendi* [reason for existence] of our beliefs, not as their logical cue or premise, and still less as their objective deliverance or content (ibid p.273).

We have seen evidence from Pragmatism that James considers the good consequences of belief in God to be a reason for accepting that belief. And - seeming to apply the idea to ordinary empirical beliefs - we find in The Meaning of Truth:

Those thoughts are true which guide us to *beneficial interaction* with sensible particulars as they occur, whether they copy these in advance or not (ibid. p.82).

But now he says he meant only that beneficial consequences are a *motive* for seeking truth.

If James means by this that our hope of beneficial consequences is our *only* motive for seeking truth, he rules out the possibility of genuinely disinterested research, and the fact of sheer curiosity. If on the other hand, he means that hope of benefit is *one* motive for seeking truth, what is supposed to be the philosophical interest of that platitude?

It is worth noticing, in passing, that some contemporary philosophers are willing to endorse the views which James himself draws back from (that beneficial consequences provide a definition or a 'sure sign' of truth). Harvey Cormier's The Truth is What Works (Rowman and Littlefield, 2001) is a book-length attribution to James of the view that, 'A "true" belief is one that plays the helpful role of leading through life in beneficial ways'. Cormier says that this theory of truth 'gives us a way of identifying true beliefs and theories, and it says that *this practical understanding is enough understanding of what truth is*' (ibid. p.10-11, italics in the original). Stephen Stich has argued that pragmatists should not tie themselves to truth as 'the standard against which strategies of reasoning should be measured' (see his article, 'Naturalizing Epistemology: Quine, Simon and the Prospects for Pragmatism' in Philosophy and Cognitive Science eds Hookway and Peterson, CUP 1993, p.9). For Stich, 'good cognitive strategies... are those that are likely to lead to the states of affairs that [the inquirer] finds intrinsically valuable'. Stich admits that this is 'a thoroughly relativistic account of good reasoning', since a strategy which is good for Smith might be bad for Jones, if their values are different, and there is no higher criterion of good reasoning. But he regards this form of relativism as 'a fact of life that pragmatists should accept with equanimity' (ibid). Another avowed relativist - though Deweyan rather than Jamesian - is Joseph Margolis (see his Reinventing Pragmatism, Cornell University Press, 2002, p.124 and elsewhere).

We have now looked at three leading ideas from The Meaning of Truth, and the upshot is that James may have held some vague form of Peirce's ideal limit theory of truth proper, and that his 'pragmatist theory of truth' was probably a genetic account of opinion-formation or acceptance (the role of beneficial consequences being to motivate belief, not to define truth). Have we moved any closer to a decision between the various things James might mean by 'reality'?

I regret to say that we have not: James does not seem to make progress with this question in The Meaning of Truth. It is interesting to notice, however, that another Jamesian idea emerges occasionally from the shadows, hinting at a theory of truth proper which might be based, not on his pragmatism, but on his neutral monism.

A neo-Jamesian theory of truth

James's neutral monism is set out in detail in the 1904 essays 'Does Consciousness Exist?' and 'A World of Pure Experience', and it is possible that by the time of Pragmatism - 1907 - he was having doubts. He nevertheless included several references to it in The Meaning of Truth (1909). Could this be because James thought that the problems of neutral monism might be strictly metaphysical, and that its central idea might nevertheless be of value in epistemology?

James's neutral monism is (initially) a theory about the relationship between body and mind. Once Descartes had sharpened the common sense distinction between body and mind into a full-blown metaphysical dualism, involving two entirely different kinds of substance, it became impossible to understand how thought could influence matter (as it seems to in actions) or how matter could influence thought (as it seems to in perception). Jamesian neutral monism posits an underlying reality, neither mental nor physical but 'neutral' between the two. James calls this neutral substrate 'pure experience', or (using an Aristotelian term) *materia prima*. The central idea is that a quantity of 'pure experience' would appear to us as physical viewed in one context, but as mental viewed in another. James's favoured analogy invites us to think of intersecting lines: one and the same point, the point of intersection, would then appear on both lines. Viewed in the context of the line AB, the point of intersection is a step on the way from A to B, but viewed in the context of the line CD, the very same point is a step on the way from C to D. The point has, not two natures, but two contexts. In the same way, James suggests, pure experience 'can be referred to either of two great associative systems, that of the experiencer's mental history or that of the experienced facts of the world' (The Meaning of Truth, footnote to p.49).

Could James mean by 'agreeing with reality' that there is a single, identical, quantity of neutral substrate which is placed in two contexts, one of which gives it the appearance of a judgment, while the other makes it seem the reality to which that judgment corresponds? If he did mean this, a number of puzzling things he says about truth become readily intelligible:

1. James mentions his adherence to 'identitätsphilosophie' (The Meaning of Truth, p.128, p.133), in spite of describing himself as an 'epistemological dualist' (ibid. p.217). This would be possible because neutral monism posits a deeper identity underlying a legitimate dualism.

2. In the same way, James might consistently talk about a mental image of a house as a copy of the real house, and yet return again and again to 'experience' or 'the sensible flux' as something which seems to be *neither* mental image nor physical object: 'experience' would be what underlies both. Neutral monism also offers a model of how we constitute beliefs and objects out of 'flux', namely, by placing them in different contexts.

3. It would then be natural for a neutral monist to stress the *continuity* of a sequence of experiences as

constituting truth, since it is the continuity of the line which constitutes the point's belonging to it. The context which 'creates' the physical object is a context of continuous phenomena, like the bush or growl.

4. The 'neutral monist' interpretation helps us understand remarks like the following, which are as typical as they are (otherwise) puzzling:

Truth is essentially a relation between two things, an idea, on the one hand, and a reality outside of the idea on the other. This relation, like all relations, has its *fundamentum*, namely, the matrix of experiential circumstance, psychological as well as physical, in which the correlated terms are found embedded (ibid. p.163 - from 1907).

Here, truth is defined as a dualistic relationship based upon a more fundamentally monistic 'matrix of experiential circumstance'. This 'matrix' is something underlying both ideas and external things, something which can be regarded as both psychological and physical.

5. James includes perfectly explicit statements of a neutral monist epistemology (not metaphysics) in The Meaning of Truth. He says, for example, that in perception, 'the knower and the known are... the self-same piece of experience taken twice over in different contexts' (ibid. p.103), and he presents this as explaining the otherwise paradoxical relationship between knower and known:

Whenever certain intermediaries are given, such that, as they develop towards their terminus, there is experience from point to point of one direction followed, and finally of one process fulfilled, the result is that their starting-point thereby becomes a knower and their terminus an object meant or known. That is all that knowing (in the simple case considered) can be known-as, that is the whole of its nature, put into experiential terms (ibid. p.106).

The crucial question here is what James means by the word 'experience' - and my suggestion is that he means 'pure experience', *materia prima*. TLS Sprigge, in his magisterial James and Bradley, (Open Court, 1993) tends to believe that he means experience in the sense of the stream of (perceptual) consciousness. But as Sprigge himself argues, neutral monism so understood is hopelessly problematic (ibid. p.122f). This being so, might it not, *pace* Sprigge and others, be worth pursuing Peirce's robust comment, in a letter to James: 'What you call "pure experience" is not experience at all' (from a 1904 letter, quoted in Perry, p.288)?

A last quotation, from 1905, but also reprinted by James in The Meaning of Truth:

...if there be any such thing at all as knowing, the knower and the object known must both be portions of experience... [in sense-perception] they must simply exist as so many ultimate *thats* or facts of being, in the first instance; and then, as a secondary complication, and without doubling up its entitative singleness, any one and the same *that* in experience must figure alternately as a thing known and as a knowledge of a thing, by reason of the two divergent kinds

of context into which, in the general course of experience, it gets woven (p.126-7).

If this neutral monist approach to the relation, not between body and mind but between knower and known, is strongly present in James's mind in 1904-5, and is endorsed by inclusion in The Meaning of Truth in 1909, why is there no mention of it in Pragmatism (1907)? James may have simply felt that neutral monism was too technical for his audience. Or he may have wished to present pragmatism as a unified movement, not something depending on an idiosyncratic theory of his own. He might also, of course, have had temporary doubts about neutral monism itself.

Suppose, then, that James does mean by 'reality' a neutral substrate of, for example, the material house and the mental image of it (possibility v in the i-viii list). What would this mean for a 'neo-Jamesian' theory of truth proper?

James accepts that in the simplest cases, a true belief is a copy of reality, and more generally, that a true belief agrees with reality. This prompts two questions:

- 1) what is meant by 'copying' or 'agreeing'?
- 2) how do we know when this copying/agreeing relation obtains?

In answer to the first question, he can now offer a deeper explanation of the copying/agreeing relation - the relation is fundamentally one of identity. One and the same 'matrix of experience' is placed in two contexts and in this way configured both as judgment and as reality. In the context of a person's mental history it figures as a belief or judgment: in the context of the causal, spatio-temporal facts of the world, it figures as an object or concatenation of objects. This can plausibly claim to be explanatory, or 'deeper' than correspondence, because of the fundamental simplicity of the identity-relation. Self-identity does not call for explanation in the way that correspondence does. It also yields a 'direct' epistemology of the kind desired by common sense: the content of a belief state is the thing itself (or its underlying *materia prima*), not a representation of the thing.

In answer to the second question, it might be argued that since we ourselves construct the duality of judgment and reality by differently contextualising the neutral substrate, we can intuitively 'see' its underlying self-identity when that occurs (as it does with true belief). We need only realise that we are placing the *same* quantity of neutral substrate now in this context, now in that. It is true (I suppose) that we do not often consciously arrive at such realisations, but perhaps that is because the double contextualisation which constructs the manageable worlds of cognised and cognition, through long familiarity 'over-prints' our more fundamental state of being-in-the-world. The theory has at any rate some show of justification for a notion of primitive or *sui generis* intuition, in response to question 2. The notion, however mysterious, does not seem entirely *ad hoc*.

Another advantage of the theory should be mentioned here. Neutral monism as a *metaphysical* theory of body and mind can be attacked as uneconomical, in other words, as contravening Ockham's Razor. In that metaphysical role N5, it posits another realm of existence, neither mental nor physical, which - it seems - we never directly experience as it is. But the epistemological version we are considering here might escape this objection. Functioning as an explanatory account of the relation between truth-bearer and

truth-maker - not as a metaphysics of mind and body, not as a theory of perception - it seems to require only an epistemological state of 'world-enfoldedness' (or perhaps 'being-in-the-world') in which the distinction between truth-bearer and truth-maker has not yet been made. James writes: 'Only new-born babes, or men in a semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet a definitive *what*' N6.

I hope this sketch suggests that a neo-Jamesian theory of truth could be of interest. Before we move on, I ought to mention that Dewey's concept of 'experience' may overlap with James's concept of 'pure experience' (as Dewey's 'immediate empiricism' overlaps with James's 'radical empiricism'). According to John Shook (see Dewey's Empirical Theory of Knowledge and Reality, Vanderbilt University Press, 2000, p.263), Dewey probably meant at least four different things by 'experience':

Absolute experience, intelligent experience, reflective experience, logical experience - there are at least four notions of experience (and many more, such as aesthetic or moral experience) operating in Dewey's philosophy (p.263).

Shook also mentions 'transactional experience', which is to be distinguished from absolute experience, and located - if I have it right - within intelligent experience (for more on this see Richard Bernstein's Praxis and Action, Univ of Pennsylvania Press, second ed. 1999, p.203-211). What this means, for our present purposes, is that a neutral monist theory of truth which attempts to explain correspondence as identity might also become available to contemporary admirers of Dewey. In this sense, it might be not just Jamesian, but more broadly pragmatist.

Conclusion

James' discussion of truth is confused and confusing, but I think we can take from it the following points:

1. Usefulness for future action does operate, as a motive, in James's theory of *acceptance*: people will tend to accept as true, beliefs which they find expedient.
2. James also says that in a situation of forced choice, where evidential reasons are equally balanced, it is rational to choose the more beneficial belief. This is little more than a version of Pascal's Wager, generalised from belief in God to other metaphysical questions.
3. James holds that the truth of ordinary or low-level beliefs - such as the belief that there is a house at the end of a particular trail - is determined by a real state of affairs independent of human wishes. It is not clear how this is to be reconciled with James' insistence on the human contribution to 'making true' N7, or with his more Berkeleyan moments.
4. James also has a theory of what he calls 'absolute' truth, but his remarks on this are Peircean and not much developed N8.
5. Finally, it is possible to construct a potentially interesting theory of truth out of Jamesian materials, though this neo-Jamesian theory depends on his neutral monism, not his pragmatism. This theory

preserves our ordinary ways of talking about truth, and promises a unifying explanation of them (though it depends on an unfamiliar or primal epistemological condition we might call 'world-enfoldedness').

The surprising outcome is that there is, in fact, *no* prudential theory of truth proper (as opposed to opinion) in James. The bogey-man was a phantom.

NOTES

N1 Pragmatism, Prometheus, 1991, p.23.

N2 See TLS Sprigge's 'James, Aboutness, and his British Critics' in The Cambridge Companion to William James ed Ruth Anna Putnam, CUP, 1997, p.125-130 for a summary.

N3 Another relevant quotation: 'Our ideas must agree with realities, be such realities concrete or abstract, be they facts or be they principles, under penalty of endless inconsistency and frustration...

Realities mean, then, either concrete facts, or abstract kinds of thing and relations perceived intuitively between them. They furthermore and thirdly mean, as things that new ideas must no less take account of, the whole body of the truths already in our possession.' (Pragmatism p.93-4)

N4 See AJ Ayer's The Origins of Pragmatism, Macmillan, 1968, p.198f for a similar interpretation.

N5 Recently advocated by Wesley Cooper in The Unity of William James' Thought, Vanderbilt University Press, 2002, Ch.8.

N6 See 'The Thing and its Relations', a 1905 essay, also reprinted in Essays in Radical Empiricism, University of Nebraska Press, 1996, p.93.

N7 Putnam's 'internal realism' was a serious and sustained attempt to provide exactly this reconciliation - though in my view (argued elsewhere) it did not succeed.

N8 For more on this, see for example Putnam's 'James's Theory of Truth' in The Cambridge Companion to William James ed Ruth Anna Putnam, CUP, 1997, p.167-185 or Richard Gale's The Divided Self of William James, CUP 1999, p.143-5.