

Therefore, continue our abstractionists, we must conceive it as essentially thus unrelated, so that even were a billion men to sport the same opinion, and only one man to differ, we could admit no collateral circumstances which might presumptively make it more probable that he, not they, should be wrong. Truth, they say, follows not the counting of noses, nor is it only another name for a majority vote. It is a relation that antedates experience, between our opinions and an independent something which the pragmatist account ignores, a relation which, tho the opinions of individuals should to all eternity deny it, would still remain to qualify them as false. To talk of opinions without referring to this independent something, the anti-pragmatist assures us, is to play Hamlet with Hamlet's part left out.

But when the pragmatist speaks of opinions, does he mean any such insulated and unmotivated abstractions as are here supposed? Of course not, he means men's opinions in the flesh, as they have really formed themselves, opinions surrounded by their causes and the influences they obey and exert, and along with the whole environment of social communication of which they are a part and out of which they take their rise. Moreover the 'experience' which the pragmatic definition postulates is the independent something which the anti-pragmatist accuses him of ignoring. Already have men grown unanimous in the opinion that such experience is of an independent reality, the existence of which all opinions must acknowledge, in order to be true. Already do they agree that in the long run it is useless to resist experience's pressure; that the more of it a man has, the better position he stands in, in respect of truth; that some men, having had more experience, are therefore better authorities than others; that some are also wiser by nature and better able to interpret the experience they have had; that it is one part of such wisdom to compare notes, discuss, and follow the opinion of our betters; and that the more systematically and thoroughly such comparison and weighing of opinions is pursued, the truer the opinions that survive are likely to be. When the pragmatist talks of opinions, it is opinions as they thus concretely and livingly and interactingly and correlatively exist that he has in mind; and when the anti-pragmatist tries to floor him because the word 'opinion' can also be taken abstractly and as if it had no environment, he simply ignores the soil out of which the whole discussion grows. His weapons cut the air and strike no blow. No one gets wounded in the war against caricatures of belief and skeletons of opinion of which the German onslaughts upon 'relativismus' consists. Refuse to use the word 'opinion' abstractly, keep it in its real environment, and the withers of pragmatism remain unwrung. That men do exist who are 'opinionated,' in the sense that their opinions are self-willed, is unfortunately a fact that must be admitted, no matter what one's notion of truth in general may be. But that this fact should make it impossible for truth to form itself authentically out of the life of opinion is what no critic has yet proved. Truth may well consist of certain opinions, and does indeed consist of nothing but opinions, tho not every opinion need be true. No pragmatist needs to dogmatize about the consensus of opinion in the future being right--he need only postulate that it will probably contain more of truth than any one's opinion now.

---

#### XIV

#### TWO ENGLISH CRITICS

Mr. Bertrand Russell's article entitled 'Transatlantic Truth,' [Footnote: In the Albany Review for January, 1908.] has all the clearness, dialectic subtlety, and wit which one expects from his pen, but it entirely fails to hit the right point of view for apprehending our position. When, for instance, we say that a true proposition is one the consequences of believing which are good, he assumes us to mean that any one who believes a proposition to be true must first have made out clearly that its consequences be good, and that his belief must primarily be in that fact,--an obvious absurdity, for that fact is the deliverance of a new proposition, quite different from the first one and is, moreover, a fact usually very hard to verify, it being 'far easier,' as Mr. Russell justly says, 'to settle the plain question of fact: "Have popes always been infallible?"' than to settle the question whether the effects of thinking them infallible are on the whole good.'

We affirm nothing as silly as Mr. Russell supposes. 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, whether

the 'trower' be conscious of such motive, or whether he obey it blindly. They are proposed as the *causa existendi* of our beliefs, not as their logical cue or premise, and still less as their objective deliverance or content. They assign the only intelligible practical meaning to that difference in our beliefs which our habit of calling them true or false comports.

No truth-claimer except the pragmatist himself need ever be aware of the part played in his own mind by consequences, and he himself is aware of it only abstractly and in general, and may at any moment be quite oblivious of it with respect to his own beliefs.

Mr. Russell next joins the army of those who inform their readers that according to the pragmatist definition of the word 'truth' the belief that A exists may be 'true' even when A does not exist. This is the usual slander repeated to satiety by our critics. They forget that in any concrete account of what is denoted by 'truth' in human life, the word can only be used relatively to some particular trower. Thus, I may hold it true that Shakespeare wrote the plays that bear his name, and may express my opinion to a critic. If the critic be both a pragmatist and a baconian, he will in his capacity of pragmatist see plain that the workings of my opinion, I being who I am, make it perfectly true for me, while in his capacity of baconian he still believes that Shakespeare never wrote the plays in question. But most anti-pragmatist critics take the wont 'truth' as something absolute, and easily play on their reader's readiness to treat his OWE truths as the absolute ones. If the reader whom they address believes that A does not exist, while we pragmatists show that those for whom the belief that it exists works satisfactorily will always call it true, he easily sneers at the naivete of our contention, for is not then the belief in question 'true,' tho what it declares as fact has, as the reader so well knows, no existence? Mr. Russell speaks of our statement as an 'attempt to get rid of fact' and naturally enough considers it 'a failure' (p. 410). 'The old notion of truth reappears,' he adds-- that notion being, of course, that when a belief is true, its object does exist.

It is, of course, BOUND to exist, on sound pragmatic principles. Concepts signify consequences. How is the world made different for me by my conceiving an opinion of mine under the concept 'true'? First, an object must be findable there (or sure signs of such an object must be found) which shall agree with the opinion. Second, such an opinion must not be contradicted by anything else I am aware of. But in spite of the obvious pragmatist requirement that when I have said truly that something exists, it SHALL exist, the slander which Mr. Russell repeats has gained the widest currency.

Mr. Russell himself is far too witty and athletic a ratiocinator simply to repeat the slander dogmatically. Being nothing if not mathematical and logical, he must prove the accusation *secundum artem*, and convict us not so much of error as of absurdity. I have sincerely tried to follow the windings of his mind in this procedure, but for the life of me I can only see in it another example of what I have called (above, p. 249) vicious abstractionism. The abstract world of mathematics and pure logic is so native to Mr. Russell that he thinks that we describers of the functions of concrete fact must also mean fixed mathematical terms and functions. A mathematical term, as a, b, c, x, y, sin., log., is self-sufficient, and terms of this sort, once equated, can be substituted for one another in endless series without error. Mr. Russell, and also Mr. Hawtrey, of whom I shall speak presently, seem to think that in our mouth also such terms as 'meaning,' 'truth,' 'belief,' 'object,' 'definition,' are self-sufficients with no context of varying relation that might be further asked about. What a word means is expressed by its definition, isn't it? The definition claims to be exact and adequate, doesn't it? Then it can be substituted for the word--since the two are identical--can't it? Then two words with the same definition can be substituted for one another, n'est--ce pas? Likewise two definitions of the same word, nicht wahr, etc., etc., till it will be indeed strange if you can't convict some one of self-contradiction and absurdity.

The particular application of this rigoristic treatment to my own little account of truth as working seems to be something like what follows. I say 'working' is what the 'truth' of our ideas means, and call it a definition. But since meanings and things meant, definitions and things defined, are equivalent and interchangeable, and nothing extraneous to its definition can be meant when a term is used, it follows that who so calls an idea true, and means by that word that it works, cannot mean anything else, can believe nothing but that it does work,

and in particular can neither imply nor allow anything about its object or deliverance. 'According to the pragmatists,' Mr. Russell writes, 'to say "it is true that other people exist" means "it is useful to believe that other people exist." But if so, then these two phrases are merely different words for the same proposition; therefore when I believe the one, I believe the other' (p. 400). [Logic, I may say in passing, would seem to require Mr. Russell to believe them both at once, but he ignores this consequence, and considers that other people exist' and 'it is useful to believe that they do EVEN IF THEY DON'T,' must be identical and therefore substitutable propositions in the pragmatist mouth.]

But may not real terms, I now ask, have accidents not expressed in their definitions? and when a real value is finally substituted for the result of an algebraic series of substituted definitions, do not all these accidents creep back? Beliefs have their objective 'content' or 'deliverance' as well as their truth, and truth has its implications as well as its workings. If any one believe that other men exist, it is both a content of his belief and an implication of its truth, that they should exist in fact. Mr. Russell's logic would seem to exclude, 'by definition,' all such accidents as contents, implications, and associates, and would represent us as translating all belief into a sort of belief in pragmatism itself--of all things! If I say that a speech is eloquent, and explain 'eloquent' as meaning the power to work in certain ways upon the audience; or if I say a book is original, and define 'original' to mean differing from other books, Russell's logic, if I follow it at all, would seem to doom me to agreeing that the speech is about eloquence, and the book about other books. When I call a belief true, and define its truth to mean its workings, I certainly do not mean that the belief is a belief ABOUT the workings. It is a belief about the object, and I who talk about the workings am a different subject, with a different universe of discourse, from that of the believer of whose concrete thinking I profess to give an account.

The social proposition 'other men exist' and the pragmatist proposition 'it is expedient to believe that other men exist' come from different universes of discourse. One can believe the second without being logically compelled to believe the first; one can believe the first without having ever heard of the second; or one can believe them both. The first expresses the object of a belief, the second tells of one condition of the belief's power to maintain itself. There is no identity of any kind, save the term 'other men' which they contain in common, in the two propositions; and to treat them as mutually substitutable, or to insist that we shall do so, is to give up dealing with realities altogether.

Mr. Ralph Hawtrey, who seems also to serve under the banner of abstractionist logic, convicts us pragmatists of absurdity by arguments similar to Mr. Russell's. [Footnote: See *The New Quarterly*, for March, 1908.]

As a favor to us and for the sake of the argument, he abandons the word 'true' to our fury, allowing it to mean nothing but the fact that certain beliefs are expedient; and he uses the word 'correctness' (as Mr. Pratt uses the word 'trueness') to designate a fact, not about the belief, but about the belief's object, namely that it is as the belief declares it. 'When therefore,' he writes, 'I say it is correct to say that Caesar is dead, I mean "Caesar is dead." This must be regarded as the definition of correctness.' And Mr. Hawtrey then goes on to demolish me by the conflict of the definitions. What is 'true' for the pragmatist cannot be what is 'correct,' he says, 'for the definitions are not logically interchangeable; or if we interchange them, we reach the tautology:

"Caesar is dead" means "it is expedient to believe that Caesar is dead." But what is it expedient to believe? Why, "that Caesar is dead." A precious definition indeed of 'Caesar is dead.'

Mr. Hawtrey's conclusion would seem to be that the pragmatic definition of the truth of a belief in no way implies--what?--that the believer shall believe in his own belief's deliverance?--or that the pragmatist who is talking about him shall believe in that deliverance? The two cases are quite different. For the believer, Caesar must of course really exist; for the pragmatist critic he need not, for the pragmatic deliverance belongs, as I have just said, to another universe of discourse altogether. When one argues by substituting definition for definition, one needs to stay in the same universe.

The great shifting of universes in this discussion occurs when we carry the word 'truth' from the subjective into the objective realm, applying it sometimes to a property of opinions, sometimes to the facts which the opinions assert. A number of writers, as Mr. Russell himself, Mr. G. E. Moore, and others, favor the unlucky word 'proposition,' which seems expressly invented to foster this confusion, for they speak of truth as a property of 'propositions.' But in naming propositions it is almost impossible not to use the word 'that.'

THAT Caesar is dead, THAT virtue is its own reward, are propositions.

I do not say that for certain logical purposes it may not be useful to treat propositions as absolute entities, with truth or falsehood inside of them respectively, or to make of a complex like 'that-- Caesar--is--dead' a single term and call it a 'truth.' But the 'that' here has the extremely convenient ambiguity for those who wish to make trouble for us pragmatists, that sometimes it means the FACT that, and sometimes the BELIEF that, Caesar is no longer living. When I then call the belief true, I am told that the truth means the fact; when I claim the fact also, I am told that my definition has excluded the fact, being a definition only of a certain peculiarity in the belief--so that in the end I have no truth to talk about left in my possession.

The only remedy for this intolerable ambiguity is, it seems to me, to stick to terms consistently. 'Reality,' 'idea' or 'belief,' and the 'truth of the idea or belief,' which are the terms I have consistently held to, seem to be free from all objection.

Whoever takes terms abstracted from all their natural settings, identifies them with definitions, and treats the latter more algebraico, not only risks mixing universes, but risks fallacies which the man in the street easily detects. To prove 'by definition' that the statement 'Caesar exists' is identical with a statement about 'expediency' because the one statement is 'true' and the other is about 'true statements,' is like proving that an omnibus is a boat because both are vehicles. A horse may be defined as a beast that walks on the nails of his middle digits. Whenever we see a horse we see such a beast, just as whenever we believe a 'truth' we believe something expedient. Messrs. Russell and Hawtrey, if they followed their antipragmatist logic, would have to say here that we see THAT IT IS such a beast, a fact which notoriously no one sees who is not a comparative anatomist.

It almost reconciles one to being no logician that one thereby escapes so much abstractionism. Abstractionism of the worst sort dogs Mr. Russell in his own trials to tell positively what the word 'truth' means. In the third of his articles on Meinong, in *Mind*, vol. xiii, p. 509 (1904), he attempts this feat by limiting the discussion to three terms only, a proposition, its content, and an object, abstracting from the whole context of associated realities in which such terms are found in every case of actual knowing. He puts the terms, thus taken in a vacuum, and made into bare logical entities, through every possible permutation and combination, tortures them on the rack until nothing is left of them, and after all this logical gymnastic, comes out with the following portentous conclusion as what he believes to be the correct view: that there is no problem at all in truth and falsehood, that some propositions are true and some false, just as some roses are red and some white, that belief is a certain attitude towards propositions, which is called knowledge when they are true, error when they are false'--and he seems to think that when once this insight is reached the question may be considered closed forever!

In spite of my admiration of Mr. Russell's analytic powers, I wish, after reading such an article, that pragmatism, even had it no other function, might result in making him and other similarly gifted men ashamed of having used such powers in such abstraction from reality. Pragmatism saves us at any rate from such diseased abstractionism as those pages show.

P. S. Since the foregoing rejoinder was written an article on Pragmatism which I believe to be by Mr. Russell has appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* for April, 1909. As far as his discussion of the truth-problem goes, altho he has evidently taken great pains to be fair, it seems to me that he has in no essential respect improved upon his former arguments. I will therefore add nothing further, but simply refer readers who may be curious

to pp. 272-280 of the said article.

---

XV

## A DIALOGUE

After correcting the proofs of all that precedes I imagine a residual state of mind on the part of my reader which may still keep him unconvinced, and which it may be my duty to try at least to dispel. I can perhaps be briefer if I put what I have to say in dialogue form. Let then the anti-pragmatist begin:--

Anti-Pragmatist:--You say that the truth of an idea is constituted by its workings. Now suppose a certain state of facts, facts for example of antediluvian planetary history, concerning which the question may be asked:

'Shall the truth about them ever be known?' And suppose (leaving the hypothesis of an omniscient absolute out of the account) that we assume that the truth is never to be known. I ask you now, brother pragmatist, whether according to you there can be said to be any truth at all about such a state of facts. Is there a truth, or is there not a truth, in cases where at any rate it never comes to be known?

Pragmatist:--Why do you ask me such a question?

Anti-Prag.:--Because I think it puts you in a bad dilemma.

Prag.:--How so?

Anti-Prag.:--Why, because if on the one hand you elect to say that there is a truth, you thereby surrender your whole pragmatist theory. According to that theory, truth requires ideas and workings to constitute it; but in the present instance there is supposed to be no knower, and consequently neither ideas nor workings can exist. What then remains for you to make your truth of?

Prag.:--Do you wish, like so many of my enemies, to force me to make the truth out of the reality itself? I cannot: the truth is something known, thought or said about the reality, and consequently numerically additional to it. But probably your intent is something different; so before I say which horn of your dilemma I choose, I ask you to let me hear what the other horn may be.

Anti-Prag.:--The other horn is this, that if you elect to say that there is no truth under the conditions assumed, because there are no ideas or workings, then you fly in the face of common sense. Doesn't common sense believe that every state of facts must in the nature of things be truly statable in some kind of a proposition, even tho in point of fact the proposition should never be propounded by a living soul?

Prag.:--Unquestionably common sense believes this, and so do I. There have been innumerable events in the history of our planet of which nobody ever has been or ever will be able to give an account, yet of which it can already be said abstractly that only one sort of possible account can ever be true. The truth about any such event is thus already generically predetermined by the event's nature; and one may accordingly say with a perfectly good conscience that it virtually pre-exists. Common sense is thus right in its instinctive contention.

Anti-Prag.:--Is this then the horn of the dilemma which you stand for? Do you say that there is a truth even in cases where it shall never be known?

Prag.:--Indeed I do, provided you let me hold consistently to my own conception of truth, and do not ask me to abandon it for something which I find impossible to comprehend.--You also believe, do you not, that there is a truth, even in cases where it never shall be known?