

Lecture I. The Nature and
The Use of Absolute Truth.

I propose, in these lectures, to undertake a task of a somewhat definitely limited interest and scope. I want to define and to defend the concept of Absolute Truth. In particular, I want to show: First that we all use the ~~conception~~, or the idea, or, if you prefer another word, the Ideal, of absolute truth as a concept, an idea, an ideal, that is of use to us for the purposes both of common sense and of science; Secondly, I want

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to show why this ideal of absolute truth is a useful ideal, - useful for the purposes of daily life, useful for the purposes of scientific inquiry, and useful for any ethical, ~~philosophical~~ or metaphysical or religious ~~concerns~~ ~~or~~ interests that any ^{of us} ~~body~~ may chance to possess; and thirdly, I want to indicate the sense in which, ~~we~~ suppose, our ideal of absolute truth is an ideal of something that is, in some regions of our life, ^{and} ~~is~~ in some ~~ways~~ ^{ways} accessible.

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degree, accessible to us. I have called
this task limited in character and
scope. Some of you will regard it, in
advance, as a hopelessly vast and
vague undertaking. ~~But~~ ^{yet} I call it limited
because in my own mind it is closely
connected with other philosophical tasks
of which ~~as~~ ^{as I prepare} these lectures, I shall in-
evitably be ~~concerned~~ almost constantly
aware, but which I must not here
attempt to accomplish, ^{or even to discuss}. As I speak, I shall
be thinking of numerous logical and
metaphysical problems whose solution
is bound up with the particular

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if I may adapt a
~~well~~ well-known phrase, a
mere playing ^{with pebbles on the} ~~of the~~
shore ^{of the great ocean of} truth, while the ocean ~~of~~
~~itself~~ is left ~~quite~~ unexplored beyond
us. This is the sort of limitation
that I mean when I call my
present task limited. Let me ~~also~~
admit all this at the outset. I shall
not content you. But if I leave you
with a sort of discontent which may
help ^{however little} to make you better explorers in
the ocean of truth in the future, I
shall have done all that in these
lectures I can hope to do.

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I.

I have chosen ^{to use} the ~~phraseology~~ ^{expression}

"Absolute Truth" in my title partly because this phrase is, at the moment extremely unpopular. ^{Of course unpopularity is} ~~itself~~ ^{not in itself an unmixed good. But sometimes, it helps one to} ~~be frank by not being independent.~~ ^{And this is just a line. What is often} ~~called~~ "Absolutism" is normally

a favorite target for the ^{joyous} ~~joyous~~ ridicule of ^{skilful} ~~skilful~~ humorists, ^{(and for the more ~~massive~~ serious security of} ~~of~~ impressive public teachers, ^{of the} ~~of the~~ leaders of ^{the} ~~the~~ thought of the day, and gull who are, so to speak, in the fashion. ~~Now~~ It seems fair, ^{to} ~~to~~

suppose that if a man is a believer in ^{what is called} Absolute Truth, he must be some sort of "Absolutist". And you will

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know in advance what ^{the leaders of opinion} ~~are~~ ~~people~~
^{today} counsel you to think of absolutists
and of absolutism. ~~And~~ ~~believe~~ ~~one~~ who
declares
~~any~~ ~~truth~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~absolute~~,
appears, in Mr. Schiller's eyes to be
assuming that he is ^{personally} in
very much ^{the same} ~~the~~ position ~~as~~ that
which the dogma of Papal Infallibility
attributes to the Pope, ^{whenever the pope} ~~is~~ ~~solely~~
^{is solemnly and officially defining the faith of the Church, and}
^{plainly} such infallibility is something that
no merely mortal philosopher ^{speaking in his own name} ~~ought~~
^{ought} to attribute to himself. ^{seem} ~~an~~ ~~absolutist~~
~~to~~ ~~say~~ ~~the~~ ~~least~~, ^{seem} ~~in~~ ~~her~~ ~~it~~ ~~erably~~
presumptuous. Meanwhile, you all
know ~~that~~ other attributes which have
now been declared by high authority,

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to belong to Absolutism and to Absolutists.
Absolutism is futile, for who, ^{as they say} can find
the Absolute, ^{either} in the market place or in
the laboratory? And who would know
what to do with it if he found it?

As for the Absolutist himself he ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{various,} ~~various,~~
~~the~~ ~~most~~ ~~various~~ ~~and~~ ~~valley~~

~~is~~ ^{yet} quite authoritatively, characterized
^{in current literature}
(as a fantastic dreamer) and also as

a cold and barren intellectual, ~~and~~
as a mystic, and ^{also} as a logic-chopper,

~~and~~ ~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~at~~ ~~all~~ ~~a~~ ~~partisan~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~
merely ^{abstract} reason, and ^{also} as an ^{abstract} ~~abstract~~ ^{sentimental} ~~abstract~~.

All these things you have heard.
Of course I do not think these statements to be correct, ^{or} ^{is} ^{it} ^{should}
^{be} ^{of} ^{an} ^{absolutist}. But I accept ^{quite} ^{deliberately} ^{the} ^{unpopularity}
of the name Absolutist. Some people,

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who are fond of ~~the latest~~ whatever happens to be the latest tendency in current opinion, are ^{consequently} fond, as they say, of watching the "passing of Absolutism". ^{Some of them say that they} I confess ~~that I~~ like to be "in at the death" of absolutism. ^{now} I confess ^{was} much affected in my childhood by

that now so antiquated and threadbare word about how "truth crushed to earth shall rise again". That old word by itself proves nothing, solves no problem, has no sort of authority, ^{being} ~~is~~ merely phrase of a poet. But I confess that, seeing some reason to believe, as I shall try to show you, that ~~that~~ that old word expressed an idea

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way ^{real state of the fact} affected, I am personally fond
of going out to see truth rise again.
I believe that I have often seen it rise again. ^{It has the}
halo of Resurrection and whenever I see truth, it has to my
mind a certain character of absoluteness
about it which makes me love ^{to share} the
present unpopularity of the word absolute.
I.

So much for a mere suggestion
of my programme. And ^{next for} ~~now for~~ ^{that a}
a preliminary sketch of some features of our
~~work in hand~~
problem.

Common sense is well
acquainted with the predicates true
and false. No doubt ^{as words} they are used
more or less equivocally by common
sense. But without repeating

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of the efforts so often made to distinguish all the ^{principal} ~~various~~ senses attributed to the predicates true and false, I am here quite ready to agree with many of my opponents in this discussion so far as to say that, in these lectures I ^{almost} mean by the words true and false predicates that are properly applied to ^{(to affirmations and denials),} assertions, to judgments, to propositions, and to ideas, ^{only} in so far as ideas are of the nature of assertions or propositions, or of analogous complexes. Thus we commonly say that the assertion " $2+2=4$ " is true. We should very generally agree that the assertion " $2+2=5$ " is false. A mining promoter may give you a true or false

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(That is, he may make true or false statements, deny it, account of his mine.) A man may make a true or false complaint when he brings a suit in court against ^{a man or} ~~another~~ ^{or a business man} ~~as a corporation~~. A lover may make a true or false promise; but his promise is true or false, for our ^{present} purposes because he says: "I will do thus and so"; that is, truth or falsity belongs to his promise in so far as it involves an assertion about his intended acts. Now you know that, by a certain ^{more or less natural} transfer, we ^{do indeed} often apply the adjectives true or false to ^{mere} feelings, to ^{emotions, to} morals, to appearances, and on occasion to ^{physical} things, or to still other objects which we do not regard as assertions, or as ^{directly} partaking of the nature of affirmations or denials.

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Thus one may speak of a true lover, or of a false friend, or of true and false emotions of love or hate. One may ask whether a broken line should be called a true curve, or may talk of a true gentleman, or of a false, that is of counterfeit money. In countless ~~other~~ other instances, and with very various motives one may, ^{thus} transfer the predicates true and false to physical or to moral or to mathematical or to psychological objects, ^{which are not ideas or assertions about any object}. It is however no part of my present purpose to discuss the variety of such transferred meanings of the words true and false, or to define or to defend or ^{to} assail such transfers. The predicates true and false shall here be used in their natural application.

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to ideas about objects, in so far as these ideas involve some form of affirmation or of denial regarding their objects.

Now common sense ^{does not confine itself} ~~is not confined to~~ ~~using merely~~ predicates true and false ^{as the} ~~are~~ ^{sole ones which can be employed} ~~are~~ ^{in assertions or to propositions} ~~where the truth or the falsity of assertions is in question.~~ Common sense also knows of various other

predicates which seem to be ^{directly} related to the predicates true and false, but which are ~~essentially~~ ^(in meaning) not intended to be identical with these predicates. An assertion may

be offered for my assent or dissent. ~~Every~~

The assertion may be an assertion

that such a man (I will not here

mention names) is to be the next President of the United States. Instead

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of saying, "This assertion is true" or "This assertion is false", I may comment upon it by saying: "This assertion is doubtful"; "This assertion is probable"; "This assertion is improbable"; "This assertion is very highly improbable"; or finally, "This assertion is conditionally or relatively true". What I ordinarily mean by such comments, - by the predicates doubtful, probable, improbable, more or less probable or improbable, relatively or conditionally true, - what, I say, such comments and predicates mean ~~for~~ my ordinary common sense, it is not altogether easy to define in a few words. But I call attention to these alternative predicates here, first because their relation to the predicates "true" and "false" has been, I think, too much

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neglected ~~by~~ ⁱⁿ many recent discussions
of the problem as to the nature of ~~truth~~ ^{truth},
and secondly because the vagueness
which ~~many~~ ^{some} people ~~were~~ ^{appear to feel} ~~have~~ regarding
the meaning of these alternative predicates,
and about their relation to the predicates true and false,
is responsible for the need that I myself,
~~and~~ ^{and} for ~~specifying~~ ^{using}, on the present occasion,
the term absolute truth. As you will later
see, while I am quite willing to use
the term "absolute truth", and to enjoy
its unpopularity, I do so with a feeling

that, as a fact, the expression is redundant.

~~Consequently~~ ^{In my opinion,} while there are the most
varied sorts and degrees of probability,
and while the probability of given assertions
varies in the most interesting way, with time

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and with the state of ^{our} experience, ~~and~~
and with all sorts of ^{judgments} fortunes, ~~there~~
is ~~to be expected~~ only one sort of truth. That
is to say, a ^{perfectly} determinate assertion, with a precise
meaning, is to my mind just either true
or false. To call it "absolutely true" really
means no more than ~~that~~ ought to be
meant by calling it "true". And this I
say with the fullest recognition of the difficul-
ties of the problem before us, and without
any ~~of~~ desire to prejudice your own
minds. ^(in advance of your further study) What the predicate true means
is not easy to define. My assertion that I
^{mean precisely the same} say truth and by absolute truth, ^(traces the property) ~~as property~~
of a given perfectly determinate assertion,
~~means~~ is meant simply as a preliminary
confession of a thesis which I am going
to ~~answer~~ explain in what follows.

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I do not say that this thesis is ^{intelligible} obvious or axiomatic. I have for years been familiar with the reproaches that my dear friend James heaped upon all who loved or made anything that they called absolute. And yet I insist that, as a fact, this is my thesis. I will soon tell you why. When however I mention in this preliminary sketch, ^{alternative} the predicates probable, improbable, and the rest, I do so to hint that even an absolutist who defines truth as a predicate ^{which has} ~~has~~ a precise ^{and absolute} meaning, and who sees no difference whatever between the predicate "true" and the predicate "absolutely true", when ^{these predicates are rightly} applied to

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assertions whose meaning is precisely determinate, need not on that account fail to recognize that most of the assertions of daily life and of the ~~exact~~ sciences in so far as they ^{in so far as they} deal with empirical data, are, ^{for us men} only probable, and are not ~~known~~ certainly known ^{by us} to be true. An absolutist, as I shall show you, - an absolutist of my own type, ^{need} make no more pretense to infallibility than does any other, ^{rightly} considerate person. Moreover, with James, he can recognize all those endlessly fluent variations of ^{human} experience which so often turn the confident assurances of one generation into the mere probabilities, or the improbabilities, or the errors, ^{perhaps into} the exploded and abandoned superstitions, of

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a later generation of men. Probability, for reasons that we shall later see, is often the most fluent and shifting of predicates. Of probability, ^{as a predicate, beliefs, can therefore} ~~can~~ ^{be truly} asserted what James asserts of truth. Probability, ^{namely} happens to ideas, ^{and to assertions} it is an incident of their fortunes. It ^{often} waxes and wanes like the temperature of the seasons. Sometimes it abides long without notable alteration, ^{but again} it changes with the "cosmic weather". It comes and goes. Some of the ^{lucky} hypotheses, some of the assertions that men make, it long favors so that, as the pragmatists say, they "work", and prosper for ^{that} a time as they work, and grow fat with assurance. Then perhaps fortune changes; probability takes wings like riches, and leaves

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the plundered hypotheses so poor that none do them reverence. They die and are forgotten. Whoever has what James calls the dramatic temper, which ~~the~~ James thinks characteristic of all pragmatists and which was certainly characteristic of himself, can, ^{truthfully} take all the joy that he wishes in watching the fortunes of the predicate probable. Why this ~~is~~ is true, we shall later see. And one of such dramatic temper can say, and can once more, truly say, that ^{probability is} ~~the~~ ~~guide of life~~, upon one side, ^(your life, indeed) the guide of life. Probability is the predicate applicable to a vast class of financial, of social, and of scientific propositions, - propositions whereof we know not whether they are

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true or not. And whatever you can
now say about ^{who is to be the} ~~the~~ next President of the
has at present, at best, only some degree
of probability; and, ^{all} such probabilities, ^{as you know} are
subject to large, ^{possible} surprises before the
next Presidential year.

A ^{complete} theory of truth, therefore,
must take account not only of the
predicates "true" and "false", but of the
alternative predicates, "probable" or "im-
probable." Most of the recent confusions
regarding our topic might have been
avoided had this ^{work} been carefully done.
I have noticed with surprise how little attention many recent writers give
to the ^{concept} of probability. Meanwhile, I have suggested, in the
foregoing list of predicates, ^{another} ~~the~~ alternative
predicate, ^{namely the predicate} relatively true, or cor:

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ditionally true. Now here again is a predicate which, despite its somewhat technical character, common sense frequently recognizes. Thus some one might ~~comment upon~~ ^{comment upon} the proposition: "X will be next President of the United States", ~~by saying:~~ ^{(not unconditional, but conditionally and}
"Yes that proposition is true) ^{relatively, hypothetically, or with reference to} ~~relatively,~~ ^{possibilities.} "If, namely, he lives, becomes a ^{certain} candidate, ^{in due time} is nominated, accepts nomination, is elected, inaugurated, &c., then he will be the next president". I mention this somewhat unfruitful instance of so-called relative truth, merely to illustrate the sort of thing that some people seem to have in mind when they oppose the absolutist. "Unfruitful as this instance of relative truth is" they may say, "we have to confess that

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We mortals have access not to absolute truth, but, ^{only} to some such relative truth as the foregoing instance suggests. Our most fruitful assertions are at best only relatively true, conditionally true. The eclipses predicted for the coming ^{year or} years, will occur, if ~~there~~ ^{there} occurs no cosmic catastrophe ~~to~~ ^{interferes} with the present order of the solar system; if the laws of nature remain uniform; if the computations have been correctly made, and so on. Nothing nearer the absolute than this sort of thing is knowable ~~to~~ ^{to} us mortals. Our truth then is relative, - never absolute".

^{Now without anything}
What is meant by ^{such} relative truth as opposed to absolute, or, as I should

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also say, to simple truth, I must later attempt to ^{discuss more at length} ~~re-assert~~. In this opening sketch I may simply point out in passing that an absolutist such as I am may assert, and ^{that} ~~that~~ I shall assert, ^{this, viz.:-} ~~that there~~ The truth of any hypothetical proposition, such as, "If A, then B", ~~is~~ is precisely the same in its character as the truth of any so-called categorical proposition. Whatever truth is, it does not alter its character because the assertion that is in question is long, or complex, or hard to understand, if only the whole proposition whose truth or falsity is to be ^{considered} ~~decided~~, when once understood, or when taken as a whole, turns out to have ^{precisely} a definite meaning. When I assert: "If A then B", I do not assert A, nor yet do I assert B.

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Hence no question about the truth of A or the truth of B is so far before me at all. What I assert is that the ~~consequent~~ antecedent, ^A implies the consequent, ^B ~~for all that I say they~~ ^{may} both be false or both true, or the antecedent may be false and the consequent ^{maybe} true. About all that, in asserting "If A then B", I assert nothing. Hence it does not help me to say that, in case I can know this sort of proposition to be true, ~~that B~~ ^{may be} ~~is~~ ^{is} a peculiar sort of truth, called conditional truth, ^{- a sort of truth} which is as much opposed to absolute truth. The whole issue regarding our ^{knowledge of the truth of} ~~about~~ conditional propositions is this: -

Can we know any of them to be true at all? If we can, then the whole proposition "If A then B" is itself known to be not conditionally or relatively true, but true, whatever this may mean. And the truth of conditional assertions, if they are true at all,

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is of the same sort as the truth of categorical assertions.

One more preliminary remark is needed regarding the predicates which common sense applies to propositions. I have spoken of the predicates "probable" and "improbable". We are all of us familiar with ^{the} another predicate, namely the predicate "certain". Now, in my opinion, the predicate "certain" does not mean the same as the "We shall win", says the college leader, sometimes to the team or to ~~the~~ his ^{other} fellows; "we shall win, that is certain". Now often common sense, and alas not infrequently, the philosophers, in their ~~own~~ discussion of the meaning of truth, confuse the predicate "true" or "absolutely true" with the predicate "absolutely true" ^{and} "certain" ^{and} "not true".

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accuse an absolutist ^{gkemiqa} ~~critic~~ person who is peculiarly prone to ~~assert~~ that many truths which more cautious theorists believe to be only more or less probable or improbable, are "absolutely certain". Now an absolutist like anybody else ^(should be aware that he, as an individual) may feel certain of many propositions that, as they say, are in truth "not so" at all. Moreover, whatever truth is, there ^{need be no question} ~~is~~ ~~no~~ ~~question~~ that "certainty" is as variable a predicate in its application to propositions as any human predicate can be. And ^{individual} any man's "certainties" are just as much subject to criticism when he defines truth in absolute terms as when he defines it in any other terms. Certainty is a predicate applicable to propositions

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in so far as the mind of some human being has ~~certain~~ feelings of assurance when he considers his own views about those propositions. In so far, certainty is a private affair. No assertion that is true, even if it be absolutely true, need appear certain to any ^{individual} man, unless he has the good fortune to acquire the private state of mind called ^{regarding that assertion} certainty. And no false statement can be found so absurd that some human being may not feel perfectly certain of its truth. Certainty, like probability, comes and goes, only with more capriciousness than does the predicate "probable", for reasons which we shall later see. For the rest,

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what is often called "self-evidence", or
"absolute and immediate certainty", is
a predicate of propositions which is often assigned to them
^{because of} a state of mind which no absolutist of
my own type ~~regards~~ regards as a really
enlightened or enlightening state of
mind. This I can say in advance of
all the rest of your discussion of truth, ^{and} that
if any proposition about any topic in
heaven or earth seems to you "self-
evident", or "immediately certain", you
may regard ^{such self-evidence} that as an excellent ^{ground} evidence
^{for the presumption} that you do not understand the proposition,
and do not comprehend the matter that is in question,
and do not yet know whether or why
that proposition is true. Self-evidence ^{(is) often a whole}
^{state - the result} of the play of mere instinct or
of blind habit. But it is never the result
of wisdom, ^{or never an expression of enlightenment} for reasons which we

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I shall later see, can ever be understood by us mortals in terms of mere self-evidence, and all sorts of falsities can seem self-evident to this or to that individual.

Do not then confound a ~~ten-~~ tendency to define truth in absolute terms with the assertion that any truth is either self-evident, or otherwise, to ~~any~~ ^{one man} ~~any~~ ^{necessary} certain. Of course whoever believes that we are reasonable beings at all, or that any proposition is true, holds that certainty ^{and} truth can be brought into some more or less close relation. But what that relation is, we have yet to see.

This ~~is~~ ^{is} preliminary survey of the predicates which common sense applies to propositions has been intended to prepare the way for a more careful study of the predicates true and false.

What do we mean by these predicates in their application to the assertions,

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to the affirmations and denials which fill ~~concern~~ human life?

I presuppose that most if not all of you know the answers to this question which Professor James, and other representatives of Pragmatism, have in recent times propounded. A distinguished colleague ^{within a few weeks} has ~~recently~~ presented to you his own version of such answers. I am ~~not~~ here to state my own case, and do not wish ~~any~~ to waste your time by any unnecessary controversy. But since I must ^{indeed} ~~say~~ mention my general relation to current discussion, there is

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One word here to be said about the number and range of the alternative answers to the question: What is truth? which ~~recent~~ ^{of the last few decades} discussions, ^{criticisms}. It is a favorite contention of some Pragmatists that their opponents are, in the main, or altogether, a set of persons ^{who are named} ~~collectively~~ not only Absolutists, but also Intellectualists. When ^{the case is} ~~so~~ ^(sole or the main) stated the alternative to Pragmatism ^{appears to be} this so-called Intellectualism, I will not stop to discuss with you, ^{at length} what the term intellectualist ^{is said} ~~appears~~ to mean. I want merely to deny, and very definitely, that my own answer to the question "What is truth?" is in any proper sense

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an intellectualist answer. Intellectualism is not the sole opponent of current pragmatism. That is to say, I myself do not believe that the predicate true belongs to assertions for any reason that can be defined in terms of the so-called "pure intellect." I have earnestly asserted for many years that the so-called "pure intellect" is a myth. I believe, and so far quite in harmony with recent pragmatism, that all ^{our human} thinking is a part of our conduct, that ^{the life of our} intellect is always a constructive process, an activity, a fashioning of ideas, a committing of ^{our selves} ourselves to assertions and denials, an adjustment of ourselves

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to our situation, - in brief, ^(I believe that) our intellectual life is a part of the expression of our will.

I decline then from the start to be classified with ^{(the world) (the mere)} intellectualists. And now this position of my own is no recent confession of a half ~~access~~ repentant abasement to the novel contentions of ^{popularly} the triumphant pragmatists. I expressed ^{in print} this general view about the ~~intellectual~~ relation of thought to activity ~~decidedly~~ more than twenty five years ago. My own form of ^{philosophical} idealism has ever since been based upon it. I stated the outline of a theory of truth in the first book that I ~~ever~~ wrote. And my theory of truth

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was then no intellectualism, and is not
today. Of course what I chanced to say
about this topic long ago will not interest
you ~~today~~ ^{here}; and I do not ask that it should
interest you. But I confess to a certain
restlessness when I hear or read of this
simple statement of alternatives, as if the
only choice were between committing
yourself to recent pragmatism, and
maintaining that the ~~distinctive~~ predicates
true and false are due to ^{something called} the pure
intellect. The view that I have to state
to you is in its essence a voluntaristic
or activist view of the nature and
meaning of truth. It was ^{most} elaborately

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and very explicitly set forth more than
ten years ago in my book called "The World
and the Individual", ^{some years} ~~long~~ before the
recent pragmatist movement began.
And if I may preface ~~any~~ ^{this present}
restatement of my view by ^{one more} word of
^{general} characterization, I ^{will venture to say} ~~desire to~~ ~~express~~
that I ^{should} have no objection to defining my
own view of the nature of absolute truth
as a form of ~~absolute~~ Pragmatism; only
that I should insist upon calling it
Absolute Pragmatism. And I should
not in the least admit that it is, as
Mr. Schiller affirmed in 1908 at the
Heidelberg Congress, a doctrine that
makes ^{or is due to} certain "concessions" to recent

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Pragmatism. As a fact I formed my own views, ^{about truth,} in the 80's of the last century, largely under the influence of Professor James's own Activism, as he then held and stated the doctrine, - ~~Willy~~ Kant, Fichte, Schopenhauer, and Fouillée, and then only later and much less decisively Hegel, being the other influences that, ^{then most} ~~less~~ affected my thoughts. To recent Pragmatism, in so far as I understand its position, I have no concessions to make, just because I imagine that its true features were anticipated and discounted long ago, ~~and~~ by a great many modern philosophers. To be sure I have repeatedly tried to earn from it, and I hope that I shall keep on trying.

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Nobody's serious efforts to come to
clearness about the truth problem
ought to be unwelcome. and I seem,
to you, in these mere suggestions of controversy,
to be austere or unqualified in my
temper, believe me that I am merely
trying to make ^{for clearness,} in my own way, and
am attempting to ~~avoid~~ prevent mis-
understandings.

III.
Our assertions, our propo-
sitions, can be true or false? But
when we make assertions, what
happens? I reply, some sort of will
is expressed. Something is done. Our
assertions are acts of conduct. Fully

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agree that they are part of our efforts to comprehend, to make clear, to define our situation. And these efforts are made in the interest of all the rest of our conduct. Our assertions and denials are acts of accepting or of rejecting some characterization or classification, or ^{acknowledgment or} ~~interpretation~~ prediction of objects. In general they are acceptances or rejections of some interpretation of our experience. And nobody can assert more earnestly that I do that, whatever we assert or deny, it is our experience and our purposes that we are trying to interpret.

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Moreover, ^{any sincere effort at} ~~general~~ interpretation has always a relation to proposed conduct. When you assert or deny that things are or that they are so or so, you are endeavoring to solve a problem that is never one of ^{the} mere copying of an indifferent fact, or a mere repetition of a world of fact which you conceive to be independent of all your purposeful relations to it. Purely theoretical truth, that is, truth having no bearing upon conceived modes of conduct, is as much an impossibility, a contradiction in terms, as is the so-called pure intellect. A man lives, and as

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He directs his life, he becomes aware of his own conduct. And his intellectual life is that portion or aspect of his conduct which is due to his effort to clarify and direct the rest of his conduct. He clarifies and directs ~~the~~ his conduct, by interpreting his experience, and by defining his plans of action in terms of his interpretation of his experience.

So far, as I suppose, I agree with at least many of my pragmatist opponents, although, in my own mind, this view is certainly not ^{due to} ~~resulting~~ the recent discussion. Let me next ~~begin~~ come to closer

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quarters with the question: What are the special purposes that guide us in our ~~assertions~~ ^{affirmations} and denials? These special purposes have always been defined as involving some sort of "correspondence" or "agreement" ^{between our assertions and what we call their objects.} We affirm or deny something about some reality, or about a present or past event, or about a content of experience, given or conceived, ^{that about which we affirm or deny is called our object.} It is said ^(by the usual philosophical truth of ~~assertions~~) that when we ~~assertions~~ make assertions, we ~~want~~ intend our ideas to "agree" with their objects, or to "correspond" to them. ^{And} it is further said that the truth of our assertions consists in our success in so arranging the ideas in terms of which we characterize our objects

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that the required agreement or corres-
pondence of idea and object obtains or
takes place or is won. ~~It is~~ ^{and consequently} an ancient
definition of truth ^{declares it to consist in} ~~depends on~~ the agreement
of the thought or assertion or idea ^{with} ~~and~~
the object that is in question.

~~Nevertheless~~ you probably
^(I have since) know the criticisms which have been
passed, both by pragmatists, and
by ^{some} absolutists, upon the adequacy
of this definition of truth. ^(in terms of mere agreement or correspondence) That some
sort of correspondence or agreement
of idea and object is in question, is indeed
generally admitted; but the critics
of the foregoing view rightly insist
that the real issue is joined only when
one defines, better than the foregoing

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abstract formula does, what corres:
pondence, what agreement is in question.

In our various efforts to characterize
and to interpret our experience, very
different modes, degrees, and types of
correspondence ~~and~~ ^{or} of agreement ^{between}
thoughts and their objects are in question.

The truth of a ledger entry, ^{viewed} as an account
of a business transaction, the truth of
the assertion that ~~all~~ a given man's
portrait by a given artist is well done,
the truth of the binomial theorem, the
truth of a legal opinion, ^{or} of a botanical
description ^{or} of a psychological analysis,
or of a political prediction, - what differ:
ent sorts of truth these seem to be,
if you judge them in terms of the

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different types and degrees of agreement of ~~any~~ idea and object which are in question? Whoever tries to define truth in general terms, must ^{therefore} attempt to seize upon some deep ^{and} common feature in terms of which all of these various sorts of correspondence or of agreement between idea and object are justly to be characterized.

The conditions of any such general definition of the truth-relation seem to me to depend upon ~~one~~ ^a consideration, which I must ~~put forth~~ ^{next emphasize,} ~~with~~ ^{-a consideration} ~~character~~, upon which I ~~once~~ insisted in my own first effort to define truth, in the book which I just mentioned, - a book printed in 1885. Any assertion

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that you please, if it is somebody's sincere effort to tell the truth, ~~assertion~~ is an act which selects its own object, and which expresses, as far as it goes, its own intentions about that object, and ~~determines~~ also determines, from the point of view of the one who asserts it, precisely the sort of correspondence with its object that is in question; and ~~his~~'s ^{mind} ~~is~~ ^{declared to be} ~~no~~ assertion can be ~~accepted~~ ^{with a full acceptance} as true or false except ~~from~~ ^{precisely} the point of view of the one who means, and who makes, ^{and who chooses its object} that assertion. If I look at a portrait, and say that it is a good portrait of a given man, you must know precisely what I have in mind when I see that portrait, and precisely ~~about~~ whom I am thinking when I say that the portrait is good, and

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precisely the standard of value to which I appeal, before you can have the whole evidence, before you which enables you, ^{fully} to verify or to refute just my assertion about just my object. Of course if I am an ignoramus about portrait painting (as, in fact, I am) and you are an expert or a portrait painter, you ~~can~~ ^{may} think that my judgment about such things is worthless for anybody but myself. And then of course you will ^{simply ignore my opinion} ~~refute~~ that view, which itself may be perfectly true, does not suffice to refute the assertion that I make about the portraits which I am ^{interested} ~~concerned~~ in. ~~my assertions~~ ^{for I make assertions about} the objects about which I intend to make assertions. I can sincerely judge about no other objects. And until you fully take account of just my interpretation of just my object, as I select and define the object, and as I mean and define my interpretation of it, you cannot have before you the evidence that in my assertion I am failing to accomplish what I myself ^{intending and} ~~undertaking~~. My assertion

is my own venture. ⁽³⁰⁾ You must judge me by my own intent.

So far then, everybody is the definer and
asserter of precisely what he himself intends
to define and assert, and his ^{account of his} ~~assertion~~
object has or fails to have truth according to whether
or no it has just that sort, that form,
that degree of ^{agreement with its object} truth, which he himself intends
it to possess. ^{when he selects and defines that object} Nobody can set the truth standard
for another man unless, - and here is
precisely the ~~more~~ centrally important condition
of all fair criticism; - unless the critic fully
shares, fully takes over, and assumes, the
precise intentions of the thinker who is
criticised. I myself aim to get this thought of
mine into some sort of correspondence with some
determinate object. This is what happens whenever
I judge. I select the object. I define it
as far as I do define it. I intend to agree

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writes it in a ~~perfect~~ way which my intent
predetermines, and which no truth-standard
which I have ^{by my choice} not made my own can possibly
set for me from without.

So far then, truth appears, and
is, a thoroughly democratic affair. You
can make assertions about no objects
which are not your own objects. They become
your own objects in so far as you intend
them to be your own objects. Your will,
your choice, defines what you intend,
precisely in so far as your assertion
expresses your deliberate opinion. And
what agreement you intend ^{your ideas} ~~to~~ have
with ~~the~~ object, it is yours to define
and to assert. And whoever judges
your success in getting at truth or

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in avoiding error must judge you by
your own standards.

But now what are your
standards? In terms of what ^{idea? goal?} objects do
you define your ^{own} ideas? Here I can only
^{just now} sketch your situation in general terms, and
^{must for the moment} leave you to verify my sketch, as well as
you can, for yourself. Remember, however,
that I am here only attempting to characterize your ideas
as a truth-seeker, ^{Get you not now talking about your certainties}
^{but about your ideals.} your assertions are, in
general, I have said, a part of your con-
duct. Now why do you make assertions? Why
do you ~~purpose~~, intended, define, characterize,
interpret, ^{seek to know} objects at all? On the whole,
- and I am here speaking quite tentatively
and empirically, - ^(may hardly) I suppose that you
do all this because you have not, just
now, all the insight and all the

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satisfaction that you want, Or again,
as I may say,
you have not the hold upon experience that
you desire. You are seeking (and here again
I agree with the pragmatists), - a control
that at the moment you do not possess.
You are using your assertions to guide
your conduct. Because you judge your
object thus or so, you are disposed to act
thus or so. Or again because you
need guidance, you try at any moment
to define for yourself your ideas about
your object. In seeking for truth you
seek for the right ^{guidance of} ~~conduct~~ ^{about} ~~it~~
your conduct. And of course the right
guidance is, for you, just that guidance ^{which} ~~that~~
you, with your intents, purposes, interests,
then and there demand, as the guidance

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which, if right, ~~is the~~ ~~guidance~~ ~~that~~
will lead you to ~~do~~ do what you want
and intend ~~to do~~

I hope that this sketch will
show you how completely relative to your
own purposes, intents, definitions, interests,
desires, and active concerns, your idea of
truth, ^{in my opinion} must indeed be. What error, you
may say, what error does this account
leave for any conception of, absolute
truth? I answer, it is precisely this
reference to your own intentions, interests,
and conduct which ^{is best expressed in} ~~is~~ ^{your} ~~is~~ you
a definition of truth in absolute terms.
This is what I want to show you. The whole affair was
the simplest of all, but is today deeply and almost
constantly misunderstood. ~~What is your view, as we~~

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active being about your ^{the nature of your} conduct.

If you do anything, whatever, what ^{is it which you intend}
^{accomplish.} What ideal of your own life as a being

Who acts governs all your special ideals?

What is your own notion of ^{the nature of a deed.}
Remember, I am still not here expounding

a metaphysic. I am not, ^{now} talking of ~~certainties~~
certainties at all. I am asking you
to note ~~some~~ a certain character ^{simply} that
you in ideal attribute to your acts, whenever
you conceive your acts as real acts.

Whoever does anything whatever
~~expressly~~ and intends to do it, supposes that
he thereby gets something done. How common-
place this observation seems! Yet I am
not here propounding this statement
as the statement of a self-evident proposition.
I am simply call your attention to a
certain ideal of what conduct is, - an

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ideal which is so practical, so common sense, and yet so deep and full of meaning, that everybody who is indeed ^{person of} a decisive character lives in the light of this ideal, while, in my own opinion the whole fabric of the exact sciences depends upon understanding what this ideal means. I repeat, whoever intentionally acts, proposes to get something done, - that is, ~~he~~ proposes to accomplish, in each of his deeds, something that ^{from his own point of view} is ~~irrevocable~~, ^{to be henceforth} irrevocable. Indecisive and untrustworthy people can ^{indeed} make plausible promises to which, as the phrase is, "a string is tied," so that they ~~can~~ ^{hope to} withdraw their promises at

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pleasure. But men of decisive wills, ^{how-} ~~act~~
ever careless they may be about their promises,
act in the light of the ideal principle that

What is once done cannot be undone.

However it may be with men's promises, ^{to your}
~~regard~~ individual deeds, ^{no you concern them} no string can be

attached. Once done they are yours, no longer
~~your~~. To conceive ~~that~~ your deeds ^{is in} ~~is~~ ^{involved} in willing to ^{to} ~~them~~
release. You cannot say: I will that this

which I have just done shall no longer
be my deed. I can wish that I had done something that I have done.

^{But to wish is not to will.} I assert this principle, at
present, not as a self-evident principle

which I ^{at this point require you to accept as} ~~am aware of~~ ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{absolutely}
~~have recognized~~ ^{itself} ~~as~~ ^{absolutely} certain. I only point

out that the ideal postulate ^{according to which} ~~that~~ ^{is}
is the ^{real} nature of action, is a postulate in

terms of which action itself gets ^{for us} some of its
deepest values. What ~~is~~ would be the
value of acting if a deed once done could
suddenly be undone at pleasure?

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The irrevocability of our deeds may of course sometimes appear to us as a sad fate: -

"The moving finger writes, and, having writ
Writes on; Not all your piety or wit
Can lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

Yes; but suppose that it is my moving finger that writes. Suppose that what I write are the ^{chosen} deeds of my life. Suppose that I intend them, and mean them as mine.

Then as the moving finger writes on, ^{I am writing it, that I can no longer live,} ^{I can live in it, that} I am ^{all the while} coming to my own. I am building my sure foundation. What I have done, ^{to-day,} is mine. Nobody shall take it away from me. It is my accomplishment; my treasury of deeds. My past is the safest of storehouses. Of course I cannot enjoy

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the safety of this ^{ideal} treasure house without accepting the consequences of viewing ^{the} my life thus. But, on the other hand, no view of life is more practically useful, for people who have wills at all, than just this ^{belief in} ~~viewing~~ the absolutely irrevocable nature of all our deeds. This view makes life for the first time real to one who in childhood for the first time comes ~~upon~~ ^{to} the consciousness that whatever he has once done, he can never undo that. Surely the "dramatic temper" ~~needs~~ needs just this ideal as to what life is in order to make voluntary life appear ^{truly and not fantastically} dramatic. This life of ours is one in which they do not murder in jest, poison in jest, do loving deeds for naught, make and unmake as in a

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dream. When we act ^(believe that we) ~~we~~ get deeds done; and that is why we can be content to sleep a little when the day's work is ^{over} ~~done~~, because our little accomplishments of the day are in any case ~~safe~~. So much is completed. We can never have the trouble and responsibility of doing this day's work over again. This we can recall, and sleep. (And if the ^{sleep is death, still life itself has been, and we conceive, an indelible accomplishment of ~~itself~~} Now, as we ^{thus} naturally ^{conceive} our voluntary life, no truth can be ^{mentioned that is} ~~conceived~~ ^{more} absolute, ^{in ~~the~~ ~~universe~~}, than ~~is~~ ^{is} this ~~supposed~~ truth that deeds once done cannot be undone. In any case, whether rightly or wrongly, we all ^{do} conceive that in reality our life is ~~really~~ of this character; and so to conceive life is useful for the formation of every clear sense of personal dignity, responsibility,

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and effectiveness.

Without here inquiring further whether this postulate is indeed ^{in itself} questionable, let us ~~turn to self~~ ^{for the time being} simply accept the postulate, to see to what further ideal ~~it leads us~~ ^{it leads us} regarding the nature of truth. Let us see ^{in what sort of relation to this postulate} ~~of our assertions~~ ^{about any} object that interests us inevitably stands.

I am interested in certain objects. I judge that they are such and such. Why do I make any such judgments at all? ~~Because~~ ^{Because} I want my conduct to be guided by my judgments. My judgments are assertions that undertake to guide me. They tell me in essence this: - "Since ~~the~~ object that interests you is thus and thus to be characterized, you are to act thus and so". Suppose that I follow my judgment. Well then I act. I do

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something. This deed, however, is, according to the foregoing postulate, something irrevocable. Once done, it is, I conceive, ^{beyond repudiation} ~~irrevocable~~. Then, in conceiving it as ^{that} irrevocable, I conceive it as possessed of its own little ^{part in a system of} ~~part in a system of~~ indestructible, ^{real} values. It either was what, in view of the real objects with reference to which I acted, and in view of my purposes, ~~and~~ I willed or meant to accomplish, or it was not. If it was not, then the assertion, the judgment, the opinion in the light of which I undertook that deed, was, ^{in so far} a mistake. If the judgment was right, then I interpreted my object so that ~~in~~ in acting according to my judgment I did what I meant to do. In that case my assertion was just in so far right. Now just as the irrevocable deed remains

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something that I can never undo, ^{20,}
^{in case this irrevocable deed is a failure to meet my own}
^{purpose,} the mistaken opinion that expressed
itself by requiring me to do, ^{just} that deed
remains forever and irrevocable, and
absolutely a mistake, — a mistake, of
course, from my own point of view, and
with every reference to my choice and my
interest, — but none the less a mistake
whose character is as incapable of being
removed from the unchangeable deed, as
the deed is incapable of being undone. And
precisely so, if my deed, directed by my
own judgements, accomplishes what I meant
it to accomplish, then the truth of the
judgment that guided me to this success
is indeed ^{through and through} relative to my ~~success~~ interests,
but, ^{is} also as absolutely irrevocable a
character of the opinion that guided

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me as my deed itself, thus guided to success, is irrevocable.

Common sense, ^{or ten} expresses this by the ~~maxim~~ maxim: - "There is a right way and a wrong way to do everything". The maxim appears to be a commonplace. But it is not barren. ^(at your will upon whatever) ~~What will~~ you choose, ^{wherever} then turn to your real world for objects, to express your will. You ^{hereupon} judge the objects to be such and such. You therefore adjust your acts to them thus and thus, now each deed is but a small part of your ^{whole} adjustment; but, taken by itself, it is an irrevocable hit or miss; a success in doing what you so far intended, ^(and just then have) or else a failure. ^(to do what you have intended) And, precisely so, the judgment that ^{has} guided you to each individual deed, just because it has

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Counselled this, ^{one} irrevocable ^{act,} ~~decision~~,
- yes just because it is itself an irrevocable
act of self guidance, - must remain
for all time either a success or a failure
in self guidance, a hit or a miss in
the form of ideas, as the deed which it
counsels is a hit or a miss in the
form of a more or less external expression
of your ideas in outer actions.

If your deeds are irrevocable,
each one of them is an irrevocable success
or failure ~~to accomplish~~ ^{as an expression of} ~~the~~ ^{so much}
of your intent as it ^{has undertaken} ~~was intended~~ to express,
and ~~if~~ if your deed, as a voluntary deed,
~~was~~ has been guided by an idea, ^(that is by an action) about
objects, then this idea is as irrevocably
responsible for its share of the success
or failure of the deed which it has

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guided, as the deed itself is irrevocably its own expression of such a guidance.

Let us go back to our former definition of truth. My judgment is true if it ^{is} characterizes and interprets my chosen object as I myself ~~would~~ select ^{my} that object, really intend to have that object interpreted and characterized. But I myself, as a voluntary agent, want to interpret my object so as to be guided by my interpretation to the ~~actual~~ deeds that ^{from my point of view,} ~~would~~ ^{really} ~~duly~~ express my will. If my idea of the object, if my assertion, guides me to what I intend to accomplish when I think of my object, my judgment is therefore in just so far, and from my own point of view, true, - otherwise false. But every deed of mine is an irrevocable hit or miss in the expression of

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my will. Precisely in so far, then, as my deeds, when done, are such that they cannot be undone, ^{and precisely} ~~the extent that~~ ~~are given~~ in so far as they are voluntary deeds that ^{have been} ~~are~~ due to the guidance of my opinions, my opinions, in so far as they have guided me to just those deeds, are as irrevocably true or false, are as irrevocably guides to success or guides to failure as my deeds ~~are~~ ~~irrevocably~~ themselves, once done, are unchangeable.

All this, I insist, is precisely as true as is that postulate of the irrevocability of ~~my~~ deeds once done — ^{the postulate} ~~is~~ which I am here assuming. That postulate, for the moment,

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I here take as an ideally interesting and valuable assertion about deeds. I do not now call it certain. I do insist that it is prodigiously useful in giving sense, coherency, decisiveness, to ^{all} the ideal of our life. Now precisely as useful is the ideal of the absoluteness of truth which we have just defined in terms of this ideal. Every assertion is true or false according as it does or does not guide the ~~assertor~~ ^{successful} one who asserts it, to ~~the~~ deeds which ₁ express his genuine will. But since each and every deed is individual, irrevocable, and once done is unchangeable as a hit or a miss, as a won or a lost opportunity, as a deed in place or not in place, — every assertion, once made, cannot

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as determinately formulated as to guide
to the choice of these and these acts, is
as unchangeably and absolutely true
or false to its own intent, as the deed
to which it guides is irrevocable. Here
is our postulate of the absoluteness of the
truth or falsity of every ~~determinate~~
assertion ~~of~~ whose sense, that is
whose guidance is determinate. This
postulate expresses, so far in our dis-
cussion, just an ideal regarding the
business of assertions. This ideal is that
it is indeed their business to guide
us to the expression of our purposes.
~~The~~ ^{and} further, ^{this} ideal is that they either do this
their business or do not; that ~~they~~ they

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^{gives us} ~~the~~ right guidance ^{or else} ~~and~~ a wrong guidance, that, if the issue is sufficiently ^{only} ~~definite~~ determined, one or the other of these characters belongs to each guidance precisely in so far as it expresses itself in deeds which once ~~are~~ done are never afterwards to be undone.

And now what is the use of knowing this ideal of the absolute truth or false character of each determinate guidance such as an assertion gives us? I reply, - the use of ^{this ideal} ~~it~~ before you when I state the ideal, and when I thus link it with the practical postulate of the irrevocable character of each act. Whoever is guided by

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This ideal says, in each assertion: "I shall pass this way no more. Never again shall I have this deed to do. Once done, it belongs to the absolute reality, and embodies unchangeably my individual success or failure in ~~each~~ ^{just this} instance. Hence I want, I intend, I propose, I demand guidance ^{from my ideas} that ^{is} as absolute as the deed is in essence irrevocable. There is just no question before us as to whether such absolute guidance is ^{accessible} ~~acceptable~~. Enough, I want it. If I try to get it. I estimate my ideas by comparison with that standard. And what do I thus gain? Coherency, sense, seriousness, ^{the ordered and real possibility} unity, — yes and the satisfaction of my "dramatic

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In each individual case, and
in view of each individual will,
is not indeed a most useful
ideal, - useful to the office boy
because it sets him to choosing
faithfully, - useful in every
calling in life because it
means just clearness, and
good faith and decision. People
talk of the abstractness of the absolute.
But is anything more concrete or more
absolute than a decisive ~~action~~ ~~action~~
~~action~~