The Development of Pragmatism in William James with Special Reference to the Attacks on the Universality of the Moral Law

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATISM IN WILLIAM JAMES
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ATTACKS
ON THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE
MORAL LAW

by

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* * *
CHAPTER I
Bases of Relativism in Moral Action

In the pragmatism\(^1\) of William James there are two primary\(^2\) dicta which serve as the bases of his attacks on the universality of the moral law. The first dictum combines two points of relativism:

"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.\(^3\) The second dictum is: "The essence of good is simply to satisfy a demand . . ."\(^4\)

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1 This term was first used in our times by Charles Sanders Peirce, in an article in the *Popular Science Monthly*, for January, 1878.
2 In Chapter III of this thesis, the potential meaning for moral values becomes actual, as the long discussion on the pragmatic nature of truth and good is used as a cornerstone for the development of relative morality.
3 James, William, *Pragmatism*, New York: Longmans, Green, 1907 222
4 James, William, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, New York: Longmans, Green, 1899 201

The complete quotation is from the chapter entitled, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life;" the context follows:

"The essence of good is simply to satisfy a demand. The demand may be for anything under the sun. There is really no ground for supposing that all our demands can be accounted for by one universal underlying kind of motive than there is ground for supposing that all physical phenomena are cases of a single law. The elementary forces in ethics are probably as plural as those in physics are."
Let us examine what is meant in the first *dictum* by the word, "true." It would appear that the whole doctrine of pragmatism as utilitarian individualism hangs upon the pragmatist account of truth. The first sentence of the first page of the preface to *The Meaning of Truth*, begins: "The pivotal part of my book named *Pragmatism* is its account of the relation called 'truth'. . ." Once the meaning of pragmatic truth is really clear, the other values may be related to it. It would first of all pragmatic elements be the most necessarily important, as nothing else in pragmatism could be explained without first making a study of the relative truth. This truth, for James, is apparently a constantly changing relation between mind and reality, and on that basis, it is relativistic.

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5 New York: Longmans, Green, 1909 Preface i
6 The context here is taken from the rest of the sentence, and from some further quotations from the Preface:

"The pivotal part of my book called *Pragmatism* is its account of the relation called 'truth', which may obtain between an idea (opinion, belief, statement, or what-not) and its object. 'Truth' I there say, 'is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their agreement, as falsity means their disagreement, with reality. . .""

Preface xiv: "The pragmatist view . . . of the truth relation is that it has a definite content and that everything in it is experiencible."

From *Pragmatism*, 226: "Experience is in mutation". Here the context describes the quarrel between the pragmatist and his demand for absolute *a posteriorism*, and the rationalist *a priorism*, which, according the James, is an incorrect pre-disposition to see things in reality which are not truly there.
"Previous truth; fresh facts: - and our mind finds a new truth." 7

Truth and experience are cumulative: "So far as reality means experiencible reality, both it and the truth men gain about it are everlastingly in the process of mutation. . ." 8 and, "truth is made largely out of previous truths." 9 There is no end to this cumulative process of discovery. "Like the half-truths, the absolute truth will have to be made as a relation incidental to the growth of a

7 James, William, Pragmatism, 241
The full context is given in the sentence just preceding the remark cited: "Truth grafts itself on previous truth, modifying it in the process, just as idiom grafts itself on idiom, and law on previous law. . ."

8 Ibid. 224-25

9 Ibid. 224

The quotations have been transposed from the original order for the purpose of bringing clarity. The context is from the chapter, "The Notion of Truth," and the matter under discussion there holds out the premiss that all beliefs are things drawn entirely from experience. "Men's beliefs at any time are so much experience funded."

On page 225:

"In the realm of truth processes, facts come independently and determine our beliefs provisionally. But these beliefs make us act, and as fast as they do so, they bring into sight or into existence new facts which re-determine the beliefs accordingly. So the whole coil and ball of truth, as it rolls up, is the product of a double influence. Truths emerge from facts; they dip forward into facts again and add to them; which facts again create or reveal new truths (the word is indifferent) and so on indefinitely."
mass of verification experience to which the half-true ideas are all along contributing their quota."\textsuperscript{10} The context from which this quotation was taken insists that any idea of an absolute truth beyond the influence of concrete reality and its changing demands is an unreal thing in itself. "No further experience will ever alter" the absolute truth, "an ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine our temporary truths will some day converge. It runs on all fours with the perfectly wise man and the absolutely complete experience; and if these ideals are ever realized, they will be realized together."

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Pragmatism}, 224
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.} 222
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.} 223

Also, from \textit{The Meaning of Truth}, in the chapter entitled "Humanism and Truth," p. 72, the following is taken:

"The only truth that he himself \textsuperscript{[the rationalist]} will ever accept will be that to which his finite experiences lead him of themselves. The state of mind that shudders at the idea of a lot of experiences left to themselves and that augurs protection from the sheer name of an absolute, as if, however imperative, that might stand for a sort of ghostly security, is like the mood of those good people who, whenever they hear of a social tendency that is damnable . . . say, "Parliament or Congress, ought to make a law against it," as if an impotent decree would give relief."
There is a further note of complaint in the chapter entitled "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life", where James says:

"They [the rationalists] imagine an abstract moral order in which the objective truth resides."\textsuperscript{13a}

The several questions begin to take shape from the root consideration of the relative truth. Unity always suggested the dread Absolute, to James\textsuperscript{13b} and his insistence upon the flux of life took him into a demand for a truth that changed from moment to moment, even as life changed.

\textsuperscript{13a} Will to Believe, 194

\textsuperscript{13b} In the same context, the article, "The Pragmatism of William James," by John F. McCormick, in \textit{Modern Schoolman}, Vol.XX, No.1, remarks on this aversion of James for any absolute as always meaning something dead, outside of life. In the same magazine, "A Summary of Bergsonism" by Stewart E. Dollard, quotes the attitude of Bergson, who was a sympathetic acquaintance of James, and often echoed his words, as holding that "science analyzes life by killing it." We might also say that James argued that an absolute truth took the life away from relative truth.
The first question we ask in dealing with the relative truth, is this one: Is there a norm for the relative truth? The answer seems to be in the use of the word "expediency" as it appears in the dictum and in the insistence upon experience and concreteness of whatever truth is attained. "All the sanctions of the law of truth lie in the very texture of experience. Absolute or no absolute, the concrete truth for us, will always be that way of thinking in which our various experiences most profitably combine."

14 Page 1 of Thesis.
15 Meaning of Truth, 73

Also from Pragmatism, 232: (Inter-relation of Truth, Expediency)
"It is quite evident that our obligation to acknowledge truth, so far from being unconditional, is tremendously conditioned. Truth with a big T, and in the singular, claims abstractly to be recognized, of course; but the concrete truth in the plural need be recognized only when the recognition is expedient. A truth must always be preferred to a falsehood when both relate to the same situation; but when neither does, truth is of as little duty as falsehood."
Expediency as an attribute of truth would demand that the truth be temporary and provisional. Since experience is such a quick-sand of change, as an anchor for truth it cannot be anything but a reference, not a real norm alone. What is expedient must also be verified; there is a one-sided relation to experience made by plunging into activity each time we want to be certain of an idea.

"True ideas are those which we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those which we cannot." 16

It would seem that what is true can be verified, and what is verified is expedient. The final reference for any idea or its truth is its usefulness, its "cash value" in terms of experience. 17

16 Pragmatism, 201 The context considers what practical difference it makes in our lives to have a true idea of something; this is so necessary to us that life or death depend on it. Again, Father McCormick (Footnote 15b) makes the remark that James never asks more of a thing than what it does. He would never have asked, "What is it?" as an essence meant something static to him.

17 The past value of an experience is invalid when we consider that experiences cannot be substituted for each other. See p.10 of Thesis and p.30.
Since the concrete truth means only the way in which our various experiences are considered to have been profitable, the note of profit, of expediency in the pragmatic sense, is the essence of truth. The attributes of this truth are to be changing, provisional, temporary and utilitarian, or expedient in the pragmatic definition. All these notes are properties of the primary dicta of pragmatism; they are being sounded constantly through the entire writings of the American Pragmatist, William James; they are needed to explain the dictum on truth as being that which is expedient in the way of thinking and the good that exists merely to satisfy a demand.

In a context dealing with some attacks on the relative truth, James says: "If the truth relation were transcendent, others might be so too..." He says that the anti-pragmatist weapons are only tools of resistance for the pragmatist. Truth is a relation for James, but it is given as a changing relation between mind and reality, and therefore "relative" to changing experience.

18 Page 1 of Thesis.
19 Meaning of Truth, Preface xiv
He took his position on the meaning of truth because he must have realized that with a transcendental truth he would lose the final value of his a posteriori stand on the good which satisfies, for the pragmatist, the demand that is there whether or not the good exists prior to the demand.

Truth must be changeable as well as cumulative: "...truth becomes a habit of certain of our ideas and beliefs in their intervals of rest from their verifying activities." The "truth-process or discovery of truth, is a constant leaning towards direct "verification" and, "...we have to live today by the truth we can get today;" also, "We get at one truth only through the rest of truth; and the reality, everlastingly postulated as that which all our truth must keep in touch with, may never be given us save in the form of truth other than that which we are testing."  

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20 Pragmatism, 222  
The context compares truth to a quality like health. Since health is what the scholastics call an "entitative" habit, and subject to change, as being part of a changeable disposition in the body, the pragmatic picture of truth becomes clearer.

21 Ibid. 207  
The context states that truth demands to be tested.

22 Ibid. 223  
See Footnote 12 on Page 4 of Thesis.

23 Meaning of Truth, 214
The acceptance of the truth of a proposition is non permanent so long as it rests upon a changing reality. The temporary and provisional nature of pragmatic truth is further explained in the following quotation, which seems to say that truth cannot rest anywhere permanently, as it is always tied to the process of verification:

"We live forwards, a Danish thinker has said, but we understand backwards. The present sheds a backward light on the world's previous processes. They may have been truth-processes for the actors in them. They are not so for one who knows the later revelations of the story."  

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25 Pragmatism, 223–24

The context is taken from the chapter, "The Notion of Truth", and underlines the modern insistence upon the idea that life is basically changing, and to demand an unchanging element is death. "Science analyzes life by killing it." Footnote 13b
The past nature of an experience would seem to rob it of truth, because "the truth of our mental operations must always be an intra-experiential affair. A conception is reckoned true by common sense when it is made to lead to a sensation. The sensation, which for common sense is not so much 'true' as 'real', is held to be provisionally true by the philosopher just in so far as it covers . . . a still more absolutely real experience."  

"For objective realities are not true, at least not in the universe of discourse to which we are now confining ourselves, for there they are taken as simply being, while ideas are true of them." Here we have the question raised as to whether James overlooks the ontological truth. He has clearly conceived all truth as a changing

26 *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, New York: Longmans, Green, 1912 202-3

27 *Meaning of Truth*, 155 Ch. VI "A Word More About Truth"
relation, a network of 'truths' as plural as the discrete reality in which they inhere. The lack of any anchor or unchanging value or anything else of a secure nature is a basic aspect of pragmatism. There is no room at all for anything like ontological truth; James sticks to a relative truth tied to experience constantly in mutation, and so there is no one truth for him, but a series of 'truths'. If James had been quite accurate in his terminology, he would never have spoken of truth in the singular, since for him there was no such thing in reality.

"Realities are not true, they are, and beliefs are true of them."

It would appear here that truth has a strictly logical meaning, or is imbedded only in knowledge, or rather in the materials of knowledge, which are for James, ideas. Truth cannot be called an equivalent of reality, an "adequation of the mind to reality," as it is in the scholastic scheme of things.

28 Meaning of Truth, 196
The context is in the chapter entitled:"The Pragmatist Account of Truth and its Misunderstanders."

29 Aquinas, Thomas, QQ. de Veritate, q. I, a. 1
"Convenientism vero entis ad intellectum exprimit hoc nomen verum . . . Hoc est ergo quod addit verum super ens, scilicet conformitatem, sive adequationem rei et intellectus; ad quam conformitatem, ut dictum est, sequitur cognition rei."
Whereas, in scholasticism, truth is expressed as a relation between mind and reality, we must attribute the same truth to reality and to knowledge of reality, or there is no relation left; in pragmatism, where true things are only true temporarily, there can be no ontological truth. Truth for James is a quality, and while he does indeed admit that truth of knowledge means that mind and the thing known are related, this truth remains changeable, on the one level. There is no higher point to which it may be referred. It hangs alone, and the mind may interpret reality entirely as it chooses, without the norm of the ontological truth of being.

30 Aquinas, Thomas, S.T. I Q.16 a.1 "Utrum veritas sit in re, vel tantum in intellectu."
Also, Q.16 a. 3 ad primum: "Dicendum quod verum est in rebus et in intellectu ut dictum est. Verum autem quod est in rebus convertitur cum ente secundum substantiam. Sed verum quod est in intellectu, convertitur cum ente, ut manifestativum cum manifestato."
James cannot have understood that because he could distinguish mentally between the reality of things and their truth, it does not follow immediately that there is no metaphysical truth at all, that it is a category impressed upon unwilling reality. Before we may exercise our human thought upon the universe, there must already exist a real truth belonging to things themselves. If the truth of things were not a relative property of being as far as the human mind is concerned, then reality would possess actual, not potential ontological truth, and there would be no ground for distinguishing between the being of things and their truth. The concept of reality as being is one thing; it is prior to the second concept of reality as true.

The pragmatist relies on psychology to supply his first principles yet begins where the scholastic does, in being. It is his application of his principles that leads him away, instead of into, the subject and object of philosophy.
James took the rationalist definition of truth as an Absolute prior to the concept of being in general and impressed upon it by the mind; his definition made truth one of a thousand other units of experienced philosophy. These "truth-units" form a series of links with reality, but are never permitted to leave it or transcend it. If we ask whose idea of the Absolute in particular does James attack, the answer is probably Kant's absolute. He never tires of attacking Kant's categorical imperative and his categories in general as "artificial constructions." 32

He seeks truth in "pure experience": "Pure experience is the name I give to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories." 33 He insists that "Truth does not lie in the direction of the Absolute," . . . "only in so far as they lead us, successfully or unsuccessfully, back into sensible experience again, are our abstracts and universals true or false at all." 34 Finally, "Taken as it does appear, our universe is to a large extent chaotic. No one single type of connection runs through all the experiences that compose it." 35

32 Pragmatism, 178
33 Essays in Radical Empiricism, 93
34 Ibid. 100 Context is on F.H. Bradley's Absolute
35 Ibid. 46
There are a few other Absolutes that suffer burning at the stake in James's writings. He seems never to have dissociated the Absolute antecedent to reality and the concept of the real truth that follows from the real existence of things.

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We may consider the pragmatic good as a twin of the pragmatic truth. The truth is one momentary realization of an experienced fact. It is part of a series carried on to no ending and in a cumulative activity. There is only a logical distinction in the scholastic mind between the truth of a thing and its being. He protests that we cannot know a thing without knowing also that it is true. It follows also that good and being may also be convertible, since anything, in so far as it is, is good.

36 Essays in Radical Empiricism, Ch.XII - "Absolutism and Relativism" This covers an attack on Hegelian monism. Will to Believe, Ch. entitled "Is Life Worth Living?" The context attacks Leibnitz. Pragmatism, "The One and the Many", pp. 142 and 146 Context attacks Royce and Bradley.

37 Summa Theologiae, I Q.XVI a. 3 ad tertium Dicendum quod, cum dicitur quod ens non potest apprehendi sine ratione veri, hoc potest dupliciter intelligi." 38 Ibid. I Q.V a.3 Resp. Dicendum quod omne ens, inquantum est ens, est bonum.
In pragmatism, good has no foothold in being. "They good or bad mean no absolute natures, independent of personal support. They are objects of feeling and desire, which have no foothold or anchorage in Being apart from the existence of actually living minds.

Wherever such minds exist, with judgments of good and ill, and demands upon one another, there is an ethical world in all its essential features." 39

James has confused two kinds of good, in the quotation. He is doing it deliberately, to keep his exaggerated a posteriorism on a certain safe level. Also, he is attacking the categorical good of the Kantian man. He is determined to avoid this last at any cost.

"In its mere material capacity, a thing can no more be good or bad than it can be pleasant or painful... Goodness, badness and obligation must be realized somewhere in order really to exist." 40 He concentrates on this realization of the appetite to the exclusion of any other good. "We are asking whether goods and evils and obligation exist in physical facts per se. Surely there is no status for good or evil to exist in, in a purely insentient world." 41

39 Will to Believe, 197 The context here gives a striking picture of two human beings surviving alone to exist in a universe that has shrunk to one rock. There is still an ethical universe so long as these two live, James says. He seems to think that transcendentals require space and immensity in which to exist.

40 Ibid. 190

41 Ibid. 190 The word 'insentient' seems to mean 'inorganic' in James. See p. 23, Footnote 5, of thesis.
The point that James is making is lost unless we remember his dislike of all absolutes, and his denial of the view of reality that may change and yet offer an unchanging truth. For the pragmatist there is never a chance to rest in the termination of the operation. The appetite never gains its end, nor does it delight in a good obtained for very long. The scholastic takes a *bonum sibi*, the existing thing looked at as good in as much as it is; the *bonum honestum* of the object which is good because it is the perfecting of the appetite; and the *bonum utile* which is good as a means, and is an instrument, for the attainment of an end that is the real good.

The pragmatist denies all subjective good, the *bonum sibi*, and the *bonum honestum* or objective good as well. It is the outcome

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42 Aquinas, Thomas, *S.T. Q.5, a.6, Resp.*

"... Sic ergo in motu appetitus, id quod est appetibile terminans motum appetitus secundum quid, ut medium per quod tenditur in aliud, vocatur utile. Id autem quod appetitur ad ultimum, terminans totaliter medium motum appetitus, sicut quaedam res in quam per se appetitus tendit, vocatur honestum, quia honestum dicitur quod per se desideratur. Id autem quod terminat motum appetitus ut quies in res desiderata, est delectatio."
of an extreme degree of **a posteriorism**. In the important dictum:

"The essence of good is simply to satisfy a demand. . . ." which has been quoted, it is evident that a pragmatic good does not exist prior to the demand. It answers a demand that is already there, blindly seeking something to satisfy it, and the demand is as stated, indifferent to which good satisfies it.

Good, in pragmatism, does not exist as good until it has actually been good, been realized in the satisfaction of a demand. It follows upon its acceptance as something good that anything satisfactory is made to be good actually.

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43 *Will to Believe*, 201 See also First Page of Thesis.

The context is taken from the chapter, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," and is mostly a protest against all absolutes:

"The various ideals have no common character apart from the fact that they are ideals. No single abstract principle can be so used as to yield to the philosopher anything like a scientifically accurate and genuinely useful casuistic scale."
James makes a double mistake about the character of the good. He denies the existence of an ontological good and he misconceives the relation good has to the demand of a nature for it. There is no criterion for him of truth or good outside the changing aspect of things in reality. Both truth and good are tied to his sort of expediency.

"Truth is one species of good, and not, as is usually supposed, a category..." The entire dictum on truth may be profitably taken up here again, as the best expression of James's way of expressing his pragmatic principles:

"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. Expedient in almost any fashion, and expedient in the long run and on the whole course; for what meets expediently all the experience in sight won't necessarily meet all further experience equally satisfactorily. Experience, as we know, has ways of boiling over, and making us convert our present formulas."\(^45\)

\(^{44}\) Pragmatism, 80
\(^{45}\) Ibid, 222 The italics are those of William James.
This discussion on the nature of the pragmatic truth is a necessary prelude to the further consideration of the pragmatic treatment of the universal moral law. Once the pragmatist has established his relative truth, then all 'rightness' of action becomes relative as well. If there is no truth in being, as a part of its necessary structure, then it follows that all truths are left without an anchor.

There remain to be considered the application of truth, in the pragmatic law, and the moral law. The meaning of the moral law in James derives its fundamentals from the attributes of the pragmatic truth as mutable, provisional, and cumulative.

* * * * *
CHAPTER II
Relativism in the Moral Life

The problem of morality in the writings of William James is complicated by his treatment of the will, his concept of the individual as an experiencing aggregate, and his treatment of first principles as entirely of psychological origin.

While these are treated in scholastic philosophy as part of a philosophy of man, it is impossible to incorporate them substantially in this thesis without spending much space on James's psychology. They are philosophical propositions treated psychologically by James, and since he has kept them almost entirely in his psychology, unless we commence a study of conditioned reflexes along with the study of morality in James, we cannot treat of those items. A complete study of morality in James would involve much mention of a minimum of neurological anatomy, etc.

1 Principles of Psychology, Vol.II, Ch. 26, "The Will"
2 Ibid. Chapter 10, "The Passing Thought is the only Thinker Which Psychology Requires."
3 Ibid. Chapter 4, "Habit"
4 Ibid. Chapter 3, "On Some General Conditions of Brain Activity."

Vol.II Chapter 23, "The Production of Movement"
Chapter 24, "Instinct"
To keep in the sphere of philosophy and away from the empirical psychology of pragmatism, we must start our study of moral life with a survey of the philosophy of activity, as distinct from the psychological or physiological principles of production of movement.

Activity must be considered as such before we can approach the pragmatic definition of moral activity and the meaning of the word, "moral." For a real beginning we take the postulate: "Nothing shall be admitted as a fact . . . except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient; and for every feature of fact ever so experienced, a definite place must be found somewhere in the final system of reality."4

The primitive stuff of our lives is not merely a process, a "something going on"5 somewhere. It is, for the pragmatist, also a sense of change, a something going on in relation to the individual

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4 Essays in Radical Empiricism, 160
5 Ibid. 161

"Now it is obvious that we are tempted to affirm activity wherever we find anything going on. Taken in the broadest sense, any apprehension of something doing, is an experience of activity. . . . 'Change taking place' is a unique content of experience, one of those 'conjunctive' objects which radical empiricism seeks so earnestly to rehabilitate and preserve. The sense of activity is thus in the broadest and vaguest way synonymous with the sense of 'life'. We should feel our own subjective life at least, in noticing and proclaiming an otherwise inactive world." (Note: Inactive, insentient and inorganic would seem to be equivalents. See p. 17, Footnote 41.)
having the experience. Activity in the abstract is a dead thing, and cannot very well be used in considering life and its processes, except as one uses a skeleton to learn about a part of man. The pragmatic appeal is to something happening now, not in the past or in the future. 6

Activity without an actor is not admissible to the universe of pragmatism, for the actor is the first point of reference.

"Bare activity would thus be predicatable, though there were no definite direction, no actor, and no aim... But in this actual world of ours, as it is given, at least a part of the activity comes with definite direction; it comes with desire and sense of goal." 7

6 Ibid. 160

"By the principle of pure experience, either the word, 'activity' must have no meaning at all, or else the original type and model of what it means must lie in some concrete kind of experience that can definitely be pointed out." p. 162

"It seems to justify, or at any rate to explain, Mr. W-'s expressions that we are only as we are active, for we are only as experients." p. 167

"The word 'activity' has no imaginable content whatever save these experiences of process." 7 Ibid. 162
That sense of goal belongs to the single actor, the acting individual. He alone is responsible for his actions and he alone in the universe is acting. He alone measures the universe to himself. For example, the story has already been cited, in which James pictures the universe shrunk to one rock on which there remain two human beings. "That rock would have as thoroughly moral a constitution as any possible world which the eternities and immensities would harbor." James remarks that we are the inhabitants of that rock; whether a god exists or not, we form an ethical universe; we rule our own actions alone, it seems to follow.

The word, "moral," in James, has almost as many meanings as it has usages. He has been quoted as saying that wherever human minds exist, there is an ethical world in its essential features.

8 Page 16 of Thesis, Footnote 39
9 Will to Believe, 197
10 Ibid. 197 The context implies that our actions are subject only to our own minds; we have no direct contact with anything else but experience, therefore nothing else can be a reference of action.
11 Page 16 of Thesis, Footnote 39
In the same context, he uses the word, "moral," as being equivalent to "ethical"; examples occur in the book, *The Will to Believe*, in the chapter entitled "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," which offers an examination of ethical philosophy. 12

Another use of the word, "moral," occurs in another context. Here James has assumed the role of a teacher discussing the formation of habits. Good habits, he says, are useful action, but bad habits are not only not useful, but harmful to the one owning them. In the same place, J.S. Mill is quoted as saying that a perfect character is a completely trained will. Here it would seem "moral" has been limited to the sense of being "rooted in the will." 14

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12 See Chapter III of Thesis, pp.40, 41
13 *Talks on Psychology and Life's Ideals*, Chapter 8, p.70
14 Quoted on p. 70 of *Talks on Psychology*:

"A character, as J.S. Mill says, is a completely fashioned will."
Again, in his psychology, the word, "moral", appears in James's writings in the connection of habit with moral principles. "Moral principles are quite incongruent with the order of nature:

The moral principles which our mental structures engender are quite as little explicable in toto by habitual experiences having bred inner cohesions. Rightness is not mere usualness, wrongness not mere oddity, however numerous the facts which might be invoked to prove such identity. Nor are the moral judgments those most invariably and emphatically impressed on us by public opinion. The most characteristic and peculiarly moral judgments that a man is called on to make are in unprecedented cases and lonely emergencies where no popular rhetorical maxim can prevail, and the hidden oracle alone can speak; and it speaks quite often in favor of conduct quite unusual and suicidal as far as gaining popular approbation goes."^15

There no development elsewhere in James that really explains the terms he uses or the propositions set up in the quoted paragraph above. A further citation from James is offered, however, to illustrate his use of "moral" as referring to ethics, and yet with its psychological meaning as applied to a movement of the will.

15 Principles of Psychology, Vol.II, 672
"Every now and then someone is born with a right to be original, and his revolutionary thought or action may bring prosperous fruit. He may replace old 'laws of nature' by better ones, he may, by breaking old moral rules in a certain place, bring in a total condition of things more ideal, than would have followed had the rules been kept." 16

The immense importance of this lonely revolutionary in the pragmatic world is an example of its unitary notion of activity. If there is any wider activity than that of the single actor, "the question of how far it is successfully exerted can be answered only by investigating the details of fact." 17

16 Will to Believe, 208
17 Essays in Radical Empiricism, 180

The context remarks, on p. 178, that we like to believe that activities of both a wider and a narrower span are at work together in reality, that the long-span tendencies yoke the others in their service; but that it is a problem how to represent the \textit{modus operandi} of such steering of small tendencies by large ones.
The problem raised by the pragmatist cannot be answered entirely on his level. We must discuss the scholastic Absolute and consider the quarrel of James with all absolutes, commenced in Chapter I of this thesis.

For the pragmatist, it is the individual alone who is considered in our pluralistic universe of chaotic units. The nature of this single actor is as pluralistic as is his universe. His will is "an aggregate of tendencies to act in a firm and prompt and definite way in all the principal emergencies of life." In his quarrel with the scholastic definition of the powers of the soul, James says:

"There is something grotesque and unnatural in the supposition that the soul is equipped with elementary powers of such an ingeniously intricate sort. . . Evidently the faculty does not exist absolutely, but operates under conditions." 19

18 Talks on Psychology and Life's Ideals, 70
Context is on the formation of good and bad habits.
(Page 26 of Thesis.)
In the quotation just given, James was thinking of the memory, and denying to it any absolute character. Perhaps this is because one experience may not be substituted for another, in a system of experiences: 20

"The only function that one experience can perform is to lead to another experience; and the only fulfilment we can speak of is the reaching of a certain experienced end. When one experience leads to (or can lead to) the same end as another, the agree in function. But the whole system of experiences as they are immediately given presents itself as a quasi-chaos through which one can pass out of an initial term in many directions and yet end in the same terminus, moving from next to next by a great many possible paths." 21

So we have the pragmatic man, with a will strictly pluralistic, in movement toward a reality that offers a chain of experiences.

"To begin with, how can things so insecure as the successful appearances of this world afford a stable anchorage? A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and life is after all a chain." 22

20 See page 19 of Thesis; this is an echo of the dictum on the good as anything that satisfies a demand; finality in activity seems to be left out.
21 Essays in Radical Empiricism, 63
The context is from the chapter, "A World of Pure Experience."
22 Varieties of Religious Experience, 136
The rule of action in the world of experience is imbedded in empirical facts. "Life is one long struggle between conclusions based on abstract ways of conceiving cases, and opposite conclusions prompted by our instinctive perception of them as individual facts." This and other pragmatic problems lead us into the study of pragmatic law.

James says that scientific laws are gained by disregarding the chaos of conditions present in the universe: "The principle of uniformity of nature is of this sort; it has to be sought under and in spite of the most rebellious appearances; and our conviction of its truth is far more like a religious faith than like assent to its demonstrations."

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23 Principles of Psychology, Vol. II, 674
The context is from the chapter, "Aesthetic and Moral Principles", in which the man of instinct is praised as being more true to his nature than the man who can spin out a lengthy commentary on ideals ways of acting.

The dictum on the pragmatic truth raises the problem of the law.

It is increasingly evident in this Chapter II that the only answer to the pragmatic rule of action is the admission of an Eternal Lawgiver, whose attributes help to bring order into the world of Being. If we have only the chaotic universe with no single pattern running through it, then we have no reason at all. But James says that there is an intellect in the universe that must be considered - man's. "Visible nature is all plasticity and indifference, - a moral multiverse, as one might call it, and not a moral universe." In another book, James says: "The pursuit of ends and choice are the marks of Mind's presence." The pragmatist recognizes only one intellect in the universe, and that is man's. This single activity is not visibly dependent upon activities of a "wider span." Whatever destiny the pragmatic man may have, it does not influence his momentary decision or his immediate actions.

26 See Conclusions of Thesis for Eternal Law.
27 Will to Believe, 43, 44
29 Page 28 of Thesis, Footnote 17
30 Page 15 of Thesis, Footnote 35
James attacks the rationalist absolute, that of one Heinrich Rickert, in a chapter concerned with truth primarily, but also protesting against absolutes as regulating laws.

"They [absolute principles] are his [the rationalist's] evidence merely, they are no part of the life of truth itself. That life transacts itself in a purely local or epistemological, as distinguished from a psychological, dimension, and its claims antedate and exceed all personal motivations whatsoever."

The point is quite true if applied to such an absolute as the transcendental idealists give us. A friend of James, Josiah Royce, may also have been partly responsible for the dictum on the life of truth.

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31 Mentioned in Pragmatism, 232, Footnote. In an article by Kurt Leidecker in D. Runes' Dictionary of Philosophy, Rickert is called a follower of Fichte and a transcendental idealist.
32 Pragmatism, 228. From the chapter, "The Notion of Truth."
33 Article on Josiah Royce, calling him a neo-Hegelian, in Runes Dictionary of Philosophy. This article is most unfair, as the deeply religious Royce was really a sort of pantheist. At least, he bears the marks of Spinoza's search for God, rather than the Hegelian absolute.
A formula for law in William James is rather hard to find from his extant writings. First of all, law seems to have as changing an aspect as the relative truth: "... their laws' great use is to summarize old facts and lead to new ones. They are only a man-made language, a conceptual shorthand, as someone calls them, in which we write our reports of nature; and languages, as is well known, tolerate much choice of expression and many dialects."  

While law in the moral world is not meant here, but the laws of nature, James sees all law in the same distasteful company as the absolutes:

"Common-law judges sometimes talk about the law, and schoolmasters talk about the latin tongue, in a way to make their hearers think they mean entities pre-existent to the decisions or to the words and syntax, determining them unequivocally and requiring them to obey..."  

34 Pragmatism, 57
35 Ibid. 240-41 The context is from the chapter, "Pragmatism and Humanism."
As far as conduct is concerned, James sweeps away any possible moral law: "Distinctions between the lawful and the unlawful in conduct, or between the correct and incorrect in speech, have grown up incidentally among the interactions of men's experience in detail; and in no other way do distinctions between the true and the false in belief ever grow up..." 36

James also charges that we set up an Almighty and read our thoughts into His mind; we see Him thinking in conic sections and syllogisms, and our laws are ours, not His. These complaints are quite fair. God does not go about His business with the same sort of tools He has given his creature, man: 37

"When the first laws were discovered, men were so carried away by the cleanness, beauty and simplification that resulted, that they believed themselves to have deciphered the eternal thoughts of the Almighty. He made Kepler's laws for the planets to follow, and when we rediscover any one of these, his wondrous institutions, we seize his mind in its very literal intention.

But as the sciences have developed farther, the notion has gained ground that most, perhaps all, of our laws are only approximations..." 38

36 Pragmatism, 241
37 Pragmatism, 56 Chapter, "What Pragmatism Means"
38 Ibid. 56, 57
Law in general, is, for James, a sort of application of his pragmatic truth. Indeed, it would appear that the relative truth of Chapter I of this thesis would rob law of any stable meaning whatsoever. If there is no real truth to rule on, no truth that does not change and can be applied in a law, then no law stands, whether it be natural or moral.

The application of the relative truth means also a relative law. There is only one "truthmaker" in the universe, and that is man himself. It follows that his law will be also a reflection of his temporary truth, and another expression of utilitarian individualism.

* * * *
CHAPTER III
Moral Activity and the Actor

The landscape of pragmatic citations provides, in the previous chapters, the background of the specific point in question, the place of the moral law in pragmatism. There are no first principles taken absolutely, in the moral order, in James:

"Since everything which is demanded is by that fact a good, must not the guiding principle for ethical philosophers (since all demands cannot conjointly be satisfied in this poor world) be simply to satisfy at all times as many demands as we can?"¹

"So far as the casuistic question goes, ethical science is just like physical science, and instead of being deducible all at once from abstract principles, must simply bide its time and be ready to revise its conclusions day by day."² With a good that is relative to a changing demand³ and a relative truth which cannot be applied by any single law, we have no finality in ethics.

¹ Will to Believe, 205 "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Universe"
² Ibid. 208
³ Page 19 of Thesis.

- 37 -
The finishing touch is given by James in a context in which he says that since metaphysics and theology, which provide the primary postulates for ethics, are also in a state of flux: "The chief of all reasons which concrete ethics cannot be final is that they [sic] wait upon metaphysical and theological beliefs."\textsuperscript{4}

If there is no finality in ethics, then there are no universal laws for human action. In Chapter I of this thesis, truth was shown to be quite unitary, measured by the individual to his own need and desire. He alone is the one who establishes his end, or ends. There can be no universal destination for all humans in the pragmatic universe, and no universal moral law regulating them toward that end.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{4} Will to Believe, 210
The context is somewhat like the one from Descartes' \emph{Method}: "Of Philosophy I will say nothing, save that when I saw that it had been cultivated for many ages by the most distinguished men, and that yet there is not a single matter within its sphere which is not still in dispute, and nothing, therefore, which is above doubt, I did not presume to anticipate that my success would be greater in it that that of others . . . As to the other Sciences, inasmuch as these borrow their principles from Philosophy, I judged that no solid superstructure could be raised on foundations so infirm."

(Tr.Veitch, Chicago:Open Court,1899 page 8)

\textsuperscript{5} See Page 26 of Thesis, footnote 13
There must be some sort of rule by which the pragmatist may make his decisions. Even with a relative good, there must be a judgment of some kind. James has taken his moral rule from the relative good. He refuses to see good or evil in physical facts as such, and says that there is no room for goods and evils to exist in, in an insentient world.  

> "How can one physical fact be considered simply as a physical fact, be 'better' than another? Betterness is not a physical relation."  

If we consider the pragmatic picture of moral activity by a free agent, man, who is his own moral universe, and forget about the several meanings of good, then James is quite right.

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6 Will to Believe, 190 Page 17 of Thesis
7 Ibid. 190
8 Page 18 of Thesis, Footnote 42
The furthering of the pragmatic rule is attempted in this quotation from "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life":

"Imagine an absolutely material world, containing only physical and chemical facts, and existing from eternity without a God, without even an interested spectator. Would there be any sense in saying of that world that one of its states is better than another? Or if there were two such worlds possible, would there be any rhyme or reason in calling one good and the other bad? Good or bad positively, I mean, and apart from the fact that one might relate itself better than the other to the philosopher's private interests." 9

Just what is gained by taking such a stand is really a mystery that remains in the mind of William James. If we are to apply his pragmatic rule to his remarks, then we can answer that since no such world or worlds exist, or can exist, then there is no possible application of them in a philosophy of pure experience.

9 Will to Believe, 167
Also, Aquinas, Thomas, from the De Veritate, Q.I,a.1
"Si omnis intellectus (quod est impossibile) intelligeretur auferri, nullo modo ratio veritatis remaneret."
After his confusion regarding the various kinds of goods, James takes the attitude that to assume an abstract good or bad is to assume an abstract zero:

"Goodness, badness and obligation must be realized somewhere in order to exist, and the first step in ethical philosophy is to see that no merely inorganic 'nature of things' can realize them. Neither moral relations nor the moral law can swing in vacuo. Their only habitat can be a mind which feels them; and no world composed of purely physical facts can possibly be a world to which ethical propositions apply." 10

There must be some individual to make a demand before anything is good, and in the universe only those individuals can seek a goal, according to James. Certainly he is right to say that the moral law cannot swing in vacuo. It doesn't, except in his system. The nature of good and evil should provide a setting for moral activity, and when good is purely relative, then we have relative morality.

10 Will to Believe, 190
The word, "sentient", seems to be equivalent to "living"; as James says that mind is shown to be present by the presence of ends and choice, so even in a pragmatic world, only a living thing with mentality could desire anything. The position of the single moral being becomes clearer:

"The moment one sentient being, however, is made part of the universe, there is a claim for goods and evils to exist, really. Moral relations now have their status, in that being's consciousness. So far as he feels anything to be good, he makes it good. It is good, for him, is absolutely good, for he is the sole creator of values in that universe, and outside of his opinion things have no moral character at all. In such a universe as that it would be absurd to raise the question of whether the solitary thinker's judgment is good or ill, or true or not. Truth supposes a standard outside the thinker to which he must conform; but here, the thinker is a sort of divinity, subject to no higher judge."

The difference to reality of the introduction of a "sentient" being is not very clear. Nature is not regarded as the work of intelligence, in the pragmatic system. Man apparently is not to be accounted for by introducing a Creator. What sort of relation man has to nature is hard to see, and his relation to his fellow man is something quite incomprehensible.

11 Will to Believe, 190
James considers his single actor in the universe as the one kind of intelligence needed in the picture:

"Let us call the supposed universe which he inhabits a moral solitude. In such a moral solitude it is clear that there can be no outside obligation, and that the only trouble the god-like thinker is liable to have will be over the considering of his own several ideals with one another. Some of these will no doubt be more pungent and appealing than the rest, their goodness will have a profounder, more penetrating taste; they will return to haunt him with more obstinate regrets if violated. So the thinker will have to order his life to them as its chief determinants, or else remain inwardly discontented and unhappy. Into whatever equilibrium he may settle, though, however he may straighten out his system, it will be a right system. For beyond the facts of his own subjectivity there is nothing moral in the world." 12

The context continues with the introduction of another solitary thinker into the universe which had but one. There are two possibilities, James says, in the ethical situation. We have twice as much of the ethical quality as before, but no ethical unity. Each of the two thinkers may ignore the other and proceed at his own pace. We have a moral dualism, and a thing may be good for one and bad for the other, with equal truth in the two judgments. 13

12 Will to Believe, 191
13 Ibid. 191,2
If we continue to add solitary thinkers to our universe:

"Multiply the thinkers into a pluralism, and we find realized for us in the ethical sphere something like the world which the antique skeptics conceived of - in which the individual minds are the measures of all things, and in which no one 'objective truth' but a multitude of subjective opinions can be found." \[14\]

Existing reality and the social order force James to admit that no one really does live entirely to himself. There is something called "obligation" which arises in all systems, even that of the pragmatist, in spite of the unitary measure of all things taken as man. We are jostled by conflicting realities, and different claims are made on us. James answers: "Invent some manner of own realizing your ideals which will also satisfy the alien demands - that and that only is the path of peace!" \[15\] Also, "those ideals must be written highest which prevail at the least cost." \[16\]

\[14\] Will to Believe, 192  
\[15\] Ibid. 205  
\[16\] Ibid. 205
Obligation for the pragmatist does not reside in any absolute right or a prior claim:

"Since the outcome of the discussion so far has been to show that nothing can be good or right except so far as some consciousness feels it to be right, we perceive on the very threshold that the real superiority and authority which is postulated by the philosopher to reside in some of the opinions which he supposes must belong to others, cannot be explained by any abstract moral 'nature of things' existing antecedently to the thinkers themselves and their ideals. Like the positive attributes, good and bad, the comparative ones, better and worse, must be realized in order to be real."\textsuperscript{17}

The final word is well summed up in this sentence: "If one ideal judgment be objectively better than another, that betterness must be made flesh by being lodged concretely in someone's actual perception."\textsuperscript{18} If we grant there is no other intellect in the universe than the human mind, and that there is no superior power in human lives, then we do indeed have a pragmatic universe.

\textsuperscript{17} Will to Believe, 192-3
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 193
In our universe of moral solitudes, we have the picture of a pattern of equal demands. There is no ruler in that world.

"If one of the thinkers were obviously divine, while all the rest were human, there would probably be no practical dispute about the matter. The divine thought would be the order, to which the others should conform. But still the theoretical question remains, What is the good of obligation, even here?"19

If we recall the obviously divine gods of the Greeks,20 to whom homage was paid through fear, we may understand the question. The pragmatist does not consider a Creator, and it follows that man's obligation to man cannot exist unless first the obligation to his God is understood.

Since the core of pragmatic ethics is the pragmatic truth and the relative good, and each individual has his own law, any over all unity in the moral order is impossible. There is no moral

19 Will to Believe, 193
20 Aeneidos,L.1.E. Vergilius Maronis, Excursus I - De ministerio deorum, imprimis Iemonis, in Aeneide Heyne, ed. London: Black and Young,1832
order, but a moral disorder. The universality of law stems from its very nature, not alone from the lawgiver.\textsuperscript{21} If each has his own law, we have a multitude of values, and no clear pattern of relationships. We have an aggregate, but not a corpus. The contrast with the integrated humanism of another point of view is very evident. If we are to live together in human accord, then each must bring his share to the organism we call society; no man can consider himself able to live alone, in the moral sense. He is never apart from them in the matter of morals. The chaos of values that results from a multiplicity of moral laws means disaster for man and his society.

\textsuperscript{21} Aquinas, Thomas, \textit{S.T. I\textsuperscript{a}-II\textsuperscript{a}Q.100 a.4 Resp. "Et sic ex quatuor praedictis potest colligi definitio legis, quae nihil est aliud quam quaedam rationis ordinatio ad bonum commune, ab eo qui curam communis habet, promulgata."}

The pragmatic attitude toward law is well presented in a book called \textit{Mr. Justice Holmes}, edited by Felix Frankfurter. Holmes remarks that handling actual issues instead of resting on formula meant the difference between life and death. Benjamin Cardozo quotes the exact phrase on p.23. John Dewey writes on "Justice Holmes-and the Liberal Mind," and quotes him as saying that the Constitution is an experiment, as all life is an experiment. In Frankfurter's article, the Supreme Court Justice says that law is less important than he who interprets it.
The pragmatic man is never sure of his footing in his slippery universe. He is forever a stranger in his daily life. He has nothing to hold himself erect by, and so must proceed to grasp at expediencies, the lowest of the crutches men may use to provide a framework for their moral judgments. Man is robbed of his full humanity in a pragmatic world, for if he really believes that all law is merely a changing set of arbitrary rules, then anyone who is strong enough can impose any law and be obeyed. There will never be an appeal to a higher justice than that of might making right.

* * * * *
CONCLUSIONS:

We have given the scholastic definition of law on page 47. The background for all law lies in the realization of an Absolute Being who is the Exemplar of creation, in whose Mind all things are, and who, because He is Truth and Good and does not participate in those attributes as mere derived qualities, must be the first measure of these values in this world of created things.

In his quarrel with the consideration of such a being, James remarks in a famous passage, that God's metaphysical attributes have no intelligible (practical) significance, and his lists these attributes, ending with the complaint that we have a "metaphysical monster" who doesn't make much difference in the universe, practically speaking.

1 Aquinas, Thomas, S.T. I Q.15,a.1, Resp. "Quia igitur mundus non est casu factus, sed est factus a Deo per intellectum agentem. . . . necesse est quod in mente divina sit forma. . . ."

2 In Libr. Sent., Dist. 36, Q.1,a.3 St. Thomas explains that created things exist non simpliciter, but in a manner of speaking; it is in God's knowledge they exist, and are maintained in being.

3 Summa Theologiae I Q.1, a.3, and in Ia-IIae Q.91 a.1, and Q.93 a.3 Here St. Thomas remarks that God, from His metaphysical attributes, is the only possible being that measures the universe and gives it and all in it a share in Truth and Goodness, and He alone can permit the application of these in Law.

4 Varieties of Religious Experience, 445-46
On the contrary, this 'metaphysical monster' makes a great deal of difference in the ethical world. There is also an actual difference, in our world of everyday experience. The aseitas does not have the compelling quality exhibited by the manifestation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity; it was never intended to supplant Him. James decries the metaphysical attributes of God as being unusable in ethics, and turns to the so-called moral attributes, those derived from Revelation, with pleasure.

Without an eternal law, our daily life would be unlivable. The universe cannot be intelligible without the Eternal Law behind it, and man without his small reflection of that Law, could not exist. Nor can he be considered in his true value, without it.

5 Ibid. 446
6 Ibid. 447

In saying here that the moral attributes of God are valuable because they invoke fear and love in man, James has forgotten to put the rational part of man above his rational appetite, in its proper place.
Therefore, in opposition to the dictum that permits each man to live under his own law, we present the necessity for there being a Divine Law that is absolute, from the nature of the Being Whose Existence is His Law⁷, and this Being as Creator has given His creature, man, a natural law;⁸ and since He gave man a share in His existence, in a qualified way, since Being most properly belongs first to God, then He must also have given his creature some of the other attributes of His existence. For, as St. Thomas says,⁹ whatever shares in the nature of a rule or measure is also ruled or measured itself. Therefore, all that are subject to God are measured both by Divine Law and by the law of their own being, in a lesser way, since their very being would have no meaning unless it followed in some way the Being of God, the First Cause.

⁷ S.T. I-IIæQ.91 a,1 ad tertium  
⁸ S.T. I-IIæQ.91 a.2 Respondeo  
⁹ Ibid.
Man, as the creature of God, follows the law he was given upon the gift of existence. His ratio of action means the exercising of activity through the laws of his nature. "Unde patet quod lex naturalis nihil aliud est quam participatio legis eternae in rationi creatura."\(^{10}\)

It is also a result of these premisses that the natural law is universal and one for all men. Each man is only part of a pattern which depends upon the Eternal Law. "Sic igitur dicendum est quod lex naturae quantum ad prima principia, est eadem apud omnes et secundum rectitudinem et secundum notitiam."\(^{11}\) It is not through man's will, as adhering to the outer things of experience, but through his intellect, that the man operates as a truly human being. The pragmatic failure is in misconceiving both philosophy and an important part of it: the psychology of humanity. It is true that moral action is only possible when man can recognize a moral command through his intellect; there can be no primary measure in the things of man's experience as related to his will in action.

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10 S.T.\(\text{II}^{\text{a}}\) Q.91 a.2.corpus
11 Ibid. Q.94 a.4
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