

Conditional Idealism

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...there is Schiller, who offers no less than seven alternative definitions of pragmatism. The first is that pragmatism is the Doctrine that "truths are logical values." At first blush, this seems far too broad; for who, be he pragmatist or absolutist, can fail to prefer truth to fiction? But no doubt what is meant is that the objectivity of truth really consists in the fact that, in the end, every sincere inquirer will be led to embrace it - and if he be not sincere, the irresistible effect of inquiry in the light of experience will be to make him so. This doctrine appears to me, after one subtraction, to be a corollary of pragmatism. I set it in a strong light in my original presentation of the method. I call my form of it "conditional idealism." That is to say, I hold that truth's independence of individual opinions is due (so far as there is any "truth") to its being the predestined result to which sufficient inquiry *would* ultimately lead. I only object that, as Mr. Schiller himself seems sometimes to say, there is not the smallest scintilla of logical justification for any assertion that a given sort of result will, as a matter of fact, either always or never come to pass; and consequently we cannot know that there is any truth concerning any given question; and this, I believe, agrees with the opinion of M. Henri Poincaré, except that he seems to insist upon the non-existence of any absolute truth for all questions, which is simply to fall into the very same error on the opposite side. But practically, we know that questions do generally get settled in time, when they come to be scientifically investigated; and that is practically and pragmatically enough.