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THE UTILITARIAN ESTIMATE OF KNOWLEDGE.<sup>1</sup>

IN the following article I desire to indicate both the truth and the error of that practical, utilitarian, or—as it is apt to call itself—‘ethical’ estimate of knowledge which has received such emphatic expression from more than one recent writer of authority. It is part of my purpose to show that, in a deeper sense of the term, the ethical function of knowledge is not exhausted by its practical application, but includes also its pursuit as an end-in-itself, as a thing of essential and intrinsic and not of merely instrumental value. For, in our escape from the one extreme of a scholastic and academic intellectualism, we are in danger of falling into the other extreme of a practical and utilitarian Philistinism. Both errors find abundant illustration in the history of human thought.

That all knowledge has a practical utility and social value, that the end of knowledge lies beyond knowledge, and is to be found in the field of activity and life, is indubitable, and may be very easily shown. I do not know any clearer or more persuasive statement of this profound psychological law than that of Professor William James in his volume of essays entitled, *The Will to Believe*. It may be said to be the thesis (or one aspect of the thesis) of the entire volume, and it is the explicit subject of the essay on “Reflex Action and Theism.” “From its first dawn to its highest actual attainment, we find that the

<sup>1</sup> This article is based largely on a paper entitled “The Relation of Knowledge to Will and Conduct,” prepared by the writer for discussion at the Washington Meeting of the National Educational Association, and printed in the fourth Yearbook of the National Herbart Society.