

# Virtual

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1902 | Virtual | CP 6.372

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(1) A virtual *X* (where *X* is a common noun) is something, not an *X*, which has the efficiency (*virtus*) of an *X*.

This is the proper meaning of the word; but (2) it has been seriously confounded with 'potential,' which is almost its contrary. For the potential *X* is of the nature of *X*, but is without actual efficiency. A virtual velocity is something *not* a velocity, but a displacement; but equivalent to a velocity in the formula, 'what is gained in velocity is lost in power.'

So *virtual representation* was the non-representation of the American colonies in the British Parliament, which was supposed to be replaced by something. So Milton asks whether the angels have *virtual* or immediate touch. So, too, the sun was said to be *virtualiter* on earth, that is, in its efficiency.

(3) *Virtual* is sometimes used to mean pertaining to virtue in the sense of an ethical habit.

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1906 | The Basis of Pragmatism. Meditation the First | MS [R] 279:13

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...a "virtual *x*," where *x* stands for a common noun, means something which is *not* an *x*, but which has, for whatever purpose may be uppermost, the *virtue* of an *x*, that is, such properties as make it equivalent to an *x*.

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1909 | Essays Toward the Interpretation of our Thoughts. My Pragmatism | MS [R] 620:24-5; ILS 197

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"Virtual," followed by any common noun, say 'N,' makes an appellative phrase which denotes anything which, while it is *not* an 'N,' has, nevertheless, the characteristic behaviour and properties of an 'N.'