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Ana Honnacker, (2015), *Post-säkularer Liberalismus: Perspektiven auf Religion und Öffentlichkeit im Anschluss an William James*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 386 p.

William James is generally regarded as the most important classical pragmatist in the philosophy of religion; more generally, he can be considered one of the founding figures of what is today known as interdisciplinary religious studies. However, James is famous for emphasizing, or even over-emphasizing, individual religious experience, and he has rarely been discussed as a theorist of religion as a societal form of life, let alone of political issues emerging from religious practices and their conflicts. The latter is exactly what Ana Honnacker seeks to do in her ambitious book, based on a doctoral dissertation defended in 2014 at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main.

Starting from the timely cultural and political discourse on secularization and on what is today called the “post-secular” situation, Honnacker carefully examines James’s pragmatism and the theory of religion based thereupon, proposing an original project of applying such pragmatism to the current issues of “post-secular liberalism.” She successfully argues that James’s pluralistic ideas may crucially help us in making sense of our contemporary cultural and political situation in which there are various different and partly conflicting views on religion available, campaigning for their rights to be heard. This situation is aptly labeled post-secular, because religion has returned to claim its place in public discussions, and the very dichotomy between religious and non-religious views may have become problematic, if not obsolete.

Among its other virtues, the book is very clearly structured. After an introductory discussion of post-secularity (Chapter 1), chapter 2 comprehensively examines various – both “exclusivist” and “inclusivist” – arguments regarding religion in the public sphere, drawing close attention not only to major authors like John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, and Robert Audi but to several minor figures in the debate as well. James’s pluralistic approach is rather obviously relevant here, as the basic problem situation can be characterized in terms of the “fact of pluralism” (37ff.). It is against this background that Honnacker, in her later chapters, moves on to her interpretations of James’s “humanistic pragmatism” (Chapter 3) and James’s conception of religion (Chapter 4). The most original part of the book is chapter 5, in which James is shown to be highly relevant to the examination of religious “voices” in the public and political arena, as well as to attempts to develop a pragmatic theology. Throughout her volume, Honnacker demonstrates excellent command of not only James but also relevant secondary literature. Indeed, the book is full of helpful references – also to German sources that are not widely cited in mainstream English-language literature on pragmatism.

In her third chapter, “Grundzüge des humanistischen Pragmatismus,” Honnacker analyzes many of the key ideas, problems, and tensions in James’s pragmatism, including James’s radical empiricism, his pragmatic conception of truth, his general antifoundationalism, and his perspectival, antireductionist attempts to accommodate both scientific and religious ways of thinking in a pluralistic metaphilosophy. Her

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reading of James is balanced, avoiding various unhelpful extremes, both antirealistic and metaphysically realistic (among others). I find little reason for any significant disagreements here; generally, I am convinced that Honnacker's overall picture of James is very close to being fundamentally correct. Even more importantly, however, she is not primarily interested in what exactly James "really" thought about these matters but rather, pragmatically, in what their contemporary relevance in the political, post-secular "religion in the public sphere" debates might be.

One could of course raise some doubts about the way in which the realism *vs.* antirealism (constructivism) tension is claimed to be resolved. Honnacker writes: "Es scheint mir jedoch völlig ausser Zweifel zu stehen, dass trotz des hohen kreativen Anteils des Menschen in der humanistischen Auffassung eine subjektunabhängige Welt – wenn eben auch keine Wirklichkeit im für uns relevanten Sinne – angenommen wird und werden muss. Diese Welt ist dem Menschen aber nicht zugänglich, sie ist ihm stets in seiner subjektiven Deutung gegeben, die zwar bis zu einem gewissen Grade arbiträr und relative ist, aber [...] alles andere als willkürlich." (166). Does this turn James into a quasi-Kantian thinker postulating inaccessible things in themselves? What exactly does it mean to say that a world independent of the subject must be postulated ("angenommen") even though such a world is not given to us except in its subjective and relative versions?

I am not entirely convinced that Honnacker succeeds in adequately settling these issues, but then again I do not think that any other James scholar (or James himself, for that matter) does, either. There is a not easily resolvable tension between realist and constructivist ideas right at the heart of Jamesian pragmatism (and perhaps pragmatism generally). Honnacker's articulation of these tensions and her attempt to show the Jamesian pragmatist how to live with them are among the best we find in recent James scholarship. I strongly sympathize with her proposal to occupy a middle-ground position between the extremes, "eine Mittelstellung zwischen einem reinen Konstruktivismus oder Relativismus und einem starken metaphysischen Realismus, Empirismus oder Sensualismus klassischer Spielart [...], zwischen der Behauptung reiner Geistunabhängigkeit der Wirklichkeit und idealistischen Konzeptionen" (168). In dealing with these tensions and the quest for a middle path, Honnacker also duly recognizes issues frequently overlooked in James research, including the problem of solipsism as something that James actually finds relevant (170-1).

Honnacker suggests, furthermore, that James is a pragmatic scientific realist endorsing the postulation of theoretical entities in science (186-7). This sounds plausible to me (and in fact she kindly cites something I wrote about this matter – and many other topics, too), but I would perhaps prefer to be slightly more careful here, suggesting that this is how Jamesian pragmatism might and ought to be developed in contemporary philosophy of science, even though this may not exactly have been his own view, given that the issues concerning theoretical entities largely emerged only somewhat later. In any case, the immediately following brief comparison to Thomas Kuhn (188) is insightful, and this analogy could perhaps have been more explicitly carried over to the philosophy of religion, too. Another important feature of Honnacker's third chapter is that she discusses James's theory of truth and his will

to believe theory in conjunction. I agree that it is misleading to treat them entirely separately, as some scholars tend to do; they are deeply interconnected.

In the fourth chapter, Honnacker focuses on James's theory of religion. One of the central concepts here is, unsurprisingly, religious experience. Honnacker argues persuasively that the primacy of religious experience does not immunize religion against criticism, as religious experience is continuous with other types of experience (236ff.). However, in my view, it sounds a bit too evidentialistic to maintain that religious convictions, though originating in individual experience, "unterliegen im öffentlichen Diskurs denselben Kriterien wie alle anderen Überzeugungen auch" (253). Can they really (according to James, or the contemporary Jamesian pragmatist) be subordinated to exactly the same ("denselben") criteria as any other convictions? Wouldn't this sacrifice the uniquely experience-grounded character of such convictions in James's view? At this point it might be worthwhile to compare James's views on religion to "Wittgensteinian" (strongly anti-evidentialist) philosophy of religion, but admittedly such a comparison would lead us far from the main goals of Honnacker's project. Generally, again, I believe Honnacker is exactly right when she points out that James lies between fideism and evidentialism (261). I suppose the key difference between James and Wittgenstein could be former's tendency to view religion and science as continuous (cf. 329), which the latter would never have approved of.

Another very important point Honnacker makes about James's philosophy of religion is that the problem of evil, albeit only seldom explicitly discussed by James, is constantly at the background of his discussions ("stellt aber einen permanenten Gedanken im Hintergrund dar," 278). The brief treatment of the problem of evil and theodicy (278-9) could even have been expanded, given its importance for James. How would this particular problem become relevant to the "religion in the public sphere" theme – are there, for instance, political versions of theodicy available there that the Jamesian pragmatist could criticize?

Chapter 4 ends with an illuminating discussion of the ways in which James's views on religious conversion ("Bekehrung") and prayer ("Gebet") presuppose a conception of the reality of God independently of subjects (284-91). Here Honnacker might have returned more explicitly to the tensions regarding realism and its alternatives (pragmatic constructivism, idealism, relativism) more thoroughly discussed in the previous chapter.

The fifth chapter is, as already indicated above, the most original section of the book in the sense that there James's pluralism is actually put into substantial philosophical work in the politically and more broadly culturally hot debates on religious "voices" in liberal democracies. James's pragmatic pluralism and his generally fallibilist and antidogmatic approach are extremely relevant here and should be more adequately acknowledged as key contributions not only to philosophy of religion but to political philosophy as well. James's pragmatism promises to avoid, e.g., both relativism and fundamentalism – and there can hardly be more important philosophical concerns in the post-secular liberal situation. Even a pragmatist conception of theological inquiry (342ff.) can be sketched with James's help. Here, however, the realism issue – this time applied to theology and religious studies – could be revisited again (cf. 348).

In the case of an excellent book like this, it is difficult to suggest any major improvements. Given that Honnacker shows how James's pragmatism deals with, and perhaps also emerges from, largely Kantian tensions (realism vs. idealism or constructivism, empiricism vs. rationalism, etc.), she might have directly referred to at least Kant's First Critique, as well as James's explicit readings of Kant, as problematic as they are. Furthermore, it might be suggested that the basic situation of post-secularity – a confusing arena of religious and non-religious voices fighting for their status in the public sphere – could be analyzed in terms of the quasi-Hegelian notion of recognition (*Anerkennung*) that philosophers like Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth have employed especially since the early 1990s. It would have been extremely interesting to read more about how James's pluralism and pragmatism might connect with the recognition discourse. An integration of pragmatism and recognition theory might be one way to carry forward the kind of Jamesian promise to make pragmatic pluralism better serve the post-secular liberalism debate. As James's pragmatism and pluralism play a mediating role between different kinds of believers and non-believers (cf. 256), or between religion and other practices and experiences, this mediation might itself be interpreted as a process of recognition (cf. also 353).

Ana Honnacker's book will undoubtedly be the starting point of a successful career in the philosophy of religion and pragmatism scholarship; it can be warmly recommended to anyone interested in James, pragmatism, or questions concerning religion in the public sphere.