Foley’s central focus on self-trust enables the avoidance of many problems associated with objectivist epistemologies, but one wonders if the resulting account is in fact too subjectivist. Is one’s feeling of epistemological confidence (obtained, of course, through self-critical reflection) sufficient to establish one as a rational cognizer? What of the religious fundamentalist who concludes after sustained introspection that the work of evolutionary scientists is necessarily flawed, since it conflicts with creationism? (Such questions further the point that “representational” beliefs may not be neatly separable from value judgments.)

Conversely, Foley’s program appears insufficiently subjectivist. Rationality as Foley conceives it appears to be a purely intellectual matter, which poses difficulties for a view so focused on epistemic self-confidence. An agent with a brash personality may take less epistemic care than necessary before concluding that her opinions are invulnerable to self-criticism, while another agent struggling with insecurities might fail to experience intellectual confidence when he ought. Epistemic self-trust involves emotional as well as intellectual factors.

Finally, Foley disallows the Foucauldian worry that we are being intellectually dominated by our society in a manner that would violate our right to autonomous self-trust. He does so on analogy with skepticism, maintaining that although we are not able to disprove the possibility, we are entitled to assume it false and proceed as thought we have intellectual autonomy. The analogy seems problematic, since a skepticism that takes seriously cannot be ameliorated. Intellectual domination by societal standards, however, can. Ignoring this disanalogy, which results from the human and hence potentially malleable nature of cultural domination, may make us epistemically quietistic when Foley’s ultimate concern is, quite properly, to increase our reflective understanding.

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Since the turn of events in Germany that started with
the breakdown of the Berlin Wall in 1998, there have been clear signs of a rising interest in classical American pragmatism. Recently, works of Peirce, James and Dewey have been translated into German. Journals like the Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie have devoted substantial parts of their issues to representatives of this kind of philosophy. This new found interest is remarkable considering that pragmatism never before gained any serious interest in Germany. Now, with the availability of some classical texts of pragmatism in the German language, a commentary on one of the most influential works of pragmatism has been published. Volume 21 of Ottfried Höffe’s Klassiker Auslegen (explaining classical texts) deals with William James’s Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking (1907).

In Pragmatism, one of his later works, James describes pragmatism both as a method and as a theory of truth. The method is based on the principle that the meaning of concepts or things is determined by the consequences they involve. The anti-essentialist and functionalist theory of truth that accompanies this method, conceives of truth not as the exact representation of a thing but as a contextually determined verification. This pragmatic conception of truth is strongly based on the thoughts of James’s contemporaries John Dewey and Ferdinand Scott Schiller. James regards pragmatism as the solution to the contradiction between empiricism and rationalism. It can be considered as his answer to the idealism of neo-Hegelians like Josiah Royce and Francis Herbert Bradley that was emerging in the prevailing empiricist philosophical landscape in the United States and England.

Klaus Oehler opens with an introduction that summarizes the history of pragmatism’s reception in Germany. Oehler explains that this original American contribution to philosophy was radically rejected in Germany partly because German thought was so strongly rooted in idealism and romanticism. There was simply no room for a philosophy so accessible to the possibility an ever changing world had to offer. It has only been in the last quarter of the twentieth century that Peirce and Mead have been introduced in Germany by Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas. However, Apel’s and Habermas’s introduction of both pragmatists submitted their thought to a transcendental alienation.

Most of the chapters of the book discuss the eight
lectures of Pragmatism. The chapters written by German authors restrict themselves to a thorough analyses of the relevant chapter of Pragmatism. Kai-Michael Hingst, who discusses the important second chapter of Pragmatism, shows how James, by taking Peirce’s pragmatic maxim as a starting point, develops his own version of pragmatism. In the last chapter, which does not deal with a specific lecture of Pragmatism, Helmut Pape describes James’s conception of truth as being the result of a semiotic theory of experience that originates in Berkeley and Peirce.

The four chapters that are written in English take a bigger distance from the lecture they suppose to discuss. This makes one assume that these articles were not originally written with the intention of becoming a part of this book. The chapters by Charlene Haddock Seigfried and Richard Rorty are reprinted articles. Charlene Haddock Seigfried, who’s text originally appeared as early as 1983, discusses James’s fifth lecture on pragmatism and common sense.\(^1\) Richard Rorty’s chapter, which is supposed to discuss James’s eight lecture on pragmatism and religion deals instead with his The Will to Believe which appeared in 1897.\(^2\) Ignas K. Skrupskelis argues that James’s theory of reference is influenced by arguments Royce developed in The Religious Aspect of Philosophy (1895). Sandra B. Rosenthal discusses James’s pluralism. Although Rosenthal is supposed to discuss lecture four and Skrupskelis lecture seven, these authors hardly refer to Pragmatism at all.

Volume 21 of Klassiker Auslegen is not just a good introduction to Pragmatism, it is also a great tool for any student of James’s philosophy. The book provides an introduction to many important aspects of James’s thought and refers regularly to his other works. Considering that seven of the eleven chapters are in German and two of the English chapters are reprints, it is obvious what group of readers the editor is aiming at. The book has the potential of contributing to further interest and understanding of James’s thought in Germany and other German speaking countries.
