In the introduction to *Revisiting Pragmatism: William James in the New Millennium*, editors Susanne Rohr and Miriam Strube indicate that this volume is not meant to present a careful exegesis of James’s work, nor a unified reinterpretation of James’s brand of pragmatism, but is rather meant to suggest how aspects of James’s work may be used to solve current philosophical or political issues. This focus acts as both this volume’s greatest strength and greatest weakness. It is its strength in that a wide variety of topics are covered from a variety of viewpoints, with many papers coming from Europeans and from women. It is its weakness in that the volume does not have a particular audience, and very few will find the entire volume appealing. Even so, this does mean that everyone should be able to find something worthwhile amongst the fifteen papers written by fourteen authors, organized thematically into four sections.

The first section contains three traditional papers on the theme of “Foundations”. The first paper is a thought-provoking reflection by Joseph Margolis on the promise that pragmatism offers to philosophy. Margolis argues that Jamesean pragmatism carries on the same line of argumentation that Hegel brought against Kant, but with naturalist and Darwinist aspects that were unavailable to Hegel. Pragmatism offers a naturalistic alternative to idealist absolutism with a method that while introspective manages to surpass mere phenomenology. The other two papers examine how James’s introspective method influenced his later viewpoints. Joan Richardson examines its influence on James’s views on religion, while Herwig Friedl examines its influence on James’s ontology. Heinz Ickstadt notes in his commentaries on these papers that while they are interesting and provocative, both papers take aspects of James’s work out of context, resulting in a number of misinterpretations. For example, in “Pragmatism…She Widens the Field of Search for God”, Richardson claims that James held a strong position regarding the effect that language has on our behaviour and beliefs based on James’s recognition that words play a central role in magic. As Ickstadt rightly points out, the very passage that Richardson uses to support her position explicitly casts doubt on the position that Richardson describes James as holding.

The second section deals with the relationship between truth, conduct, and understanding within James’s thought with the goal of making James’s pragmatism more palatable to European philosophers, who traditionally have rejected it on the basis of its account of truth. Helmut Pape argues in favor of James’s insistence that small, situational truths are considered more important to an individual’s mental development than the capital-T Truths that other philosophical systems chase due to the force that they have in everyday life. Kai-Michael Hingst argues that James’s view of the human condition implies that it is up to individuals to decide what makes their life worth living on the basis of what has concrete import to their life rather than relying on abstract conceptual frameworks. This viewpoint allows James to advocate a melioristic approach.
view of ethics that avoids both ethical nihilism and moralistic dogmatism. Lastly, Ulf Schulenberg points to the worldliness of James’s pragmatism and James’s role as a public philosopher as a possible explanation for the pragmatic turn in recent philosophy.

Most of the papers in the first half of this volume exhibit the same problem in varying degrees. While many authors emphasize the importance of context to James’s thought, they fail to adequately take into account James’s context in their interpretations of James’s thought. For example, Pape discusses the psychodynamic effects of situational truths in the mental lives of individuals but does not refer to James’s discussions of this subject in any of James’s more psychologically-oriented texts. This is a shame, as his paper would have been greatly benefitted from even a brief examination how James’s psychology led to the formation of his ethical system. There does not seem to be a particular reason why this is so evident in the first half of the volume, although Margolis does hint at a possible cause; namely, that Continental European philosophy has traditionally been hostile to naturalism and the incorporation of science into philosophy. It is possible that the authors have omitted this aspect of James’s thought in order to make it more palatable to European philosophers, but in so doing have deprived James’s thought of its strongest support. This is not to say that what the authors present is incorrect; rather, it is incomplete. The second half of the book fares much stronger than the first in this regard. In many cases, the authors took great pains in ensuring that James’s context was acknowledged and deviations from his paradigm were accounted for. As a result, the papers found in the second half of the volume are generally much stronger than those in the first.

In the third section, four authors apply James’s pragmatism to cultural politics. This section contains some of the most compelling and thought-provoking papers in this volume. The strongest paper in this chapter is Miriam Strube’s “Negating Domination: Pragmatism, Pluralism, Power”. In this essay, Strube considers the role that James’s philosophy has played in the development of several African-American thinkers. Starting with Alaine Locke, Strube follows the Jamesean thread through W. E. B. Du Bois, Cornel West, and up to Paula Moya. Strube argues that by incorporating the considerations of interest, power, and domination into their philosophical systems, these African-American thinkers have overcome the overly epistemological and individualistic pragmatism of James’s own pragmatism by articulating a version of James’s pragmatism that is equipped to deal with cultural and social issues. Patricia Rae’s and George Schiller’s respective papers are also interesting. Rae argues that a version of James’s procedure of verification can be found in Europe through the work of George Orwell. Schiller argues that many of the tenets of Native American religion fits with what James describes in the *Varieties*, and thus could serve as a framework under which non-Native Americans may be able to understand Native American religious practices without engaging in cultural appropriation.

The final section of the volume showcases four ways in which James’s philosophy may help to solve current debates in politics, ethics and the sciences. Trygve Throntveit examines the use of the term “pragmatist” in American
politics and argues that Obama ought to be considered an imperfect member of the pragmatist fold. While intriguing, it would be interesting to know if Throntveit still maintains his position in light of events in American politics which have occurred since the time of writing. Andrew Flescher’s and Robert Main’s respective papers follow a similar model: they each take a somewhat obscure aspect of James’s philosophy and show how it would resolve a specific social issue. Flescher shows how overbeliefs could be beneficial in medical settings, wherein a patient’s hope of recovery often affects her chance of recovery. Main argues that James’s pragmatism overcomes the traditional natural/artificial dichotomy, leading to a “pragmatic naturalism” that serves as a middle ground between preservation- and use-based valuations of the world. In the final paper of the volume, Michael Anacker presents a compelling reinterpretation of the role of concepts in our scientific practices. Anacker argues that a pragmatist account of science would view underdetermination of scientific concepts as a result of successful research and a crucial step in the scientific process rather than being a shortcoming of that same process. This recognition gives a pragmatic account of science an advantage over competing theories.

Taken as a whole, *Revisiting Pragmatism* accomplishes exactly what its editors says that it will accomplish: it presents a diverse collection of authors examining James from their viewpoint in order to address a particular problem in their own realm of expertise. Although not without its faults, the volume is worthwhile and interesting. That said, it is difficult to recommend it for any particular use or audience. Since the volume is explicitly not meant to provide a unified view of James or a systematic interpretation of his work, one may come away confused if one isn’t already at least familiar with James’s work. A mix of Continental European and Anglo-American methodologies may limit the number of papers that one may find useful. If one can overlook the first half of the volume’s tendency to remove James from his historical context, one is treated to some compelling and useful papers in the second half.

*Kyle Bromhall*

*Department of Philosophy*

*University of Guelph*

*kbromhal@uoguelph.ca*