Review of *Vernunft und Temperament: Eine Philosophie der Philosophie*. By Logi Gunnarsson. Leiden & Paderborn: Brill/Mentis, 2020. 447 pp. ISBN 978-3-95743-181-3. US$57.

As philosophy is, to a large extent, discussion with real or imagined conversation partners, philosophers have since Plato written fictional dialogues whose characters represent the positions examined. Logi Gunnarsson's *Vernuft und Temperament* joins this perennial tradition by interpreting and further developing William James's philosophy in the form of an exchange between two imagined figures, Bill Headstrong and Wilhelm Kornblum. These "soulmates," an American and a German, set out to write a joint book on James, but they gradually run into disagreements, and eventually Kornblum leaves the project. The chapters they produce are, however, "published" by Headstrong, along with their correspondence illuminating the progress of their project and its abrupt ending.

Gunnarsson's volume acknowledges a central feature of Jamesian *pluralism*: there are many "voices" in philosophical investigation. The book accounts for this insight through its unconventional form, but the same result could have been achieved in an ordinary monograph by arguing that James's views entail a genuinely polyphonic conception of philosophy. In any case, a dialogue like this is, presumably, a monologue in disguise.[1] Kornblum and Headstrong are figments of Gunnarsson's philosophical mind—and perhaps, by extension, James's. It is a fresh but somewhat strange decision to put two fictional

philosophers into a dialogue about a *real* historical philosopher; in their book chapters, they also cite a number of other sources, historical and recent, so the reader is invited to imagine that they live in the real world of contemporary academia.

This artificiality of the arrangement notwithstanding, the arguments developed are vitally important. The main idea Headstrong and Kornblum agree about is the Jamesian contention that we must philosophize as genuine human beings. Philosophical theories are individual persons' attempts to live on in the world. We encounter "the whole human being" in a philosophical work. "True philosophy" does not (merely) consist of true theories but primarily of a correct philosophical way of living. For example, the question concerning free will (vs. determinism), or the meta-level one concerning compatibilism and incompatibilism, cannot be resolved purely theoretically but must be tested in one's life, with emotions playing a crucial role in our evaluation of the potential solutions.

For a Jamesian-inspired philosopher, it is relatively easy to agree with these views defended by Gunnarsson via his fictional characters. What is more problematic is the author's decision to restrict the discussion to the early James and to avoid his later *pragmatism* (which, appropriately interpreted and developed, could render the basic position of the book even more plausible). The main sources are the essays collected in *The Will to Believe*, many of which were first published in the 1870–80s.

Gunnarsson's characters speak about the "truth" of philosophical views throughout the volume. Philosophical theories or propositions [*Sätze*] are said to be true [*wahr*] or false; however, a "good philosopher" must be a "true human being" [*ein wahrer Mensch*],[2] and philosophical "truths" may thus be (partly) practical and emotional.[3] These expressions suggest a play with the word *wahr*, which could in some contexts be translated as "genuine." The German word thus behaves rather similarly to its English equivalent. What troubles me is the choice to resolutely avoid interpreting this in the sense of the "pragmatist conception of truth." The truth the Jamesian "true human being" is seeking when pursuing philosophical truth (and philosophical life) is *not*, according to

Gunnarsson, truth in the pragmatist sense—though something like this was, presumably, James's mature position.

The notion of *temperament* figuring in Gunnarsson's title would also suggest taking seriously what James says about "philosophical temperaments" in *Pragmatism*, which is beyond the scope of the investigation. *Pragmatism* is a rich source of insights into what it is to be a "true human being"—and what it thus means to pursue philosophical truths in the full-blown pragmatist sense. Many of the views criticized by the later James (e.g., materialism, determinism, Hegelian idealism, theodicies explaining evil away) are arguably *pragmatically false* because they cannot in the end be held by a "true" human being.[4]

Nevertheless, what Gunnarsson says about the early James is certainly worth saying, and it should be admitted that pragmatism is only one of the potential outcomes of James's early thought.[5] As philosophy is contingently embedded in human life, we should avoid reading classics like James teleologically, assuming that their early views inevitably lead to their "mature" views. At the meta-level, however, I think James's position changed little: he seems to have maintained from early on that a "true human being" is presented with philosophical questions that need to be answered through that person's life, and that the point of philosophical systems is to answer such questions.[6] Philosophy thus emerges as something like a vocation for a person living "truly." There is also a kind of melancholy—comparable to the condition of the sick soul in James's *Varieties*—almost inevitably attached to philosophical life, and deep philosophical truths can be achieved only through such a melancholy.[7]

When justifying their restriction to the young James, the author(s) maintain that the claim that the answers to philosophical questions depend on emotional grounds is independent of the pragmatist theory of truth.[8] This may be true (!), but addressing the topic of this book in the context of the later James would in my view have made the overall case more plausible. Now the exact sense in which the concept of truth is used remains less than fully developed and slightly obscure. Perhaps Gunnarsson assumes the

correspondence theory of truth or a pre-philosophical "ordinary" notion of truth?

Moreover, the idea that the grounds determining the correctness or incorrectness of philosophical theories are practical and emotional rather than purely theoretical ("*nicht rein theoretisch, sondern praktisch bzw. emotional oder empfindungsbezogen*"[9]) sounds like a formulation of pragmatism, although the very distinction between the theoretical and the practical could be questioned by the Jamesian pragmatist.

When it is suggested that, according to James, life can be worth living only if "pluralistic moralism" is "true"—i.e., there really is good and evil in the world—this could, again, be plausibly understood in the sense of pragmatist truth.[10] Similarly, the claim that optimism is made true by, or depends on, our subjective reactions would be natural to cash out in explicitly pragmatist terms.[11] Alternatively, this could mean that we merely (epistemologically) employ our emotions to test the truth of theories like optimism or materialism, which are true or false independently of emotions, but this would be a relatively thin account of the "true human being."[12] At any rate, both "early-Jamesians" and "late-Jamesians" can agree on the need to widen the scope of philosophical reason in truth-seeking from the allegedly merely theoretical area to a practical area taking individual temperament and emotions seriously. For example, the question concerning the truth of materialism cannot be distinguished from the question concerning our ability to live without objective norms;[13] our metaphysical views thus depend on our ethical orientation.

I believe it is problematic to isolate James's later pragmatism from the early writings this book focuses on for at least two reasons. First, as suggested, the use of "true" and "truth" in the relevant contexts could be claimed to presuppose a pragmatist conception of truth—or to function as an early articulation of that conception—though this is explicitly denied. At least a pragmatist interpretation makes better sense of those contexts than, say, a standard realistic one. Secondly, more historically, James was, obviously, already in the 1870s deeply influenced by Peirce and the Metaphysical Club,

within which pragmatism was emerging, while the word was first used in print (by James) only in 1898.[14] Therefore, the decision to cut out pragmatism seems to me as artificial as the fictional dialogue form of the book.

This said, Gunnarsson's account of the young James—philosophical and historical—is outstanding. It is particularly important to understand James's spiritual crisis (ca. 1870) as a crisis concerning our philosophical search for the truth. It is the pursuit of truth concerning freedom (vs. determinism) and, hence, the very possibility of morality that leads us to the philosophical, and melancholic, questions bringing James to his collapse, and far from being able to resolve such issues by means of the kind of purely theoretical argumentation one encounters in the hundreds of volumes published on the problem of the free will, the Jamesian needs to face this crisis as an entire human being. In a sense, this crisis could be seen as leading the Jamesian thinker to *critical* philosophy in a quasi-Kantian sense (though this is not suggested by either Gunnarsson or James), because the basic worry concerns the inability of our philosophical reason to solve the problems our lives set us.[15] A "Kantian" aspect of James could also be naturally emphasized when it comes to analyzing James's views on the conditions for the possibility [*Ermöglichungsbedingungen*] of moral integrity and meaningful life.[16]

Gunnarsson's chapter 4 is a detailed biographical account of James's years of crisis, 1868–1873,[17] while chapter 5 (Headstrong's version)[18] provides a painstakingly detailed interpretation of James's argument for incompatibilism culminating in a 48-step reconstruction of this argument, illustrating the way in which James's "philosophy of philosophy" employs emotional reactions in the justification of philosophical theories.[19] In this context, in particular, Gunnarsson (i.e., Headstrong) argues that philosophical theories are objectively true or false—in a non-pragmatist sense—and the purpose of testing them in practical life is to find out whether they are true or false; again, no pragmatist (or any other) theory of truth is ascribed to James.[20] Emotions and subjective reactions pertain primarily to the *grounds* [*Gründe*] of philosophical truths.

Subjective emotions do not simply make such truths true, especially not in any straightforward causal sense. There is, according to James, a kind of "congruence" between our subjective contribution and the way the world is, but this does not compromise the objectivity of philosophical truth.[21]

The discussion, as admirably clear and argumentative as it is, seems to oscillate, perhaps deliberately, between a metaphysical dependence of truth on subjectivity ("life-reactions") and an epistemic dependence of our reasons for believing truths on subjectivity. The great value of a fully developed pragmatist account of truth is to run these together. This is particularly important, I think, in the "will to believe" type of cases concerning, say, freedom—in short, cases that may lead us to crises of life coloring our entire pursuit of truth. Thus, James's later pragmatic pluralism is arguably a development of the early position, rather than something to be rejected in order to maintain the objectivity of philosophical truth.[22]

In chapter 6, the more academically minded of the characters, Headstrong, moves on to formulate his (i.e., presumably, Gunnarsson's) own theory of how philosophical truths involve "the whole human being." While his previous chapter was concerned with interpreting James, Headstrong now seeks to show that a carefully articulated version of the Jamesian position is actually correct (for a summary of the metaphilosophical theses defended).[23] Here the notion of truth is brought onto a metaphilosophical level: "*Wir wollen vor allem die Wahrheit in James's These ausarbeiten, dass der ganze Mensch über die Wahrheit philosophischer Theorien entscheidet. Ist diese These richtig?.*"[24] Does it follow that the concept of truth can equally well be applied at the metaphilosophical level to the theses and theories put forward in this book? Or is the choice of the word *richtig* here a signal of some uncertainty regarding this point?[25] Again, a pragmatist conception of truth would offer a smooth way of handling the matter. However, both Gunnarssonian characters, also Kornblum, agree that the pragmatist theory of truth is *false*[26]—whatever *this* exactly means for them.

Gunnarsson's project is highly ambitious and bold in its thoroughgoing *reflexivity*: whatever it means to speak about truth in philosophy, we have to extend this discussion to the metaphilosophical truths we pursue in seeking the right attitude to philosophizing in our lives. In this sense, the book is really about what it is to be a "true human being." This also means that metaethical theses must be investigated with reference to ("first-order") ethical views and emotions.[27] While Gunnarsson does not develop his ideas in these terms, it could be suggested that he ascribes to the early James a version of "holistic pragmatism": our theoretical and practical, including ethical, beliefs are "in the same boat" and form a "seamless web" tested as a totality in the course of our lives, and feelings of ethical obligation may legitimately lead to revisions of factual beliefs.[28]

The fictional characters in a sense (holistically) represent two sides of James, and perhaps of Gunnarsson's intended reader as well: the more academic and scholarly (Headstrong) and the more popular and life-oriented (Kornblum). The tension between these two philosophical selves leads to a break between the fictional authors: Kornblum decides to leave academic philosophy and change his life; Headstrong, on the contrary, insists on discussing James's work within the context of academic philosophy, distinguishing clearly between interpreting James and arguing for one's own position (while doing both). Kornblum in the end gives up not only the project but also his academic life in order to test his philosophical ideas in a true Jamesian spirit by "living." This could have been reconsidered. Why give the impression that academic life is not "real"? The Jamesian philosopher could argue that we need more, and better, such life, not the rejection of academic life *à la* Kornblum. The very distinction between scholarly and "real" life is unpragmatic and in my view un-Jamesian. It is also a cliché unnecessary to repeat in an extremely sophisticated and generally very well-argued philosophical work.

Gunnarsson's unusual volume is an impressive achievement and to be warmly recommended to scholars seriously interested in James, metaphysics, ethics, philosophy of life, and metaphilosophy.

It is well written, accessible (but not popular), carefully argued and learned, though somewhat puzzling in its setup and in portraying only an early time-slice of the complex character of James.

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NOTES
   [1] Eino Kaila, a Finnish philosopher also inspired by James, pointed out in the introduction to *his* dialogical work, *Syvähenkinen elämä* ([Deep-Mental Life], 1943), that the "dialogues" philosophers have constructed since Plato are actually, invariably, monologues.
   [2] Gunnarsson, *Vernunft und Temperament*, 19; see also, e.g., 50, 79, 147, 218–19.
   [3] Gunnarsson, 77.
   [4] I have tried to suggest in my own work on James that even loose references to truth in such contexts should be interpreted with reference to James's pragmatist account of truth. See Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatic Realism, Religious Truth.*
   [5] Gunnarsson, 39.
   [6] Gunnarsson, 25–26.
   [7] Gunnarsson, 33–34, 79–80, 83.
   [8] Gunnarsson, 47.

[9] Gunnarsson, 48.

[10] Gunnarsson, 127–8.

[11] Gunnarsson, 152.

[12] Cf. Gunnarsson, 154.

[13] Gunnarsson, 168.

[14] See, however, Gunnarsson, 167, 187–9.

[15] See Gunnarsson, 71.

[16] Gunnarsson, 313.

[17] More precisely, the authors distinguish three periods in the development of the early James: the crisis phase (from the late 1860s to 1878), the creative phase (1878–1884, during which most of the papers addressing these issues were first written and published), and the reconsideration phase (*Nacharbeitungsphase*, 1884–1896, when further contributions developing the same ideas, including most famously "The Will to Believe," were written).

[18] Due to the disagreement between the two fictional authors, the book contains two chapters 5, one by each. Kornblum's chapter 5 is a fictional philosophical diary of James—a layer of fiction within the fiction—while the one by Headstrong offers a conventional scholarly reading of James.

[19] Gunnarsson, 327–31.

[20] Gunnarsson, 256–62.

[21] See, for example, Gunnarsson, 279.

[22] Cf. Gunnarsson, 289–90.

[23] See Gunnarsson, 374–75.

[24] Gunnarsson, 337.

[25] In chapter 6, both truth and rightness are ascribed to philosophical theories (Gunnarsson, 343–44).

[26] Gunnarsson, 408.

[27] Gunnarsson, 373.

[28] This holistic pragmatism is developed by Morton White, for example, in his *A Philosophy of Culture*.