Sophisticated issues with the goal of improving actual, lived experience is missing. One must never forget that the early pragmatists, especially James and Dewey, were integrally involved in theorizing and writing not just for other philosophers, but for the larger purpose of improving life. Why did James practice and study so many meliorative somatic techniques, or use his 1906 presidential address to the American Philosophical Association to plead for a disciplined study of the “energies of men” and how they can be improved? Why did Dewey not only write about art and education, but also administratively take part in the Barnes Foundation and the Laboratory School?

Even the one essay in this collection that addresses moral issues in a sustained matter lacks this melioritve focus – like the contributions dealing with epistemological/metaphysical issues, it focuses on giving a descriptive theoretical account of some human practice (viz., moral judgment). The missing alternative is to give attention to ways of changing or reconstructing human practices or habits. Other “new pragmatists,” such as Richard Shusterman, would approach this issue differently, perhaps giving the bulk of their attention to what ends should be aimed at in the production moral inquirers and how we can effectively produce such habits in individuals. This is the melioristic voice that is missing from the current volume; any current revival of pragmatism would be greatly enhanced if it were to include such a voice. *New Pragmatists* serves as an interesting, if incomplete, start to elaborating on what pragmatism has to contribute to modern philosophical discussions.

Scott R. Stroud  
University of Texas at Austin

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For some of us “contemporary pragmatists” who do philosophical theology and political philosophy, Jeffrey Stout’s *Democracy and Tradition* was a book that had to be written. It put in conversation those who defend a “secular democracy” (think Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls, and Richard Rorty) with those who defend a Christian “traditionalism” in contemporary philosophy and theology (think Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair MacIntyre, and John Milbank). Of these philosophers and theologians, Stanley Hauerwas is now officially the first one to respond to Stout in book-length form – though he had some help in doing it. In *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, Romand Coles (a political
theorist at Duke University) and Stanley Hauerwas (the theological ethicist at Duke University, Duke Divinity School, and Duke Law School) offer us timely reflections on the relation between contemporary Christian theology and contemporary democratic political theory. These timely reflections are worth the ride and the ticket price for what they call their “conversations between a radical democrat and a Christian.”

Coles is not only concerned with contemporary democratic political theory but with ordinary lives and “radical democracy.” Coles and Hauerwas find themselves in conversation because Coles thinks that some of the best exemplars of his understanding of “radical democracy” are found in actual Christian churches and communities. For example, the Christian churches that Charles Marsh writes about in his The Beloved Community – like Martin Luther King’s church in Birmingham, Alabama – exemplify what a “radical democracy” looks like, for Coles, because they practice the politics of both “generosity” and “receptivity.” Radical democratic communities practice the politics of “generosity” by being the church, being the body of Christ for the world, and giving in “excess” of what God has given them. And radical democratic communities practice the politics of “receptivity” by being challenged by other communities and traditions through argument and making explicit their differences and disagreements, through encountering the “other” and receiving the “other,” and with the kind of “wild patience” that requires a sacrifice of attempting to control history and the world.

Though it is not a self-description, Coles is a deeply pragmatic thinker in that his political theories are determined by the actual practices of real communities. Coles is not a Christian, which becomes an interesting issue in Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary, but he takes Christian churches and communities seriously in ways analogous to how William James took Christian believers and their convictions seriously throughout his work. Coles works within the tradition of democratic political theory, but his use of democracy stays close to the ground and thus is much closer to that of John Dewey than John Rawls. And, like any good pragmatist ought to do, Coles does not partake in polemics against those with whom he disagrees but rather offers a “rational reconstruction” (Jürgen Habermas’s phrase) of the arguments of his opponents. In doing so, he brings his readers into sympathy with his opponents as much as with those for whom he agrees.

What is Hauerwas’s role in this conversation? As a fond reader of Hauerwas’s work, I found this book to be one of his most important and insightful because Hauerwas is fully engaged with and vulnerable to someone who is “outside the church.” The reason for this engagement and vulnerability is that Hauerwas seems to trust Coles in ways he seems not to trust other critics of his work. Perhaps the reason for this trust is exactly Coles’s practice of “rational reconstruction” when it comes to Hauerwas’s arguments and thought. Coles does not seek to stick labels on Hauerwas like “sectarian” or “traditionalist” but rather puts questions to Hauerwas about his logic, reasoning, and thought.