The essays in this collection are as diverse as James's interests. They are perceptive and informative in varying degrees, and can be read independently of one another. Recommended.

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Professor Stone's voice in the contemporary dialogue in American religious empiricism is thoughtful, thorough, and expressed in an admirably lucid American plain style. Stone situates his views in the context of some twenty thinkers from Hume and Kant to Gadamer and Ricoeur and attempts to explain the nature of the divine within the limits of human experience and the historical nature of all thought.

Briefly put, the minimal model of transcendence can be formulated as follows: the transcendent is the collection of all situationally transcendent resources and continually challenging ideals we experience. [11]

According to Stone, the divine consists of real but unexpected and unmanageable creative forces of healing and ideals such as beauty and love that continually challenge us. Even though we never fully realize these ideals, their pursuit is experienced as worthwhile. We are "called" by these ideals to a life of prudent care, service, and a discernment of worth in giving someone "a cup of water, a reconciling word, a healing medicine." [188] Being religious, then, in this framework, means being open to these nurturing forces and opportunities, which leads to a life of realistic hope and courage.

Stone's fresh contribution to contemporary American philosophy of religion is his recommendation that the language of inquiry be used in the place of the language of devotion. "I propose that the language of inquiry can also nurture and transmit the experience of transcendence" [162]. Most philosophers of religion since Schleiermacher have analyzed religious language into first order personal language about God and second order reflection on the philosophical significance of the God-concept. Stone is wise to urge the devotional use of language about fulfilling natural experiences such as creative dialogue. For this language is more direct and less confusing than indirect figurative language that is often taken as literal language. Also, a naturalistic philosophy of religion should be just that--natural--and his talk of transcendence suggests something non-natural, even super-natural, which is clearly not his point.

The weakest part of this book is his short discussion of non-theistic American religious humanism. I wrote my dissertation on
Roy Wood Sellars' philosophy of religion, which is behind the Humanist Manifesto of 1933 that Stone discusses. Sellars drafted three pages of fifteen theses about the reconstruction of religious beliefs and values to reflect the theory of evolution and naturally occurring experiences of human significance such as friendship, art, and economic cooperation. Thirty-four American philosophy professors—including John Dewey, Edwin Burtt, and John Herman Randall—lawyers, journalists, and Unitarian and Universalist ministers signed it.

First of all, Stone repeats the same response that Hartshorne and others made in the thirties that religious humanists "neglect situationally transcendent resources of healing." [199] This is false. The thoroughly natural resources of healing that Stone mentions are the naturally significant human activities that the religious humanists had in mind. We are always immersed in the cosmic forces of nature that give birth to us, sustain us, and will finally consume us. The only fundamental difference between Stone's religious naturalism and Sellars's religious naturalism is that Sellars did not use the language of transcendence.

Second, he faults the Manifesto for neglecting religious traditions, which again is not true. The signatories were very religious men who took Dewey's advice and tried to reconstruct existing religions around humanly significant natural experiences. Also, Sellars made it clear in his 1918 The Next Step in Religion and his 1928 Religion Coming of Age that he was attempting to preserve the ethics of Jesus while updating his metaphysics to a thorough-going naturalism.

Third, Stone criticizes the Manifesto for its arrogance in putting emphasis on self-reliance in solving human problems. He hesitates to criticize this point because of the great importance of self-reliance, but he detects a confidence that goes beyond the evidence. Stone, however, forgets the historical context of the Manifesto. America was in the Great Depression, religious fundamentalism was on the rise, and liberal Protestant theologians had abandoned God as an entity and were thinking of God as "creative event" or "personality-producing forces in the universe" without telling the average member of the congregation. This historical situation motivated the religious humanists to try to redirect attention away from reliance on an, honestly speaking, fictitious entity to solve problems to reliance on natural ways to solve problems. Also, the religious humanist's focus on reason as a guide to living should keep human beings aware of the inherent limits of human knowledge, human effort, and human life.

In short, these are minor shortcomings in a book that is well worth reading, especially for those philosophers who are not familiar with this extensive body of Twentieth Century religious empiricism.

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