matter. First, Quine, contra Dewey, argues that "objects of scientific knowledge are never within human experience but always beyond experience." Second, Quine argues for a realist interpretation of unobservable theoretical entities. Shook contends that both these things speak against Quine’s pragmatic credentials; Dewey’s philosophy espouses a more thorough-going pragmatism. Dewey’s belief that we can have direct experience of even scientific objects, and that unobservables have only a hypothetically pragmatic meaning, contribute to making his pragmatism all the more naturalistic in a way that nonetheless respects the existence of meaning. We can study the production of warranted assertions naturalistically if we but admit the truly empirical context of known objects.

All these essays reveal that Dewey was prescient in emphasizing the biological component of inquiry. Proponents of Dewey’s logic should pursue, more so than we have, results from the cognitive sciences (particularly neurobiologically informed findings) that give bite to some of his contentions about the nature of inquiry and that tell us more about the empirical contexts of our methods of knowing. We need more science with our theory of inquiry, please, in at least equal measures with the philosophy. As this enlightening collection of essays hints, we likely can gain yet more warranted assertibility for Dewey’s logic by taking seriously his call for an interdisciplinary, context-laden approach to logic that (among other things) takes the biology of cognition seriously.

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Philosopher Charles Taylor has read William James’s Varieties of Religious Experience, and his book is a record of his thoughtful insights about James’s message for today. Although Taylor’s book is very short, he is dealing with a very large topic, “the place of religion in our secular age” (p. vi), using James as a starting point and guide.

Taylor chose James to be the centerpiece of his inquiry into contemporary religion because, even though the
Varieties was written a century ago, in the freshness of its writing, “it could have been written yesterday” (p. v). In addition, Taylor regards James as the most articulate progenitor of the modernist style of religion with its assumption that “the real locus of religion is in individual experience,” in feelings, not community life or intellectual formulations (p. 7). So for Taylor, James’s writings are a kind of ur-text of contemporary religion, although he also provides the historical contexts to show how “James’s position ... emerge[d] from the main sweep of Latin Christendom” (p. 15). There has been a “steadily increasing emphasis on a religion of personal commitment and devotion over forms centered on collective ritual” (p. 9) since the Middle Ages. That trend accelerated with the Reformation, among both Protestant and Catholic believers, and in recent times, it has even shaped secular thinkers whose “really inward commitment would have to free us from religion” (p. 13). The theme that Taylor is addressing and that makes James a good focal point is the belief that insists: “To take my religion seriously is to take it personally, more devotionally, inwardly, more committedly” (p. 11).

Even when Taylor takes up critiques of his much-admired main subject, he finds “blind spots” in James that are also “widespread in the modern world” (pp. 3-4). The intensely personal emphasis neglects the “locus of collective connection” (p. 25) that every individual shares with surrounding people. Moreover, although Taylor respects non-cognitive feelings, he maintains that some reasoning with “propositional formulations are unavoidable” (p. 26). Taylor does not reject or ridicule the modernist/Jamesian approach to religion, but he finds it an exaggeration that neglects crucial parts of our humanity.

Taylor then explores the character of secular thinking that has emerged in the shadow of James’s style of religious outlooks. Drawing on James’s insights about the sick soul, Taylor uses a marvelous metaphor to compare the melancholy of pre-moderns with the melancholy that has emerged in modern secular minds. In earlier times, an individual in doubt would feel “exile[d] from the general feast of meaning,” but a contemporary who has lost religious belief feels “the threatened implosion of meaning altogether” (p. 40). Both positions hurt, but the latter has greater social significance because of its suggestion about ultimate meaninglessness. Taylor praises James not
only for his courageous explorations of the “modern spiritual malaise” (p. 41), but also for his ability to think clearly on both sides of the religious belief-secular doubt divide: through his writing, “he helps you image what it’s like to be on either [side] (p. 57). James is “our great philosopher of the cusp”—he does not answer these dilemmas, but he helps his readers to understand the depths of the questions.

This praise of James as the wise philosopher of the secular dilemmas brings Taylor to his ultimate goal in assessing the religion of today: these contexts have been important because “more and more people are pushed on to the cusp that James so well described” (p. 63). For this analysis, Taylor turns sociologist in using Emile Durkheim’s social categories to understand different paths to contemporary religion as it brushes against secular challenges. He dubs “paleo-Durkheimian” those societies formerly with state churches, which have turned anti-clerical, with “the spiritual dimension of existence ... quite unhooked from the political” (p. 76). The “neo-Durkheimian” societies include many denominations that maintain voluntary religious adherence, with each one in loyal opposition to the others’ particular tenets; this model is most fully realized with the American civil religion, in which “the whole of these [denominations] make up ‘the church’” (p. 73). While these social settings have felt the issues that James wrestled with, his thought becomes even more relevant in a third social trend of most recent vintage: the individualistic culture of authenticity that has emerged most forcefully since the 1960s. Pockets of intellectual elites and cultural radicals engaged in this expressive individualism before this era, but since that time, this style has been mass marketed. The social structures that result from this “post-Durkheimian” style does not promote “common action,” but instead “mutual display” (p. 85). With the unabashed individualism that flourishes in this contemporary dispensation, “there is no necessary embedding of our link to the sacred in any particular broader framework, whether ‘church’ or state” (p. 95). Instead, “deeply felt personal insight now [has become] our most precious spiritual resource” (p. 100). Here the book comes full circle, with Taylor pointing out that history has caught up with James, the original observer and advocate of expressive individualism.
While Taylor points to James as the prophet of our contemporary religious situation, he also adds some qualifications to that generalization—and they are elaborations of the things that James missed in his assessment of the nature of religion. He points, for example to the endurance of churches and the way in which that individualizing drive leads many people, ironically, into religious communities. Also, people of particular ethnic and historical identities still often “look to some religious marker to gather around” (p. 114), although Taylor readily adds that those identities are often manipulated for political—and worse, for military—purposes. In addition, James is hardly a guide to the way that even those with a highly personal spiritual style often demand commitment to “formal spiritual practices” (p. 115) involving rituals, disciplines, and explorations beyond the initial personal feelings that he was so astute in noticing and describing.

Taylor’s little book, based on his Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna lectures, is a clear and compact guide to James’s religious thought and to contemporary religion. It could serve as a good spur to class discussions. In his brevity, he does not address the socially-oriented and community-minded parts of James’s thought. In addition, he makes little effort to dialogue with scholars of James or pragmatism, but he sets his thoughts in a learned context of philosophy, history, and social thought. The alarms he sounds about contemporary religion are similar to those that emerge from laments about the loss of civic culture, and there is little emphasis on what has been gained by the expressive individualism of James and his modern followers, including the liberation from historic oppressions. Taylor is at his best in clearly describing the Jamesian mindset and pointing out its individualistic foibles.

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This valuable book contributes to the increasing literature on Dewey's political thought, which is important today as a counter to the often corrosive skepticism of