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
anti-rationalist postmodern political theory as well as serving as a brake on universalist aspirations of the newer schools of rationalist and constructivist political theory. John Dewey's Liberalism continues the project of contextualizing Dewey in current political thinking begun by Caspary's Dewey on Democracy (2000) and Festenstein's Pragmatism & Political Theory (1997). However, unlike these authors, Savage is concerned with Dewey's answers to questions raised by the contemporary liberal/communitarian debate, and specifically, his aim is to show how Dewey "saw freedom and community as necessarily contiguous, that is, freedom is a universal and immutable principle because it is the means to a good that is bounded by time and space" (2).

Structurally, the book strikes out toward this goal sensibly. The two major divisions are devoted first to the individual and then the community. In the first part, Savage defends Deweyan conceptions of autonomy, of the self, and of individuality; in the second, Dewey's reconstruction of liberalism through social intelligence and the notion of "cultural evolution." The chapters on individuality and cultural evolution, respectively, offer the most original and perceptive insights of the book. In the former, Savage contends that Dewey's theories of art and individuality are the same (62), a highly defensible thesis that has been all but ignored up until now in favor of the idea that Dewey was a kind of proto-communitarian. Yet much of what Savage has to say about individuality and self-development can be found easily and relatively early in Dewey's work, for example in the programmatic essay "Philosophy and American National Life," where Dewey says: "If our civilization is to be directed, we must have such a concrete and working knowledge of the individual as will enable us to furnish on the basis of the individual himself substitutes for those modes of nurture, of restraint and of control which in the past have been supplied from authorizations supposedly fixed outside of and beyond individuality" (MW 3, 75). As Savage points out, communitarians (MacIntyre is Savage's oft-used example) would be uncomfortable with the central pillars of Dewey's idea of cultural evolution, the idea that only contingency and change are universal (161) and that, therefore, cultural growth can only be measured in reference to how well reconstructed traditions allow their members to meet their own needs (156).
However, the strongest chapter in Savage's book is chapter four, "The Unity of Freedom and Authority," which, in preparing the way for a Deweyan response to Rawls's political liberalism in the following chapter, emphasizes social intelligence. In many ways, this is also the least abstract of the chapters, offering reasons for why liberals should eliminate predatory economic practices and ideas for dealing with political conflict in a democratic manner. This part of the book is particularly important because it addresses themes that most other accounts (and in particular, rationalist accounts that focus primarily on the role of institutions) completely leave out: the primacy of democratic culture over political practices, the role of education in self- and cultural development, and the need for an alleviation of the "communication gap" between liberal intellectuals and the public that they purport to assist.

Why, however, given all these strengths, does Savage feel the need to rely on two highly "un-Deweyan" ethico-political concepts in order to make sense of Dewey's liberalism? Here I am referring to virtue, conceived of by Savage as the mean between two extremes which "provide us with a practical and general method [rather than a rule; KD] for conducting moral inquiry," (10) and autonomy, which, again according to Savage, would be constituted in the Deweyan sense by the attainment of the intellectual and moral virtues (2, 18). It is the importation of these concepts that is the most surprising departure of the book and not the mere fact, as Savage notes, that his exposition is a "somewhat radical departure" from Dewey scholarship because the author believes that Dewey's political writings "contain the basis for general moral and political principles" (3). This thesis is nearly incontestable by anyone working in the field, but often Savage's account of Dewey's principles appears to be a philosophical retrogression, rather than a practical reconstruction.

There are several reasons for this. There is the matter of Dewey's own increasing discomfort with, and lack of attention to, the classical theory of the virtues in the four main texts in which he treats of it at length. In Human Nature and Conduct (1922), for example, it is easy to see his impatience with the metaphysical residue of virtue theory as well as its tendency to allow us to divorce the consequences from otherwise virtuous acts (MW 14, 36). There, he is much happier talking about habits,
dispositions, and tendencies, and in general deferring analysis of these functions to "scientific psychology" (MW 14, 35).

There are also problems with how virtues function. Now, Savage's appropriation of the virtue concept in reference to Dewey's political thinking is to secure the timeless applicability of three such "methods": critical reflection, creative individuality, and sociability, or the willingness to submit one's ideas to intersubjective verification (28-37). The proper exercise of each of these is a mean between two extremes; for example, sociability is the mean between docility and rebelliousness. Dewey would, I think, be uncomfortable not with Savage's identification of these methods, but with their status as virtues, as means between extremes. For one thing, this kind of characterization smacks of the kind of dichotomous thinking that Dewey consistently refutes. Another third problem with Savage's interpretation is that virtue theory, according to Dewey, cannot take proper account of the transactional relationship that "virtuous organisms" have with their environment, and how much this relationship canalizes, but not determines, our moral capacities (MW 14, 38). Similar objections can be made, I would suggest, in reference to Savage's use of "autonomy." Regardless of Dewey's own criticism of the autonomy/heteronomy distinction (See EW 3, 293), Savage's attempts to meet Gerald Dworkin's criteria for a concept of autonomy (38), which lead up to the centrality of self-determination for that concept, would have to complicatedly qualify "self-determination" in terms of so many other of Dewey's ideas--many of them having to do with social psychology--that it would clearly not be acceptable to Kantians at all.

Despite these reservations, and others which there is not space to discuss here, Savage's book is an important addition to the political literature on Dewey and will undoubtedly be used by both students of Dewey and those new to his thought struggling to understand his highly complex and engaging model of reflective, participatory democratic life.

*Works mentioned in review:


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Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others. Richard Foley.

Richard Foley’s latest book is an intellectually exciting contribution to contemporary epistemology. Foley covers a number of important classical and current figures in the field—including Descartes, Locke, Hume, Reid, Chisholm, Davidson, Gettier, Goldman, Quine and Putnam, not to mention Foucault, Marx and Rorty—yet manages to keep the text accessible, clearly written, and jargon-free. Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others is particularly worthwhile reading for those interested in questions concerning knowledge, rationality, social epistemology, pragmatism, and the nature of personal identity over time.

Recognizing the impossibility of obtaining a complete proof of our beliefs or defeat of skepticism, Foley constructs a practical and realistic account of rationality based primarily on intellectual self-trust. While acknowledging that our beliefs are profoundly shaped by others, Foley retains a central role for intellectual autonomy and careful reflection on one’s current epistemic perspective. In so doing, he is able to explain why we trust others and our past, current, and future selves to the extent we do, as well as how such trust functions philosophically.

Since our beliefs cannot be apodictically proven, self-trust is pragmatically necessary; the question is, how far should that self-trust range? Foley answers that we should trust ourselves intellectually insofar as we have for the relevant beliefs an epistemic confidence so deep