



Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited (Institute for Human Sciences Vienna Lecture Series)

Charles Taylor

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A hundred years after William James delivered the celebrated lectures that became *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, one of the foremost thinkers in the English-speaking world returns to the questions posed in James's masterpiece to clarify the circumstances and conditions of religion in our day. An elegant mix of the philosophy and sociology of religion, Charles Taylor's powerful book maintains a clear perspective on James's work in its historical and cultural contexts, while casting a new and revealing light upon the present.

Lucid, readable, and dense with ideas that promise to transform current debates about religion and secularism, *Varieties of Religion Today* is much more than a revisiting of James's classic. Rather, it places James's analysis of religious experience and the dilemmas of doubt and belief in an unfamiliar but illuminating context, namely the social horizon in which questions of religion come to be presented to individuals in the first place.

Taylor begins with questions about the way in which James conceives his subject, and shows how these questions arise out of different ways of understanding religion that confronted one another in James's time and continue to do so today. Evaluating James's treatment of the ethics of belief, he goes on to develop an innovative and provocative reading of the public and cultural conditions in which questions of belief or unbelief are perceived to be individual questions. What emerges is a remarkable and penetrating view of the relation between religion and social order and, ultimately, of what "religion" means.

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