

(italics mine). While the presentation of the material certainly makes it accessible to non-specialist scholars, the *appropriateness* of the material for scholars, especially those who have a serious need for background in this area, is questionable. This is not intended as a criticism of the book on its own merits, simply an observation about the limitations on its uses.

One final comment—and it is, perhaps, a quibble—concerns the terms, “faith” and “piety” in the title of the book. These were prominent in the original edition and are now much less so, having been relegated to the subtitle, but they are nonetheless present. The concepts of “faith” and “piety” (in Greek *pistis* and *eusebeia*) are simply not found in the Hebrew of the period. They are prominent in Greek Jewish writings, including the Septuagint, but were foreign concepts to Semitic Jews of the time. Further, they are words that become laden with tremendous theological baggage once those Jews who follow Jesus of Nazareth separate from “the synagogue,” a complex event which occurs in the period covered by the field of “early Judaism.” The use of these terms in the title thus seems to me to be most unfortunate, and I hope that future editions of this text will omit them altogether. However, given that we have here an excellent textbook that will be a valuable resource to teachers for years to come, this criticism constitutes no more than a footnote by a junior scholar with a particular obsession.

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***This Incredible Need to Believe***

Julia Kristeva. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

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Julia Kristeva’s engagement with religion has a long and complex history, and arguably exceeds that of any other influential critical theorist of her generation. During the 1970s, Kristeva published several essays that applied semiotic and psychoanalytic interpretations to Christian art and employed literary criticism to challenge religious ‘monologism’. Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory, developed mainly in the course of the 1980s, recognizes from the very beginning that it is impossible to fully understand the psychic life of the modern subject without addressing the role religious texts or symbols have played in his or her constitution. Kristeva’s early tendency toward psychological reductionism has gradually given way to an approach grounded in a dynamic interplay between psychoanalytic, religious, and literary discourse. This, in turn, has enabled Kristeva to offer some significant insights into the ‘crisis of secularism’ that, in the past decade or so, has emerged as a prominent issue in academic circles as well as in public debate.

Kristeva's most recent book, *This Incredible Need to Believe* (Beverly Bie Brahic's translation of *Cet incroyable besoin de croire*), follows in this vein. Beyond offering an analysis of the nature of 'belief' and its connection to language and knowledge, this publication, composed of two interviews, two short essays, and a lecture, continues Kristeva's earlier explorations of the relationship between psychoanalysis, religion, and democracy, and provides critical commentaries on the 'death of God', the 'return of religion', religious conflict, and the limits of secularism. Kristeva's preface reminds the reader that she regards the crisis that afflicts 'late modernity' as necessarily *both* secular *and* religious in character, and that her inquiry situates itself between 'nihilistic certitude' and 'fundamentalist exaltation'. The reader should not expect simple answers in this regard; the question of religion and its role in human life presents "an impossible wager" that calls for an ongoing response, rather than for hasty decisions, explanations, or solutions.

The centre-piece of *This Incredible Need to Believe* is the transcribed and revised interview with Kristeva's editor Carmine Donzelli, which lends the book its title. Bringing together psychoanalytic, linguistic, historical, and theological insights, Kristeva strives to liberate the meaning of the term 'belief' from its somewhat one-dimensional, practical use in contemporary discourse. As in her other work, Kristeva's approach here aims to establish a dynamic space in the midst of which figures as diverse as Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, Descartes, Voltaire, and Freud can encounter each other in a mutually enriching manner. This exchange leads Kristeva to assert that the experience of belief must be regarded as necessarily *prereligious*: at the 'zero-degree of meaning,' the human being emerges as a speaking being (or *parlêtre*) only insofar as s/he is capable of believing at once in the *other* (another human body) and the *Other* (meaning as such). In this sense, belief underlies the capacity for knowledge *and* for radical questioning. Kristeva bemoans the manner in which the 'human sciences' fragment human experience, reducing knowledge to a 'product' and the complexity of the Judeo-Christian tradition to 'superstition', 'illusion', or ontotheological error. By the same token, these sciences fail to acknowledge the impasses inscribed into secular humanism, which leaves them unable to properly address questions of language, meaning, and knowledge, as well as to respond to those marginal experiences (love, desire, faith, suffering, or death) through which the subject encounters itself and transforms its relationship to its Other.

Kristeva's response to this situation is to suggest that *homo religiosus* may well constitute an integral part of *homo sapiens*, and that the sublimatory accomplishments of the Christian tradition permeate the entire development of Western culture's symbolic capacities and revolts, enabling a constant transformation of the believing subject into a subject who becomes a question to itself. By the same token, psychoanalytic discourse emerges as the dialogical space of the most

significant encounter between the secular-humanist and religious experience. The encounter between religion and humanism constitutes, in Kristeva's view, nothing less than a key political project that calls for a *refoundation*—rather than a simple return to—of the Greco-Judeo-Christian discourse insofar as it carries within itself the vision of a pluralistic yet universal community. Kristeva argues that this multiple discourse embodies a “preparation for humanism”, and hence its ‘refoundation’ is necessary if humanism is to avoid reaching a dead end. The short lectures and essays that follow this discussion focus on elaborating Kristeva's insights into the essential relevance of Christian ‘genius’ for contemporary Western culture and its splintered efforts to respond to suffering on the one hand, and to the desire for love and liberty on the other.

Scholars familiar with Kristeva will recognize echoes of her previous work in *This Incredible Need to Believe*; indeed, in a few instances, the discussions contained in this book repeat, nearly word for word, arguments found in other essays and lectures published since the late 1990s. Be that as it may, the book offers a significant resource to scholars and students concerned with contemporary intersections between religion, psychoanalysis, philosophy, critical theory, and politics. A considerable number of Kristeva's commentaries here add welcome nuance to her engagement with religion and elaborate, in new and interesting ways, themes and motifs that inform her thought on the relationship between religion and secularism, opening up new possibilities (and impossibilities) contained in questions such as: *Where* is ‘religion’ today? From *where* does it speak to us? And *where* is it leading us? Toward what truth or what limit does it enable us to speak? These questions continually return, both explicitly and implicitly, to a single question, whose peculiar form Kristeva had once declared as quintessentially psychoanalytic in character: *Who is afraid of homo religiosus*—and why? Kristeva makes her concern with this question—and the religious affirmation it embodies—apparent in her final comments, in which she pleads with her “agnostic, humanist, atheist friends” to give up their fear of Christianity and realize its proximity to the humanist project. Throughout the variety of texts offered in this volume, the reader hears Kristeva echoing, in her own manner, Freud's assertion concerning the irreducibility of the religious impulse in human life: like language, meaning, and subjectivity itself, the need for religion is not a sickness to be cured, but a passion to be endured and sublimated—to the point of meaninglessness and beyond.