

A Short Selective Bibliography on Secularism

Selected by Béla Egyed

- 1) Karen Armstrong: *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Ballantine Books, New York, 1993. A very readable and informative history of the Abrahamic religions, and of the different movements within them.
- 2) William James: *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. Random House, Toronto, 2002 (1902). An essential reference for enlightened thinking about religion by one of the greatest American philosophers. James calls for a true "science of religion", one that investigates what is common to all religions belief, and at the same time respects the integrity of different religious creeds.
- 3) Henri Bergson: *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Trans. R.A. Audra and W.H. Carter, Doubleday, Garden City, 1935 (1932). A close friend of W. James, one of the great modern French philosophers, Bergson was progressive catholic thinkers. In this book he advocates an open and dynamic approach to religion.
- 4) Sigmund Freud: *The Future of an Illusion*. Trans. W.D. Robson-Scott, Liveright, New York, 1928. The founder of psychoanalysis a) explains the sense in which religion is an illusion, b) argues that the claim to do away with all illusions is itself an illusion and c) defends religion as a practical illusion.
- 5) Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. H. B. Samuel, Dover Thrift Edition, New York, 1913 (1887). A sharp attack on orthodox Christianity, arguing that it is a form of moral and intellectual blackmail.
- 6) Charles Taylor: *A Secular Age*. The Belknap Press, Cambridge Mass. 2007. A genealogy of secularism combined with a defence of a belief in some form of transcendence. This book draws on a number of intellectual sources, including W. James.
- 7) Charles Taylor: *Sources of the Self*. Harvard U. Press, Cambridge Mass. 1989. This study examines the way in which the self was constructed in response to evolving historical circumstances: an essential precursor of *A Secular Age*.
- 8) Michael Warner and Jonathan Vanantwerpen (Eds.): *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*. Harvard U. Press, 2010. This collection contains responses by leading theologians and philosophers to Taylor's *A Secular Age*.
- 9) Ivan Illich: *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David Cayley*. Anansi, Toronto, 2005. A very moving personal account of Christian faith by a great critique of institutional orthodoxy.
- 10) Richard Kearney: *Anatheism*. Columbia U. Press, New York, 2010. This is a book looking for God beyond theism and atheism in order to revitalize religious faith. In fact, the author considers atheism to be an essential part of this revitalization. Kearney shows great openness to different religions, and shows a deep knowledge of post-metaphysical theology.
- 11) Henri Laux: *Le Dieu excentré: Essai sur l'affirmation de Dieux. (The God outside Itself: Essay on God's Affirmation.)* In this essay the Jesuit philosopher invites us to think God not as a static being, but as one who is open to history: in waiting, and in speech – in "the Word".
- 12) Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton: *Radical Theology and the Death of God*. Bobbs Merrill, New York, 1966. A selection of articles by two leading America radical theologians.
- 13) Lissa McCullough and Brian Schroeder (Eds.) *Thinking through the Death of God*. SUNY, Albany, 2006. A number of critical essays on Altizer's theology and a response from Altizer.
- 14) Gyorgy Tatar: "Death of God: The Heaviest Burden", in *Kritika & Kontext* Vol. XII, No. 35, Bratislava, 2007.
- 15) John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo: *After the Death of God*. Columbia U. Press, New York, 2007. An accessible introduction to Caputo's and Vattimo's theology inspired by continental philosophy.

- 16) Slavoy Zizek: *On Belief*. Rutledge, New York, 2001. A Lacanian/Leninist appropriation of Christology. For Zizek God did not die on the cross; rather it revealed its essential weakness. As did Badiou before him, he admires St. Paul for his unswerving fidelity to the “event” of Christ; and he proposes Paul as a role model for revolutionary commitment.
- 17) Sarah Allen: *The Philosophical Sense of Transcendence: Levinas and Plato on Loving Beyond Being*. Duquesne U. Press, Pittsburgh, 2009. This book is useful introduction to Levinas’ ethical approach to religion. Levinas, a student of Heidegger’s and a friend of Derrida is solidly anchored in the phenomenological tradition. And, as Allen shows, Levinas’ notion of desire as a desire for the other is partly inspired - in a Judaic perspective - the Platonic conception of *eros*.
- 18) William E. Connolly: *Identity/Difference*. Minnesota U. Press, Minneapolis, 1991. One of many books by a leading American proponent of democratic theory. The influence of Foucault is reflected by the author’s “agonistic respect” toward religious belief.
- 19) William E. Connolly: *Capitalism and Christianity: American Style*. Duke U. Press, Durham, 2008. This book argues that conservative religious beliefs undermine the capitalist project. In addition, Connolly suggests that capitalism is in need of redemption by the democratic left.
- 20) Philip Goodchild: *The Theology of Money*. SCM Press, London 2007. A more detailed discussion of the themes introduced in his essay in this volume. The main argument of the book is that in modernity money, as debt and credit, takes over the role of religion in economic life.
- 21) Daniel Dennett: *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life*. Touchstone, New York, 1996. A readable account of the implication of Darwin’s theory of evolution for the study of religion. At the same time, this is a detailed analysis of the intellectual context of Darwin’s theory by one of the most exciting American philosophers.
- 22) Daniel Dennett: *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. Penguin, New York, 2008. This book is perhaps the most measured contribution by a “new atheist”. It reads like a “genealogy of religious belief”. The book offers many interesting insights. It takes a descriptive approach to religion, but it sees no merit in, or prospect for, the future of religious faith.
- 23) Sam Harris: *The End of Faith: Religion Terror and the Future of Reason*. Norton & Co. New York, 2004. A well written, spirited, but at times shrill attack on religion. The main characteristic of this book is its unconditional faith in scientific reason, and near paranoid fear of religious fundamentalism. Interestingly, Harris has sympathies for Buddhist thought.
- 24) Richard Dawkins: *The God Delusion*. Houghton Mifflin Co. New York, 2008. Another New Atheist manifesto. Similar in tone to Harris’s book, and not much different in substance. A well written attack on religion by a leading scientist.
- 25) Christopher Hitchens: *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 2007. A vitriolic attack on religion by a controversial journalist. This book offers some different examples, and provides some different detail, than can be found in the writings of previous two on our list. In substance it is not new. Still, it is a good read for those who like good writing.
- 26) Michael Ruse: *The Evolution-Creation Struggle*. Harvard U. Press, Cambridge Mass. 2005. One of the foremost philosophers of biology (editor of the prestigious journal *Biology and Philosophy*) Ruse traces the history of debates between evolutionist and creationists. In doing so he introduces a number of subtle distinctions. He is one of the main opponents of the New Atheists who is both a scientist and an unbeliever.
- 27) Herman De Dijn: *Modernite et tradition. Essay sur l’entre-deux (Modernity and Tradition. An Essay on In-between Two)*, Vrin, Paris, 2003. This is a further elucidation of De Dijn’s views on religion, science, ethics and their interrelation.
- 28) Michael Ruse: *Science and Spirituality: Making Room for Faith in the Age of Science*. The unique contribution of this book is that, unlike Radical Theologians, it stays close to orthodox Christian doctrine; and unlike the New Atheists he claims that religious beliefs cannot be refuted by science. While he leaves open the question whether religious doctrine could be discredited on other – perhaps philosophical – grounds, he believes that religious doctrine does provide answers to questions that are not addressed by science.