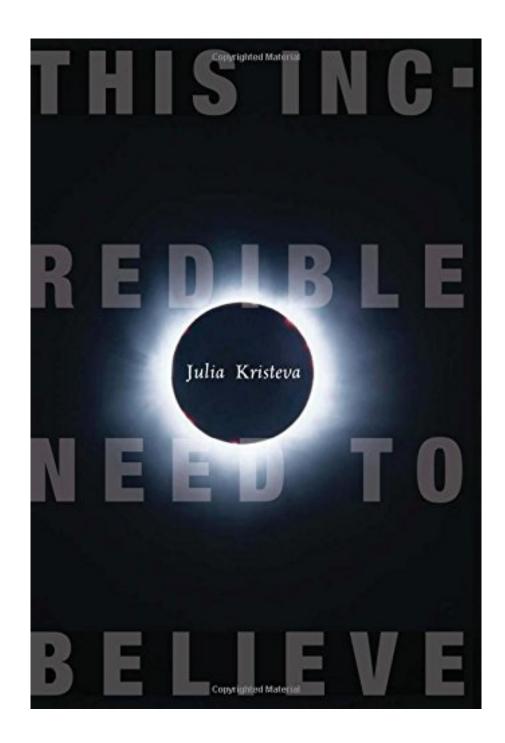


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"Unlike Freud, I do not claim that religion is just an illusion and a source of neurosis. The time has come to recognize, without being afraid of 'frightening' either the faithful or the agnostics, that the history of Christianity prepared the world for humanism."

So writes Julia Kristeva in this provocative work, which skillfully upends our entrenched ideas about religion, belief, and the thought and work of a renowned psychoanalyst and critic. With dialogue and essay, Kristeva analyzes our "incredible need to believe"--the inexorable push toward faith that, for Kristeva, lies at the heart of the psyche and the history of society. Examining the lives, theories, and convictions of Saint Teresa of Avila, Sigmund Freud, Donald Winnicott, Hannah Arendt, and other individuals, she investigates the intersection between the desire for God and the shadowy zone in which belief resides.

Kristeva suggests that human beings are formed by their need to believe, beginning with our first attempts at speech and following through to our adolescent search for identity and meaning. Kristeva then applies her insight to contemporary religious clashes and the plight of immigrant populations, especially those of Islamic origin. Even if we no longer have faith in God, Kristeva argues, we must believe in human destiny and creative possibility. Reclaiming Christianity's openness to self-questioning and the search for knowledge, Kristeva urges a "new kind of politics," one that restores the integrity of the human community.

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Psychoanalysis and Religion

By Robert C. Hamilton

Although this recent work by the prolific Julia Kristeva is brief and composed of a mosaic of interviews, letters, and occasional writing, it is no less rich as a result. The main attraction here, comprising more than half the work, is the eponymous interview in which Kristeva answers questions concerning religion, transcendence, psychoanalysis, fundamentalism, the feminist movement ... and the list goes on. It is impressive how much ground is covered in such a slender volume. The trade-off, of course, is that no single idea is exhaustively developed, and plenty of the work of interpretation is left (deliberately, I think) to the reader.

Perhaps surprisingly, the book remains close to the thoroughly atheist work of Sigmund Freud, with particular attention paid to late works like Moses and Monotheism. But Kristeva is not, by any stretch of imagination, attempting to cherry-pick from Freud's work to force it into friendlier relations with religion. Instead, remaining close to Freud's work and constantly re-affirming his atheism (and, presumably, her own she denies being "a believer" several times), she argues that religion is better understood as "sublimation" than as delusion or neurosis. Kristeva has done a good deal of work on St. Theresa of Avila of late, including a chapter on her in her recent book Hatred and Forgiveness and writing a novel about her (as yet unpublished in English, so far as I know), and it shows in this work: Kristeva points out the extremely close manner in which Catholic mysticism and psychoanalysis allow the ego access to the id, and via this connection, suggests that psychoanalysis may itself be the proper heir of religion, its most worked-out and sophisticated form. She puts an extremely high priority on the individual via the concept of "genius," the sense of being accompanied by a god or (more realistically) of exceeding oneself, of a blurring between the ego and the world outside. Individual genius, for Kristeva, must inform our political arena, or it will inevitably degenerate into sterile empirical modernism or rage-suffused fundamentalism and religious war.

Another significant preoccupation of the book is suffering, worked out both in the central interview and in the "Lenten Lecutre" delivered at Notre Dame cathedral. Again, Kristeva teases out the similarities and differences between psychoanalytic and mystical-religious attitudes toward suffering. Both find ways to recontextualize suffering, to "forget" its oedipal roots in desire for / desire to murder the father. This is important work for Kristeva, as she considers happiness "only a kind of mourning for suffering."

Finally, two occasional pieces on John Paul II and the Roman Catholic church round out the collection; Kristeva sees John Paul as an admirable exponent of the "genius" of Catholicism, despite his regressive politics. She admires him in light of his expression of Catholic uniqueness and also his mature attitude toward, and endurance of, suffering.

Kristeva writes in a distinctive, almost poetic style that cannot reflect actual, spontaneous interview answers; clearly the work has been edited carefully (this actually helps make the collection feel more cohesive). The style is not especially difficult by the terms of French poststructuralism, but it cannot be absorbed as quickly or as casually as its length might suggest. If your acquaintance with Freud and Lacan is as introductory as mine, you might want to remind yourself of the nuances of a few terms (e.g. transference, countertransference, sublimation, "le nom du père," père-version) before embarking; I found this extremely helpful. The translation was readable throughout, and provides adequate reference to the original French in brackets; that said, the translation grew extremely idiosyncratic when rendering proper names, leaving us with cacophonous franglais like "Saint Jean of the Cross," "Pope Jean Paul II," "Le Chanson of Roland," and "The Virgin Marie." Not having access to the French text, I am unsure if this confusion extends to the remainder of the text; however, it seems less an issue of translation per se than of editing.

Overall, I recommend this text to students of, or individuals interested in, the confluence of religion and

psychoanalysis, religion and literature (Kristeva has high praise for the religious insights of literature, especially the work of Modernists like Joyce and Proust) or religion and philosophy. More than an encyclopedic theory of these confluences, it functions as an intervention that sheds light on canonical work and will, we can hope, provoke new work in the same direction.

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Name a society founded on crime and become the class clown By epic phlegm Hooha

This is not a way to forget your troubles. One of the new words for me in this book was dolorism. Try to think of religion as a social form of dolorimetry. Compared to psychoanalysis, American medical practice has become a steamroller blues of painkillers. Julia Kristeva has an intellectual link to M. M. Bakhtin, who was sent into exile after his book on Dostoevsky was ready for publication in 1929 because Bakhtin belonged to a discussion group concerned with the philosophy of religion that did not limit itself to Russian Orthodoxy. Most of the philosophers in Russia who thought deeply about religion were outboated under Lenin and Stalin was following up with surges of purges that kept expanding. Kristeva was an exile to Paris at the age of 24. Because Bakhtin had health problems, his exile was in an area near the Black Sea where Kristeva could read Bakhtin in the Russian language she learned as a child before she knew French and the social linguistics of European cultures.

Sometimes it is difficult to believe that Bakhtin wrote a book on Marxism and the Philosophy of Language. A class clown might be more interesting than anyone who could be published openly in the Soviet Union, but Bakhtin had a respectable friend V* who could get a publisher and converse with Bakhtin about whatever V* thought should be in the book. Having Bakhtin prepare the manuscript with so many strings to strangle the theory of politics like National Lampoon producing a movie called Animal House in America was a rogue stunt like our planetary era of poverty face to face with extravagant accumulations of thermonuclear weapons and wealth being shaken by fracking.

Lent is a season forever doubled by anguish, as I think page 92 follows examples of foppish religion in the suffering of enslavement dropping back to punt or dropkick, take your pick. On page 84, rationalism was a dead end. Suffering is an opportunity for hiatus. Kristeva does not like religion in which suffering erupts in the persecution of heretics and bloody religious wars. (p. 82). If you want global explosions of the death drive, think about Bakhtin recapitulating auscultation of speech genres.

0 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Two Stars By Robert Johnson could have been better written

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