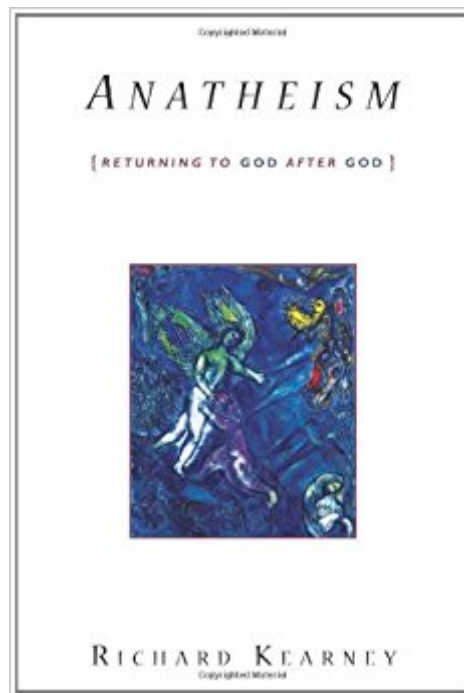


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# Anatheism: Returning To God After God (Insurrections: Critical Studies In Religion, Politics, And Culture)



## Synopsis

Has the passing of the old God paved the way for a new kind of religious project, a more responsible way to seek, sound, and love the things we call divine? Has the suspension of dogmatic certainties and presumptions opened a space in which we can encounter religious wonder anew? Situated at the split between theism and atheism, we now have the opportunity to respond in deeper, freer ways to things we cannot fathom or prove. Distinguished philosopher Richard Kearney calls this condition *ana-theos*, or God after God—a moment of creative "not knowing" that signifies a break with former sureties and invites us to forge new meanings from the most ancient of wisdoms. *Anatheism* refers to an inaugural event that lies at the heart of every great religion, a wager between hospitality and hostility to the stranger, the other—the sense of something "more." By analyzing the roots of our own anatheistic moment, Kearney shows not only how a return to God is possible for those who seek it but also how a more liberating faith can be born. Kearney begins by locating a turn toward sacred secularity in contemporary philosophy, focusing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Paul Ricoeur. He then marks "epiphanies" in the modernist masterpieces of James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Virginia Woolf. Kearney concludes with a discussion of the role of theism and atheism in conflict and peace, confronting the distinction between sacramental and sacrificial belief or the God who gives life and the God who takes it away. Accepting that we can never be sure about God, he argues, is the only way to rediscover a hidden holiness in life and to reclaim an everyday divinity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A remarkable book exploring what it means to "return to God after God," as Kearney puts it. This is a must-read for those who take faith and culture, experience and thought, seriously, and who know "God" as one who is a stranger and wanderer who lives in exile from the certainties of "thin" religion. This is a call to a poetics of belief, an apologia of the "learned ignorance" of the mystical path. Kearney here reminds us that our calling in this age is to be "strangers to the earth so that we may dwell more sacramentally upon it." This is not a book for those who have never doubted, never wondered, never pondered what it means to live in the "disenchanted" world of late modernity. But for those who are such "resident aliens," it will be a book to read slowly and ponder thoughtfully. It is testimony to the elusive sense of the God who absents himself from our dogmatic certainties, freeing himself from our clutching grasp in order to lure us into the unknown terrain where beauty alone reveals another Presence to us.

anatheismKearney's book is concerned with the fact that the "God" question is returning today with a new sense of urgency (xi). But the book is much more than this - it is about the experience of anatheism - the returning to God after the disappearance of one's sense of who or what God is or was (5). This experience he says is critical and centres on the idea to recover the presence of holiness in daily life one 'has to concede' that in fact we really know nothing about God. One has to begin with an epiphanal, anatheistic moment of not knowing, of doubt and disorientation, letting go of received certainties and opening to a faith beyond the taken-for-granted and one that which rebirths in an experience of second belief. Part of this transition involves these anomic moments where one has to stand, at least for a time with the likes of Nietzsche, acknowledging/accepting that many of the received ideas of God don't actually work for us. He notes that atheism can be really useful in bringing to our attention the delusional, silly, destructive, harmful and oppressive aspects that have become part of so much religion today (73). Anatheism opens up the possibility for belief after experiences of un-belief, disbelief and atheism (74). And this is such a credible position as he brings forth the insight that much of systematised belief has grown out of limited human understanding of who or what God is. Individuals, he says, have drawn on their assumptions, presumptions (15), interpretations, insights and experience, all trying to make sense of the Other within limited cultural frames, bound in time and space, that have drawn upon the often under-developed intellects of the day. And then these understandings have been reified themselves - my god is the only true god - and ordering society according to select understandings across time and space. Organised religion is, he suggests, not a lot more than various cultural struggles, binding

communities to certain practices and customs based on limited insight (20). Before we can believe again, we must first empty ourselves of this baggage. In the latter chapters of this book Kearney explores the idea that in studying other experiences of belief, one learns more about one's own. He is not promoting pantheism or the birth of a global religion. He brings forth the insight that at their core, various belief systems, though culturally bound and interpreted, in fact have much in common with regards the lived aspects of belief and spirituality. At the same time (and yet without quoting Jung), he brings forward Jung's insight that while we may learn deeply from others systems and experiences, such encounters serve to reinforce, and yet renew, the depths of one's own faith experience. Central to anatheism is the freedom to converse with those who remain alien to one's own faith (149). We can also learn from each other and admit equality without necessarily embracing sameness (151). he draws forth the insight that responsible believers are those who have ventured thru rival interpretations of belief making the the best decision they can - picking and choosing aspects of belief and practice are central, not marginal to an anathetically informed faith that is based on deep discernment (169-170) And so in finding God after God, there is a journey to be undertaken - beginning with the epiphanal moment in which one realises that what one once grew up believing, no longer works for you; and so the journey begins: "without dispossession no return; without sundering, no arrival' (13). This book engages with the many of us who can neither accept the God we were taught to believe in, nor turn our backs on that which calls us deeper and seeks to engage with us. To this end Kearney suggests that 'one has to liberate oneself from creedal attachments - at least provisionally - in order to liberate oneself into an awareness of the holy beyond habitual constructions' (16). This is the first essential message within this book, albeit studied from a variety of experiences and perspectives. The second message is that the divine is to be found and experienced 'in each human who asks to be received into our midst' (20). Here Kearney seeks to move beyond embedded notions of an all powerful, omni-everything god, who smites some, saves others, pull levers here and drops thunder bolts over there. No, God is in fact manifested in the Stranger (hospes - hospitality), the vulnerable, the defenceless - the human persona of the divine - and who at the same time calls for justice (21). 'Eschatology is realised in the presence of the alien in our midst. Love of the guest becomes love of God (29)'. He in turn explores this dynamic across the three Abrahamic faiths while also noting the presence of this dynamic in other faith systems as well. What a conceptual shift, to move from the God who is omnipotent to a realisation of God who is not impotent, but certainly one that does not exercise power as we once thought they did. A key problem with the sovereign god has been the ready translation of such notions of power into theocracies and other forms of violence justified in terms of belief (146).

Kearney notes that in Islamic belief, for example, the Prophet was sent to the white and the black, that is to all people alike' (147). Similar messages are evident in Christianity as are many excesses. Kearney then deeply challenges the reader to reflect on their model of God - be it an absolutist, a sovereign or a God manifest in the stranger (148). The third message is the rediscovery of the sacred in everyday life (153) - an engagement with the incarnate standing before us; a new attunement of the sacred in flesh and blood (166). He goes on then to examine three examples of lives so lived. Atheism does not propose a new God, a new belief, a new religion. It simply invites us to see what has always been there - a second time around (167). Yet Kearney is implicitly calling for a continued reformation of organised religion and in so doing provides a coherent legitimation for much of that which many of us have been going through (168). He also notes that simply because religion has been mis-used, it doesn't mean that there was not something valuable there in the beginning. At the same time, organised religion must continually subject itself to critique and change. I thoroughly enjoyed most of this book, albeit I skipped over the middle section as I am not really into literary criticism per se. For me it addresses a vital part of this journey many of us are undertaking; moving beyond the silly, simplistic, emotionally, intellectually and culturally immature aspects of much of organised religion and being open to what we can learn from other experiences. Importantly, this experience is not just an intellectual one, for one's experience of the atheistic journey is also emotional (and related to identity and practice) and spiritual. If it is the case that at the beginning of the journey we do not actually know God, then the journey has to have an aspect of encounter within it. And while Kearney acknowledges this, in that one may explore other faiths and practices along the way, the book stops short of engaging us in this process of the renewed encounter with the Other. What I think Kearney is really trying to do in this book is to legitimate the need many of us have, to set aside the many aspects of belief systems that don't work for us, so that we can free ourselves to encounter the Other on their own terms. And once having grown in and thru that encounter, the Other manifests itself to us in the stranger we see in our midst everyday.

Personally I think Kearney has been shortchanged in the recognition department. He is superior to many of the post-modern leftists out there. I read his essay on the "desire of god" and that led me to this book. This book is systematized beautifully and defines his constructive moments of "wager" beautifully. And he covers "mediation" better than most. I like a leftist who desires god. And admits it. He also emphasizes the importance of the existential workspace of self-model construction when we engage in his ethics. And to admit the possibility of "epiphany" as the first moment solidifies him

as a writer truly seeking answers and communication. He is accessible and full of depth at the same time. Ignore the average rating. This gets a HUGE 5 STARS.

This is a pretty accessible book considering the subject matter. I think it's a book that's good for anyone who is persuaded by arguments in favor of atheism, but still can't shake the feeling that there's still something mystical to be explored. Sam Harris' new book *Waking Up* would probably be a good co-read with this.

I might be one of the few, but this book really helped my outlook on life and God. I have a Master's degree in Religious Studies at Florida International University and this book was really original and powerful.

I really enjoyed this book, and found Kearney's way of relating to God very similar to my own. I like the idea that we have to lose God before we can find him, and that is a never ending process. I have worked as a spiritual healer all of my life and my observation is that as with God, when one loses one's understanding of, or belief in one's illness, good health emerges. This is how the miraculous becomes un-obscured. Holding on to an image of God prevents one from actually experiencing Him/it.

Difficult to read but very good and very important, I hope other writers write on this topic. Thank you

Anatheism is a worthwhile philosophical read. It takes the thoughts of earlier works like Kolakowski's *Metaphysical Horror* and ramps it into "high-gear" as it were. The basic premise is, "What do we do after religion" and postulates a positive agnosticism--that is if we cannot know a god then we should strive to enjoy life no matter what is waiting for us (even if it is scary) after we die it is more important to live. The wording is poetic, which is fun to read but also at times frustrating to understand, but completely worth reading. I feel like this is one of the more important recent works I have seen on the market.

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