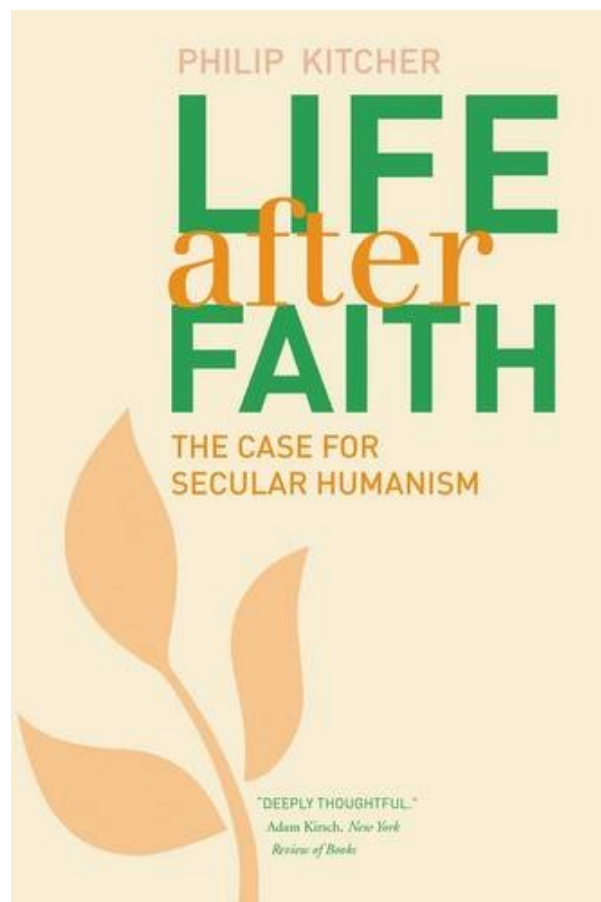
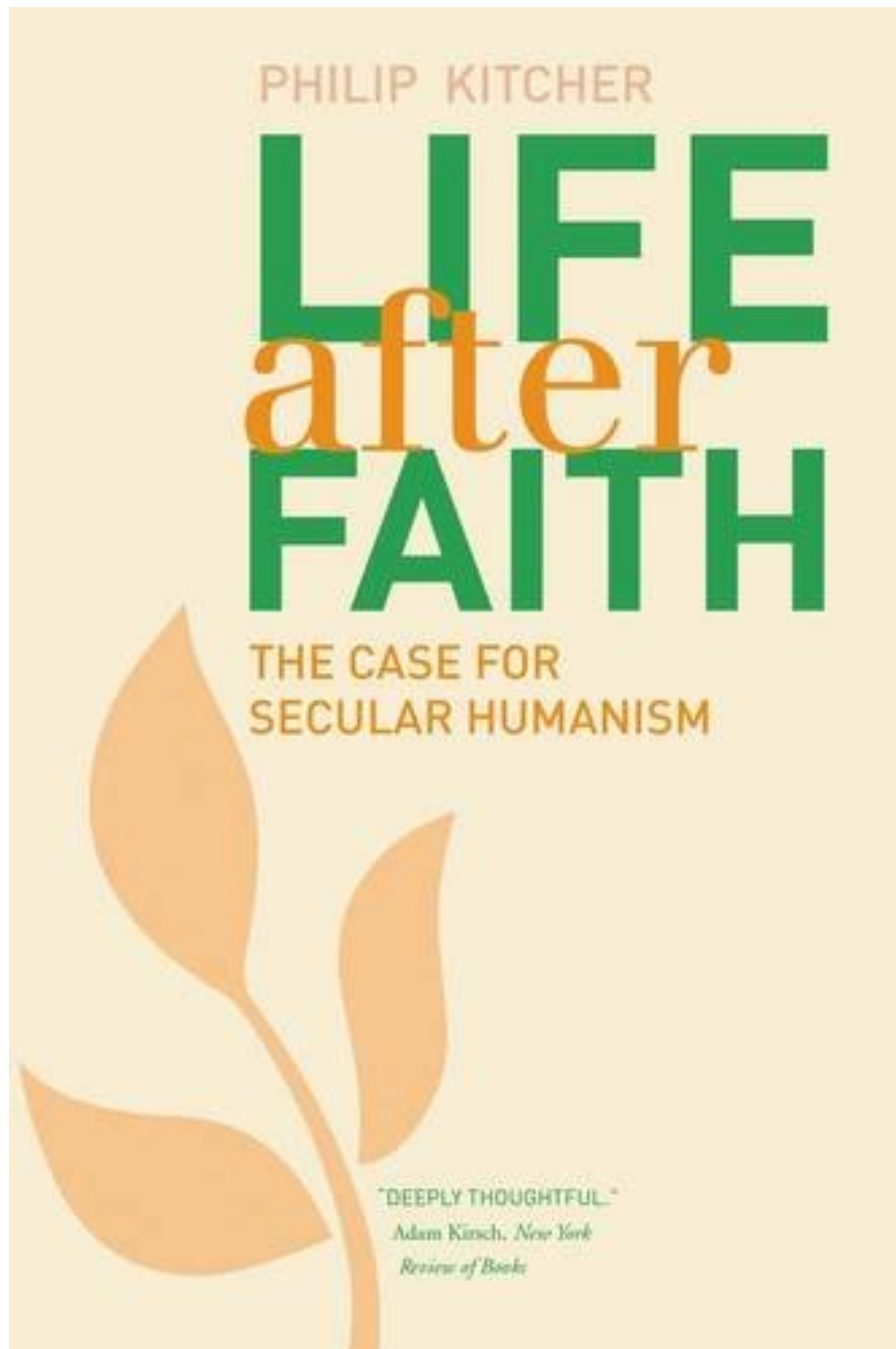


LIFE AFTER FAITH: THE CASE FOR SECULAR HUMANISM (THE TERRY LECTURES SERIES) BY PHILIP KITCHER



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A positive assessment of secularism and the possibilities it offers for a genuinely meaningful life without religion

Although there is no shortage of recent books arguing against religion, few offer a positive alternative—how anyone might live a fulfilling life without the support of religious beliefs. This enlightening book fills the gap. Philip Kitcher constructs an original and persuasive secular perspective, one that answers human needs, recognizes the objectivity of values, and provides for the universal desire for meaningfulness.

Kitcher thoughtfully and sensitively considers how secularism can respond to the worries and challenges that all people confront, including the issue of mortality. He investigates how secular lives compare with those of people who adopt religious doctrines as literal truth, as well as those who embrace less literalistic versions of religion. Whereas religious belief has been important in past times, Kitcher concludes that evolution away from religion is now essential. He envisions the successors to religious life, where the senses of identity and community traditionally fostered by religion will instead draw on a broader range of cultural items—those provided by poets, filmmakers, musicians, artists, scientists, and others. With clarity and deep insight, Kitcher reveals the power of secular humanism to encourage fulfilling human lives built on ethical truth.

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Admirable Attempt But Probably Limited Appeal

By Book Fanatic

This is a short little book of only 160 pages of text. Parts of it are a little heavy on philosophical reflection and it isn't really what I thought it would be. It's not a guide on how to live without religion but a reflection on how secularism might evolve to replace some of the things that we have historically gotten from religious rituals and community.

While I enjoyed this book and definitely got a lot out of it, there were times I found it a little cumbersome. It's not particularly compelling writing and I really think it will not appeal to a wide range of readers. This is a very thoughtful book and Kitcher does a good job of illuminating the issues and providing a possible way forward. It provokes and requires a lot of thinking on the part of the reader.

Recommended but only for readers who are really interested in the topic.

21 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

More to life

By Hande Z

There are several perspectives in the study of religious beliefs. One is to examine why we should believe in gods, or a God. Another is to examine why we should not believe. In this book, Columbia University's John Dewey Professor of Philosophy examines what religious people think they will lose if they were to exchange faith for secularism. The two main issues are: first, the claim that we would lose our values, our sense of morals - the 'without God anything is permissible' argument; second, that without God our lives would be meaningless.

There is a reason for this approach. Kitcher is promoting the case for secular humanism which he says begins with doubt. But one must move on from there so that it can be properly understood and lived as a rewarding way of life. Religions are founded on doctrinal statements that are accepted by the devout, and if we take those doctrines away, we find a void that may have to be filled. Secular humanism does that, and Kitcher provides a clearly written and well-reasoned case for this. Every page of this 159-page book is illuminating.

Kitcher deals with the religious preoccupation with the transcendent life and makes an irrefutable argument against that belief. However, he knows that for the believers, no amount of rational argument would persuade them to abandon the idea that after this finite life, there is a better, infinite one. His gently leads the reader to look at the end of this finite life from different perspectives and thus allay fears of death and what comes thereafter. Does it bother us what had been going on 100 years before we were born? Probably not. Many of us do not even know our great-grandparents to have any special bond with them. Would the affairs of the world 100 years after we die bother us? Again probably not. Kitcher rightly points out that what bothers us about death is that we leave behind friends and family, and projects we want to complete. It bothers us that we cannot meet our tennis friends for the weekly hit, or the coffee after that. It bothers us that we would leave behind an unfinished book. 'Absence from the period just after my death is poignant because so much of the stuff of my life will be continued in it. Whenever I die, people about whom I care most deeply will live on, and I should like to be there, sustaining them and being sustained by them.' But once we come to terms with that, we can come to terms with this finite life. Kitcher points the way to looking 'forward to a future, to a world without you...where you will no longer be part of the show.'

Kitcher shows not only that there is a firm, rational way to morality and ethics through the path of secular humanism, he also shows the contradictions and inconsistencies of establishing ethical beliefs from a religious base. Naturally, everyone who believes in God believes his God is the true God and that God wants us to live life according to his doctrines. The trouble is that that God cannot make himself universally clear and consistent.

It is with the issue of the meaning of life that Kitcher is at his best. He weaves that subject seamlessly into the issue of our finite life, our living ethically without God, and shows what we need to do when our lives go awry - we 'should be committed to salvage, not salvation'. He shows us that, ironically, it is the immortal life that is meaningless. It reminds us of what Seneca once said, 'In hope of tomorrow, we forfeit today.'

Kitcher's book is best read with Samuel Scheffler's 'Death & the Afterlife', 2014 Oxford University Press.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Innovative Approach to Secular Humanism

By Annette Lamb

LIFE AFTER FAITH by Philip Kitcher provides a thoughtful and well-researched examination of how secularism can respond to the challenges of life.

A professor of philosophy, Kitcher uses his knowledge of both religion and secularism to address an imagined critic. Chapter by chapter he skillfully engages the reader in increasingly deeper discussions of the

issues and arguments surrounding the creation and justification of a meaningful life without religion. His frank and well-articulated discussion provides a positive alternative to society's historic reliance on religion. Each chapter focuses on commonly asked questions from issues associated with mortality to the meaning in life.

The author's conversational writing style makes even the most complex discussions enjoyable to read and easy to comprehend. Kitcher acknowledges the purposes that religions have traditionally served and is concerned that contemporary atheists ignore the role of religion in the lives of many humans. He skillfully explains why people are drawn to religion and continue to practice rituals instilled in childhood throughout their lives. Pointing out strategies religious people use to defend their religion, he provides persuasive arguments for why religion isn't necessary in today's society. Kitcher states that "faith is belief that outruns the evidence available to the believer."

The author stresses that secularists can't rule out the possibility that new evidence may be presented because throughout history humans continue to build knowledge. He notes that "soft atheism acknowledges the bare possibility of the transcendent, but regards the present assertion of any such aspect of reality as entirely unwarranted."

The book features discussions on a wide range of issues but places emphasis on the relationship between ethics and religion, noting that the secular view of ethics allows for new information and change. Rather than putting religion in a negative light, the author prefers to focus on the positive. He notes that people like Mary Wollstonecraft, Jesus, and Buddha have all sparked thinking about important topics and provided a framework for developing arguments outside their connections to particular movements or religions. The author notes that these people can be "recast as initiators of a thoroughly secular conversation."

Kitcher's innovative approach is best reflected in his discussion of how humans possess a mixture of factual beliefs and value judgments. He stresses that humans are impacted by their feelings. From the varied perspectives of early abolitionists to the impact of Dickens's works on Victorian readers' views on poverty, the author does an outstanding job providing detailed examples from history to help readers understand the connection between facts and feelings. He stresses that emotions often associated with religion such as joy, gratitude, respect, and awe can all be connected to ethical traditions that don't require religion. Kitcher states that "my version of secularism places humanity at the center of value. It does not need a detour through some dim and remote transcendent. Nor does it see vivid vindication of human worth in supposing, whether literally or metaphorically, that we are children or servants of God. My naturalism conceives us as both creators and loci of value."

The author does an extraordinary job addressing abstract concepts in an accessible way. Using easy-to-understand examples, Kitcher walks the reader through each chapter laying out his arguments. However, this isn't a book for beginners. Those without a background in the work of Hume, Kant, and others may momentarily feel lost. However, those with a limited background in philosophy will be able to follow the author's clear arguments and well-organized narrative. A chapter-by-chapter list of sources provides the reader with background information. In many cases, additional explanations are also provided.

Throughout the book, Kitcher focuses on ways that secular humanists can have a fulfilling life without religion. For those readers just beginning to let go of their religion, this book may be very useful in helping them make the transition to a meaningful life without religion.

For happy secular humanists like this reviewer, the book provides useful suggestions for talking with religious friends about the secular humanist perspective on life. By employing cases from literature,

mathematics, and other fields, readers can easily identify examples that connect with their backgrounds and philosophies. I highly recommend this innovative approach to secular humanism.

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