



Encountering Religion: Responsibility and Criticism After Secularism (Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture)

By Tyler Roberts

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Tyler Roberts encourages scholars to abandon rigid conceptual oppositions between "secular" and "religious" to better understand how human beings actively and thoughtfully engage with their worlds and make meaning. The artificial distinction between a self-conscious and critical "academic study of religion" and an ideological and authoritarian "religion," he argues, only obscures the phenomenon. Instead, Roberts calls on intellectuals to approach the field as a site of "encounter" and "response," illuminating the agency, creativity, and critical awareness of religious actors.

To respond to religion is to ask what religious behaviors and representations mean to us in our individual worlds, and scholars must confront questions of possibility and becoming that arise from testing their beliefs, imperatives, and practices. Roberts refers to the work of Hent de Vries, Eric Santner, and Stanley Cavell, each of whom exemplifies encounter and response in their writings as they traverse philosophy and religion to expose secular thinking to religious thought and practice. This approach highlights the resources religious discourse can offer to a fundamental reorientation of critical thought. In humanistic criticism after secularism, the lines separating the creative, the pious, and the critical themselves become the subject of question and experimentation.

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Editorial Review

Review

A richly informed case for the humanistic cultural criticism of religions.

(Kevin Schilbrack, Western Carolina University)

Tyler Roberts's work is the single most consequential programmatic work on the study of religion in the past several decades. It takes seriously, and treats charitably, a range of thinkers from J. Z. Smith and Rowan Williams to Saba Mahmood and Stanley Cavell, learning from them while (and sometimes through) critiquing them. It also lucidly lays out an alternative vision of a truly humanistic form of the study of religion—one open to a response to religious themes, figures, and texts, not just permitting an explanation or critique of those objects. It marks the first fully realized humanistic account of the study of religion, and thereby the opening of a new era in the history of the field. A tremendous accomplishment.

(Charles Mathewes, University of Virginia)

There is a danger that the study of religion will be reduced to flat, static, and reductive analyses. Tyler Roberts's presentation not only conserves religion's rich, disruptive complexity but also helps us encounter it. Roberts's research is so comprehensive, and he separates the strands of arguments so readers can see their consequences with clarity and without simplification. He doesn't just construct an argument (which he does extremely well), he speaks, addresses, communicates, and genuinely convinces. I have rarely been as satisfied with an intellectual encounter in a scholarly work as I have been in reading this book.

(Frederick J. Ruf, Georgetown University)

Encountering Religion shows Tyler Roberts to be one of the most important voices in the philosophy of religion today. Addressing a major lacuna in the field of religious studies, Roberts probes what broader discussions of methodology in the study of religion should learn from philosophy of religion and vice versa. Bringing recent discussions of the discipline of religious studies into fruitful dialogue with recent work in 'continental' philosophy of religion, he makes a powerful and thought-provoking case for the enduring roles of openness, encounter, and responsibility in the academic study of religion. Written in lucid, precise prose and drawing on impressively diverse bodies of scholarship, the book demonstrates the urgency of querying and crossing divisions that often partition our field. The work will make a vital contribution to many courses in philosophy of religion and in methodology in religious studies, while simultaneously illustrating what reflection on the academic study of religion contributes to the conceptualization of the humanities as a whole.

(Thomas A. Lewis, Brown University)

An engaging and thoughtful defense of empathetic, humanistic study of religion.

(CHOICE)

Encountering Religion is an important and worthwhile book... If there remains any vitality to our field beyond the liberation from illusions (purportedly) wrought by suspicion, I think it lies in the direction Roberts indicates.

(*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*)

An important and valuable book.

(*International Journal for Philosophy and Religion*)

About the Author

Tyler Roberts is professor of religious studies at Grinnell College. He received his B.A. from Brown University and his M.T.S. and Th.D. from Harvard University. He is the author of *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion* and has published essays on Jacques Derrida, Slavoj Žižek, and J. Z. Smith.

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Danielle Smith:

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