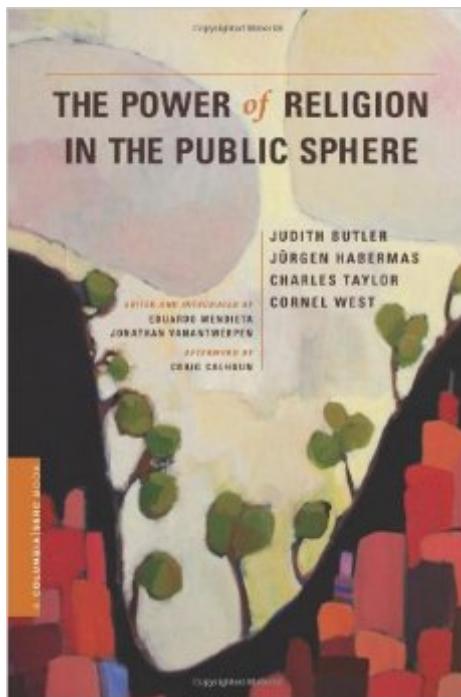


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# The Power Of Religion In The Public Sphere (A Columbia / SSRC Book)



## **Synopsis**

The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere represents a rare opportunity to experience a diverse group of preeminent philosophers confronting one pervasive contemporary concern: what role does or should religion play in our public lives? Reflecting on her recent work concerning state violence in Israel-Palestine, Judith Butler explores the potential of religious perspectives for renewing cultural and political criticism, while Jürgen Habermas, best known for his seminal conception of the public sphere, thinks through the ambiguous legacy of the concept of "the political" in contemporary theory. Charles Taylor argues for a radical redefinition of secularism, and Cornel West defends civil disobedience and emancipatory theology. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen detail the immense contribution of these philosophers to contemporary social and political theory, and an afterword by Craig Calhoun places these attempts to reconceive the significance of both religion and the secular in the context of contemporary national and international politics.

## **Book Information**

Series: A Columbia / SSRC Book

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press; 5th PRINTING edition (March 2, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0231156464

ISBN-13: 978-0231156462

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.4 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (8 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #226,968 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #31 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Movements > Deconstruction #332 in Books > History > World > Religious > Religion, Politics & State #344 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Church & State

## **Customer Reviews**

First of all, reading this book made me wish I could have been in attendance at the event for which it is the basis. Imagine hearing Charles Taylor, Cornel West, Jürgen Habermas and Judith Butler all lecture on the same day and then discuss back and forth. Second, the book's brevity is its strength. It helps if you have read these philosophers outside of this book, but even if you haven't, you

receive a rather robust introduction to their ideas and their style. Third, Craig Calhoun does an outstanding job in the afterword of summarizing the arguments. After reading the lectures and debates, and then reading his summary, I have a much clearer view of what religion and its voice looks like in the public sphere. It's really a great little resource.

When I received this in the mail, I was a little put-off by how small the book was. But the quality of the content won me over: Not only are the essays themselves important and thought provoking, but the editing is amazing. Each pair of essays is situated with a transcript of a debate between the two authors. This encouraged me to think of each essay in relation to the other essays in the book--to compare each take on the role of religion and the purview of the public sphere.

Very good, broad-minded and deep in general. I can point as jewels: Cornel West description of a poet in pag. 93 (complemented in p.98) and its dissection of prophetic religion in pag. 99; though I do not agree with his opinion that President Obama is mesmerized by the braininess of technocratic elites.

Not a light read. Some good information but densely written.

An alternative title for this book could be: "how can left-wing intellectuals cope with religious arguments in public political debate in a liberal post-christian democracy." The speakers are clearly extremely intelligent and articulate and with deep understanding of the topics. They don't agree on everything, but the spectrum of views is rather narrow. They also acknowledge their bias, but what is a discussion worth when the conclusions are foregone? A case in point, which curiously enough is not addressed in any of the talks, is the Muhammad caricatures affair. There is a tension between a view that holds that speech and actions in the public sphere entail responsibility - for example, when public figures in the U.S. are expected to be "politically correct" and not speak as freely as they do in private - and the secular interpretation of freedom of speech in which "blasphemy" is meaningless, and in which the most you can say about the Muhammad caricatures is that they offended the feelings of some people - which of course misses the point. I didn't find that this book really addresses such issues. To the extent that it does it does so from a purely secular point-of-view.

Great insight...still reading it. I read what I needed for my research paper, but I definitely plan to go

back and finish reading all of it.

Judith Butler reduces the level of discussion considerably. Her eccentricities simply do not pass for serious intellectual examination of the topic.

I expected a more interesting book about the matter, it is superficial and doesn't pose anything new about secularism and religion.

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