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August 16, 2012: Experiments in Unbelief

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Title: Experiments in Unbelief

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8/16/2012—A lot of ferment is going on in nonreligion these days. I read a story today in Religion Dispatches about Simon Critchley's new book, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*. In the view of Beatrice Marovich, the author of the piece, "The Faith of the Faithless points to the ways in which religious ideas—theology—are still deeply (if crookedly) embedded in our politics, a convoluted situation for which Critchley has no simple solution. But he does suggest that old theological standbys (faith, hope, love) might still offer the freshest breath of air in our contemporary political situation. Critchley recently spoke with RD about atheism, Christianity, Occupy Wall Street, love, and other fictions of our so-called secular age." In the interview, Critchley criticizes what he calls "evangelical atheism" of the New Atheists. Critchley sees someone like Richard Dawkins as "just another progressivist, quasi-theological narrative. It's not the unfolding of God's plan but the unfolding of an evolutionary form of design." This insight shows the power of familiarity with theological sources. There is not much in the interview about what faith Critchley might actually have. Applying theological insights into political events is revealing, but is not a way of life. So Critchley says the Constitution was an appeal to the divine. Quite true in a sense, but what does it tell us about living? Critchley does say that his is a faith "that's not underpinned by any metaphysical entity, like God." But treating God as a metaphysical entity is a form of heresy from a Christian perspective (even though it is a massively common heresy). Critchley wants to come into the neighborhood of the infinite. Maybe, as Martin Heidegger might say, that is not a metaphysical neighborhood. Anyway, the fact that this comes out of Verso Press, the left-wing publisher, is a very good sign that the smug days of the secular may be ending.