

value,” but they cannot help human beings determine which values they ought to hold (28). In this same way, White seemingly argues not that “the evolutionary narrative” *can* “propel human’s efforts to create meaning and purpose,” but that it does so more or less inevitably (36). But this seems unlikely: while White perceives evolution as evidence that life is interconnected and purposeful, could it not just as credibly be interpreted as evidence that life is random, predatory, and cheap? White’s urgently needed attempt to bring science and religion into deep conversation unfortunately forgets that science, like religion, is interpreted by human communities who are often deeply habituated by social vices. As with religion, science will be only as good as the communities who translate its findings into ethical norms.

One also wonders whether connectedness is as much the problem as it is the solution. After all, the connectedness of all life requires that we kill and consume other species to stay alive. And while connectedness may resonate with Martin Luther King Jr.’s “beloved community,” it clashes with the thought of Malcolm X, whose black nationalism sought to sever the cord of interracial connectedness. Nor does White fully explain why we need science to instill in us a “responsibility to act in ways that promote the flourishing of all life” (126). Have not many human beings grasped these truths without the aid of modern science?

Despite these shortcomings, theologians ought to take White’s arguments seriously. Most theologians have ignored both the questions evolution raises and the potential answers it offers. For example, by grounding the sacred in the natural, White can help theologians start a conversation we did not realize we needed to have. The increasingly incredible notion of an incorporeal soul manning the controls of the human person continues to haunt contemporary theology. Her work also provides a sharp rebuttal to academic racial chauvinism: too often, white scholars cordon off the African American intellectual tradition into the merely ethical or topical; White demonstrates its broadly interdisciplinary significance.

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*The Nonreligious: Understanding Secular People and Societies*. Edited by Phil Zuckerman, Luke W. Galen, and Frank L. Pasquale. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. v + 226 pages. \$26.95 (paper).

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Over roughly the past decade, as rates of religious unaffiliation and disidentification have increased, a growing body of academic literature has

explored those people categorized or self-identified broadly as “secular,” “nonreligious,” “spiritual-but-not-religious,” and “nones,” as well as those who identify more specifically as atheists or agnostics. Phil Zuckerman, Luke W. Galen, and Frank L. Pasquale have contributed extensively to this work, and thus it is fitting that the three would come together “to compile, in one cohesive volume, what existing social scientific research reveals about nonreligious men and women in the world today” (223). Among the successes of *The Nonreligious* is that the authors employ a highly readable style while effectively synthesizing a wide range of research in anthropology, psychology, religious studies, and sociology as well as sharing stories of people who see themselves as variously nonreligious (though it is a disappointment that so little of this research is original to the volume).

Divided into two sections, *The Nonreligious* first explores social and cultural aspects of secularity (chapters 1–4), beginning with a robust discussion of the academic discipline of secular studies that highlights the challenges of defining “the secular” and “secularity” at the level of the social, the institutional, and the individual and of describing processes of secularization and practices of secularity without reliance on religious categories and terminologies. Though the book focuses primarily throughout on nonreligious institutions and individuals in North America—particularly, the United States—the authors take care in chapter 2 to broaden the view with a survey of secularity in Western Europe, East Asia, India, the former Soviet Union and Orthodox countries, Latin America, the Islamic world, Africa, and among Jews in Israel and the Diaspora. The authors likewise provide an overview of social, political, and historical forces that have contributed to the growth of secularity or the persistence of religion over time.

The research presented illustrates that as existential and economic security increases, individual autonomy and choice increase, with the effect that religiosity declines and secularity advances. The authors clearly understand this trend toward secularity as an unalloyed social and cultural benefit. Their open sympathy for secularism, however, sometimes slides into apology, as in a discussion of the relationship between totalitarianism, antireligious coercion, and nonreligion (85–87). Here, the authors fail to consider that the individualist orientation they have highlighted as a critical engine for secularization can be deployed to undermine features of religion such as notions of collective identity and a common good that transcends the individual that often press against totalitarianism.

These background chapters provide important grounding for a rich exploration of nonreligious individuals and invite further research on global practices of secularity and processes of secularization. The second part of the book (chapters 5–10) examines nonreligion at the level of the individual,

considering the development of secular identification, the personalities of secular individuals, the well-being of the nonreligious, morals and values, the political and social outlooks on secular people, and how the secular do (or often do not) gather in ways that promote or threaten social cohesion.

The material related to psychological well-being and morals and values responds effectively and with equanimity to characteristic critiques of the nonreligious—that they are less psychologically stable and ethically grounded than their religious counterparts. The chapter on social organization among nonreligious people likewise takes on the assumption that increasing secularity foments a degree of individualism that erodes social bonds by illustrating diverse practices of social engagement by nonreligious people even though they are less likely to organize on the basis of their secular orientation in itself. All of this allows the authors to deftly challenge what remains a prevailing attitude in the United States, at least, that one cannot be a well-balanced, moral, socially engaged individual without religion.

Overall, the authors have made an important contribution to our understanding of nonreligion that will be of value to those beginning an exploration of secular culture and society and individual practice.

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