



BRILL

Welcoming the Broad Field of Vision That Is the Secular Experience

Where do we find the secular? Who or what exactly is the secular? These questions are at the core of our field and yet continue to be relegated to the sidelines within religious studies with essentialist assumptions as though secular equates to atheism which in turn means that all related concepts, secularisation for instance, often continue to be presented as enemies to religion and the gatekeepers of a cold a rationalist society. The words of Julian Huxley, one of the founding fathers of Humanists International in the early 1950s, come to mind:

To speculate without facts is to attempt to enter a house of which one has not the key, by wandering aimlessly round and round, searching the walls and now and then peeping through the windows. Facts are the key.¹

Although our field is well-established now, it still feels as though research is still focussed highly both on understanding organisational frameworks of secular people as well as examining the more obvious manifestations of doubt and unbelief. This special issue gives room to a variety of authors in building on the results presented by Joseph Blankholm in his already influential work *“The Secular Paradox. On the Religiosity of the Not Religious.”*² Blankholm has in this volume successfully demonstrated the viewpoint not of the organisations deemed secular but of the individuals presenting themselves as such. A special focus is given to what he has coined as secular misfits, namely the people who mis-fit normative secularism in the United States.

In this special issue, you will find an attempt to enter the house of the secular with the goal of understanding exactly who inhabits the building, what identity markers come into play and how these seculars—be they individuals or organisations—choose or are allowed to function within the context of their home. This issue searches for facts in the sense that we hope to demon-

1 Julian Huxley, “Heredity I: The Behaviour of the Chromosomes,” *Essays in Popular Science* (1926), 1–2.

2 Joseph Blankholm, *The Secular Paradox. On the Religiosity of the Not Religious* (New York: University Press, 2022).

strate that the religious other is as human, as diverse and as interesting of a subject matter as their faith-inclined pendants. Not necessarily the opposing force, but more likely a group of people occupying a different position on the spectrum, an idea launched some time ago in the work of Lois Lee,³ that is already occupied by orthodox and liberal believers as well as spiritual individuals. Not devoid of interest in religion, but often religion-related—a term thoroughly worked out in the work of Johannes Quack⁴—in the way one's identity markers are formed.

As has become somewhat of a tradition in this journal, the author of the book that lit the fuse closes this volume with a response to the way in which our other contributors have attempted to build on his ideas.⁵ This is an interesting task given the fact that this volume spans both great geographical (South America, Greece, India) as well as disciplinary (legal scholars, anthropologists, religious studies scholars and historians) variations. The authors have attempted to find the secular paradox in, among others, western Taoism, counselling, Greek atheists and European legal frameworks. We have hoped to light the fuse on a discussion within the field and invite you to ascertain whether the idea of a secular paradox and secular misfits is of use to your own research.

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3 Lois Lee, "Secular or nonreligious? Investigating and interpreting generic 'not religious' categories and populations," *Religion* 44, no. 3 (2014): 466–482.

4 Johannes Quack, "Outline of a Relational Approach to 'Nonreligion,'" *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 26, no. 4–5 (2014): 439–469.

5 This response will be published in *Advance* on Brill's online platform and will be included in the the next issue of the journal.