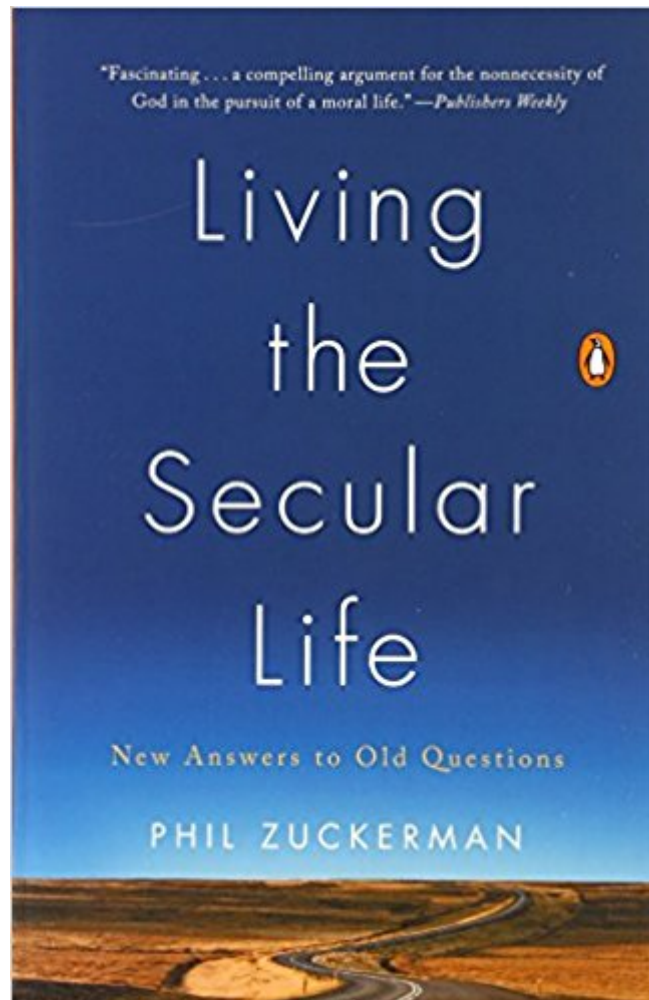




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Living The Secular Life: New Answers To Old Questions



Synopsis

“A humane and sensible guide to and for the many kinds of Americans leading secular lives in what remains one of the most religious nations in the developed world.” • The New York Times Book Review

“Over the last twenty-five years, no religion has become the fastest-growing religious preference in the United States. Around the world, hundreds of millions of people have turned away from the traditional faiths of the past and embraced a moral yet nonreligious or secular life, generating societies vastly less religious than at any other time in human history. Revealing the inspiring beliefs that empower secular culture alongside real stories of nonreligious men and women based on extensive in-depth interviews from across the country • Living the Secular Life will be indispensable for millions of secular Americans. Drawing on innovative sociological research, Living the Secular Life illuminates this demographic shift with the moral convictions that govern secular individuals, offering crucial information for the religious and nonreligious alike. Living the Secular Life reveals that, despite opinions to the contrary, nonreligious Americans possess a unique moral code that allows them to effectively navigate the complexities of modern life. Spiritual self-reliance, clear-eyed pragmatism, and an abiding faith in the Golden Rule to adjudicate moral decisions: these common principles are shared across secular society. Living the Secular Life demonstrates these principles in action and points to their usage throughout daily life. Phil Zuckerman is a sociology professor at Pitzer College, where he studied the lives of the nonreligious for years before founding a Department of Secular Studies, the first academic program in the nation dedicated to exclusively studying secular culture and the sociological consequences of America’s fastest-growing “faith.” Zuckerman discovered that despite the entrenched negative beliefs about nonreligious people, American secular culture is grounded in deep morality and proactive citizenship • indeed, some of the very best that the country has to offer. Living the Secular Life journeys through some of the most essential components of human existence • child rearing and morality, death and ritual, community and beauty • and offers secular readers inspiration for leading their own lives. Zuckerman shares eye-opening research that reveals the enduring moral strength of children raised without religion, as well as the hardships experienced by secular mothers in the rural South, where church attendance defines the public space. Despite the real sorrows of mortality, Zuckerman conveys the deep psychological health of secular individuals in their attitudes toward illness, death, and dying. Tracking the efforts of nonreligious groups to construct their own communities, Zuckerman shows how Americans are building institutions and cultivating relationships without religious influence. Most

of all, *Living the Secular Life* infuses the sociological data and groundbreaking research with the moral convictions that govern secular individuals and demonstrates how readers can integrate these beliefs into their own lives. A manifesto for a booming social movement and a revelatory survey of this overlooked community *Living the Secular Life* offers essential and long-awaited information for anyone building a life based on his or her own principles.

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Customer Reviews

A Best Book of 2014, Publishers Weekly: "Zuckerman is a sociologist who in this groundbreaking book writes clearly, offers unobtrusive statistical support, and provides a persuasive and comprehensive look at the growing contemporary phenomenon of people who choose to live without religion, but with ethics and meaning in their lives." Library Journal: "The author brilliantly weaves stories and reflections together with empirical sociological research to create a rich portrait of secular America... Highly recommended for all readers, both religious and nonreligious, seeking a more accurate understanding of this ever-growing segment of the American population." Publishers Weekly: "In this fascinating work, Zuckerman (*Faith No More: Why People Reject Religion*), professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College, explores the moral and ethical foundations of secularism, addressing the question of whether you can live a good life without God or religion. Anecdotal evidence abounds; interviews with former religious adherents who have moved into secularism, both within and outside their religious communities, offer a compelling argument for the non-necessity of God in the pursuit of a moral life." Booklist: "With recent polls reporting 30 percent of Americans are nonreligious, while other studies find atheists the

least-trusted people in the country, isn't it high time to blow away the myths about the nonreligious? Answering affirmatively, the sociologist founder of the first secular-studies program at Pitzer College presents real secular people as peaceable, productive, and living happily. He also shows that secularism isn't bipolar – believer or nonbeliever – but includes many with some supernatural beliefs but who aren't religiously observant. And there's not a proselytizer or zealot among this group – the point being that secular people are not all – indeed, hardly ever – Christopher Hitchens or Madalyn Murray O'Hair. May one more prejudice fall."Greg M. Epstein, humanist chaplain at Harvard University; author *Good Without God* – "Phil Zuckerman is without a doubt the leading American sociologist of secularism. And with America secularizing more rapidly and profoundly now than in any previous era in our history, Zuckerman's work has become essential reading for everyday people who want to understand religion – and the nonreligious – in this country. *Living the Secular Life* represents the next big chapter in a centuries-old story, so if you've ever taken an interest in Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens, et al., you certainly need to pick this book up and find out where things are headed."Bart Campolo, author *Things We Wish We Had Said* – "Since coming out as a post-Christian minister, I've discovered all kinds of people sincerely pursuing goodness without the nurture, encouragement, and mutual support most church folks take for granted. These folks are hungry for fellowship and pastoral care, but even hungrier for a thoughtful, positive way to communicate their values and commitments to friends and family members instinctively distrustful of anyone who doesn't believe in God. For them – and for me – Phil Zuckerman is a genuine hero, and *Living the Secular Life* is a wonderful gift. Here at last is a clear, concise, and compassionate guided tour of the world's fastest-growing way of life. Zuckerman isn't trying to prove everyone else wrong. On the contrary, he's helping the secular community better understand and comport itself, and helping the rest of humanity understand that we're on their side too."Peter Boghossian, professor of philosophy, Portland State University; author of *A Manual for Creating Atheists* – "For secular people seeking deeper insight into their own worldview, or religious people seeking to better understand the rise of irreligion in society today, this book is indispensable. An engaging, powerful read."

Phil Zuckerman is a professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College in Claremont, California. He is the author most recently of *Faith No More* and *Society without God*, and he blogs for *Psychology Today* and the *Huffington Post*.

This was a fairly quick read. I've read Phil's other two books and thought they brought up some points that True Believers should consider, though I have doubts that they would really change the mind of any evangelical. I enjoyed the book, and I'm certainly glad that Zuckerman wrote it. I'm glad he cited the anecdotes of unbelievers being harassed and discriminated against, especially those secularists who have the misfortune of living in the Bible Belt. Christians are told by Jesus to "love your enemies," but all too many of them see unbelievers as spawn of the devil, to be hated and told we will all go to hell. I think all of us secularists are aware of the low opinion the Christian majority in America have of us, but it's still disheartening to me to read that they would never even consider voting for an atheist or avowed unbeliever for any public office. After all, there's not supposed to be a "religious test" to hold public office in our country. And I'm glad he brought up the point about the "under God" clause in the Pledge of Allegiance, because many Americans blindly believe it was always that way, but it was simply added in 1954. There's a lot of anecdotes in this book. It wasn't written as an academic exercise, or a philosophical treatise, so don't expect it to be, nor should you attack it because it isn't. We need books like this from Zuckerman, if only, as he describes it, to give "backbone" to the secularists who are a growing number in America, so I think he realizes that he's largely "preaching to the choir." I'm not crazy about that choice of words, because some brainwashed believers actually think that secularism is some kind of religion, because it's characteristic of atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and humanists, as well as those who simply give no thought to going to church or reading the Bible. In other words, it's a large umbrella. The only criticism I have of this book is somewhat minor, but it still detracts one star from the 5-star rating I would have liked to give it. I expected a lot of anecdotes in the book, including his own personal anecdotes, but I would have liked to see a bit less of talk about himself and his friends. Anyone who reads widely of non-fiction will note that many authors of such works seem to dwell a bit overmuch on themselves and their life experiences. I would have preferred a bit less of talk about himself and maybe a little more about the hardships of being a freethinker in this country that prides itself on being "free." I would encourage True Believers to read this book, too, but even if they do, they may view it entirely through their own ideological lenses. It would be helpful if they reflected on the meanness and narrow-mindedness of many Christians toward their unchurched neighbors. And, of course, any bona-fide secularist should read the book. You might get some ideas from it that would promote some social interaction with other secularists. We are a growing number, and it's time we all came out from the shadows. Some Christians love to promote the notion that they are being hushed or punished or discriminated against. I guess they think being a Christian should make you

automatically a victim or a martyr. But the shoe is definitely on the other foot, in America, and that's what this book points out clearly.

One of the great dividing lines in American life today is between believers and non-believers. This division is seen in various ways in our politics, and in popular culture. Perhaps inevitably given our either-or, binary take on so many issues, many believers and non-believers appear to stereotype and stigmatize those on the other side. In politics, for now, this is often at the expense of non-believers. In popular culture, for now, this is increasingly at the expense of believers, especially Christians of various denominations. Sociologist Phil Zuckerman sets out to correct the record. In particular he would challenge the notion that those who identify as non-believers inevitably reject the moral teachings shared by various religions. His anecdotes are informative, easy to follow, and engaging. Zuckerman also challenges the popular notion, propagated by politicians, that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. That topic is so large and controversial that his discussion is unlikely to carry the day. Nonetheless, he presents a concise case for the proposition. With the number of non-believers rising and with anti-religious sentiments being heard in various quarters everyone can benefit from clear thinking about the link between religion and morality. Zuckerman is eloquent, emphatic, and effective in making the case that those who identify as religious, as well as those who identify as non-believers, can lead moral lives. They merit respect as well as tolerance. *Living the Secular Life* is a timely contribution that will, hopefully, spark discussion and soul-searching on all sides.

In contrast to some of atheistic literature, this book concentrates what non-believers are or can be, instead of what they're not. Some of the topics: Morality - Morality is developed from socialization, culture, intelligence and experience. Religion may or may not be included. Societies - Explores the correlation that secular societies tend to be better places to live Trying times - Examines the myth "There are no atheists in foxholes" and provides several example of how secularism helps people deal with crises Death - You didn't exist 100 years ago and won't exist 100 years from now -- so live NOW! Definitions "Atheism" - Describes what is missing "Agnostic" - Either too wishy-washy or too academic to be useful "Secular humanist" - Celebrates the positives about life "Aweist" - Even more!

What a fantastic book. Zuckerman doesn't try to convert anybody but demonstrates through statistics and anecdotes that being secular can not only be full of meaning and wonder, but in some cases it can leave you better prepared for what life throws at you. This book is extremely well

written, moves quickly, and is full of heart. I not only recommend it for us secular folk. Our religious friends and neighbors who are interested in understanding the now 25% (and growing!) of Americans who are not religious will come away with less fear of us. Who knows, they may even find some things to think about.

A wonderful piece of writing by a wonderful Secularist. This is a book that should be read by all those living in the US. It has great information on how secular societies are leading the world in almost all aspects. It also shows how many people live wonderful lives without any religion whatsoever and that is something of great value. This book is easy to read and very straight forward. Pick it up! You won't be disappointed.

An excellent book to explain being non-religious to the religious who can't understand how the secular can have morals and an ethical way of living. For me, it helped me better identify who I am and how to express my views.

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