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March 14, 2010: The Cascade of Nontheistic Religion

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Title: The Cascade of Nontheistic Religion

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3/14/2010—There is so much activity right now in the category of nontheistic religion that it is hard to keep up. Lots of Americans and other Westerners are apparently looking for religion without the supernatural. For starters, I am reading Jerome Stone's full treatment of the history and development of Religious Naturalism: Religious Naturalism Today (2009). Then I saw on Tikkun Daily a comment on Stephen Batchelor's Confession of a Buddhist Atheist, particularly the endorsement of the book by Christopher Hitchens. Religion Dispatches is currently touting reviews and discussion of three such books: Bron Taylor, Dark Green Religion; Benjamin Weiner, Yearning for a God We Can Live With; and Jay Michaelson, Everything is God. And of course there is Hallowed Secularism. All of these books raise similar kinds of questions. For example, what is nature of the invisible? After all, quantum physics is all about the invisible, but it is still science. I think that what people are rejecting is not the invisible, but willful interference with the laws of nature by a supernatural entity. Or as the New Testament puts it, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mk. 4:41). Two matters bother me about all this work, including my own. First, there is very little here about sin. Even the environmental catastrophe is being brought about by misunderstanding, not by human evil. The Judeo-Christian tradition here is morally superior. This absence of evil is the danger of emphasizing spirituality. Similarly, there is very little here about justice. The poor at least have had the divine right to object to things as they are. So where is the prophetic voice in these authors? The Judeo-Christian tradition here is morally superior as well.