

Duquesne University

Duquesne Scholarship Collection

Hallowed Secularism

The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian
Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly
Excellence and Professor of Law

7-18-2010

July 18, 2010: Is Human Life a Tragedy?

Bruce Ledewitz

Duquesne University, ledewitz@duq.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism>



Part of the [Constitutional Law Commons](#), and the [Law and Philosophy Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2010). July 18, 2010: Is Human Life a Tragedy?. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/443>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly Excellence and Professor of Law at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hallowed Secularism by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact beharyr@duq.edu.

Title: Is Human Life a Tragedy?

Date: 2010-07-18T16:22:00.001-04:00

7/18/2010—The American sociologist Peter Berger once wrote that human life is a tragedy without a belief in God. Note that this observation is not strictly speaking an argument for God's existence. It might just be that human life is a tragedy. I was reminded of this observation by a review in today's New York Times book review: David Kirby's review of Maxine Kumin's new book of poetry, *Where I live*. (review [here](#)). Kirby remarks on Kumin's view of her long and satisfying marriage: "The title of the final poem, 'Death, Etc.', is wittily misleading. Here Kumin starts out with a characteristically satisfied look at a marriage of many years that will nonetheless end with one partner left alone, then swerves toward a startlingly grim conclusion when she says 'we try to live gracefully' but 'in truth we go forward / stumbling, afraid of the dark, / of the cold, and of the great overwhelming / loneliness of being last.' Hey, what happened to the stoicism? Maybe this is Kumin's way of pointing out the real importance of her calling. Because it's not going to end well, folks: Hitler killed his millions, and one of us will be broken by the death of the other. Between now and then, this book says, there's poetry." I don't know why Kirby feels the need to make a joke about this. Every time we experience happiness, we tend to remember that the moment we are experiencing is fleeting. Soon everything will be different. The ones we love will be old or dead and we will be as well. I hear atheists say, I don't need fairy tales to live a good and satisfying life. Maybe not, but that does not mean our lives are not a tragedy. We know we will die. We know that nothing we value will last. Just watch the movie *A League of Their Own* to experience this bitter quality. This does not mean humans invented God to remove the sting of life. It could be that humans found the senselessness of oblivion too overwhelming to admit that it could be the last word. Perhaps it would be truer to this spirit to say God must exist. For those of us who do not believe, we must always look death directly in the face. We must hold to all of our beliefs without any false hope. We will die. Everything will eventually pass away.