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10-17-2010

### October 17, 2010: Woody Allen's Hell

Bruce Ledewitz

*Duquesne University*, ledewitz@duq.edu

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#### Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2010). October 17, 2010: Woody Allen's Hell. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/467>

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Title: Woody Allen's Hell

Date: 2010-10-17T06:52:00.003-04:00

10/17/2010—The reviewers are saying that it is only a shallow movie about uninteresting characters making bad choices. So, who cares what the movie says? But to me, Woody Allen's new movie, *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*, is a searing indictment of the human condition. We have no self-insight, we make foolish choices and then when we are disappointed, turn on others in rage or despair. The main characters either commit acts of violence or seem utterly capable of doing so when their desires are thwarted. This movie gives the lie to the easy "good without God" school. These characters are all utterly without God and they are not good at all. Only one character genuinely loves (and it is his deceased wife he loves); only one character seems to be grounded, even a little, in truth (the gallery owner). And if we reflect on ourselves and our small acts of violence every day, we can see ourselves in Allen's universe. We can be sure that Allen would not think that religion has anything to do with improving humanity's situation. The characters in this recent movie are not much different from the murderer in his earlier, great movie, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. And that character was fully grounded in Judaism. *Stranger* is a sketch while *Crimes* was the full bloody canvas. But essential humanity is the same. Are we really the way Allen sees us? And if we are not necessarily that way, what are the sources of judgment, compassion and sacrifice? Allen is no help to us at answering these questions. The conclusion of *Stranger* seems to be that lies and truth are about equal and you can live just as well, or badly, out of illusions. I cannot accept that. Any improvement in humanity must begin with a commitment to truth. While it is true that Freud called religion an illusion, I don't think that is so. Religion seems to me very concerned with truth. In fact, religion teaches truth so well that people are often led out of it when the religion seems false. This latest Woody Allen movie is a challenging reminder. Of course we need not be like his portrayal of us. But we can be. So we must try to live our lives truthfully, carefully and lovingly. Allen's characters don't any longer even make that effort.