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4-11-2014

### April 11, 2014: More Secular Yearning for God

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#### Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2014). April 11, 2014: More Secular Yearning for God. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/824>

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Title: More Secular Yearning for God

Date: 2014-04-11T08:13:00.002-04:00

4/11/2014—This past Sunday Barbara Ehrenreich published a column in the New York Times entitled A Rationalist's Mystical Moment. (You can read it [here](#)) When she was 17, Ehrenreich had a mystical experience of seeing the world suddenly flame into life. As an atheist—she has described herself as a fourth-generation atheist—Ehrenreich suppressed this memory. She thought it might be evidence of a mental breakdown. Eventually, she says, it was her scientific training that nudged her to consider the possibility that this kind of mystical experience, which the literature tells us is very common in human history, might be evidence of some kind of actual encounter, as religious believers have always insisted. But contact with what? Here Ehrenreich refers to quantum mechanics and “the realization that even the most austere vacuum is a happening place, bursting with possibility and giving birth to bits of something, even if they are only fleeting particles of matter and antimatter.” Maybe we are not alone in the universe. There may be other forms of consciousness, “which may be beings of some kind, ordinarily invisible to us in our instruments. Or it could be that the universe is itself pulsing with the kind of life, and capable of bursting into something that looks to us momentarily like the flame.” Ehrenreich wants to be very clear that this is not anything supernatural and that there is no evidence for a God or gods, least of all caring ones. Now, other than reassuring herself and her friends that she is not becoming religious, what can such a reservation mean? What in the world does Ehrenreich imagine that religious believers, especially including mystics, have meant all along if not beings ordinarily invisible to us or that the universe itself is alive? Let me put it this way. Ehrenreich is betrayed by the term supernatural. Why don't we posit that there is no such thing as anything supernatural. Everything that is mysterious and everything that is beyond our explanation and everything that is beyond our language is nevertheless natural, including the Big Bang, including time and including God. Maybe when we use the word God, we mean in part that the universe itself is alive and capable of bursting into something that looks like flame.