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### October 15, 2016: So, Hallowed Secularism is Getting Somewhere

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10/15/2016—The biggest problem in addressing the nihilism of modern life is admitting that modernity has led to nihilism. Secularists are sure that the death of God is either a blessing or at least irrelevant to cultural health. But there are indicators that secularists are catching on that something is wrong. One such indicator is Tony Kronman's book, *Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan*. Kronman was dean at Yale Law School in the 1990's. He joined the faculty a year after I graduated, in 1978. So, I don't know him. David Brooks praised the book yesterday in his column. The book sounds enormous—over 1000 pages of thoughtful review of what you could call the non-theistic, religious tradition in the West—I have only seen the Amazon page so far. Brooks says that Kronman ends up a follower of Nietzsche, Spinoza and Whitman. It is exactly the book I could never write—Kronman has become a great teacher of philosophy. And it shows why and how law works to create great generalists. But for Brooks—and undoubtedly for me as well—Kronman is missing the moral: "Personally, I have issues with born-again paganism. Shapeless, it leads to laxness — whatever moral quandary you bring it, it gives back exactly the answer you'd prefer to hear. It throws each person back on himself and leads to self-absorption and atomization, as everybody naturally worships the piece of God that is one's self. Naïve, it neglects the creedal structures that are necessary for those moments when love falters." At the moment, though, so what? The book is a great marker. Secularists who feel the emptiness will now have a place to start. Good for him.