

its clearly explained methodology, useful appendices, and extensive up-to-date bibliography, it would also be a good book for graduate seminars on the sociology of religion.

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*Spirituality without God: A Global History of Thought and Practice.* By Peter Heehs. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 296 pages. £67.50 cloth; £21.59 paper; ebook available.

Peter Heehs' *Spirituality without God* seeks to demonstrate that "[t]he search for spiritual wisdom unfettered by the gods goes back thousands of years" (4) and that "it is only in the modern West that the idea of godless religion is new" (26). The motive in writing this book is frankly ideological. Heehs contends that conflicting god concepts inevitably cause theistic believers to become violent. He thus wishes to replace theistic religions with "spiritual ideas and practices that are not dependent on irreconcilable ideas about the gods" (4). By providing a global pedigree for nontheistic spirituality, Heehs evidently hopes to make godless traditions more plausible and palatable to western audiences; the more people who convert to them, he believes, the lower religious tensions will be in the world. As problematic and debatable as these goals might be, *Spirituality without God* is for the most part a fairly straightforward history of the philosophy of religion, much along the lines of Ninian Smart's *World Philosophies* (1999), but with nontheistic traditions highlighted.

Heehs' introductory chapter deals with a series of contemporary concepts and issues through which the rest of the book is refracted: the inadequacy of the English word religion when applied beyond the West; the modern dichotomy between organized religion and individualistic spirituality; the failure of western philosophical arguments for the existence of God; and the challenge of scientific materialism. Moreover, in keeping with his agenda, Heehs argues for the inherent superiority of nontheistic spiritualities, especially those that deny the reality of the supernatural in favor of something he vaguely calls "a superhuman order of being" (7). Chapter 2 traces the development of religion from Neolithic magic and polytheism through the philosophical reorientations of the Axial Age, to the rise of monotheism in Ancient Judaism. Most of the chapter focuses on the nontheistic aspects of such traditions as Jainism, Confucianism, and pre-Socratic philosophy, while the next chapter charts the development of such traditions into the Common Era. Chapter 4, "The Triumph of Theism," emphasizes the spread of devotion to personal gods in the post-Axial Age period, which led to the decline of nontheistic thinking in India, China, and the West. The core

of the chapter, however, is devoted to psychological and sociological arguments for why theism, especially monotheism, is so often associated with violence.

The second half of *Spirituality without God* follows the re-emergence of nontheistic traditions in the modern period, and while Asia still makes an appearance now and then, these last chapters are more heavily weighted towards developments in the West. The rise of science and philosophical skepticism from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment is covered in Chapter 5, as is European pietism, the direct ancestor of today's hyper-individualistic spirituality. In the next chapter, Heehs presents an overview of secularizing trends in the nineteenth century as manifested in Romanticism, evolutionary biology, sociology, and the introduction of Asian religions to the West, all of which helped to legitimize nontheistic spirituality as a socially acceptable alternative to Christianity.

Finally, in chapter 7, Heehs brings his narrative into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by surveying further secularizing developments in, among other areas, philosophy (e.g. Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Sartre), sociology (e.g. Durkheim, Weber), psychology (e.g. James, Freud), and theology (e.g. Bonhoeffer, Tillich). The chapter ends with a discussion of global demographic trends indicating that, while the number of people identifying as spiritual but not religious continues to grow in the West, theism in its various forms continues to grow just about everywhere else. In light of this fact, Heehs does concede that theism isn't all bad, although he still believes "that nontheistic spirituality offers a way to keep some of the good effects of religion while getting rid of its abominations" (230). At the very least, given the fact that theism isn't going to disappear anytime soon, Heehs pleads for tolerance and pluralism in the world, concluding his Epilogue with the remark that "the crucial distinction is not between nontheists and theists, but between people who are open-minded and people who think they have all the answers" (237).

As a textbook, *Spirituality without God* might be useful as an introductory cross-cultural survey of the history of religious thought, although the density of its chapters would make it better suited for graduate students than undergraduates, who will be overwhelmed by the sheer number of movements and thinkers presented. Of course, the biggest stumbling block to classroom use is that *Spirituality without God* is a frankly missionary work promoting the particular worldview of nontheistic spirituality. Again, graduate students might find it a useful exercise to deconstruct Heehs' historical narrative in light of his biases, but undergraduates, without proper contextualization, might simply accept the text's ideological claims at face value since they are simply asserted, never argued. Indeed, nowhere in the book does Heehs adequately demonstrate why nontheists—being human beings—wouldn't

be as dogmatic, intolerant, and potentially violent as any other religious believers. This, apparently, is a claim one must accept on faith.

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*Imagining the East: The Early Theosophical Society*. Edited by Tim Rudbøg and Erik Reenberg Sand. Oxford University Press, 2020. x + 384 pages. \$99.00 cloth; ebook available.

University of Copenhagen professors Tim Rudbøg and Erik Reenberg Sand have edited a fine collection that sheds fresh light on the earliest years of the Theosophical movement. The choice of contributors balances older and younger scholars very nicely. But be forewarned: the contributors assume that their readers know the debates among historians on early Theosophical history. The contributors demonstrate the truth of this assertion in the way they arrange the information in their chapters.

Like their predecessors who wrote Theosophical history, many of this book's authors approach their task in the following manner: a controversy or lacuna is identified as posing a problem for interpretations of Theosophical history. Then the contributor explores various individuals who had some impact on Theosophical groups, usually recovering them through exhaustive research on their correspondence, but also reading numerous articles published in Theosophical periodicals since the early years of the movement. From this examination of the minutiae of the historical record, the contributor then arrives at a conclusion about the controversy or lacuna identified at the outset. Readers who enjoy wading through a barrage of information, often recounted in the style of he said/she said, will have a wonderful time. However, readers who want to understand larger cultural and social issues arising from examinations of historical details, will invariably become frustrated with both Theosophical history in general and many of the chapters in this book.

The book's title requires some explanation. The term East as used here refers to the symbols, languages, cultures, and religions found in Asian lands, especially India. This is a Western (primarily European) way of identifying India, which is considered to be Eastern because it lies east of those Western countries that conducted trade with India beginning in the Early Modern era of Western history. When the editors say that Theosophists imagined the East, they are relying on several decades of scholarship, beginning with Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which is deeply indebted to disciplines like cultural studies and literary theory. The editors assert that imagination is "the human ability to produce images and concepts in the mind of past events and places we have not visited . . . when representatives from one culture meet another culture they often do so through a lens of preconceived ideas about