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### June 20, 2007: What Makes Hallowed Secularism, Secular?

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Title: What Makes Hallowed Secularism, Secular?

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6/20/2007--After reading the blog entry for 6/19/2007 I am tempted to ask, since this writing is so God-intoxicated, what makes secularism, secular? The answer is not that the secularist does not believe in God, because what is meant by that statement is part of the work that hallowed secularism does. The secularist comes to see that what he or she does believe about reality is what some religious believers call "God". So, the secularist and the believer may agree about God, in part. The secularist begins and ends with this world and this world very much in the state in which we know it ordinarily. That is not the same as materialism since the world as we ordinarily know it includes many intangibles, like ecstasy and the number 2. But secularism does exclude in principle happenings outside the usual scientific laws. This is different from the believer like Maimonides who concluded that God chooses to act within physical laws. For the secularist there are no miracles in principle and if we want to know what the physical laws of the universe are, we turn to science rather than religion. This insight does tell us something about the nature of God because there could not be the sort of God who has the capacity to do things in the physical world outside its physical laws. The deeper difference between secularism and biblical religion, however, is not the issue of miracles, but what this difference says about death. In secularism, death must be the end of existence and must be unalterable. And somehow that blunt fact must be consistent with the nature of God. I will add here that some secularists, including me, regard death as positive rather than negative, but since there is nothing we can do about death, there will be secularists on both sides of that issue. This view of death is obviously inconsistent with Christianity, in which the victory of God in Jesus overcomes death. It is inconsistent with any notion of a new age after resurrection or any apocalyptic belief. Strangely, it is not inconsistent with the Old Testament, in which Abraham and Moses both die (and mostly everyone else) and are never promised any sort of eternal life beyond the blessing of their descendants. I don't want to make too much of this, however, as if this view of death were a difference between Christianity and Judaism. By the time of the end of the Old Testament period, the prophets were using messianic imagery, which of course is where the New Testament gets it from. The Pharisees of Jesus' time had already linked resurrection of the dead to the advent of the Messiah, which is why Jesus is the "first fruit", and not the exception. Therefore, the end of death is a Jewish concept. Plus, in Genesis itself, death enters the world as something quite unnatural, which one would expect God eventually to fix. So, the secular view is not that of Judaism, which on this crucial point is akin to Christianity. If we believe that death is the end and will always be the end, we are secularists. It remains to be seen, however, what kind of secularists we are.