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April 2, 2009: The Secular Mind on the Huffington Post

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Title: The Secular Mind on the Huffington Post

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4/2/2009--Since I began to blog semi-regularly on the Huffington Post, I have seen attributes of the secular mind that I intuited in my book, *Hallowed Secularism*, but had not encountered regularly before. My blogs always say about the same thing: that secularists should be more open to religious wisdom, symbols, language and images, that secularism needs these things to become a flourishing civilization and that nothing about this kind of borrowing threatens legitimate secular values. The somewhat heated responses usually run in the following channels. (I'm not going to respond to these perspectives at any length today. That requires more space.) "I don't need religion to be a good person". Daniel Dennett told a New School audience just this in New York City last month. I address this point in *Hallowed Secularism*, in which I suggest that there really are very few good people in the world, and even if religion does not produce much goodness, secularism doesn't produce any more and maybe a lot less. People who talk this way are not confronting the issue of how to raise children. If you don't need religion, you need something. So, what will secularism do for that something?" "The framers of the Constitution separated church and state". Considering that many of the people who respond to me are pro-choice and pro-gay marriage, this assignment of sovereignty to history is just odd. In any event, that history is by no means clear. Thanksgiving to God is an old United States tradition. "Religious believers should not force their beliefs on others". This is really the heart of the matter. Secularists often think of religion as a personal matter. The believer can always pray privately, so why should any public manifestations of religion be thought necessary? But, as Justice Scalia likes to say, this view ignores the fact that there is a clash of values present in church/state controversies. Believers often think of their religion as social, rather than private. Think of the plagues of Egypt. Slavery was a public issue and its justice was a religious issue. A certain kind of religion can be relegated to private life, but not anything like biblical religion. That kind of religion is inescapably public.