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July 8, 2009: What is the Difference Really Between Believers and Nonbelievers?

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7/8/2009--Much of our present political and legal disputes are premised on a divide between religion on the one hand and secularism on the other. But how well founded is this assumed division? That is obviously an important question in the context of Hallowed Secularism, which, both in its book and blog forms, has a religious tone. That is why some secularists distrust it. But religious believers are subject to the same pressures and assumptions that nonbelievers are. Listen, for example, to Chris Hedges, in Fred Clarkson's book, *Dispatches from the Religious Left*: "God is a human concept. God is the name we give to our belief that life has meaning, one that transcends the world's chaos, randomness and cruelty. ... The question is not whether God exists. The question is whether we concern ourselves with, or are utterly indifferent to, the sanctity and ultimate transcendence of human existence. God is that mysterious force—and you can give it many names as other religions do—which works upon us and through us to seek and achieve truth, beauty and goodness." Certainly there are issues here. For example, what does human life "transcend"? Or is transcendence built in, somehow? But if the secularist responds by saying, I can do all that without religion, she may be making a category mistake. Maybe doing all that is religion.