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### March 6, 2010: Calling all secularists Monday night

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Title: Calling all secularists Monday night

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3/6/2010—This Monday night, 3/8, at 9 p.m. ET, Tikkun magazine will sponsor a phone forum in which callers will be able to ask questions about my contribution to the theme of this month's issue: [God and the 21st Century](#). Call (888) 346-3950 and enter 11978#.

The magazine issue is organized around Arthur Green's upcoming book, *Radical Judaism*. His essay is entitled "Sacred Evolution: A Radical Jewish Perspective on God and Science". As the title suggests, Green is engaging in a form of religious naturalism. He writes of God, "I do not affirm a Being or Mind that exists separate from the universe and acts upon it intelligently and willfully." What differentiates Green from a materialist or a pantheist (he calls himself a *mystical panentheist*) is that "this whole is mysteriously and infinitely greater than the sum of its parts, and cannot be known fully or reduced to its constituent beings." This position sounds like the concept of emergence in biology. Holiness resides there. Almost all of the contributors to the magazine commenting on the theme of God seem to share Green's framework: science first and religion adapts. Hans Kung, Aryeh Cohen and Zaid Shakir are exceptions. (For background, see Jerome Stone's recent book, *Religious Naturalism Today*).

What is odd about this is that I share Green's framework too, but I am about the only "secularist" in the magazine. I know what Christopher Hitchens would say about this. He would repeat his comment to Marilyn Sewell, a Unitarian Minister who was trying to differentiate herself from fundamentalist Christianity: "I would say that if you don't believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and Messiah, and that he rose again from the dead and by his sacrifice our sins are forgiven, you're really not in any meaningful sense a Christian." He would say that Green is not a Jew. Granted, it is harder to pull that stunt with Judaism than with Christianity, but that would be the general view both by Hitchens and by many Jews.

Now I would not say that. My experience is just that the Green translation becomes too difficult over time. And you can hear the difficulty in his essay, which is too long and too qualified to inspire. He also has lost the concept of evil along the way. I think Green illustrates that mysticism, and indeed the personal in general, are not important religious categories without a strong unifying narrative. Yes, people are saved in fundamentalist religion, but only because God is real.

My contribution to this is twofold. First, I'm in the same boat as most of the others, but I don't call it religion. I call it Hallowed Secularism. Thus, you don't have to join organized religion. Actually, I can't join organized religion and I don't understand how others manage to do so.

Second, and more significant, I argue in my recent manuscript, *Higher Law in the Public Square*, that if God can mean what these writers mean by God, then In God We Trust does not violate the Establishment Clause.