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September 16, 2010: What is the Problem with Secularists?

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Title: What is the Problem with Secularists?

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9/16/2010—My friend wants to know what is the problem with secularists? He means why do secularists have a problem with religion? I can't say it is because of organized religion because he has little to do with organized religion. Besides I don't think that is it. Most secularists I know are not disabused of religion because of the problems of the Church, for example. They are more likely to view these problems as inherent in religion. So I say, it is the supernatural claims of religion. But he responds with disdain: no one talks that way today. He means no self-respecting theologian writes about Beings doing tricks with the natural order. (And he has read them all). Yet, is it that simple? He and I are reading the New Testament at this moment. Isn't Christianity just one big miracle, as C.S. Lewis once put it? Last week, I looked at a prayer book for the High Holy Days. It reminded me why I felt I had to leave Judaism. What is the point of asking God for forgiveness? Is forgiveness a favor? Surely, my obligation is to recognize my sins and sincerely repent. But if I really repent, why would I not accept my punishment as just? Why would I ask to get out of it? On the other hand, if I don't ask for forgiveness, I can still be grateful that it occurs. And I know that it does. But who is this God? I told my friend that what the secularists like Christopher Hitchens seem to deny is that there is anything more to life than what lies on the surface. They seem to deny mystery and depth as aspects of human experience. If, for example, I claim that repentance leads to forgiveness, Hitchens would have to say this is just a psychological reaction. In principle, we could duplicate it with a pill. But I believe the experience of forgiveness is real. It is another of the promises of the Bible that genuinely reflect the way things are. Just like justice. How these things came to be that way, the authors of the Bible called God. Maybe God just meant they did not know. The Bible generally did not ask its audience to believe things they could not accept. The ancient world believed in gods, so God was just greater than the Egyptian gods. Jesus cast out demons, but so did his critics. The amazing thing to the ancient world was that the Jewish God in the Old and New Testament cared about slaves and the poor and women, not that this God existed. Somehow we have to get clear of things that probably cannot be true and see what is then left of religion. I think quite a lot.