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January 14, 2011: The Atheist Wars

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Little did I suspect last Sunday, when I posted here concerning the violence of the secular that there would be a political back and forth over which "side" is responsible for the violence of the Tuscon shootings. Jared Loughner, the apparent shooter, does not seem to have been either religious or a self-proclaimed atheist. My point in the blog had to do with "secular politics," which is what our political system is, even though of course, religious believers participate. The question for me has to do with the assumptions of political life. Are we self-interested, rational consumers or are we at least potentially something more? But on Tuesday, Lauri Lebo weighed in on Religion Dispatches to the effect that conservative religious groups were blaming atheism for the shootings ("New Theory for Tuscon Tragedy: Blame the Atheists"). As one person put it, "It's actually very simple,' [Ted] Shoebat was quoted in Special Guest's promotion, 'When God is not in your life, evil will seek to fill the void.'" The irony of all this is that secularists like Christopher Hitchens and Mark Lilla have argued for years that religion in politics leads to violence and the only way to have peace in political life is to strictly limit the role of religion in the public square. Loughner reminds us that When God is not in your life you may turn to violence and that when God is in your life, you may also turn to violence. So we really should step back and not criticize the "other side" for now doing what "our side" has been doing all along. No one has a monopoly on violence. No one has yet figured out how to build a just and peaceful world.