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"Secular" Does Not Mean Non-religious

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Phil Zuckerman is a professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College in Claremont, California. As a part of his job, he teaches about religion and the nature of religion. In his teaching, he makes a distinction between what is secular and what is religious. To explain his understanding of the concept of Secularism, he wrote an article for *Psychology Today* called "What Does 'Secular' Mean?" (You can read the article at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-secular-life/201407/what-does-secular-mean/>) Here is his description:

So to be secular means that 1) a person does not believe in supernatural beings, entities, or realms, 2) a person does not engage in religious behaviors, and 3) a person does not identify as religious and is not a member of a religious community.

But I have a question for you: Is his definition right? Is that really the nature of Secularism?

The word "secular" comes from the Latin word *saeculum* which means "worldly" or "temporal." It is most often used in English to represent a state of being that is separate from religion, or of not being exclusively allied with or against any particular religion.

That common English usage, however, does not reflect actual reality. The fact is, there is no such thing as a state that is separate from religion. Secularism is, itself, a religious point of view.

Secularism is an expression of a naturalistic worldview – the belief that the natural universe

is all that exists. The Secularist belief is that since God does not exist, no transcendent being is existent that a person could possibly worship. As such, they assert that religion itself is a meaningless concept.

The way Secularists define religion allows them to think that separating religion from non-religion is a possibility. They define religion as a belief in and worship of a superhuman power labeled as God or gods, or as some identifiable system of faith and worship. But in its deepest sense, that is not the meaning of religion. Religion actually refers to any faith system.

Secularists believe, based on their naturalistic worldview, that reality exists apart from any faith system. They believe that the natural universe is all that exists, and can be ultimately understood using purely empirical methods.

However, Naturalism is, itself, a faith system. There is no science able to verify any of its essential core beliefs. Science can't answer:

- What is the nature of ultimate reality?
- What is a human being?
- What is the ultimate a person can achieve in this life?

They do, of course, answer these questions – and they do it in a way that is consistent with their worldview beliefs. Here is the way they attempt to answer the questions:

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality? - The only thing that exists is the natural universe that came into being and continues based on natural laws.

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2. What is a human being? - Human beings are nothing more than natural animals that came into being based on natural evolutionary processes.

3. What is the ultimate a person can achieve in this life? - The ultimate a person can achieve in life is survival and personal fulfillment.

In looking at these answers, a very striking picture emerges. What we see are statements of faith, not observations based on science. If science actually could answer these questions, these are probably the answers that would naturally emerge. But there is no science capable of answering them. These answers are purely statements of faith.

The truth is, science is incapable of answering any of the three. There is no science able to prove that the natural universe is all that exists. Science cannot demonstrate any biological process that shows it is even possible for less complex life forms to evolve into more complex forms. And, using science, there is no way to answer any question about life's purpose. The answers to all of these questions are religious statements – all based on faith. So the only conclusion we can draw here is that Secularism is a religious point of view. In fact, it is VERY religious!

To take it one step further, Secularists, as they express themselves in society today, are not only religious, they are very zealous in their religious beliefs – in many cases to the point of being willing to even kill people and destroy property to further their cause.

Every group or organization whose belief foundation is Naturalism expresses the beliefs of Secularism. Such contemporary groups as Black Lives Matter are Marxist to the core – and Marxism is a naturalistic belief system. Anarchist groups, such as Antifa, build their entire belief structure on the same naturalistic belief foundation.

Based on their naturalistic beliefs, there is no such thing as objective morality. There is no such thing as a definitive right and wrong. These groups do, of course, have moral beliefs, but their morality is based on a

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relativistic foundation. As such, they basically get to make up their morals as they go along. Morality is what they decide is moral. So, if they decide that looting, rioting, and even killing people will further their personal goals, they deem those things to be moral – again, not based on science or any objective criteria, but on their own beliefs and desires. This is possible for them because their faith allows it.

So, when you are in a position to interact with people who call themselves Secularists, you have to know

that you are not dealing with people who are devoid of religious beliefs. You are dealing with religious zealots. And the only way to turn the tide on them is to help them see that their beliefs are simply not true. It is necessary to help them recognize that theirs are false beliefs and do not reflect the actual structure of reality – as opposed to the truth of biblical faith. That requires a religious conversion. You will likely not make any headway with Secularists until you are ready to deal with them in this arena by sharing with them faith in Christ.