

Question: Shouldn't one distinguish between two types of "secularism"?

In support of an affirmative answer, one may distinguish between what I should call a "soft" and a "hard" secularism. "**Soft secularism**" is the type of position that assumes a basic confidence in the meaning of life only to deny that there is any transcendent ground of this meaning. Thus, while it typically asserts some way of existing that is authentic, it implicitly denies that there can be any such way. This it does because, in denying that there is any transcendent ground of the meaning of life, it denies the necessary condition of there being any authentic existence. "Soft secularism," then, is a self-contradictory position that differs in this respect from the position that I should (still) distinguish as "secularity," which doesn't deny a transcendent ground of meaning, but is content merely to imply such without asserting it explicitly. "**Hard secularism**," by contrast, does not assume a basic confidence in the meaning of life, nor does it assert any way of existing that is authentic. On the contrary, it explicitly denies any such way, even if it may at the same time imply self-contradictorily that there is some way in which a human being ought to live. Thus "hard secularism" is, in effect, nihilism—the explicit denial that there is any meaning of life and any way of existing that is authentic.

Because one may, and I believe must, distinguish between these two types of position, it is arguable that one should distinguish between two types of "secularism," although whether either position should be characterized as "secularism" may be an independent question.

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