

NSRN Glossary



[First draft, by Lois Lee, 28 April 2011]

Given that the core terminology for nonreligion often involves terms with allocated rather than intrinsic meaning (c.f. for example ‘unreligion’, ‘nonreligion’, ‘areligion’), this glossary gives a guide to how such terms are used throughout this website.

N.B. This terminology does not include definitions of religion, theism or other relative concepts. The argument is that being precise about different forms of contingency is useful in itself – and are meaningfully distinct regardless of how their

contingent terms are understood. E.g. the concept of 'nonreligion' is contingent on notions of 'religion', which might be viewed as an analytic category or as a human construction or as both. This website is interested in the breadth of nonreligion research and therefore in both uses of the term and according to all definitions of religion; it therefore does not stipulate which of these two approaches, the realist or constructivist, it is taking.

Areligious Without religion or religious references.

E.g. an infant, who is not conscious of religious *or* nonreligious phenomena or of ascribed religious or nonreligious status, might be described as areligious.

Anti-religious Hostility or an otherwise clearly oppositional position towards religion

Atheism A conscious or unconscious lack of commitment to god(s)

Explicit nonreligion Forms of nonreligion which are clearly articulated or codified

Implicit nonreligion Forms of nonreligion which are not clearly articulated or codified

Irreligion Traditionally defined as hostility or indifference towards religion (as in Campbell 1971), but its contemporary connotations suggests, especially and specifically, *defiance* of or *deviance* from religion. Useful as such? Something more rebellious-sounding than anti-religion, per se – not least because it might be something that happens within a broadly religious practice?

Nonreligion Something which is defined *primarily* by the way it differs from religion.

E.g.s might then include atheism, ‘indifference’ to religion and agnosticism would all be examples. Humanism would *not* be an example (although empirical cases of humanism may well be considered profoundly nonreligious in practice). Alternative spirituality would not be included where this spirituality is defined fundamentally by its autonomous principles and practices.

Non-theism Meaning the same as ‘atheism’ but sometimes preferred in order to distinguish a more general non-commitment to god(s) from a more explicit, cultural orientation and movement like the New Atheism.

Secular A space in which religion is not the primary reference point or authority.

Contrasted with religious meaning theocratic, i.e. a space in which religion is the primary reference point or authority.

This is a traditional understanding of the term; modern incarnations use imply a system of making this differentiation, as in ‘secular society’ or Charles Taylors ‘a secular age’; to identify this system, see ‘secularism’.

Secularism A distinctive doctrine, system or theory of differentiating primarily secular (in which religion is not the primary or immediate reference point) and primarily religious parts (in which religion is the primary or immediate reference point) of a whole.

Secularity The quality or state of being secular; secularness

Secularness The quality or state of being secular; secularity

Unreligion

That which is different from religion according to a particular measure of religion; what is not religious is then unreligious.
(As in Voas 2009.)