The cultural phenomenon produced in recent years by the Harry Potter books and films has sparked outrage among critics and avid devotion from supporters. This article examines the debate through the implementation of three dichotomies that help to define the approaches people typically take to the Harry Potter stories: 1) fantasy vs. reality, 2) good versus evil, and 3) secular versus religious. As I demonstrate through an examination of these dichotomies and their application, the public debate about Harry Potter encourages us to reexamine the import and meaning of the separation of church and state.

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Religious debates over the Harry Potter series of books by J. K. Rowling are based on claims that the novels contain occult or Satanic subtexts. A number of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians have argued against the series, as have some Shia and Sunni Muslims. Supporters of the series have said that the magic in Harry Potter bears little resemblance to occultism, being more in the vein of fairy tales such as Cinderella and Snow White, or to the works of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. The cultural phenomenon produced in recent years by the Harry Potter books and films has sparked outrage among critics and avid devotion from supporters. This article examines the debate through the implementation of three dichotomies that help to define the approaches people typically take to the Harry Potter stories: 1) fantasy vs. reality, 2) good versus evil, and 3) secular versus religious.