



## Viewpoints on religion and secularism (part 1) – Religion and me

### KEY QUESTIONS ??

- What is secularism?
- Who is a secularist?
- How do secularists think about religion?

### STIMULUS

#### Viewpoints

Consider the following viewpoints (a–f) on religion:

### VIEWPOINT

#### Viewpoint a

“I’m not religious, but I think it’s good to have an established church with strong links to the state because we’re a Christian country. Whether or not you are Christian, having a Christian state preserves our culture, provides a strong moral compass and helps protect against foreign ideas.”

### VIEWPOINT

#### Viewpoint b

“My Islamic religion is very important to me, but I think people need to be able to form their own beliefs. Too often religious arguments are used to impose conservative views on others. That’s not my version of Islam and I don’t think it should be the basis for laws.”

### VIEWPOINT

#### Viewpoint c

“Belief in gods is ridiculous. That’s why I’m an atheist. Religion is harmful and we should restrict its spread, by promoting atheism in schools, closing churches and banning all religious books or preaching.”

### VIEWPOINT

#### Viewpoint d

“I’m an evangelical Christian and I don’t believe that same-sex relationships are as valid as straight ones. My blog explains why I don’t think people should have any sexual relationships outside of heterosexual marriage. But it’s up to the Church to preach morality, not for the police to enforce it. What people choose for themselves is their business, and I don’t think my opinions should be forced on anybody.”

### VIEWPOINT

#### Viewpoint e

“I’m an atheist and think believing in gods is silly. I’d like to spread atheism and discourage religion through my YouTube channel and social pressure. People who want to be religious should have that right and not be discriminated against, so the government shouldn’t push atheism.”

### VIEWPOINT

#### Viewpoint f

“I’m a Christian and I think it is very important that my values are promoted in schools. Unless you have a Christian basis and values in education, that education will impose atheism. Most people realise there is no other truth but God, and the government should acknowledge this. It’s fine if you’re not religious, but you should keep quiet about that or expect to be ostracised for attacking our religious values.”

### EXERCISES

**Q1.** Is this viewpoint secularist? (a–f)

**Q2.** Why do you agree or disagree with this viewpoint? (a–f)

### Are the viewpoints secularist?

The clearest secularist answer here is **#b**, but both **#d** and **#e** are also secularist. Two of these statements come from people who are religious believers. But for a secularist that is up to them. All that matters is whether religion (or irreligion) is forced on others by the government.

**Viewpoint #a**, though it comes from a non-religious person, is not secularist, because they think the church and the state should have strong links. They might have all sorts of reasons why they think religion (Christianity in particular) should be privileged.

**Viewpoint #b**, from a Muslim, is secularist, because they don't think any version of religion (or religion in general) should be imposed on anybody else.

**Viewpoint #c**, comes from an atheist. But this person would impose their views on everybody else and would restrict religious freedom. Secularists would strongly oppose this.

**Viewpoint #d**, is similar to the second – and largely secularist. They are a deeply religious person who respects the rights of others not to be religious and they don't think religion should be legally privileged, so they are a secularist.

**Viewpoint #e**, is similar to the fourth and largely secularist. They are non-religious with strongly anti-religious views, but they don't want them imposed on others.

For both viewpoints **#d** and **#e** some secularists could have concerns over “social pressure”. Many forms of social pressure are part of promoting your views and changing people's minds in a pluralistic society. But other forms of social pressure could lead to privilege or discrimination.

**Viewpoint #f**, is definitely not from a secularist. They are deeply religious (not a problem) but they want to impose that on everybody else and use the power of the state and the education system to make everybody else share their views (a big problem for secularists).

So, you can be a religious secularist (e.g. **#b** or **#d**), or anti-secularist (e.g. **#f**). You can also be a non-religious secularist, which is very common (e.g. **#e**), or a nonreligious anti-secularist; this is less common, but not unheard of (e.g. **#a** or **#c**).

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Find or imagine examples of two secularist and two non-secularist viewpoints, which people might hold.
- How do you think these viewpoints will affect these people's views on other issues?
- Script or act out a roleplay involving people holding two of the example viewpoints. They could be discussing a social issue, or could both be being interviewed about the role of religion in society.