



Viewpoints on religion and secularism (part 2) – Religion and others

KEY QUESTIONS ??

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

STIMULUS

Viewpoints

Consider the following viewpoints (a-f) on religion and society:

VIEWPOINT

Viewpoint a

“We’re a Christian country and have earned the privileges religion has. In a democracy, if most people want Christian services provided then why should non-religious services be imposed? I like having prayers in school and at the start of meetings; if you don’t like them then don’t turn up.”

VIEWPOINT

Viewpoint b

“It’s a problem when the government picks and chooses between religions. But as long as each religion is treated equally then why shouldn’t religion as a whole be promoted? Religious freedom means being able to practise your religion, so this should be supported by the state.”

VIEWPOINT

Viewpoint c

“Religion might inform people’s personal values, but when we come together as a group to make decisions that affect all of us, decisions should be made based on reason and evidence, not just personal feelings. Otherwise what basis do we have to say your personal religious feelings should trump mine?”

VIEWPOINT

Viewpoint d

“Religion is the only basis for morality and so should be the basis of our laws and decisions. If people don’t follow my religion it harms our society, which we all have an interest in preventing. If a law isn’t consistent with religion, then it can’t be moral and forcing people to follow immoral laws is wrong.”

VIEWPOINT

Viewpoint e

“The only way to ensure no religion is treated more favourably than others is to completely ban religion from public life. If you want to be religious you should keep that in your home, along with any religious symbolism or claims. People guided by personal religious ideas have nothing to contribute.”

VIEWPOINT

Viewpoint f

“Everyone should have the right to practise their personal religion or belief, but this should never be imposed on others. The government should stay out of people’s religious beliefs and shouldn’t support religious practices or beliefs. This requires the state and its services to be religiously neutral.”

EXERCISES

Q1. What do you think of this viewpoint (a–f)?

Q2. Who do you think might hold this viewpoint (a–f)?

Q3. Why (a–f)?

Q4. Is this viewpoint (a–f) secularist or not?

Q5. Why (a–f)?

Q6. Place the viewpoints in an order of your own choosing. Why did you put the viewpoints in this particular order?

Q7. Do you think religion should influence the rights of others?

Q8. Where would your view fit in the order you’ve created?

Are the viewpoints secularist?

- a. This is a common objection to secularism; it mixes a majoritarian and traditional argument. Such approaches tend to be more favoured by groups in a privileged position.
- b. This could be seen as a model of secularism, although it is generally outside the mainstream (for secularists). The problem with trying to treat all religions with equal state support is that religions are not homogeneous groups. Such approaches tend to give more power to religious leaders and to exclude the non-religious.
- c. This is a mainstream secularist position. Different secularists might interpret this differently.
- d. This is almost the opposite of a secularist position, as they are advocating for all laws and decisions which affect others to be based on religion. Depending on how that is interpreted, it might be a democracy limited by religious rules or an outright theocracy.
- e. This could be seen as an extreme form of secularism, so far outside any mainstream approach that most secularists wouldn't recognise it as such. Secularists believe religion shouldn't be privileged in public life (so shouldn't play a formal role in public services or government) but don't believe it should be restricted, except where necessary to protect other rights. Most secularists think people guided by religious, irreligious or non-religious personal beliefs contribute to society, but that decisions which affect the rights of others shouldn't be based on religion or purely personal preferences.
- f. This is a mainstream secularist position. Different secularists might interpret this differently.

TAKE IT FURTHER 

- Think of 3 questions to ask people that hold each of the 6 viewpoints.
- Script or act out a roleplay involving people holding two of the example viewpoints. They could be discussing a social issue or both be being interviewed about the role of religion in society.
- Find examples of historical, public or political figures who hold similar viewpoints.