

1.10 Religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination (part 2) – What are they?

BACKGROUND	<p>Concepts of religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination are central to secularism. They come up in other resources and can be brought up in almost any discussion of religion in public life. Resources 1.10 and 1.11 address these directly and encourage students to engage with different viewpoints on these central terms.</p> <p>The resource contains three stimuli; the first defines these key terms, the second provides examples and the third compares privilege and discrimination. The exercises assess students' background knowledge and invite discussion of the examples and differing opinions on the key concepts.</p>
SUBJECTS	Politics Religion & Belief Education Citizenship SMSC Fundamental British Values
KEY QUESTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination?
LEARNING OUTCOMES	<p>Basic</p> <p>Students should demonstrate they can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the basic principles of religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination. • Identify and comment on the role of religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination in simplistic examples of conflicts involving religion and the rights of others. <p>Advanced</p> <p>In addition to the basic learning outcomes, students should demonstrate they can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically reflect on the principles of religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination, drawing on a range of outside examples. • Offer nuanced comments on the role of religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination in a range of social debates involving religion and the rights of others.
LINKS	Resource page: ExploringSecularism.org/110-religious-privilege-tolerance
STIMULUS	<p><i>Stimulus #1 (Principles)</i></p> <p>What are religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination?</p> <p>Privilege, tolerance and discrimination are key concepts within sociology and social justice. They are also key to secularism, and to arguments for or against a secularist approach.</p> <p>Privilege describes the benefits and advantages held by one group relative to another, which are the result of power dynamics.</p> <p>Privileged groups often view the imposition of their values as natural or normal. Because religious privilege is so normalised, many people have difficulty identifying it. To get around such “privilege blindness” we need empathy. If you are comfortable with one form of religion being imposed, how would you feel if it was another religion or belief system?</p> <p>“When you’re accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.” – Anonymous</p> <p>Tolerance is the ability or willingness to allow practices or opinions that one differs from, dislikes or disagrees with. Synonyms include: forbearance, toleration, sufferance, liberality, open-mindedness, lack of prejudice, lack of bias, broad-mindedness, liberalism and pluralism. In terms of religion, tolerance is the ability to practise your religion or belief without interference and without impinging on the rights of others; in this way tolerance is not and cannot be absolute.</p> <p>Discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people. Religious discrimination would be laws or practices which treat people unfairly or restrict their freedom because of religion or belief – either the religion or belief of the person being treated unfairly, or that of the person practising the unfair treatment.</p> <p>Privilege and discrimination can be seen as a horseshoe, as privilege for one group or idea inevitably means discrimination for alternative groups and ideas that are relatively disadvantaged by not receiving this privilege. For example, privileging group A in school admissions discriminates against group B as they are moved towards the back of the line.</p> <p>Many people are beneficiaries of privilege in some ways and victims of discrimination in others.</p>

Stimulus #2 (Examples)

In this stimulus you will examine six examples where religion impacts public life.

Example A: Bishops in the House of Lords

The UK House of Lords is an unelected chamber. That means most members hold their position – and can vote on laws that affect all of us – after being appointed. An exception to this (the appointment, not the voting) is the “Bishops’ Bench” – twenty-four bishops and two archbishops of the Church of England hold seats in the House of Lords based on their church offices.

Example B: Article 9 of the Human Rights Act

Article 9 of the Human Rights Act (which is also Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights) states:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Example C: Equality Act

The Equality Act sets the standard for equality and anti-discrimination law in Great Britain (Northern Ireland has its own version). It sets out the conditions where it is legal or illegal to treat people differently based on their “protected characteristics”. Among these are religion and belief and sexual orientation. That means that it is generally illegal for a business like a shop, restaurant or taxi company to refuse to serve someone because they are a member of a group the business owner doesn’t like.

For example, Barry the baker could refuse to sell Cindy a croissant because Barry doesn’t like Cindy. This would be legal. But if Barry refused to sell Cindy a croissant because Barry didn’t like women, or didn’t like gay people, or didn’t like Christians, or didn’t like Asian people, or didn’t like people with disabilities or didn’t like old people, this would all probably be illegal.

Example D: Blasphemy laws

Blasphemy is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as “something that you say or do that shows you do not respect God or a religion”. Generally, the term is applied by different groups to describe beliefs or statements they have a theological disagreement with, because either they differ on interpretations of a religion, or criticise religious ideas and institutions. Blasphemy laws can take the form of laws banning insulting religions or causing religious offence.

The common law offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel were abolished in England and Wales in 2008. As of 2018, blasphemy remains a common law offence in Scotland and Northern Ireland although these laws are probably not enforceable.

Elsewhere in the world, blasphemy laws are enforced, and in some theocracies carry the death penalty. Some people would like to see blasphemy laws introduced or other laws against insulting religions, though very few advocate such extreme penalties.

Example E: Non-stun slaughter

Animal welfare legislation in the UK requires all animals to be stunned before slaughter in order to minimise suffering. The only exemption is for religious communities to meet Jewish and Muslim religious dietary preferences.

Example F: Separation of church and state

Many countries have a formal legal requirement for religious and state institutions to be separate. Others have the opposite (i.e. they require the state to maintain religious institutions). Others have something in between. Perhaps the clearest example of a country with a formal separation of church and state is the USA, whose constitution’s First Amendment reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Stimulus #3 (Privilege or discrimination?)

Imagine Kya and Lola are two students of equal ability who are running against each other in the final race of the school sports day. Mr Kelly the PE teacher is Lola's father and wants her to win, so gives her a 10m head start. This could be considered an example of tolerance if the advantage was earned in some relevant way (e.g. the rules of the race could agree that the runner with the best score in qualifying gets a head start) or necessary to offset another advantage (e.g. on a circular track, athletes on the outside lane would need to run further if they started in line).

The question is, has Mr Kelly:

- Privileged Lola by giving her a 10m advantage **or**
- Discriminated against Kya by giving her a 10m disadvantage

Often whether we describe something as privilege or discrimination is simply a matter of emphasis.

For example: A law which discriminates against atheist citizens would be an example of religious privilege (because it would give the religious a comparative advantage). A law which privileged religious citizens would be discriminatory against non-religious citizens (because it would deny them a comparative advantage).

What follows are ten statements, five of which secularists generally consider to be examples of religious privilege and five of which secularists generally consider to be examples of religious discrimination.

Privilege

- The views of religious leaders are treated with greater weight because they are assumed to be of higher moral value or to be representative of large groups.
- There are many religious exemptions to laws ranging from animal welfare legislation to employment law.
- Religious based conscientious objections are often given greater weight than those based on other personal preferences.
- Societal taboos protect religious beliefs or practices from criticisms levelled at non-religious or irreligious comparisons.
- Certain positions in public office or employment are reserved for people of specific religions.

Discrimination

- Some people are insulted or attacked because of their religion or lack of religion.
- Some people are turned down from certain jobs because of their religion or lack of religion.
- In some places the practices of certain religious or irreligious groups are banned without good justification.
- In some places it is illegal to hold certain religious or irreligious views.
- Some people refuse to serve others because of their religious beliefs.

EXERCISE

- Divide a whiteboard into six segments, with three columns and two rows. In the top three boxes write the terms: Privilege, Tolerance and Discrimination.
- Ask the class **Q1**. *What do these terms mean to you: a) privilege, b) tolerance, c) discrimination?* Write down some key words or phrases in the boxes.
- In the bottom three boxes put the terms: Religious privilege, Religious tolerance and Religious discrimination.
- Ask the class **Q2**. *What do these terms mean to you: a) religious privilege, b) religious tolerance, c) religious discrimination?* Write down some key words or phrases in the boxes.
- **Review Stimulus #1 (Principles)** and invite general discussion.
- **Review Stimulus #2 (Examples)** as a class, in groups or individually and answer the next two questions
- **Q3**. Are each of the examples (**a–f**) religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination?
- **Q4**. Why? (**a–f**)
- After discussion see if you can place each example into one of the columns.
- **Review Stimulus #3 (Privilege or discrimination?)** and invite general discussion.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q5. For each of the examples of religious privilege (a–e), rephrase this so it is an example of religious discrimination. For each of the examples of religious discrimination (f–j), rephrase this so it is an example of religious privilege. • As a class discuss, or individually answer the final questions • Q6. Do you agree that this is an example of religious privilege (a–e) or discrimination (f–j)? • Q7. Why or why not? (a–j)
TAKE IT FURTHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a poster called “10 rules for religious tolerance”. What will these rules be? Who will create/enforce them? How will they affect people with different religious/irreligious views? • Review the viewpoints in resources 1.03 and 1.04 (<i>Viewpoints on religion and secularism (part 1) – Religion and me and (part 2) – Religion and others</i>). Are each of these people advocating for religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination? • What role does religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination play in the speech in resource 1.05 (<i>Viewpoints on religion and secularism (part 3)</i>)? • Review the councillors’ arguments in resource 1.08 (<i>How do secularists make decisions? (part 3)</i>) What role does religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination play in each of their viewpoints? • Create a poster to illustrate the concepts of religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination. • Think of three examples of religious or religion-related practices which are privileged, tolerated or discriminated against. Why is this the case? What would it look like if they were treated differently (e.g. if a practice that is currently privileged were tolerated, or a practice that is currently tolerated were discriminated against)?
NOTES	<p>The <i>Take it further</i> activities in this resource are shared with 1.11 (<i>Religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination (part 3)</i>)</p> <p>For any aspect of religious or irreligious practice considered in RE, Politics or Citizenship Studies, students could explore how the practice is affected by religious privilege, tolerance or discrimination in their own and different societies.</p> <p>Alternatively, the role of religious (or other) privilege, tolerance and discrimination can be explored in practical case studies and examples such as those attached to Theme 3 (Equality and human rights) or Theme 4 (Secularism, religion and society: key debates).</p> <p>Notes on Stimulus #3</p> <p>The following are examples of how the statements could be rewritten to change the emphasis between religious privilege and discrimination or vice versa:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The views of those who are not religious leaders are treated with less weight because they are not assumed to be of higher moral value or to be representative of large groups. There are many exemptions to laws ranging from animal welfare legislation to employment law that benefit the religious. Conscientious objections based on non-religious personal preferences are not given as much weight as those based on religious beliefs. Societal taboos mean those criticising religious beliefs or practices are treated harshly compared to those criticising non-religious or irreligious practices. Certain positions in public office or employment are closed off for people of specific religions or who are non-religious. Some people have the advantage of not being (or being less likely to be) insulted or attacked because of their religion. Some people have an advantage when applying for certain jobs because their religion or belief is more favoured, or less disliked. In some places certain religious or irreligious groups have the privilege of not having their practices banned, when comparable practices are. In some places the law supports specific religious or irreligious views. Some people are able to refuse to serve others because of their religious beliefs, while being unlikely to be refused service because of theirs.