



Glossary

KEY QUESTIONS ??

- What is secularism?
- Is secularism a form of atheism, agnosticism or humanism?
- What are religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination?

STIMULUS

Glossary

- a. Atheism
- b. Apostasy
- c. Blasphemy
- d. Humanism
- e. Liberalism
- f. Pluralism
- g. Privilege
- h. Privilege blindness
- i. Religiopolitical
- j. Religious privilege
- k. Secular
- l. Secularisation
- m. Secularism
- n. Theocracy
- o. Theocratic

EXERCISES

- Q1.** What does this term mean? (a–o)
- Q2.** Why might it be relevant to this subject? (a–o)

Glossary

a. Atheism

A theist is someone who believes in one god (monotheism) or multiple gods (polytheism). A theist might or might not regard themselves as part of a religion.

b. Apostasy

Apostasy is the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief, principle or identity. People can be labelled as apostates for holding alternative versions of religious or political beliefs. Apostasy and apostates are generally considered pejoratives and apostates suffer discrimination in many cases. Some people self-identify as apostates in order to celebrate its positive connotations for independent thinking or to rob the label of its power as an insult.

c. Blasphemy

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.

d. Humanism

Traditionally “humanist” has been a label applied to people or worldviews that are primarily concerned with the ethical value and agency of human beings, or that emphasise reason over dogma or superstition in decision-making.

Although many religious traditions have strong histories of humanist thought, the label generally applies nowadays to people or worldviews which are non-religious. So a humanist is someone who believes humans are capable of being ethical and moral without religion or a god. The term “secular humanism” might be used to emphasise the non-religious nature of modern day humanism.

Most forms of contemporary – and many forms of historic – humanism include support for some form of secularism.

e. Liberalism

Liberalism is a very wide ranging political, philosophical and social concept. This means that people with very different and conflicting opinions on how society should be run can still be liberals, or advocates of liberalism.

Liberalism is an idea that takes protecting and enhancing the freedom of individuals to be the central problem of society. Liberals typically believe that rules and restrictions are necessary to protect individuals from being harmed by others, but they also recognise that excessive rules or restrictions can pose a threat to liberty.

Liberalism generally values pluralism and the freedom of individuals and groups to seek their version of the good life.

f. Pluralism

A pluralistic society is one where people with different or competing views on how to live, are largely able to live according to these views. Pluralism can be descriptive, i.e. it could mean the existence of different types of people, who have different beliefs and opinions, within the same society. Alternatively it might be normative, i.e. it could mean the belief that the existence of different types of people within the same society is a good thing.

g. Privilege

Privilege exists when a group, ideology or identity is given special treatment because of differences in power related to other groups.

h. Privilege blindness

Privilege blindness refers to being unaware of privilege because of being so accustomed to something being treated specially. When an advantage or special treatment is normalised, people who benefit from it (and others) start not to notice it, or think of it as normal, natural or the default.

i. Religiopolitical

This is an adjective which refers to issues, worldviews or movements which combine religion and politics.

j. Religious privilege

Religious privilege exists when a group, ideology or identity is treated specially for religious reasons, e.g. a law that treats two similar ideas or people differently because of the religious nature of one of them.

k. Secular

“Secular” means religiously neutral or unrelated to religion, e.g. brushing your teeth is a secular activity.

Beyond this simple definition, secular is a contested adjective. It comes from a Latin word *saecularis* or *saeculum* meaning “the world”, “generation” or “age”. Many religious traditions draw a distinction between the temporal and the divine, or the worldly and the spiritual, considering that both have their place. In some contexts, secular is used to mean non-religious.

l. Secularisation

Secularisation is a label that has been applied to many historical and contemporary processes. It can refer to the transfer of religious assets to secular organisations, the trend of many western countries’ populations to become less religious, the decline in religious interest or ideas, the removal of religious ideas or symbols from certain spheres or the disentanglement of religious concerns from everyday life.

m. Secularism

Secularism is a political approach which aims to balance freedom of and from religion with other human rights. Its main principles are that religion should not be privileged or discriminated against by the state. There are many different models of secularism. A secularist might or might not be personally religious or non-religious.

n. Theocracy

Theocracy could refer to a worldview that believes religious rules should govern most areas of life, or a system of government where either authority derives from religious positions, or a religious ideology or organisation runs the state.

o. Theocratic

This is an adjective describing something as being related to theocracy. It might be applied to ideas, e.g. “the idea we should ban blasphemy is theocratic”, or movements, e.g. “the ‘Ban Blasphemy Party’ is theocratic”.

EXERCISES  

Q3. What do you think of this term’s definition? (a–o)

Q4. Did it match your definition? (a–o)

Q5. Why or why not? (a–o)

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Use each of the terms in a sentence.
- Write a short script featuring two or more people discussing religion and politics. Within at least eight lines of dialogue, at least four of the above terms should be used in the correct context.
- What do you think might be some of the misconceptions/confusion/conflict over these terms?
- Independently research these terms. Try to use a variety of sources. How are they used in different contexts? Are there disagreements over their definitions?
- Are there any other terms that should be included in the glossary? What are they and what are their definitions?
- Create a poster display for this glossary to explain them to other students.
- Try to find translations (these might not be literal) of the terms in the glossary in other languages.