

DIFFICULTIES WITH SECULARISM

Secularism is...

Secularism is state or political policy.

Secularism is a form of democracy that is neutral in matters of religion in order to be in favour of evidence and scientific proof when making laws. It does not let religion (you can be your own religion or a member of a religion) intrude in the public arena or in civic or state duties.

The believers say that God must take supreme importance in the world and in your life. Even when they support secularism, they teach that it is only acceptable in the sense that God gave the state a separate job to do from the Church. So even their secularism is religious at least in intention. It is saying, "We believers support the separation of Church and state on religious grounds and because God asks for it. If our religion tells us different or if God tells us different we will oppose this separation. We only accept because we think God wants us to. If we are wrong we will change our minds." Their secularism only looks like secularism - it is not secularism. Their secularism contradicts and therefore opposes true secularism

Secularism forbids the state to force religion to do things against its beliefs - eg conduct gay marriage. By the same token, religion cannot impose its rules on those who do not agree with it. If the Church does marriages that are not valid in the eyes of the state and lets the couples think they are valid, those responsible for the deception need to be charged.

Some secularists say that secularism is not about morality or ethics. This seems to arise from the error that ignoring religious ethics means you are walking away from morality. People who say, "I do not have a value system", do not realise that they are making a value system of not having one!

If secularism rejects right and wrong then it does not matter if the state is secular or not. And it has no right to make laws. Law is picking out things considered immoral in order to make them crimes.

Religion is unethical for it opposes full equality. The state will not encourage religion or discourage it. It will be punished if it goes too far in its opposition to the human right of equality. In practice, religion will not be encouraged. But to refuse to take its doctrines seriously is discouraging it in a sense. Enthusiasm is catchy and so is lukewarmness! If it is not the job of the state to show that your religion is wrong then in serious matters affecting the public interest then the religion should encourage people to think twice. We should be there to help those who need to see their beliefs are wrong but that is not the state's job.

The difficulty with neutrality

Secularism means the state is neutral in matters of religion. For example, the state refuses to make it a crime to blaspheme God. Secularism favours democracy - which is the best form of government there is despite the serious problems it can result in. It also requires that if you are involved in the government, you keep your faith if any out of any political decision making. If you are a believer then you have to act the non-believer (a non-believer as in being neutral and not having your mind made up) and as a neutral person when involved in legislating for the state.

Neutrality in politics is saying that you are making no commitments. But what if you should? It comes down to a matter of what you like or dislike. Not choosing is choosing. Though secularism is neutral about religion this is only neutrality in a loose sense. A bias against religion is therefore necessary and inevitable.

"Neutrality is not really possible. Those who say they are neutral are being untruthful. They are pretending to be objective. They would say they were objective even if they were not. If there is no neutral way to sort out wrong views from right ones then those who say they have the truth are really just saying that they prefer their views. If you are neutral to the laws of mathematics imagine the much harm you do! Neutrality only leads to arbitrary rules and morals being enforced."

The answer to that is that neutrality though hard to do is the best policy though it is not a great one. Worrying about Gods and ghosts only makes it worse!

Focus on secularism

Secularism is about political policy. Secularism is the total separation of the state and religion. Secularism is the view that

the state must not be tied up with religion or religious faith at all. Secularism treats religion as irrelevant. Secular states are impartial between different religions. Religion must not be telling the state what to do.

There is no need for religion to dictate to the state.

Freedom of belief is not the same thing as freedom of religion. Freedom of belief would mean you just believe whatever you think is true and the state will not interfere.

Freedom of religion is the freedom to influence the law of the land and practice your religion in the public sphere - eg pray at school assemblies and organise masses for state functions.

Secularism means that the state is neutral in regard to religion and groups that are anti-religion and groups that just don't care. The state is only anti-religion when the religion is one that seeks to force its will on the state and the people. There are religions that deny the right to freedom of religion and the right to freedom from religion. Even then the state is only against the religion in so far as it seeks to take away human rights.

Secularism is necessary. Some say that secularism is anti-religion in the sense that it makes policies and does not care about what religion has to say. That is only the case if secularism is not necessary and not the best policy. It is about doing the right thing not about being anti-religious.

Secularism requires that politicians who won't stop taking orders from their religious leaders or their Jesus or God must be fired when they start to introduce such religion and superstition into their politics.

Secularism is about protecting the rights of religious people and the rights of those who do not believe in religion or who are not members of any religion. However, as with anything else, not every right demanded by an individual or a group really is a right. For example, a religion might claim that being forbidden to cut off the labia of little girls by the state is forcing a violation of conscience on that religion. The religion will say that in this matter, its right of religious freedom is violated.

Secularism is not a belief but a method. The state or government and the lawmakers need to be neutral on the question of religion or supernatural powers. They must leave their religious and supernatural and superstitious beliefs at home. That is secularism. Secularism is the servant of fact not faith.

The state should be neutral as regards religion or supernatural beliefs. Accordingly, religious rulers should not impose anti-abortion law because their religion says abortion is wrong. It may impose it for other reasons. They have to approach the governing of the people as if there is no God and as if there is no supernatural. Religion teaches ideas such that as if God commands something, we must obey even if we don't understand why he commands it. It is hard enough to know what we should do without religion complicating things. And if the state should obey religion and make laws to please it then which religion?

Minorities and democracy

Some say the Church should run the state if enough people want it that way. They say that is democracy. But what about minorities who do not wish to be dominated by any religion? What the majority wants has to come first but only if there is no way to look after the wishes of minorities as well. People voting the Church into political power to govern a nation is not democracy. It rides roughshod over minorities.

Even if the majority want a religion to dictate to the state and control it, this is not democracy. It is trampling over the rights of religious minorities. Be true democrats and sever faith and the state. There is no need for religion to run the state even if people want it to.

What about minorities?

The state must not be influenced by religious teaching. It is okay for the state to accept influence from Churches that speak in terms of commonsense and not religion. For example, say the Church forbids infanticide. The state can learn from the human reasons the Church gives. However, it must not be influenced by or pay attention to notions such as that God has spoken out against infanticide or that a Bible forbids it. Listen to the human arguments not the specifically religious.

For an example of secularism think about the following. The secularist will forbid hurting babies because they choose to make babies happy. They will not forbid it because God says its wrong. They will not forbid it because some guru says such activity will prevent your salvation or because some holy book forbids it. The secularist is to be a warm person and must work for the wellbeing of society. The secularist cares for people for human and not religious reasons. These are the only

right reasons. She refuses or he refuses to let religion intrude and take away that humanity. In so far as you obey for God or a Bible in so far you fail to be warm and human even if you carry a smile. To choose to make a baby happy because God says you must make that choice is not as good as simply just making the choice! Then you are putting God's will above the child in your intentions.

Secularism is when we govern on naturalistic grounds. We reason what we should do regardless of what religion says. We decide things on the earthly level and consider no other level. For example, we can't start making laws to please God. Which God can we please? Allah and Jehovah have different values! Both of them even expect us to believe that certain evils are good.

Secularism considers what laws would be the best for people and decides it on a religiously neutral basis. It is neutrality so it has to act as if no religion is or can be known to be true. So it treats religion as irrelevant.

Secularism decides ethical issues on their merits and engages in philosophical debate and in doubt and questioning to arrive at a decision. The idea that there is dogma we must believe even if we don't understand it or if the evidence for it is poor is rejected as dangerous.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees religious freedom as long as it is subject to laws that protect the rights and freedoms and public interests of the people in a democratic society. This statement puts limits on how much freedom a religion has got.

We secularists are opposed to religion getting any special treatment from the state. Let there be no state Church. The state must not promote any religion but focus on the things that are really necessary to be a law abiding citizen. There is enough in the world to cause division without a religion dictating to or influencing the state with its prejudices.

Being realistic

Everybody has a different set of values. When you join a religion, you commit yourself to the values as propounded by and interpreted by that religion. But nevertheless, through mistakes and through lack of information, at least some of your values will vary from it. Secularism recognises that everybody has different values so the law cannot please everyone.

Does secularism force people to keep their faith private?

It is said that secularism wants to confine religion to the house of worship and the home. This is not true. The secularist simply wants the state to do its job and let religion do its job without one trying to control the other. The state will intervene if a religion breaks the law, eg commands the genital mutilation of a female child.

This implies that the state comes first. It gives religion the freedom it has. It will not let religion abuse that freedom in a serious matter.

What rights come first?

We live in a world where we have to decide what rights to take and what ones to forget about. We can't have everything we are entitled to. Life is not fair.

We cannot avoid taking away some state or civil liberties. For example, we may force men to fight in war. So it follows then that we should keep our beliefs on the human level and forget about concern for God and angels and spirits and magic. There is enough to worry about.

Liberals may put equality before liberty. For example, some liberals argue that the main purpose of family policy isn't the promotion of child welfare, but the promotion of human equality. For example, they will say the child has the right to divorce her parents even if it rips the family apart. This is putting the equality of the child with her parents before the right of the child to happiness.