

Religion

I was once in a room where we everyone was asked whether or not they supported a burkha ban. Most people in said room objected to this. Everyone was then asked whether there should be a burkha ban in passport photos. Most people did not object to this. Many people have a similar position on religion – they accept it and often embrace it, but believe that certain restrictions should be placed upon its role in public life.

Do people have a choice in their religion?

YES (conditions necessary for this to happen)	NO
Democracy	The state may be a religious one
Secular upbringing	The religion itself may try to stop you from leaving "You leave religion" => "you go to hell"
Lack of external pressure	External pressures from community/family exist

Universal truth

Religions generally claim a monopoly on truth – i.e. that they are the correct religion and other religions are wrong.

Pascal's wager

$\Pr(\text{God exists}) = \text{small}$

- BUT the punishment for not believing in God (hell) is really painful so it makes sense to pray as praying does not take much effort

- BUT this may not work as believing only to escape hell invalidates the belief

The harm principle

Governments can ban things if they cause lots of harm to many people.

Based on this a ban on some elements of religion can be justified.

Is religion good?

GOOD	BAD
Religion provides moral principles and a strong incentive to follow them	Religions oppresses minority groups and women (e.g. LGBT people).
Religion builds a community – it often provides trust in business transactions	Religion stops scientific progress (e.g. Galileo, contraception)
Religion is often important to people's culture	Religion is used to justify conflicts
Religion can provide a sense of national unity	
Religion provides people with a sense of purpose	

Why is religion more likely to teach moral principles than other people or methods?

- Religion offers better rewards and worse punishments than other methods.
- Religion has mass followership which attracts more people
- Religion offers a broader sense of purpose which doesn't exist otherwise – storytelling offers a powerful narrative for why people should do good.

Why is religion less likely to teach moral principles than other people or methods?

- Treatment of women
- Treatment of slaves
- Religion can be used to enforce the pre-existing power structure onto people.

Religion in business

Religion brings people into groups where they can trust each other. Religion sometimes acts as a binding force between parties when they make a business transaction.

Religion as a central authority

When the government is weak religion can often act as a central authority, for instance after the Haiti earthquake, everyone paid money into the Church who then distributed the wealth as the Government was unable to fulfil its duties.

Liberation theology

A series of South American Churches said that dictatorship was unbiblical. Religion provides incentives where the immediate consequences are perceived not to matter as much as the longer term ones. The logic applied here is such **I oppose the dictator => I die => I go to heaven .**

Of course, sometimes the inverse can happen. The Catholic Church signed a series of treaties with dictators such as Hitler, Mussolini and Franco.

Proselytising

Religious organisations generally try to recruit more people to their religion. Often they do this by providing aid to those in need, but only to those of the same

religion as them which encourages people to convert to their religion so as to receive aid.

Last update: January 1, 2020