

What is secularism?

Activity: Religious beliefs and political beliefs

In asking whether any one religion or worldview should hold a privileged position in society, the humanist philosopher Stephen Law asks us to consider how we would feel if we replaced the word 'religion' with the words 'political position'.

How would you feel about the following?

- 1) The state is to be under the control of one particular political party.
- 2) The state is to fund schools run by political parties and those schools are allowed to discriminate in the teachers they employ and the students they admit based on their political beliefs or the beliefs of their parents.
- 3) Employers are denied the right to prevent their employees from wearing political symbols.
- 4) People are no longer allowed to say things that offend people holding particular political beliefs.

Law says most people would be uncomfortable with this and so anyone who argues against secularism needs to be able to provide a good reason why such discrimination is OK on the grounds of religion or belief but not on political positions.

One might argue that religious beliefs are passionately held or form a core part of a person's identity. But the same is true of many people's political beliefs. People are sometimes prepared to die for their political beliefs.