SECULARISM VS. THEOCRACY

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DEMONCRACY (SECULAR) BACKGROUND & HISTORY

• Democracy was introduced in 507 B.C. by Athenian leader Cleisthenes. Ancient Greece was the first civilization to participate in a Democratic government.

• The type of democracy Americans are familiar with is a secular representative democracy run by three branches of government: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. All three branches have duties and powers of their own and can reject or choose to accept any laws or regulations submitted to them by the other branches by using the United States Constitution as its means of making rational decisions.
DEMOCRACY (SECULAR) BACKGROUND 
AND HISTORY CONT.

• Democracy - A type of government where citizens participate directly or indirectly through their choice of elected officials that represent them to develop and establish the laws that will be used by their society.

• Seven ideas for a virtuous democratic government: Harmony, the rule of law, freedom, natural equality, citizen wisdom, reasoning without knowledge and general education. – Paul Woodruff

• Secularism – A type of government that is run by non-religious officials and policies set for the purpose to prevent religious influence in that government.

FOUNDING FATHERS

• Founding Fathers– Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison and George Washington all considered themselves deists. John Adams was a Christian but was not affiliated with Orthodox religions. Alexander Hamilton did not practice religion.

• Deism – Belief in a God based off of evidence of reason and nature while rejecting supernatural revelations.

• The Founding Fathers of the United States all agreed upon that the United States should remain a secular nation and separate religious institutions from government. Some quotes from them will prove this statement.

• Separation of Church and State – According to the First Amendment, Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.
FOUNDING FATHER QUOTES

• Thomas Jefferson said in his letter to the Danbury Baptist association stated:
  “I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church & State."

• George Washington believed in the separation of Church and State and religious freedom. In this quote from his letters to the members of the New Church in Baltimore in January 1793 he explains why.
  “We have abundant reason to rejoice that in this Land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and superstition... In this enlightened Age and in this Land of equal liberty it is our boast, that a man’s religious tenets will not forfeit the protection of the Laws, nor deprive him of the right of attaining and holding the highest Offices that are known in the United States.”

JFK’S QUOTE

• On September 12, 1960, then presidential candidate and future 35th president of the United States John F. Kennedy gave a speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association on the issue of his religion and religion in government. Here is an excerpt of what he said.

  “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.”
ARGUMENTS FOR

1) Secular governments will not impose a religion on the will of the people or the government, but will not prohibit any citizen from exercising their religion of choice.

2) Religious people and non-religious people have the same rights to share ideas, knowledge and gospel to anybody who is willing to listen.

3) Therefore, in a secular government, everybody has a chance to share an opinion and use the freedom to express themselves equally without being imposed on, thus giving citizens equal opportunity to practice religion freely in secular nations.

ARGUMENTS FOR

1) In theocratic governments, the freedom to express one’s opinion is suppressed and seen as opposing the will of the deity.

2) Limiting the freedom to express alternative views limits the ability of the people to participate in government to voice their concerns and hampers the potential growth a theocracy can have.

3) Therefore, ideas expressed by citizens who oppose what their theocratic government does are suppressed by the will of the deity and the clergy, limiting their ability to participate in changing their government for the better.
THEOCRACY BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

• Theocracy – A deity (or god) of a particular religion is chosen to be the official influence for governance and policy of that nation.

• Theocratic governments are run by divinely guided government officials or clergy and can combine with any form of government i.e. monarchy, oligarchy, etc., as long as the government is institutionalized by a religion.

• Theocratic governments also use their religious text as a basis for their justice system, while the police enforce the law and the punishments are sentenced by the courts based off of the religious texts.

• Examples of ancient civilizations that were run under theocracies include the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Cretans and the Roman Empire.

• A great portion of the Dark Ages were run by Christian bishops and the Church or kings (monarchy) in the absence of a government.

THEOCRACY BACKGROUND AND HISTORY CONT.

• Theocratic governments of today are popular among majority Islam countries, but not all countries with Islam as the majority religion are theocratic.

• Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan are run by Sharia Law.

• Sharia Law - Government influenced and established by Islam (or the Koran)

• Examples of countries that are Muslim dominant that are declared secular: Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Chad, Somalia and Senegal.
ARGUMENTS AGAINST

1) In secular democracies, there are multiple parties in government that make decisions together but don’t always agree since all parties have opposing views and beliefs, making it more difficult to agree upon decisions.

2) Theocratic governments, whether they work under a monarchy, oligarchy or any other form of government, are run by a one party, one religion system, making it easier to make decisions without any interference from opposing views.

3) Therefore, theocratic governments can make important government decisions with little effort and no opposition than a secular democracy that has many opposing ideas.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

1) In secular democracies, if a political party controls a majority of the government, they control the decisions made in everyday decision making.

2) Political parties and leaders don’t always represent the common citizen, but can represent their party’s agenda, their own or the agenda’s of another source.

3) Therefore, having a political party control the majority of the government can create a form of tyranny by not representing the will of the people, but their party’s agenda or their own.
PLOT TWIST

• In Plato's *Republic*, Plato mentioned an alternative to democracy and how a government should be set up.
• Plato believed that philosopher kings should decide on everyday government operations and decisions guided by philosophical ideas. The government he believed in is what we would know as a secular monarchy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that a religious institution running the government is a good idea, if so under what circumstances?
2. Is democracy working as intended?
3. When citizens are divided on an issue, as they often will be, whose views should prevail, and in what circumstances?
4. Were the founding fathers correct in making a secular government?
5. Do you think any other government would work better for any society than the two we discussed, for example, Plato's “philosopher kings”?
SOURCES


SOURCES CONT.