

A Cost/Benefit Analysis of Religion's Effects in Society

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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Abstract

This classroom activity is a multi-stage guided discussion about religion. It introduces sociological ways of considering religion, using students' existing collective knowledge about different religions and their effects on society. By allowing them to express their own views on the social influence of religion and intentionally beginning with an overly simplistic binary for them to struggle against, the activity creates investment and willingness to listen before suggesting a sociological perspective that accounts for all of their varying contributions and deconstructs facile discourses. The three stages walk students through a discussion of religion that moves beyond a simplistic binary of good or bad, leading students to a view of religion as a social construction, a set of institutions, a resource mobilized by social actors, and an instantiation of power. It introduces sociological ways of considering religion in 45-75 minutes, works well in small or larger classes, and as such is particularly effective as an early activity in a particular course's consideration of religion.

Details

Subject Areas: Religion
Resource Types: Class Activity
Class Levels: Any Level
Class Sizes: Any

Usage Notes

I conduct this activity early in a particular course's consideration of religion, and refer back to it as a reminder of how to critically consider religion's structural effects, or how to take a sociological perspective on religion. It requires a chalk/whiteboard, takes between 45-75 minutes, and works well in small or larger classes. It can be expanded by including video of examples of agents drawing on religious power, or linked to readings that give specifics about the social construction of religions or their uses throughout history. It provides guidance in moving away from a faith-based or simplistic good/bad perspective of religion, and as such is useful for a wide range of courses that discuss religion (Introductory Sociology, Introduction to Religion, Social Inequality, Sociology of Religion, Intersectionality).

Learning Goals and Assessments

LEARNING GOALS

To introduce students to thinking about religion from a sociological perspective instead of a faith-based one, viewing religion as a social construction, a set of institutions, a resource mobilized by social actors, and an instantiation of power.

to assist students in considering the structural effects of religion and provide practice in thinking about religion structurally instead of individualistically.

to walk students through a discussion of religion that moves beyond a simplistic binary of good or bad, instead considering religion in more critical, sociological ways.

ASSESSMENTS

As this is an in-class activity, student learning is assessed primarily through visible student understanding and vocal response during the activity.

The activity can be expanded to include a written follow-up assignment that ask students to reflect on the

activity, give examples of how religion gets constructed and used, and/or give examples of how power dynamics are implicit in religion's functions.

Assessment could also be included in later quizzes, exams, etc.

Resource Files

PDF