

Green lights and privilege

## **Driving provides a good example of privilege—and our ignorance of it.**

By [James F. McGrath](#)

April 26, 2017

Everyone gets frustrated sometimes when they are in a hurry and they encounter a red light.

But some people get frustrated every time they encounter a red light. (You know who you are.)

I realized recently (yes, while stopped at a red light) that this is a perfect illustration of privilege (or [advantage](#), if you prefer the term).

If the light were always green for you, it would have to mean that the light was red more frequently for other people. And so wanting the light to always be green for you, and treating the occasional red light not as good news for those heading in a different direction, but as though it were an infringement on your right to travel wherever and whenever you please as quickly as possible, means you want to be privileged, and others to be correspondingly disadvantaged in order to facilitate your own desires and interests, your own well-being and convenience.

That's what ignorance about privilege is like—treating every minor setback as though it were unfairness, as though the universe were organized for your benefit, or as though everyone could always get everything they want.

Sometimes when you don't get what you want, it is because others are getting what they want.

Sometimes when you need to slow down, it is so that others can move quickly.

If you are frustrated with this aspect of life in community, that suggests that you have experienced privilege that you may not be aware of.

*Originally posted at [Religion Prof](#)*