

Understanding atheism

“What is called atheism is not a light, flippant assertion, but a calm, thoughtful conclusion. It is a conviction that human experience and human reflection have generated. Atheism is not the irresponsible opinion of moral debauchery; it is the outcome of an intelligent consideration of nature and life. Atheists have been honest with themselves and with the world. We have made a careful survey of the universe, as far as we are able; we have canvassed the facts of life that have come within the range of our observation, and we have candidly declared the result of our study and freely related the reasons for our conclusions.

Atheism is the universe as science finds it and as interpreted by human understanding. It is an attempt to state the simple truth, to give a fair likeness of things, to photograph facts. Atheism is denial of nothing true, of nothing good, of nothing that can be proved. Our opinions don't make us bad citizens or bad people. We can be as moral as our neighbors, and as ready to help a fellow being.”

Adapted from L.K. Washburn "Is the Bible Worth Reading and Other Essays", 1911

“Religious apologists complain bitterly that atheists and secularists are aggressive and hostile in their criticism of their beliefs. I always say: Look, when you guys were in charge, you didn't argue with us, you just burnt us at the stake. Now what we're doing is, we're presenting you with some arguments and some challenging questions, and you complain.”

– A.C. Grayling

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Humanists, Atheists, and Agnostics of Manitoba



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“Reality is the things we all agree upon that don't go away when we stop believing in them.”

– Matt Dillahunty

Terminology

Atheist

Atheism is not a religion; it is simply the absence of belief in any god(s). An atheist therefore is simply a person who does not believe that there is evidence for the existence of any gods.

Atheists tend to be skeptical of all supernatural claims, citing a lack of empirical evidence.

Knowing that a person is an atheist does not allow one to make any other assumptions about that person's beliefs or character; there are good and bad atheists just as there are good and bad people in all religions and cultures.

Although many atheists have adopted secular philosophies such as humanism, there is no one ideology or set of behaviours to which all atheists adhere.

Agnostic

An agnostic believes that the truth of certain claims—especially claims about the existence or non-existence of any god, but also other claims as well—is unknown or unknowable.

Secularist

Secularism is the separation of church and state. It provides a framework for a democratic society, protecting both believers and non-believers alike. A secularist can be of any faith or no faith.

Deist

A deist believes in an omniscient god who created the universe but who now has no personal interaction with the actual world.

Theist

A theist is a person who believes in one or more gods or deities. Theism does not denote any particular religious view, but all religions with any number of gods are by definition theistic religions. Conversely, religions without a necessary god (such as Buddhism or Taoism) are atheistic religions.

Types of disbelief

Some atheists may assert that there is no god. However, most atheists don't claim to know for certain, but instead simply lack belief in a god.

It is possible to be an *agnostic atheist* (one who does not believe any deity exists, but does not deny it as a possibility); or an *agnostic theist* (one who believes a deity exists but does not claim it as personal knowledge).

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