

ATHEISTS, AGNOSTICS, AND HUMANISTS

Theist = somebody who believes in a god

Atheist = somebody who does not believe in a god

Agnostic = somebody who says that we cannot know whether a god exists or not

Some people describe themselves as atheist *and* agnostic. They accept we cannot **know** for certain whether a god exists or not, but they live their lives without **believing** in one.

WHY MIGHT SOMEBODY NOT BELIEVE IN A GOD?

The simplest reason why somebody might not believe in a god is that he or she does not see any **reason** or **evidence** to believe. They don't think we need to believe in a god to explain the world around us, and they don't believe there needs to be a god for human beings to lead good and happy lives.

Believing in a god or gods helped some people in the past to explain the natural world and our experiences. However, today, **science** has answered many of our questions about how the world works. A belief in a god can also be a source of meaning and comfort for many people. However, many atheists believe that we can find meaning and comfort without religious beliefs.

There is a great deal of pain and **suffering** in the world. This makes many atheists find it difficult to believe in an all-powerful and good god. Why would a good god let suffering exist if he or she could stop it? Religious people have attempted to answer this question, but many atheists believe that the simplest answer is to conclude that there is no god.

'Even though there's no scientific evidence at all for God's existence, it's also impossible to prove that God doesn't exist (or that anything doesn't).'



ARIANE SHERINE, writer and Patron of Humanists UK

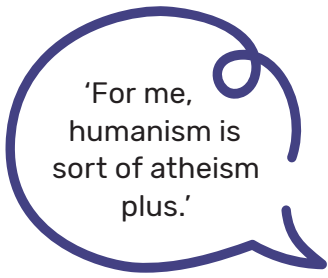
There is no way to **prove** that a god doesn't exist, but many atheists don't think that that is a good reason to believe in one. There are many things we choose not to believe in even though we can't prove for certain that they don't exist.

Atheists don't believe that a god created human beings. They believe human beings created gods – they believe that gods are a **human invention**.

“The Ethiopians say that the gods have flat noses and are black, while the Thracians say that the gods have blue eyes and red hair... And if cattle or horses or lions had hands or could draw or sculpt like men can, then the horses would draw their gods like horses, cattle draw their gods like cattle, and both would depict the bodies of the gods in their own likeness.”

XENOPHANES,
(570 – 475 BC)





'For me, humanism is sort of atheism plus.'



NAOMI PHILLIPS, humanist

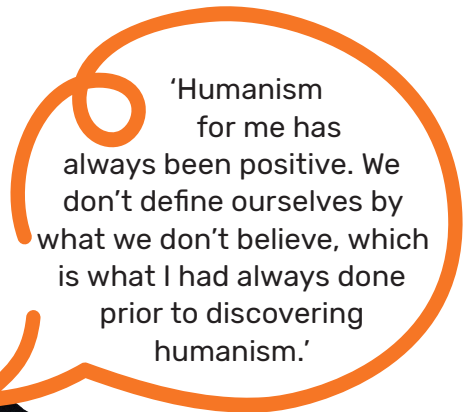
HUMANISTS

If all you know is that someone is an atheist or an agnostic, that does not tell you a great deal about what else that person believes or how they live their life.

Many (but not all) atheists and agnostics will have a humanist approach to life. Humanists are non-religious people who may use the word 'atheist' or 'agnostic' (or both) to describe themselves. However, being a humanist means more than this. Humanists believe we can understand the world through science. They believe we should treat each other with kindness and respect. They believe it is possible to lead good, happy, and meaningful lives without the need to believe in a god.



Although humanists don't believe in a god, they recognise that many people do. Humanists support **freedom of belief**. That means they believe people should be allowed to believe what they want. It's OK to disagree. We should not let our disagreements get in the way of friendship.



'Humanism for me has always been positive. We don't define ourselves by what we don't believe, which is what I had always done prior to discovering humanism.'




STE RICHARDSSON, humanist

How many atheists and agnostics are there?
A survey in 2018 revealed that nearly half the people in Britain are atheists or agnostics¹.

Some people who identify as religious (e.g. Jewish or Christian) are atheists and agnostics. They might feel a sense of belonging to a religion for family or cultural reasons, they may follow religious practices and celebrate religious festivals, but they do not believe in a god.

“ I am an atheist, and this confuses some people... For me, Jewishness, and I would say for an awful lot of Jews, is nothing to do with believing in God... For me, Jew is an identity. It's an ethnic and cultural identity, which I feel very strongly. ”

DAVID BADDIEL,
patron of Humanists UK



¹ British Social Attitudes Survey, NatCen (2018): www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39293/1_bsa36_religion.pdf



QUESTIONS:

- Why might somebody not believe in a god?
- What is a humanist?
- Is it possible to be religious and atheist?
- Do you think it matters whether you believe in a god or not? Is how you live your life more important?