

The I am an atheist Mini FAQ

I am an atheist. That means I do not believe in any gods, goddesses, or divine beings of any kind.

I began this pamphlet mostly as a joke: something to hand back to proselytizers who occasionally come to my door. But, after more thought, I began to think it was a good idea: a simple way to help people understand what I believe, and why.

In this pamphlet, it is important to note that I speak only for me: others may have different motivations and thoughts. It is equally important to note that no one else speaks for me, so what you've read or heard about (or from) other atheists may or may not apply to me.

Why don't you believe in gods?

The answer is very simple: I have seen no reason to think any religious belief is true.

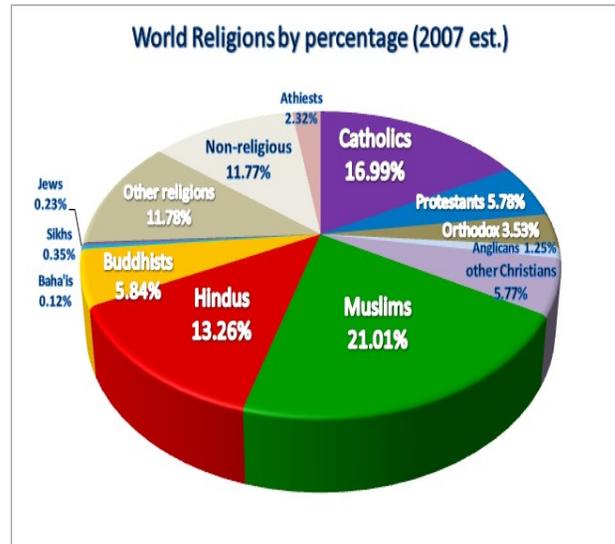
What would you accept as evidence?

I'm not sure, exactly. Many people have put forth many things as "evidence" of their beliefs, but none of them has struck me as valid, and often people from opposing religions use the exact same arguments, so obviously at least some of them must be wrong. So, I do not know what I'd accept as evidence. So, I must turn the question back to you: What evidence would you need to start believing in one of the other 10,000 gods you do not believe in?

But so many other people believe in God! Are they all wrong?

Probably. As everyone should know, just because many people believe something, doesn't mean it's true. However, it's even more complicated than that.

In the world, no religion holds a majority of believers. If you combine all Christian denominations together, it turns out that less than 34% of the world is Christian. Around 21% is some flavor of Muslim. Hindus, Buddhists, and many others make up the rest.



(Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:World_religions_pie_chart.png)

So, no matter who is right (if anyone), *at least* 66% of people on earth will be wrong, and mostly likely many more. Just consider for a moment that it might be you.

Do you think you have all the answers?

No, I'm just pretty sure that no one else does either.

Aren't you just an agnostic?

Yes and no: I am not "just" an agnostic. I am both. I am an agnostic because I don't know for certain there are no gods, and probably can't. But I'm also an atheist, because I do not think they exist. The two positions are not incompatible.

If there is no God, then how did the universe start? How did life originate?

Short answer: I don't know. Long answer: There are many theories, but I still don't know. Luckily, I don't have to. If I find that "Theory A" (i.e. God did it) has no evidence and is lacking in plausibility, I don't have to have an iron-clad "Theory B" to replace it.

But the Bible/Koran/Vedas/Book of Mormon/etc is proof!

I'll be honest and say I have not read most "holy books" from cover to cover. But I have read a large portions of them, and nothing so far has given me the impression that they contain proofs or evidence of divine beings. To me, they are interesting semi-historical passages, which may be important for their impact on history, culture, and literature, but they don't seem to contain any special knowledge.

You believe your holy book provides evidence, but so do the believers of every other religion. And there are hundreds of holy books (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_text). They all contain tales of creation, miracles, morality, sacrifice, and redemption (and war, murder, genocide, and various other atrocities), all mixed together with a little history and a lot of good stories. I see no reason to elevate one of them above the others.

What about my favorite argument for proof of my god's existence?

Many believers in many religions have come up with wordy arguments, which are often presented as "proofs". None, so far, has struck me as a valid reason to believe. There is not space here to deal with them all. Please use your favorite search engine to find more about why your favorite arguments are not valid. (For a short list, see: <http://quaap.com/D/arguments>)

Isn't "Atheism" a religion? I've heard it takes great faith to be an atheist.

As the old saying goes: if "atheism" is a religion then "bald" is a hair color. Atheism is not a set of beliefs about morality or the supernatural. It is has no dogma. It is not even a philosophy. It is merely a conclusion some people draw. People draw this conclusion for many reasons. Personally, I drew it based upon lack of positive evidence. To find out why someone else is an atheist, simply ask him or her (politely).

There is no "faith" required to be an atheist any more than it takes "faith" for you to not believe in Allah, Kali, reincarnation, spirits, Chi, UFOs, ghosts, or Zeus. You can't "prove" those don't exist, but saying "I don't think they do" takes no "faith".

Why make such a big deal of it? If there are no gods, you shouldn't care, right?

Atheism is merely a label for those who do not believe in gods. It shouldn't be an important label, but in our religion-saturated culture, everyone is assumed to be religious by default. Not coincidentally, almost all politicians are religious and sometimes try to make laws with their particular religion in mind. And people's religious beliefs often have effects in the real world. Me

saying "I am an atheist" is a simple way to differentiate myself and help others understand that their beliefs are not universal.

Don't atheists start believing in God during personal tragedies, such as the loss of a loved one, cancer, or war?

Doubtless some do: people do many things when under extreme stress. However, it is a myth that most atheists "recant" on their deathbeds or become believers when facing tragedy. "There are no atheists in foxholes" is also false, and quite insulting to those who were there.

How can you be 100% certain there are no gods?

I can't be 100% certain, and I don't claim to be. I simply have seen no reason to think they exist.

What if God is real? Aren't you afraid of hell?

I could ask the same of you: what if your religion is false and another's is true? Are you afraid of offending Kali? Or being reincarnated as a flea? What if you don't get into Valhalla? I'm not worried about those either, because I have no reason to think they're true.

If there is no God, what is our purpose here?

I don't know that there is a "higher" purpose. To me, it appears that we are here, and everyone just figures out what is most important to them. We seem to make our own purpose.

What do atheists believe about morality?

There is no atheist position on morality. Atheism is simply a description of someone who doesn't believe in gods. It is not a religion or philosophy, just a label for someone who would not answer "yes" to the question "Do you believe in any gods?" So, there is no common moral philosophy

which binds all atheists, any more than there is a common moral philosophy which binds people with brown eyes.

Where does morality come from?

I think my morality came from my upbringing and my natural human instincts, as well as years of reading and thinking about such things. Personally, I do my best to not cause harm to others, and help those who need it when I can. Not really much different than you, most likely.

If you don't believe in gods, what do you believe in?

I believe in many things: life, living, love, fun, helping, food, friends, laughter, creating, learning, my wife and my child.

Further reading

I hope this document has, in some small way, helped you understand what (and how) some of us think. This FAQ can obviously not cover everything, and doesn't try to. There is much more information online, but remember: no one else speaks for me.

My website:

<http://quaap.com>

All my articles relating to religion and atheism:

<http://quaap.com/D/religion-index>

A much larger not-too-bad intro FAQ:

<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/mathew/intro.html>