

Definition Of Atheism: Not A Belief

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Atheism is not a belief, and a proper definition of atheism has to start with the reality of what it is.

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Contrary to what many people think and many dictionaries suggest, atheism is not a belief. It is simply the lack of belief in "God " or gods. Before starting this article, I checked several dictionaries. In the first one, the definition of atheism given was, "The doctrine or belief that there is no God." What nonsense!

{bot_wrgoogle}Fortunately, not all dictionaries define atheism in the same way, but many do make this mistake of equating a lack of belief with a belief in the opposite. Other definitions I found included, "Disbelief in or denial of the existence of God or gods," and even "Godlessness; immorality." At least that last one is half right.

Finally, I did find an online dictionary which has the following definition of atheism: "A lack of belief in the existence of God or gods." Amen!

How To Define Atheism

Definitions are tricky. There is no official arbiter of the English language, and if there were, he or she or they could make mistakes in any case. How do we decide what definition is best, then? We look at the reality which the word represents, and use a definition that best describes that reality. The fact that we disagree on the outcome doesn't invalidate the process or suggest that we need to put total faith in some "authority" to choose for us.

In this case, we look at what atheism actually is. It is clear that atheism isn't a belief, but a lack of belief. The believer is the one who claims a god exists. Atheism simply points to the reality that some people's belief systems don't include a belief in a god.

Some atheists (a small minority) may think they can "prove" the non-existence of gods. This, however, has nothing to do with atheism, anymore than a belief in Vishnu by some god-believers shows that theism is a belief in Vishnu. Atheism is simply the stance that "you have not proved your case, therefore I don't believe in your god."

The burden of proof is properly on the person making a claim. The typical atheist makes no claim about God, except that he doesn't believe. He has no obligation to prove non-existence. If I claim Mickey Mouse is the "supreme spirit" that rules our universe, would you feel obligated to start gathering evidence to prove me wrong? And how could you anyhow? The nature of these claims is that they are made in ways that make them not subject to any standards of evidence or proof.

Bottom line? Atheism is not a belief, and a proper definition of atheism is simply not believing in gods.

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