

# Apatheism

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**Apatheism** (a portmanteau of apathy and theism/atheism), also known as pragmatic atheism or (critically) as practical atheism, is acting with apathy, disregard, or lack of interest towards belief, or lack of belief in a deity. Apatheism describes the *manner* of acting towards a belief or lack of a belief in a deity; so applies to both theism and atheism. An apatheist is also someone who is not interested in accepting or denying any claims that gods exist or do not exist. In other words, an apatheist is someone who considers the question of the existence of gods as neither meaningful nor relevant to his or her life.

Apathetic agnosticism (also called pragmatic agnosticism) is the view that thousands of years of debate have neither proven, nor dis-proven, the existence of one or more deities (gods). This view concludes that even if one or more deities exist, they do not appear to be concerned about the fate of humans. Therefore, their existence has little impact on personal human affairs and should be of little theological interest.<sup>[1]</sup>

## History

Historically, practical atheism was considered by some people to be associated with moral failure, willful ignorance, and impiety. Those considered practical atheists were said to behave as though God, ethics, and social responsibility did

not exist; they abandoned duty and embraced [hedonism](#). According to the French Catholic philosopher [Étienne Borne](#), "Practical atheism is not the denial of the existence of God, but complete godlessness of action; it is a moral evil, implying not the denial of the absolute validity of the moral law but simply rebellion against that law."<sup>[2]</sup>

In recent history (2000s onward), pragmatic atheism has been seen in a more positive light. The journalist [Jonathan Rauch](#) believes that "apatheism is to be celebrated as nothing less than a major civilizational advance. Religion, as countless acts of violence in the name of God have underscored, remains the most divisive and volatile of social forces... Apatheism, therefore, should not be assumed to represent a lazy recumbency... Just the opposite: it is the product of a determined cultural effort to discipline the religious mindset, and often of an equally determined personal effort to master the spiritual passions. It is not a lapse. It is an achievement."<sup>[3]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Types of apatheism

### [\[edit\]](#) Absence of religious motivation

This apatheistic argument states that morals are present in human society and do not rely on religion to be a part of the human experience. The existence or nonexistence of a god has no effect on the actions of humans and may actually cause more human suffering than benefit. Apatheists recognize that religion may provide a "comfort" for many people around the world, but apatheists do not need religion

to be content with the morality of their lives and therefore live without it, thus "moral apatheism".

The active exclusion argument states that religion has been the root cause of wars and cultural disputes for thousands of years, and therefore "religion" is still a very relevant issue within societies. However, since the existence of a god or gods can never be proven or disproven, society, culture, and science can and should progress without religion playing a role in intellectual pursuits and practical action. Including religion in dialogues and actions can result in suboptimal outcomes due to the inherent fractionalization between cultures that religions cause. <sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Indifference is better known as [Indifferentism](#), defined as "the belief that there is no evidence that one religion or philosophy is superior to another."<sup>[4]</sup> Use of indifferentism in this context was popularized by [Kant](#) in his [Critique of Pure Reason](#).<sup>[5]</sup>

Kant argues that indifferentism represents an extreme form of skepticism that argues that there is no rational ground for accepting any philosophical position.<sup>[6]</sup> According to the Catholic Church, this type of absolute indifferentism results in a willingness to concede any position.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> It is often associated with [moral relativism](#).

The Catholic church ascribes indifferentism to all [atheistic](#), [materialistic](#), [pantheistic](#), and [agnostic](#) philosophies, as well as pluralist religious philosophy, such as that espoused by [Rousseau](#).<sup>[7]</sup>

Many religions first became popular because of "miracles" or "acts of God".<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup> In the Bible, Jesus and his Apostles were seemingly granted powers from God in order to convince followers of his existence. They healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, fed multitudes with a few loaves of bread, walked on water and rose from the dead. The "not in my power" argument states that without these "acts of God", it is doubtful that anyone would have believed in Christianity. It has not been proven these feats really occurred. Therefore, if God wanted people to believe in him, he could show off his existence and explain to humans what he wants us to do. Being all powerful, if he truly wanted humans to believe, he could send a divine sign. Since he does not seem to care if humans believe or not, apatheists will not care until he shows them a reason to.

## [\[edit\]](#) Quotes

The eighteenth century [French](#) philosopher [Denis Diderot](#), when accused of being an atheist, replied that he simply did not care whether God existed or not. In response to [Voltaire](#), he wrote:<sup>[8]</sup>

“ It is very important not to mistake [hemlock](#) for [parsley](#); but not at all so to believe or not in God. ”

[Jonathan Rauch](#) described apatheism as "a disinclination to care all that much about one's own religion and even a stronger disinclination to care about other people's".<sup>[9]</sup>

## **[[edit](#)] See also**

- [Agnosticism](#)
- [Cosmicism](#) (see "cosmic indifference")
- [Ignosticism](#)
- [Indifferentism](#)
- [God in Buddhism](#)
- [Nontheism](#)

## **[[edit](#)] References**

1. [^ Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance: Apatheism: "Does God exist? I don't know & I don't really care"](#)
2. [^ Borne, Étienne \(1961\). \*Atheism\*. New York: Hawthorn Books. ISBN 0-415-04727-7.](#)
3. [^ Rauch, Jonathan, \*Let It Be: Three Cheers for Apatheism\*, \*The Atlantic Monthly\*, May 2003](#)
4. [^ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indifferentism>](#)
5. [^ Rees, D.A. \(1954\) "Kant, Bayle and Indifferentism," \*The Philosophical Review\*, 63\(4\)](#)
6. [^ Rees, D.A. \(1954\) "Kant, Bayle and Indifferentism," \*The Philosophical Review\*, 63\(4\)](#)
7. [^ Fox, J. \(1910\) "Religious Indifferentism," The Catholic Encyclopedia.](#)
8. [^ Herrick, Jim \(1985\). \*Against the Faith\*. London: Glover & Blair. pp. 75. ISBN 0-906681-09-X.](#)
9. [^ Rauch, Jonathan, \*Let It Be: Three Cheers for Apatheism\*, \*The Atlantic Monthly\*, May 2003](#)

