



**WIKIPEDIA**  
The Free Encyclopedia

- [Main page](#)
- [Contents](#)
- [Featured content](#)
- [Current events](#)
- [Random article](#)
- [Donate to Wikipedia](#)

- Interaction
  - [Help](#)
  - [About Wikipedia](#)
  - [Community portal](#)
  - [Recent changes](#)
  - [Contact Wikipedia](#)

Toolbox

Print/export

- Languages
  - [Dansk](#)
  - [Deutsch](#)
  - [Español](#)
  - [Esperanto](#)
  - [Bahasa Indonesia](#)
  - [Italiano](#)
  - [Norsk \(bokmål\)](#)
  - [Polski](#)
  - [Português](#)
  - [Русский](#)
  - [Slovenčina](#)
  - [Srpskohrvatski / Српскохрватски](#)
  - [Suomi](#)
  - [Svenska](#)

Article [Discussion](#)

Read [Edit](#)

Search

# Ignosticism

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Ignosticism**, or **igtheism**, is the [theological](#) position that every other theological position (including [agnosticism](#)) assumes too much about the [concept of God](#) and many other theological concepts. The word "ignosticism" was coined by [Sherwin Wine](#), a [rabbi](#) and a founding figure in [Humanistic Judaism](#).

It can be defined as encompassing two related views about the [existence of God](#):

1. The view that a coherent definition of [God](#) must be presented before the question of the existence of god can be meaningfully discussed. Furthermore, if that definition is [unfalsifiable](#), the ignostic takes the [theological noncognitivist](#) position that the *question* of the existence of God (per that definition) is meaningless. In this case, the *concept* of God is not considered meaningless; the *term* "God" is considered meaningless.
2. The second view is synonymous with [theological noncognitivism](#), and skips the step of first asking "What is meant by 'God'?" before proclaiming the original question "Does God exist?" as meaningless.

Some philosophers have seen ignosticism as a variation of [agnosticism](#) or [atheism](#),<sup>[1]</sup> while others have considered it to be distinct. An ignostic maintains that they cannot even say whether he/she is a theist or an atheist until a sufficient definition of theism is put forth.

Contents <span>[hide]</span>
<a href="#">1 Relationship to other views about God</a>
<a href="#">2 Dependence on a particular view concerning the word God</a>
<a href="#">3 See also</a>
<a href="#">4 Notes</a>
<a href="#">5 References</a>

## Relationship to other views about God [edit]

Ignosticism and [theological noncognitivism](#) are generally synonymous,<sup>[2]</sup> but the relationship of ignosticism to other nontheistic views is less clear. While [Paul Kurtz](#) finds the view to be compatible with both [weak atheism](#) and [agnosticism](#),<sup>[3]</sup> other philosophers consider ignosticism to be distinct.

In a chapter of his 1936 book *Language, Truth, and Logic*, [A. J. Ayer](#) argued that one could not speak of God's existence, or even the probability of God's existence, since the concept itself was unverifiable and thus nonsensical.<sup>[4]</sup> Ayer wrote that this ruled out atheism and agnosticism as well as theism because all three positions assume that the sentence "God exists" is meaningful.<sup>[5]</sup> Given the meaninglessness of theistic claims, Ayer opined that there was "no logical ground for antagonism between religion and natural science",<sup>[6]</sup> as theism alone does not entail any propositions which the scientific method can falsify.

Like Ayer, [Theodore Drange](#) sees atheism and agnosticism as positions that accept "God exists" as a meaningful proposition: atheists judge it to be "false or probably false" while agnostics consider it to be inconclusive until further evidence is met.<sup>[7]</sup> If Drange's definitions are accepted, ignostics are neither atheists nor agnostics. A simplified maxim on the subject states "An atheist would say, 'I don't believe God exists'; an agnostic would say, 'I don't know whether or not God exists'; and an ignostic would say, 'I don't know what you mean when you say, "God exists" '."

Although a self-proclaimed atheist, [Sam Harris](#) has expressed frustration with being labeled an atheist and often employs igtheistic arguments criticizing the ambiguous and inconsistent definitions of "God". Harris finds the label and concept of atheism as extraneous as needing to label oneself a non-racist or a non-believer in [Zeus](#).<sup>[8]</sup> In this sense, Harris finds debating about the existence of God to be both absurd and ascientific yet still an inconvenient necessity when speaking in defense for reason and science.

Ignosticism is not to be confused with [apatheism](#), a position of apathy toward the existence of God. An apatheist may see the statement "God exists" as meaningless, yet they may also see it as meaningful, and perhaps even true.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Dependence on a particular view concerning the word *God* [edit]

Drange emphasizes that any stance on "Does God exist?" is made with respect to a particular concept of what one claims to consider "God" to represent:

Since the word "God" has many different meanings, it is possible for the sentence "God exists" to express many different propositions. What we need to do is to focus on each proposition separately. ... For each different sense of the term "God," there will be theists, atheists, and agnostics *relative to that concept of God*.<sup>[7]</sup>

As *god* means very different things to different people, when the word is spoken, an ignostic may seek to determine if something

Part of a series on

### Irreligion

**Irreligion**

[Secular Humanism](#) · [Post-theism](#) · [Freethought](#) · [Secularism](#) · [Secularity](#) · [Criticism of religion](#) · [Anti-clericalism](#) · [Antireligion](#) · [Parody religion](#)

---

**Atheism**

[Demographics](#) · [History](#) · [State](#) · [Militant](#) · [New](#) · [Implicit and explicit](#) · [Negative and positive](#) · [Criticism](#) · [Discrimination](#) · [Existence of God](#) · [Antitheism](#) · [Atheism and religion](#)

---

**Agnosticism**

[Strong](#) · [Weak](#) · [Agnostic atheism](#) · [Agnostic theism](#) · [Apatheism](#) · **Ignosticism**

---

**Naturalism**

[Metaphysical](#) · [Religious](#) · [Humanistic](#)

---

**People**

[Atheists](#) · [Agnostics](#) · [Humanists](#)

---

**Books**

[The God Delusion](#) · [God Is Not Great](#) · [The End of Faith](#) · [Why I Am Not a Christian](#) · [Letter to a Christian Nation](#)

---

**Organizations**

[Atheist Alliance International](#) · [Freedom From Religion Foundation](#)

---

**Atheism portal**

[WikiProject Atheism](#)

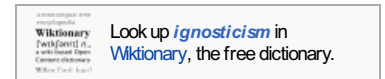
v · t · e

like a child's definition of a god is meant or if a **theologian's** is intended instead. A theistic child's concept generally has a simple and coherent meaning, based on an **anthropomorphic** conception of god.<sup>[10]</sup> Many philosophers and theologians have rejected this conception of god while affirming belief in another conception of god, including **St. Augustine**, **Maimonides**, **St. Thomas Aquinas**, **Baruch Spinoza**, and **Søren Kierkegaard**.

## See also

[[edit](#)]

- [Epistemology](#)
- [Scientific method](#)
- [Verificationist](#)
- [Theological noncognitivism](#)



## Notes

[[edit](#)]

- <sup>^</sup> ["The Argument From Non-Cognitivism"](#) [↗](#). Retrieved 2008-02-11.
- <sup>^</sup> Conifer, *Theological Noncognitivism*: "Theological noncognitivism is usually taken to be the view that the sentence 'God exists' is cognitively meaningless."
- <sup>^</sup> Kurtz, *New Skepticism*, 220: "Both [atheism and agnosticism] are consistent with igtheism, which finds the belief in a metaphysical, transcendent being basically incoherent and unintelligible."
- <sup>^</sup> Ayer, *Language*, 115: "There can be no way of proving that the existence of a god ... is even probable. ... For if the existence of such a god were probable, then the proposition that he existed would be an empirical hypothesis. And in that case it would be possible to deduce from it, and other empirical hypotheses, certain experimental propositions which were not deducible from those other hypotheses alone. But in fact this is not possible."
- <sup>^</sup> Ayer, *Language*, 115–16
- <sup>^</sup> Ayer, *Language*, 117
- <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Drange, *Atheism*
- <sup>^</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KG5s\\_-Khvg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KG5s_-Khvg) [↗](#)
- <sup>^</sup> Rauch, *Let It Be*: "... many apatheists are believers. ... Even regular churchgoers can, and often do, rank quite high on the apatheism scale."
- <sup>^</sup> Hanisch, *Drawings*

## References

[[edit](#)]

- [Armstrong, Karen](#) (1993). *A History of God*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. ISBN 0-679-42600-0.
- [Ayer, A. J.](#) (1952) [1936]. "Critique of Ethics and Theology". *Language, Truth and Logic*. New York: Dover Publications. LCCN 52-860 [↗](#). ISBN 0486200108.
- Conifer, Steven J. (June 2002). "Theological Noncognitivism Examined" [↗](#). *The Interlocutor* **4**. Retrieved 2007-05-24
- Cousens, Myrna Bonnie, ed., "God" [↗](#), *Guide to Humanistic Judaism*, Society for Humanistic Judaism
- Drange, Theodore (1998). "Atheism, Agnosticism, Noncognitivism" [↗](#). *Internet Infidels*. Retrieved 2007-03-26.
- Hanisch, Helmut (2002-10-21). "Children's and Young People's Drawings of God" [↗](#). Retrieved 2007-04-26.
- Kurtz, Paul (1992). *The New Skepticism: Inquiry and Reliable Knowledge*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books. ISBN 0-87975-766-3.
- Rauch, Jonathan (2003). "Let It Be" [↗](#). *The Atlantic* **291** (4). Retrieved 2007-05-24
- Spiegel, Irving (1965-06-20). "Jewish 'Ignostic' Stirs Convention; Dropping of 'God' in Service Deplored and Condoned". *New York Times*. p. 62.

<span>v</span> <span>H</span> <span>c</span> <span>H</span> <span>e</span>	<b>Irreligion</b>	[ <a href="#">show</a> ]
<span>v</span> <span>H</span> <span>c</span> <span>H</span> <span>e</span>	<b>Theological thought</b>	[ <a href="#">show</a> ]

Categories: [Agnosticism](#) | [Neologisms](#) | [Opposition to religion](#) | [Words coined in the 20th century](#)

This page was last modified on 3 January 2011 at 11:09.

Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. See [Terms of Use](#) for details. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.

[Contact us](#)

[Privacy policy](#) [About Wikipedia](#) [Disclaimers](#)

