



ARE AGNOSTICS ATHEISTS?

A Question of Moral Atheism

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better to believe in God and hedge your bets than disbelieve in God and perhaps be punished). Pure agnostics who do not find this argument compelling may be acting as if there is no God while attempting to maintain some element of neutrality on the subject, and in many cases these supposedly pure agnostics are indistinguishable from agnostic atheists.

Moral atheism is not agnostic in that it does not hold that compelling proof for the existence of deities, however unlikely, is impossible. For example, a personal religious revelation might be compelling proof to the individual who received it (although it would not be compelling at all to anyone else). If nothing else, the moral atheist is not willing to rule out the possibility that some proof for a creator's existence that we currently cannot conceive of might be discovered in the future.

Agnostics and moral atheists would agree that it is in principle impossible to prove that no possible deities exist. There is no way to absolutely prove a negative statement of this sort without absolute knowledge of the universe.

SO FAR AS deities are concerned, agnostics believe that the existence of deities cannot be proven or disproven. That's it. Despite what some people think, just knowing that someone is an agnostic does not tell you whether or not they are also an atheist.

One may be an agnostic theist (believing in a deity though proof is impossible), an agnostic atheist (not believing in deities although — or because — proof is impossible), or simply an agnostic (neither believing nor disbelieving in deities because it's impossible to discover the truth). Any of these people might be correctly referred to as agnostic.

Some people like to call themselves agnostic because, although they are atheists, they feel that "atheist" is either socially loaded or misrepresents their position (because they incorrectly assume all atheist think there definitely are not deities, which conflicts with agnosticism).

A pure agnostic — someone who neither believes nor disbelieves in deities — might be tempted to take Pascal's wager (the argument that when in doubt it's

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QUESTIONS OF MORAL ATHEISM: INSTRUCTIONS

We appreciate your interest in helping us spread information about moral atheism! To make copies of this pamphlet for your own use or to share with friends, follow these simple steps:

1. Print pages one and two of this document, one on each side of the same piece of paper (if you don't have access to a duplex printer, print page one, put the page back in the paper tray upside down, and print page two — depending on the type of printer, you may have to experiment a bit).
2. Cut the printout in two, using the thin rules across the middle of the page as a guide.
3. Fold the two pieces of paper in half, making a pair of small pamphlets.
4. Keep one of the pamphlets to read, and give the other away to an interested friend or stranger.

That's it! If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we invite you to share them by leaving a comment on blog.iamanatheist.org. Thanks!
