

Is Agnosticism the default?

A default belief or position is what makes sense to start off with unless you get evidence to the contrary. Agnosticism seems like a good default position and looks more open-minded than belief in God or in atheism.

It may seem unfair to risk offending a good God by assuming he does not exist or either way we do not know if he exists. But the risk of hurting somebody is not a reason to say they exist.

A dogmatic believer in God, agnosticism (as in saying definitely nobody knows if there is a God) or religion is one who thinks there is no possibility of being wrong. There is a difference between me saying I am right full stop or a belief is. Is the difference relevant? No. Either way I am still announcing my infallibility. It just sounds less deranged if I say my belief is infallible. Saying it is me who is infallible is too much of a boast.

Believers in God say that you would need to know all things before you can know if there is no God. What about those who claim they cannot know but they believe beyond reasonable doubt that there is no God? Why do they not say you need to know all things before you can know there is no reasonable doubt? What about those who say you cannot be sure there is a God or not? Why do they not say they have seen all the evidences for and against? The trouble for believers is that if you need to know all before you can deny or doubt God then you need to know all things in order to believe too! So if those who think it cannot be known that there is a God are arrogant, the believers are worse. Even the atheists are not as bad as the believers for they play safer. Better to be good without God than to be good just to please a God who does not exist or may not exist.

Agnostics say they do not believe or disbelieve that there is a God. They say the evidence they have so far is indecisive. They are accused of being fence sitters but true agnostics keep a careful eye on what the evidence says about the God question.

There are no believers in God at all. There are just people who say they believe. Believers are really agnostics. There is no way of showing that free will exists or probably exists. If there is a loving God, religion says it is us who mess things up not him. But if there is no free will, that argument is meaningless. When you cannot present okay evidence for free will that amounts to being unable to present okay evidence for God.

Whatever the default is, then it is not belief in God. Is it agnosticism?

Flew mentions Anthony Kenny's claim that agnosticism not atheism is the default position. Now if somebody tells you they have had a vision of an alien saviour who wishes to save the world, the default position is that you do not accept it for you have no reason to. Being agnostic about it means that you will remain open to persuasion by argument and evidence. But the problem is we are not open to such ridiculous claims. If you are agnostic all the time about things you will end up having everything down as 50/50, tooth-fairies and leprechauns and lying visionaries! There will be no rationality! That is not agnosticism for agnosticism requires an openness to new light and you need rationality for that! Agnosticism taken too far ceases to be agnosticism.

Believers say that God is not in the same category as the vision. But he is. It is people who think they have experienced God in their hearts who have come up with belief in God. That is even more unconvincing than a vision!

Kenny is wrong. The default position then is not agnosticism.

Kenny would add that "atheism is a less modest position than theism, as it rules out more possibilities" than theism does - see page 51, Agnosticism, A Very Short Introduction.

So theism would have more right to be assumed true than atheism because there are many possible understandings of God. For Kenny, debunking and refuting the Christian version of God does not mean there could be a God of a different kind. Kenny thus argues that atheism is not the default.

Kenny fails to recognise that anything other than an all-good and all-perfect God of love upon whom all things depend for everything and who makes all things from nothing is not really a God. It's simple. Atheism is compatible with belief in supernatural beings. It is not true that it drops too many possibilities.

Kenny is wrong that the need for an assumption about whether or not God exists justifies the assumption or presumption of

theism and not atheism.

Agnosticism - the stopping point?

Suppose Agnosticism is the default. If you are at this default of Agnosticism then are you obligated to go any further? If you are not obligated to find God and believe in him then he is not God. He is not all-good for he is optional. If food is for keeping you alive then it is not optional - you have to get it and eat it. A being that is imperfect or optional cannot be God for he is not in full control and his weaknesses and defects show that there are powers better than him and stronger. If you are obligated then atheism and agnosticism cannot be the default positions. But they plainly can be. Plus we know that unbelief in God is the default. If we deny that we will be teaching rubbish as morality and be really damaged people.

If you have to be bad to believe in God then that shows that God would not leave evidence that he exists at all. If he has to do that and if it is bad to believe in him then he may be an intelligence but he is not a good being and therefore not God. Thus agnosticism would be your stopping point. Its the default and the only choice.

Agnosticism would suggest that we do not worry about God's rules.

Practical atheism or practical agnosticism (same thing) makes God unimportant to our lives and morals even if he commands us to worship and obey him.

This stance sees no correlation between belief in God and living a good life.

The inquirer must look at the universe and look to see if God exists. The believer has made up her mind already. Believers will say that atheists come to the debate with their minds made up already too. And they will say that agnostics have made up their mind that there is no evidence for or against God before they come to the debate. The believer/atheist cannot argue objectively if this is the case. If it is true that believers and atheists are only assuming then clearly the default position is agnosticism. If believers and unbelievers are as bad as each other the only solution is to meet the problem half way: assume neither side knows. The agnostic is not as bad as them because she has to assume something and has made the right choice. And God by definition cannot be important enough to justify assuming he exists. We have to judge what is good regardless of God so even if there is a God he cannot expect to be OUR God. In other words, he cannot expect us to obey him and acknowledge him as authority.

Agnosticism argues that we must try to avoid assuming there is a God or that there is no God so that we might be unbiased. Assuming would be biased yes. If you have to assume then agnosticism is the best assumption and reduces bias as much as possible though not completely. So if we cannot avoid assuming then agnosticism is the default. But we hold that assuming is unnecessary. Evidence helps us work out the belief that there is no God. That is to say, evidence from science and philosophy shows that there is probably no God. The default would be that there is to be disbelief in God until the evidence shows we should believe.

The label

Some say you must not make the term agnostic a religious or philosophical identifier. It cannot really be a religious identifier - agnosticism unlike religion advocates freedom instead of going into an organisation with regulations. Agnostics often say it is impossible to tell if you should believe in God or not. But some ask "What about knowledge? Agnostics should be about knowledge not belief. It is possible to see that something cannot be known but belief is another matter because it is not certain and somebody could have evidence that something is likely to be true that you don't have. Belief is too fluid for anybody to say you should not believe. Having said that there are some things that are definitely unbelievable but everything else has enough credibility to invite somebody's belief. Agnosticism should say we don't know if there is a God and leave it at that." But what use is that when you can say and do say that about anything? You do not know if the custard on your table really is custard. Agnostic is useless as a term and a concept if it is about knowledge. The other thing is that some agnostics may have the correct evidence and interpret it correctly that the God subject should be left alone for there is no way to tell one way or the other what is likely to be true.

Methodological agnosticism?

Should agnosticism be a default as in how we approach religious claims? Many say that agnostic as in method not belief is the way to go. They say that if there is a belief then it is not about the belief. This would be methodological agnosticism. As it is only a method, it follows you can be a polytheist, a believer in God or anything. You just live as an agnostic and ignore your belief. If you think correct belief matters and you must get the best supported beliefs that approach will not do.

If there really is no way to test what is behind magical claims and divine revelations then methodological agnosticism has to be atheism pretending to be neutral. When you talk about open-mindedness you mean you are going to keep testing and

will change your mind according to the best information available. To just assume there is a supernatural when you cannot test for what it is or when it happens or what it does is not open-mindedness.

FINALLY

If it's immoral or stupid to be agnostic then you have to decide between atheism or theism or deism.