



Topic: What difference does it make to be an atheist or agnostic in Britain today?

**I need to know:**

- To be able to identify some different types of non-religiousness including atheist and agnostic.
- To describe/ explain some changes in the demographics of religion in the UK and the impact on religious belief.
- To explore why and how some non-religious people want to gather together to celebrate as a community such as the Sunday ssembly.
- To be able to describe a Humanist funeral service and explain its significance.
- To be able to weigh up a range of views about life after death.
- To be able to explain why Humanists and other atheists are often rationalists and reject belief in any god. Explore how religious believers such as Christians may respond.

**Non-religious worldviews** – approaches to life that have nothing to do with a particular religion. They might call followers to lives of unselfishness and love. These belief systems might include Humanism, rational atheism and agnosticism.

**The Sunday Assembly**

This is an example of a non-religious gathering which began in 2013. The meetings will consist of songs such as pop music, talks and readings.

**The views of the British Public**

**The Census** – This is a survey that takes place in the UK every ten years. It gathers information on every household in the UK. One of the areas it gathers information on, is religious and non-religious beliefs. The most recent was in 2021. However, we are currently unable to access the results and so will refer to the 2011 census.

**The British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey** - These surveys are carried out every year since 1983. The surveys are in the following areas: Religion; science; women and work; relationship and gender identity; poverty and gender identity; poverty and inequality and the EU debate. So far over 90,000 people have taken part and usually 3000 people take part every year!

**Think Tanks – The 2012 Theos Report** - **Theos** is the UK's leading religion and society **think tank**. They conduct research, publish reports, provide commentary for the media, and hold events on the relationship between religion, particularly Christianity, and society in the contemporary world. In 2012 a report was issued called ***Post-Religious Britain? The Faith of the faithless***. The aim was to find out more about the beliefs of atheists, the 'non-religious' and those who never participate in religious services.

**Interesting views on God**

**Professor Brian Cox** – Although he has no religious beliefs and has rejected the label atheist, he said he *'can't be sure there is no God'* and that science *'doesn't have all the answers'*.

**Richard Dawkins** - Some atheists like Richard Dawkins argue that the idea of God makes no sense.

**Ricky Gervais** - *'The existence of God is not subjective. He either exists or he doesn't. It's not a matter of opinion. You can have your own opinions. But you can't have your own facts.'*

**Abert Einstein** – *'Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.'*

**Key Words and Definitions**



- **Agnostic:** A person who is unsure about the existence of God. Nothing is known or can be known about the existence of God.
- **Atheist:** a person who does not believe in the existence of God or gods. It comes from a Greek term, the 'a' meaning 'without' and 'theos' meaning 'God'... without God!
- **Post-religious:** a time or society when most people are no longer religious.
- **Rationalism:** the belief that we should base opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response.
- **SBNR:** Spiritual but not religious
- **Secular:** non-religious.

Other reasons for being an atheist or agnostic could include:

- Some believe science and religion are incompatible.
- Too much pain and suffering in the world.
- There is no proof of the existence of God. Neither is there disproof!
- Religion is just a way of bringing people hope.

How might religious believers respond?

On the other hand...

- Many religious believers think that science and religion are compatible. They just answer different questions. For example, science asks how and religion asks why.
- God is not responsible for pain but humans are.
- Proof could be seen in personal experiences of God such as miracles.

**Arrow Tasks** You could enhance your learning by visiting one of the suggested websites below. Further compare differences between religious and non-religious events such as weddings and funerals. Evaluation question challenges: 'Science proves that religion is wrong.' Discuss. 'Britain is no longer a Christian country'. Discuss.

Links to further resources: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zjgvt39/articles/zv3tjhw> <https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/films/how-do-we-know-what-is-true/> . Explore further philosophical arguments for and against the existence of God <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zpxpr82/revision/5> .