
Agnosticism: The upsurge of rational thinking

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Abstract

Agnosticism is the position that the existence of God or the supernatural is unknown, inherently unknowable, or beyond human comprehension.

“An agnostic person is the one who believes that nothing can be known about the existence of God or anything else beyond the material, and may therefore prefer to make an affirmation rather than an oath.”¹

The term agnosticism is coined by Thomas Huxley, a British biologist. It is originated from Greek “a” meaning without and “gnosis” meaning knowledge, which later interpreted as truth of God is unknowable to us.²

“Agnosticism, in fact, is not a creed, but a method, the essence of which lies in the rigorous application of a single principle. That principle is of great antiquity; it is as old as Socrates; as old as the writer who said, 'Try all things, hold fast by that which is good'; it is the foundation of the Reformation, which simply illustrated the axiom that every man should be able to give a reason for the faith that is in him, it is the great principle of Descartes; it is the fundamental axiom of modern science. Positively the principle may be expressed: In matters of the intellect, follow your reason as far as it will take you, without regard to any other consideration. The results of the working out of the agnostic principle will vary according to individual knowledge and capacity, and according to the general condition of science. That which is unproved today may be proved, by the help of new discoveries, tomorrow. The only negative fixed points will be those negations which flow from the demonstrable limitation of our faculties. And the only obligation accepted is to have the mind always open to conviction.

Huxley says, “Agnosticism is of the essence of science, whether ancient or modern. It simply means that a man shall not say he knows or believes that which he has no scientific grounds for professing to know or believe. Consequently, Agnosticism puts aside not only the greater part of popular theology, but also the greater part of anti-theology.”³

Keywords: *Agnosticism, Belief system, Theism*

Understanding different beliefs

Agnosticism is not some belief that people blindly follow, it is rather a way of life, how one thinks and the way one wants to lead a life, it is not being promoted as objective reality, it is purely subjective in nature and in some point or the other, every person is agnostic in nature, who is God?, where is god?, why I cannot see this entity, if it exists? how does it function? Questions like these have sometime or the other has always emerged in our minds, like a passing thought, some people tend to ignore them, some people act towards it and some try to find answers to the questions that are constantly twitching their mind.

Theology is a complex subject, it tells us about the supreme power, that is the guiding force for the functioning of the world, it tries to answer nature of religious belief, experience and practice.

There are three major belief systems which are mainly, Theism, Atheism and Agnosticism.

Theism is the view that all things in the world finite or infinite in some way or the other is depended on some supreme power or ultimate reality, that there is some creator who is omniscient and omnipotent which we call God. This God has many forms that eventually turned to various religions and faiths, such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, etc. there are some types of theism as well which are; monotheism, polytheism, deism, pantheism and panentheism. All these types cater to different religions and religious practices we might also consider demography and sociopolitical factors for the inclination.

Monotheism i.e. mono, one; single. belief on one and only one supreme power. there is no power beyond that one. Christianity, Islam and Judaism these purely follow monotheism.

Polytheism i.e. poly; more than two or multiple gods with different powers in them. Hinduism is the major example of this belief.

Deism believes in a creator God, who has put power into the nature and does not have humanlike form and does not show miraculous behaviour or is prayed to.

Pantheism says all is God and all is God, everything that is there in the world is contained within the god itself.

Panentheism also sees God within universe as well as separate and beyond it.

Atheism is total disbelief or rejection of any supreme entity or power, due to lack of evidence and ability to prove something otherwise. People with scientific approach tend to lean towards such belief.

Agnostics remain open to both possibilities equally and without any specific preference or bias, they choose to stay on the middle ground and seem to think around may or may not be, the unsurety is rather comes with its own grace. Uncertainty holds its own beauty it gives space for exploration ad discovery.

Is agnosticism really practical?

Agnostic mindset says that even if there is any supreme being, we are unaware of it. We will neither accept nor reject the notion it is like standing at the crossroads, not knowing which way has answers. Such group of people deserve an identity; they are devoid of both extremes that are theism and atheism. They are acknowledged as agnostic.

For new generation, reasoning is priority, they love to ask all kinds of questions such as what, where, when and how. If kept unanswered they might get an identity crisis which is becoming very common in today's day and age. Lack of stable belief system is upcoming as one of the major factors for it. Stability or knowing that there's also a term which can define or make place for their thought is more than enough for their self-satisfaction, because a person from today's generation does not want to be a mere sheep that follows the herd, everyone has different path and different mindset which is very important for their development and evolution so that they find and make their own identity and live their life on their terms and lead a gratifying life that is free from any societal rules, family bias and pressure. Choosing one particular belief system comes under a major life decision, that might shape their entire mindset to see the world. Hence, it becomes very important for the youth to be aware of the system they relate to, because they do not want to follow what their family beliefs are, every person is different and cannot be put in the same mould, sometimes disagreement is a life saver which might give structure to one's being through deliberate action. Exploring options, questioning the system and committing towards one particular belief is not easy for them. Belief is something very personal and subjective as discussed earlier and it must be properly thought of and researched. What we are seeking is also in search of us and that which belongs to us will find its way, as we are finding ours.

Generational trends

In 2024, 12% of young people surveyed, identified as agnostic.

Gen z is about twice as likely to identify as agnostic⁴

A new Ipsos Global Advisor survey shows wide variations across countries and generations in the prevalence of religious affiliation and practice, beliefs, the role of religion, and the extent to which it defines personal identity and morality. This survey shows the global countries average of 21% people who do not believe in God and any spirituality.⁵

According to springtide research institute around 50% of young people do not turn to faith due to lack of belief in people and systems of organized religion.

Conclusion

We must acknowledge and consider this emerging variant of belief system, ignorance is not an option because we are trying to build a safe space for everyone in the society where people can voice their opinions without any fear of judgement. Agnosticism might not be relatable for everyone but for sure it has someday or the other has been a passing thought in everyone's head. To inculcate that view we must read, understand and then react toward taking any path, this fresh perspective might change the way we look at our world, it will help in minimizing rigidity, superstitions and many other such things that are becoming a threat to the society. Agnosticism has brought in the wave of asking questions and becoming okay with not finding answers it has embraced uncertainty in a new way.

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