

**Seattle Worldcon 2025
Atheist Genre Fans Meetup
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So what is this document?

If is a very brief, incomplete, over-simplified and very rough attempt to answer a few questions. This document represents the author's views; not those of the Seattle Worldcon.

So why is the Atheist Genre Fans Meetup being held in the Interfaith Lounge?

Because Programming assigned that location.

Does this mean that Atheism is a faith?

No. Atheism is not a faith. (More about this below)

This what is Atheism?

George H. Smith summarized it well in this passage from his book Why Atheism? "Atheism, or the absence of theistic belief, is therefore a perspective, not a philosophy."

It is this "absence of theistic belief" which is the key point. The 'a' from the Greek indicating 'without' in this case 'without theism' just as the 'a' in amoral indicates 'without moral foundation' in common usage.

What about the old usage that Atheism is the denial of the existence of God?

Well this is an old usage and is following out of usage because it has some problems. First is which God or Gods are being referenced: Yahweh, Elohim, Vishnu, Allah, Poseidon, etc. This list is long. And there is the additional problem of exactly what are the attributes of the deity. Great number of people have been murdered because they had the wrong ideas about these attributes. So it is the responsibility of those claiming that something exists to give a clear, coherent, and rational definition. Then the need to provide both the evidence in favor and very importantly the tests on how their claim could be falsified.

What is this 'falsified' stuff? Sounds like philosophy.

Yes. The idea of 'falsifiability' as it relates to science was developed and spread by Sir Karl Popper. A simplified summary of this is that a proposed scientific hypothesis needs to be falsifiable and if it is not then it does not deserve that label. Popper's great insight was that we make progress in science by criticizing and falsifying ideas which allows us to refine our knowledge. Popper's ideas were extended by W. W. Bartley to apply religion; see his book The Retreat To Commitment. (Warning this is a very scholarly book so is not an easy read.)

But what about agnosticism?

Here again it depends on what is meant. There is a difference between someone saying they do not have an opinion on some matter and saying the matter is not knowable. Note that 'a' meaning 'without' as mentioned above and 'gnosticism' with also a Greek origin about 'having knowledge' as seen in 'gnostic religions' which claimed special secret knowledge. So agnostic is used in a variety of ways. Unfortunately the confusion around the term is so great that the term is not very useful unless it has an agreed upon rigorous definition.

But what about faith?

One sometimes encounters the word faith to mean confident; if someone says 'I have faith that it will rain tomorrow' or some similar usage. Another usage of faith is to mean absolute acceptance of an idea without doubt and regardless of lack of evidence or tests that falsify the idea; typically this usage is in relation to religion or politics. The book by Sam Harris titled The End of Faith is a useful resource.