

Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction
Robin Le Poidevin

What is agnosticism? Is it just the 'don't know' position on God, or is there more to it than this? Is it a belief, or merely the absence of belief? Who were the first to call themselves 'agnostics'? These are just some of the questions that Robin Le Poidevin considers in this *Very Short Introduction*. He sets the philosophical case for agnosticism and explores it as an historical and cultural phenomenon. What emerges is a much more sophisticated and much more interesting attitude than a simple failure to either commit to, or reject, religious belief. Le Poidevin challenges some preconceptions and assumptions among both believers and non-atheists, and invites the reader to rethink their own position on the issues.

- Is agnosticism the kind of attitude that requires reasons in its defence?
- What is Huxley's Agnostic Principle? Do you accept it?
- Clifford thought that it was morally wrong to believe anything on insufficient evidence. Is it appropriate to talk of right and wrong here?
- Victorian critics of agnosticism often said that it was just atheism in disguise. Do you agree?
- Should there be a presumption of atheism?
- Should we be agnostics about Russell's celestial teapot?
- Do experiments with the 'God helmet' show that apparently religious experiences are illusory?
- Is theism a scientific hypothesis? Why (or why not)?
- What is the difference between 'theoretical' and 'practical' atheism? Should an agnostic be a practical atheist?
- Is a scientist who is uncertain about their hypothesis a less effective scientist?
- Is a priest who is uncertain about the existence of God a less effective priest?
- Under what circumstances did James think it better to be credulous than sceptical? Do you agree with him?
- Is it appropriate for buses to display slogans like 'There's probably no God'?
- Should schools be obliged to teach the idea that all religious beliefs are uncertain?
- 'Agnosticism should be the state religion.' Can you make sense of this remark? Do you agree with it?

Other books by Robin Le Poidevin

Arguing for Atheism: an introduction to the philosophy of religion (Routledge, 1996)

Travels in Four Dimensions: the enigmas of space and time (OUP, 2003)

The Images of Time: an essay on temporal representation (OUP, 2007)

Further Reading

Julian Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Paul White, *Thomas Huxley: Making the 'Man of Science'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995)

Simon Blackburn, *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

Clement Dore, *Moral Scepticism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991)

Thomas Dixon, *Science and Religion: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)