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 'agnostic'? 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


