

Emma van den Terrell
AMST 355, fall 2014
Assignment 4: Op Ed
Word Count: 728

Agnost-a-what?

What religion are you? Every adult has heard this question in some shape or form. It can be a loaded and difficult one to answer. I don't mind telling you that I'm a perfectly content agnostic. Just try to convince me otherwise. And I've come to recognize this is a little understood and unpopular position outside of the agnostic community. I, like other agnostics, have "neither faith nor disbelief in God." To quote John of Damascus, I believe that God "in his essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and totally unknowable." I live straddling the line between religion and atheism. And as a result, often my agnosticism is critiqued, denounced, and downright rejected in American culture. Why, though?

Isaac Saul recently asked agnostics in his Huffington Post article "You're Not Agnostic, You're an Atheist" that "the question is, if you truly are agnostic and don't feel like you know, shouldn't you do some things to find out?" At first I was offended; I have come to my beliefs as a matter of personal discovery and critical reading. Then I realized just how the premise of agnosticism is simply unpopular and not talked about commonly. Shallowly, agnosticism is not knowing. Saul accuses agnostics of not knowing due to laziness or lack of thought, because he does not probe deeper. Ultimately, he asks the wrong question of agnostics. The point is not "to find out" about the nature of God. The point is that agnostics are OK with not knowing and never trying to find out the. Agnosticism is belief—just not specifically in God or lack of a God.

Agnosticism comes out of believing in the limited nature of human knowledge. I believe that human beings cannot ever know the capital T truth in all matters. I also know it is unpopular to believe that human being's capacity to know is limited, not only in religious circles, but in technological, scientific circles, and philosophical circles. Yes, we learn things every day, and increase our communal knowledge over the years. We have done amazing things as a species. I just don't believe we can ever know the exact Truth for everything, and even if we could—how would we truly know we were right? Saul asks the wrong question of agnostics. The point is not “to find out” about the nature of God. The point is that agnostics are OK with not knowing and never trying to find out.

Because Saul doesn't probe into the core of agnosticism he alludes that "You can be against God or you can be for God, but you cannot be without him." Why ever not? According to a recent Pew Study, 2.4% of all adults in the United States believe you can be without. Are all of their beliefs just plain wrong when religion and atheists beliefs are justifiable, or more coherent? Agnostics account for more than the 1.6% of adult atheists and just a little over half of all non-Christian religious adults (4.7%) in America. The common misconception regarding agnosticism still rings true. People believe if you have faith in anything, then you are not agnostic. But I do have faith. I believe that I cannot never completely know ultimate truths—including truth about God's existence. Claiming agnosticism is not to believe in nothing.

To agnostics, reclaim and acknowledge our middle ground between religion and atheism. With “nones” (people who identify with nothing particular) on the rise, it is possible that there are more agnostics than known before. It is not a popular place to be, but it is an important

place. The God or not debate is too important a debate in America to not have a stake at the table. It plays into so many other debates—creationism vs Darwinism in school, gay marriage, separation of church and state, and the list goes on. Positions have become so entrenched that often religious people and atheists don't even want to have these conversations with each other. Somehow that would be seen as legitimizing the other view. Agnostics provide a population of people for both atheists and religious peoples to persuade or engage in less controversial debate. To non-agnostics, please don't put us in a box by calling us atheists. Try opening up public debate by trying to convince us of why you are right. It might be more difficult than you think.