

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ATHEISTS AND AGNOSTICS: A COMPARISON OF VARIOUS ATTITUDES

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Abstract

Many studies show that there are different types of nonbelief. Some of them define atheism and agnosticism as two different types of nonbelief, while others see agnosticism as a form of atheism. This paper deals with the differences in attitudes of atheists and agnostics on various issues. In order to detect this difference, the dataset of "International Social Survey Programme: Religion IV (ZA7570_v2.1.0)" on religion and values was used. The data were downloaded from [gesis.org](https://www.gesis.org) and analyzed. Survey data were collected by GESIS (n=46267) from 33 countries between 2017 and 2020. The number of atheists and agnostics is 11759 (58.4% atheist). The two groups were compared in terms of demographics, attitudes towards religion, sexual attitudes, political preference, trust in science, and happiness. The results of the analysis show that atheists and agnostics have different attitudes on many issues and that atheists are more true believers than agnostics.

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Keywords: Psychology of Religion, Nonbelief, Atheist, Agnostic, Attitudes, Difference.

ATEİSTLER VE AGNOSTİKLER ARASINDAKİ FARKLAR: ÇEŞİTLİ TUTUMLARIN KARŞILAŞTIRILMASI

Öz

Birçok çalışma inançsızlığın farklı türlerinin olduğunu göstermektedir. Bazı çalışmaları ateizm ve agnostisizmi inançsızlığın iki farklı türü olarak tanımlarken, bazıları agnostisizmi ateizmin bir türü olarak görmektedir. Bu makale ateistlerin ve agnostiklerin çeşitli konulardaki tutum farklılıklarını ele almaktadır. Bu farklılığın tespiti amacıyla "International Social Survey Programme: Religion IV (ZA7570_v2.1.0)"in din ve değerlere ilişkin veri seti kullanılmıştır. Veriler gesis.org'dan indirilmiş ve analiz edilmiştir. Anket verileri GESİS (n=46267) tarafından 2017-2020 yılları arasında 33 ülkeden toplanmıştır. Ateist ve agnostiklerin sayısı 11759'dur (%58,4 ateist). İki grup demografik özellikler, dine yönelik tutumlar, cinsel tutumlar, siyasi tercih, bilime güven ve mutluluk düzeyi açısından karşılaştırılmıştır. Analiz sonuçları, ateistlerin ve agnostiklerin birçok konuda farklı tutumlara sahip olduğunu ve ateistlerin agnostiklere göre daha kesin inançlı olduklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, İnançsızlık, Ateist, Agnostik, Tutumlar, Fark.

Introduction

It is estimated that approximately 16% of the world's population is religiously unaffiliated today (Pew, 2017). This corresponds to a population of over one billion. Those without religious affiliation are not all nonbelievers but have some religious or spiritual beliefs. Therefore, there are different types of nonbelief (see Sevinç, 2017a; Silver, 2013; Oser et al., 1994; Hadaway, 1989; Keysar, 2014), meaning not having a religious or spiritual belief in the sense of vertical transcendence (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006). Nonbelievers are not a monolithic group and appear in many different forms, from their attitudes about the existence/absence of God to differences in their level of nonbelief and demographic characteristics. The studies on the types of nonbelief reveal different approaches.

Some of them classify nonbelief into types based on distancing from institutional religion and have an anti-religious attitude. For example, Baker and Smith (2009) classify nonbelievers as atheists, agnostics, and unchurched in terms of their level of opposition to religion. Atheists are anti-religious and reactionary, but agnostics are not anti-religious, and unchurched people have simply renounced their church affiliation. On the other hand

some researchers, by emphasizing the distinction between behaving and believing, discuss nonbelief in different dimensions. Keysar (2014) distinguishes between belonging, believing, and behaving, taking into account the three dimensions of religiosity. While some people believe in God but live as if there is no God, others participate in religious rituals even though they do not believe in God. On the type of nonbelief, some scholars create a typology on the basis of the degree of intellectual level on which nonbelief is based. For example, Hashemi (2016) divides atheism into pilgrim and tourist atheism. Pilgrim atheism is an atheism based on the claims of the social or natural sciences. Oser et al. (1994) similarly distinguish “worked-through, philosophical, continuing atheism” from other forms of atheism. Norenzayan and Gervais (2013), also, associate nonbelief with cognitive processes and divide them into the following types: (1) mind-blind atheism, (2) apatheism, (3) incredulous atheism, (4) analytical atheism. Gurney et al. (2013), on the other hand, divide nonbelief into the following categories: atheists, agnostics, unchurched, and non-religious.

Considering these views, there are intellectual and non-intellectual atheists; atheists who are against religion and who are not; those who participate in religious rituals, and those who do not; who define themselves as atheists or agnostics. Silver (2013), who conducted research on the types of nonbelief, divided nonbelief into the following types: (1) Intellectual Atheist/Agnostic, (2) Activist Atheist/Agnostic, (3) Seeker Agnostic, (4) Anti-theist, (5) Non-theist, (6) Ritual Atheist/Agnostic. Silver has taken into account many differences regarding the nonbelievers. However, what stands out in this typology is the use of atheism as a synonym for nonbelief and the definition of agnostics as a type of atheist. Studies show that the vast majority of nonbelievers (about 80%) label themselves as atheists (Sevinç, 2017b). In addition, one of the most used labels is *agnostic*. At this point, the following question comes to mind: Is agnosticism a type of atheism or a separate type of nonbelief?

Atheism means not being a theist in the narrow sense. In a broader sense, it argues that the reality in the universe consists of matter and physical forces and that there is no supernatural reality (Martin, 2007; Rowe, 1979). The most distinctive feature of atheism is the *absence of belief in God* (Bullivant, 2013). However, agnosticism is the name of an epistemological attitude indicating that the existence or non-existence of God cannot be known. Therefore, the basic difference between agnosticism and atheism is the claim that the non-existence of God cannot be known. Following this claim agnostics live “as if God does not exist” what makes agnosticism a type of nonbelief. At this point, agnosticism seems to be intertwined with atheism. Flint (1903) states that agnosticism is a theory about knowledge, not about religion, and claims that it can be defined as a kind of atheism. A theist can be agnostic as well as an atheist. According to this classification, agnosticism seems to be a type of atheism called “agnostic atheism”. Although agnostic atheists do not believe in God, they claim that it cannot be known (Shook, 2010). Similarly,

Page and Navarick (2017), count agnosticism among the types of atheism: gnostic atheism, agnostic atheism, ambivalent atheism, and others.

The limited number of studies on this subject in the psychology of religion reveal that agnostics differ from atheists in terms of various characteristics. Those who define themselves as agnostics, that is, those who say “I don’t know if there is a God, and I don’t believe there is a way to know it,” exhibit distinctly different characteristics from those who define themselves as atheists, that is, those who say “I don’t believe there is a God.” For example, Keysar and Navarro-Rivera (2013) argue that atheists and agnostics differ in terms of almost all demographic variables, e.g., agnostics have a higher average age than atheists. In the research conducted by Bainbridge (2005), it was determined that agnostics establish warmer relationships with their close circles compared to atheists. Zinnbauer et al. (1997) found in their study that there is a higher rate of agnostics among those who define themselves as “spiritual but not religious”. Baker and Smith (2009) conducted a study to determine where nonreligious people stand between religiosity and spirituality. Accordingly, 93% of those who define themselves as atheists and 49% of agnostics define themselves as “I am not religious at all”. The rate of those who marked “I am not a spiritualist at all” consists of 78% of atheists and 58% of agnostics. Among the agnostics, the rate of those who feel belonging to any religion is higher than the atheists. In the study conducted by Sevinç (2017b), the nonreligious levels of atheists were found to be higher than that of agnostics. In addition, a higher proportion of spirituals was found among agnostics. Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) found that agnostics were the most open-minded and flexible group among nonbelievers. The rate of dogmatism in agnostics is lower (Silver, 2013). All these findings show that agnostics differ from atheists in many ways.

When it comes to the types of nonbelief, atheism, and agnosticism, there are two basic views. The first of these is that sees agnosticism as only an epistemological choice and defines it as a version of atheism; the second defines agnosticism as a different type of nonbelief from atheism. The main purpose of this article is to show that agnostics differ from atheists in many of their attitudes and therefore agnosticism should be defined as a separate type of nonbelief. In addition, describing the differences in the attitudes of these two groups is among the aims of the research.

1. Method

The purpose of the present study is to compare atheists and agnostics with each other and to describe their attitudes and perceptions using the dataset collected by GESIS in the “International Social Survey Programme: Religion IV (ZA7570_v2.1.0).” The data was downloaded from the ISSP website (gesis.org) and analyzed with the permission of GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences.

1.1. Participants

Survey data was collected by GESIS by interviewing 46267 people from 33 countries between 2017 and 2020. Participants were adults aged over 18 years. Countries where data was collected are: Austria, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Chile, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Georgia, Croatia, Hungary, Israel, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Korea (South), Lithuania, Norway, New Zealand, Philippines, Russian Federation, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, Suriname, Thailand, Turkey, Taiwan, United States, South Africa.

In the research, the participants were asked the question “Please indicate which statement below comes closest to expressing what you believe about God”. In the present study who ticked “I don’t believe in God” among the options related to belief in God were accepted as atheists, those who ticked “Don’t know whether there is a God and no way to find out” were accepted as agnostic, and analyzes were carried out by choosing only atheists and agnostics. The number of atheist or agnostic participants in the research is 11759. Among them, the rate of atheists is 58.4% (n=6866).

Table 1: Participant profile.

		N	%
<i>Belief in God</i>	Atheist	6866	58.4
	Agnostic	4893	41.6
<i>Gender</i>	Male	6744	57.4
	Female	5003	42.5
	NA	12	0.1
<i>Education</i>	No formal education	204	1.7
	Primary school	535	4.5
	Lower secondary	2350	20
	Upper secondary	2860	24.3
	Post secondary	1522	12.9
	Lower-level tertiary, first stage	2294	19.5
	Upper-level tertiary (Master, Doctor)	1881	16
	NA	113	1
<i>Marital status</i>	Married	5472	46.5
	Civil partnership	327	2.8
	Separated	170	1.4
	Divorced	1075	9.1
	Widowed	601	5.1
	Never married	3927	33.4
<i>Place of living</i>	NA	187	1.6
	A big city	3218	27.4
	The suburbs or outskirts of a big city	1789	15.2
	A town or a small city	3250	27.6
	A country village	2912	24.8
	A farm or home in the country	5468	4
	Others	5	0.04
<i>Socio-economic level</i>	Lowest 01	198	1.7
	02	225	1.9
	03	713	6.1

04	1177	10
05	2443	20.8
06	2217	18.9
07	2036	17.3
08	1230	10.5
09	294	2.5
Highest 10	163	1.4
NA	1063	9.1
Total	11759	100

Table 1 shows that the majority of the sample was men (57.4%). The average age of the participants was 47.12 (SD=17.5), which means an advanced age participant profile. Regarding the education level, the majority are high school graduates (24.3%). In the research, the participants were also asked about their years of full-time schooling. The mean of this time was found to be 13.44 (SD=4.134). This time roughly corresponds to high school graduation. Most of the participants are married (46.5%) and live in a town or small city (27.6%). A scale of 10 was used to determine the socio-economic level. The majority of the participants have a medium or higher level (5-20.8%, 6-18.9%, 7-17.3%, 8-10.5%).

1.2. Measures

This survey was conducted on religion and values and includes a total of 492 variables. Some of these variables were selected and included in the analysis of the present study. The selected variables are grouped under 6 main headings. The first of these was *beliefs*. Participants rated their religious or spiritual beliefs by answering various questions. These questions are of the Likert type. The second main topic was *family*. Participants stated their parents' level of religiosity and how happy they were with their family relationships. Other main topics were sexuality, view of religion and religious people, view of the education system, and life satisfaction. None of the variables were collected with a standard measurement tool. Instead, Likert-type individual questions or multiple-choice questions were used.

1.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected between 13 October 2017 and 22 April 2020 with the help of contracted companies in each country by face-to-face interviews. Additionally, in some countries, Paper-and-pencil (PAPI) and Computer-assisted (CAPI/CAMI) methods were used. The research design is cross-sectional. The collected data set is made conditionally available on the genesis website. The data has been made anonymous and shared. The data set, which was downloaded with permission, has been rearranged so that only atheists and agnostics remained. Then, the variables to be used in the analyses were left

and other variables were deleted. In the last stage, analyses were carried out by comparing atheists and agnostics.

2. Results

Various studies show that the demographic characteristics of atheists and agnostics differ. In the present study, atheists and agnostics were compared in terms of gender, age, education level, marital status, place of residence, and socio-economic level. When comparing gender, no significant difference was found between atheists and agnostics. Likewise, the mean age was compared (47.1 in atheists and 47.16 in agnostics) and no significant difference was not found. In terms of level of education, years of full-time schooling were found to be 13.43 for atheists and 13.45 for agnostics. No significant difference was found regarding the place of residence.

Table 2: Comparison of marital status of atheists and agnostics.

	Atheist		Agnostic		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Married	3094	45,7	2378	49,5	5472	47,3
Civil partnership	218	3,2	109	2,3	327	2,8
Separated	101	1,5	69	1,4	170	1,5
Divorced	651	9,6	424	8,8	1075	9,3
Widowed	365	5,4	236	4,9	601	5,2
Never married	2338	34,6	1589	33,1	3927	33,9
Total	6767	100	4809	100	11572	100

However, there is differentiation when it comes to marital status (Table 2) and socio-economic level. Among atheists, the rate of married people (45.7%) is lower than that of agnostics (49.5%). Divorce rate and never married rate are higher among atheists ($X^2=22.520$, $df=5$, $p<.001$). Considering the socio-economic level, the mean level of atheists on a scale of 10 was found to be 5.77 ($SD=1.813$), while it was found to be 5.7 ($SD=1.712$) for agnostics. According to independent sample t-test results, the difference between the two groups was significant ($t=2.112$, $df=10694$, $p<.05$).

Did atheists and agnostics have a religious affiliation before? In the survey, participants were asked whether they believed in God before and whether they were raised as religious in childhood.

Table 3: Rates of atheists and agnostics who believed in God before.

		I don't believe in God now and I never have		I don't believe in God now, but I used to		Others	Total
		N	%	N	%		
Atheist	N	5117		1289		201	6607
	%	77,4%		19,5%		3%	100,0%
Agnostic	N	1897		1368		416	3681
	%	51,5%		37,2%		11,3	100,0%
Total	n	7014		2657		617	10288

% 68,2% 25,8% 14,3% 100,0%

The majority (N=7014, 68.2%) stated that they never believed in God (Table 3). When the answers given by atheists and agnostics to this question are compared, the rate of those who said that they have never believed in God in their life was 77.4% among atheists, while 51.5% among agnostics. Accordingly, the rate of those who stated that they believed in God before was higher (37.2%) among agnostics. This proportional difference between the two groups was significant (Chi-Square test, $X^2=837.405$, $df=30$, $p<.001$).

Table 4: Religion respondents raised in.

		No Religion	Religion	Total
Atheist	N	2721	3958	6679
	%	40,7%	59,3	100,0%
Agnostic	N	1241	3477	4718
	%	26,3%	73,7	100,0%
Total	N	3962	7435	11397
	%	34,8%	65,2	100,0%

The majority of the participants (65.2%) stated that they were raised as religious (Table 4). The previous analysis revealed that the majority never believed in God. Although these two findings may seem contradictory, research shows that some participants can state that they have never believed in a certain religion even though they were raised as religious in childhood. A similar picture emerges here. When atheists and agnostics are compared regarding childhood religion, it is seen that the rate of those who were raised as nonreligious is higher among atheists (40.7%) than among agnostics (34.8%) ($X^2=276.604$, $df=10$, $p<.001$). The finding about believing in God once and this finding are parallel to each other.

Table 5: Religious attitudes and behaviors.

	Atheist		Agnostic		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Religious attendance in childhood</i>						
Never	3042	46,2%	1344	28,9%	4386	39%
Several times a year	488	7,4%	708	15,2%	1196	10,6%
<i>Praying (about the present)</i>						
Never	5764	84,6%	3055	63,2%	8819	75,7%
Less than once a year	211	3,1%	459	9,5%	670	5,7%
<i>Taking part in religious activities</i>						
Never	5023	75,8%	3019	63,6%	8042	70,7%
Less than once a year	676	10,2%	717	15,1%	1393	12,2%
<i>Read or listened to religious scripture (Last 12 months)</i>						
Yes	936	13,7%	756	15,5%	1692	14,5%
No	5888	86,3%	4112	84,5%	10000	85,5%
<i>Visiting holy places</i>						
Never	5598	82,4%	3377	69,7%	8975	77,1%
Less than once a year	527	7,8%	643	13,3%	1170	10%

<i>Religiousness & Spirituality</i>						
R-S	221	3,5%	173	3,9%	394	3,7%
R-NS	475	7,4%	886	20,1%	1361	12,6%
NR-S	677	10,6%	843	19,1%	1520	14,1%
NR-NS	5008	78,5%	2506	56,9%	7514	69,6%
<i>Belief in life after death</i>						
Yes, definitely	350	5,4%	207	4,8%	557	5,2%
Yes, probably	637	9,8%	821	19,1%	1458	13,5%
No, probably not	1448	22,3%	1893	44,1%	3341	31%
No, definitely not	4046	62,4%	1368	31,9%	5414	50,3%
<i>Belief in religious miracles</i>						
Yes, definitely	203	3,1%	135	3,1%	338	3,1%
Yes, probably	484	7,4%	592	13,6%	1076	9,8%
No, probably not	1124	17,1%	1733	39,8%	2587	26,1%
No, definitely not	4762	72,4%	1899	43,6%	6661	60,9%

Participants were asked whether they participated in religious activities during their childhood (Table 5). While 39% of the participants answered “never” to this question, the rest of them said at different frequencies (less than once a year, about once or twice a year, several times a year, about once a month, 2-3 times a month, nearly every week, every week etc.). When the rate of “never” response is analyzed among atheists (46.2%) and agnostics (28.9%), a significant difference appears ($\chi^2=428.773$, $df=8$, $p<.001$). Just as agnostics are more likely to be brought up with a certain religious identity in childhood than atheists, their participation in religious activities is also higher. The next question on religious attitude and behavior is about prayer. To the question “How often do you pray” (about the present), most of the participants answered “never” (75.7%). The rate of saying “never” to this question is 84.6% among atheists and 63.2% among agnostics ($\chi^2=937.825$, $df=10$, $p<.001$). As expected, the majority of the participants (70.7%) stated that they did not participate in religious services. Here again, the rate of those who answered “never” to this question was higher in atheists (75.8%) than in agnostics (63.6%) ($\chi^2=347.579$, $df=8$, $p<.001$). A similar situation is valid for reading religious texts ($\chi^2=7.551$, $df=1$, $p<.05$) and visiting holy places ($\chi^2=291.969$, $df=4$, $p<.001$). In all, it is seen that agnostics exhibit religious behavior at a higher rate.

Whether or not atheists are spiritual is a controversial issue. The study examined how the participants defined themselves in the four classifications (*religious-spiritual*, *nonreligious-spiritual*, *religious-nonspiritual*, *nonreligious-nonspiritual*) related to religiosity and spirituality. Accordingly, as expected, the majority (69.6%) defined themselves as *nonreligious-nonspiritual* (NR-NS). Atheists (78.5%) chose NR-NS at a higher rate than agnostics (56.9%). It is seen that agnostics mark religious-nonspiritual (R-NS) and nonreligious-spiritual (NR-S) options more than atheists. These differences between agnostics and atheists were statistically significant ($\chi^2=641.864$, $df=3$, $p<.001$).

Participants were asked about their belief in life after death and belief in miracles. As shown in Table 5, in addition to the two definite answers *yes* and *no*, the participants also

marked two less definite answers such as yes probably, and no probably. When the answers about life after death are analyzed, it is seen that the majority of the participants (50.3%) gave the answer *no* unequivocally. The rate of those who said absolutely *yes* is only 5.2%. While the rate of those who say *no* is 62.4% among atheists, the rate among agnostics is 31.9%. This ratio is highly related to the agnostics' epistemological attitudes towards supernatural issues. When it comes to probably yes and no answers, it is seen that agnostics mostly (44.1%) prefer probably no instead of a definite no answer. The same situation is seen in the rate of "probably yes". Attitudes towards believing in the afterlife were significantly different between atheists and agnostics ($X^2=1040.842$, $df=3$, $p<.001$). It is possible to see a similar situation in belief in miracles. As expected, the majority (60.9%) said no, although this rate is much higher among atheists (72.4%). Here too, agnostics preferred uncertain answers ($X^2=976.562$, $df=3$, $p<.001$).

Table 6: Nonreligiosity level.

	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Ateist	6686	5,99	1,306	34,453	10162,136	,001
Agnostic	4748	5,13	1,319			

In the survey, the participants were asked to rate their religiosity on a 7-point Likert type scale. 1 means highly religious, 7 means highly nonreligious. Accordingly, when the two groups were compared in the present study (Table 6), the nonreligiosity level of atheists was 5.99 (SD=1.306) and the nonreligiosity level of agnostics was 5.13 (SD=1.319). This difference between the two groups was statistically significant ($p<.001$).

Table 7: Attitudes towards religion and religious people.

	Atheist		Agnostic		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Confidence in religious organizations</i>						
No confidence at all	2703	42	889	19,4	3592	32,7
Very little confidence	1843	28,7	1647	36	34900	31,7
Some confidence	1255	19,5	1511	33,1	2766	25,1
<i>Religions bring conflict</i>						
Strongly agree	2678	41	1398	30	4076	36,4
Agree	2041	31,2	1843	39,6	3884	34,7
Neither agree nor disagree	1057	16,2	898	34,7	1955	17,5
<i>Religious people too intolerant</i>						
Strongly agree	2243	34,8	1207	26,3	3450	31,3
Agree	2163	33,6	1803	39,3	3966	36
Neither agree nor disagree	1228	19,1	1036	22,3	2264	20,5
<i>Religions are a barrier to gender equality</i>						
Strongly agree	1464	23,9	587	13,6	2051	19,6
Agree	2054	33,6	1618	37,4	3672	35,2
Neither agree nor disagree	1317	21,5	1178	27,3	2495	23,9

The attitudes of nonbelievers towards religion and religious people are discussed under four headings (Table 7). The first is confidence in religious organizations. When atheists and agnostics are compared, it is seen that the rate of those who tick “no confidence at all” is higher among atheists (42%) than among agnostics (19.4%). Agnostics show very little (36%) or some confidence (33.1%) in religious organizations and these rates are higher than atheists’ ($X^2=716.819$, $df=4$, $p<.001$). The rate of those who say that they strongly agree with the idea that religion brings conflict is 41% among atheists and 30% among agnostics ($X^2=163.985$, $df=4$, $p<.001$). Similarly, those who say that they strongly agree with the idea that religious people are too intolerant ($X^2=121.942$, $df=4$, $p<.001$) and that religion prevents gender equality have a higher level among atheists ($X^2=218.359$, $df=4$, $p<.001$). This data shows us that atheists have more strict and definite attitudes towards religion and religious people, whereas agnostics are more flexible.

Table 8: The level of negative attitudes of the participants towards religious groups.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Christians	10761	1	5	2,58	,878
Muslims	10503	1	5	3,28	1,042
Hindus	9800	1	5	2,86	,868
Buddhists	10117	1	5	2,63	,882
Jews	10110	1	5	2,88	,877
Atheists or non-believers	10415	1	5	2,42	,889

The attitudes of the participants towards various religious groups were evaluated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very positive) to 5 (very negative). Considering the average of attitudes, Muslims are the most negatively perceived group by nonbelievers ($M=3.28$) and the most positive group are atheists and unbelievers ($M=2.42$) (Table 8).

Table 9: Comparison in terms of attitudes towards religious groups.

		N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Attitude towards	Atheist	6248	2,69	,895	15,182	10759	,001
Christians	Agnostic	4513	2,43	,832			
Attitude towards Muslims	Atheist	6150	3,32	1,052	5,070	9514,389	,001
	Agnostic	4353	3,22	1,025			
Attitude towards Hindus	Atheist	5775	2,91	,887	6,934	8980,972	,001
	Agnostic	4025	2,79	,834			
Attitude towards Buddhists	Atheist	5934	2,69	,914	7,522	10115	,001
	Agnostic	4183	2,55	,828			
Attitude towards Jews	Atheist	5951	2,93	,897	7,130	9297,659	,001
	Agnostic	4159	2,81	,841			

Atheists and agnostics were compared in terms of their attitudes towards the five main religious groups (Table 9). Atheists view all religious groups more negatively than agnostics, and these differences between the two groups are significant.

Table 10: Level of satisfaction with family relationships.

	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Ateist	6789	2,29	1,118	-3,570	11685	,001
Agnostic	4848	2,36	1,078			

Participants were asked how satisfied they were with their relationships with family members (Table 10). They were asked to rate this question from 1 (totally satisfied) to 7 (not at all satisfied). High scores indicate low satisfaction. As seen in Table 10, the score of atheists (M=2.29) is lower than the score of agnostics (M=2.36), and this difference between the two groups is significant ($p<.001$). This result shows that atheists are more satisfied with the relationship with their family members.

Table 11: Religious affiliation of the parents.

	Mother		Father	
	N	%	N	%
No religion	2595	22,1	3196	27,2
Catholic	2894	24,6	2621	22,3
Protestant	3424	29,1	3076	26,2
Orthodox	297	2,5	248	2,1
Other Christian	292	2,5	218	1,9
Jewish	229	1,9	227	1,9
Islamic	145	1,2	149	1,3
Buddhist	1001	8,5	917	7,8
Hindu	20	,2	22	,2
Other Asian Religions	204	1,7	195	1,7
Other Religions	82	,7	65	,6
Total	11183	95,1	10934	93,0
NAP, no mother or mother,	43	,4	107	,9
DK	345	2,9	490	4,2
NA	188	1,6	228	1,9
Total	576	4,9	825	7,0
Total	11759	100,0	11759	100

NAP: Not applicable, DK: I don't know, NA: No answer

Considering the religious affiliation of the parents of atheists and agnostics, Table 11 shows that most of them have a religious affiliation. When parents are examined separately, the rate of nonreligious is 22.1% among mothers and 27.2% among fathers.

Table 12: The rates of religious affiliation of parents in atheists and agnostics.

	Mother's religious affiliation*			Father's religious affiliation**		Total	
	No Religion	Religion	Total	No Religion	Religion		
Atheist	N	1799	4744	6543	2152	4255	6407
	%	27,5%	72,5%	100,0%	33,6%	66,4%	100,0%
Agnostic	N	796	3844	4640	1044	3483	4527
	%	17,2%	82,8%	100,0%	23,1%	76,9%	100,0%
Total	N	2595	8588	11183	3196	7738	10934
	%	23,2%	76,8%	100,0%	29,2%	70,8%	100%

When the rates of religious affiliation and nonreligion of parents of atheists and agnostics were compared (Table 12), the proportion of atheists with nonreligious mothers (27.5%) was higher among agnostics than those with nonreligious mothers (17.2%); therefore, the rate of those with nonreligious fathers among atheists (33.6%) is higher among agnostics than those with nonreligious fathers (23.1%).

Table 13: Sexual attitudes.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
Sexual relations with someone other than spouse	Atheist	6283	1,76	,919	2,550	10075,934	,011
	Agnostic	4481	1,72	,849			
Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex	Atheist	6370	3,15	1,222	5,444	10765	,001
	Agnostic	4397	3,02	1,227			

The sexual attitudes of atheists and agnostics were compared in Table 13. The first of the comparisons is about attitudes towards extramarital sex, and the other is about attitudes towards homosexuality. Participants expressed their attitudes on this issue on a four-point scale (1-Always wrong, 4- Not wrong at all). A high score indicates a positive attitude in this regard. Table 13 shows that atheists view extramarital sex more positively ($M=1.76$), while agnostics view it more negatively ($M=1.72$) ($p<.05$). Likewise, atheists ($M=3.15$) view homosexuality more positively than agnostics ($M=3.02$).

Table 14: Political preference rates.

		Frequency	Percent
Political preference	Far left (communist, etc.)	682	5,8
	Left /center left	2096	17,8
	Center / liberal	1366	11,6
	Right / conservative	1788	15,2
	Far right (fascist, etc.)	428	3,6
	Total	6360	54,1
	Missing	5399	45,9
Total	11759	100,0	

When the political preferences of the nonbelievers participating in the research are examined, it is seen that in Table 14, the majority (17.8%) chose the left/center left option on a scale from 1 (far left) to 5 (far right). 11.6% chose the center/liberalism option. If we leave this group out, the sum of those on the left (23.6%) is more than the sum of those on the right (18.8%).

Table 15: Differences in political preference of atheists and agnostics.

	Belief	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
Left-right scale	Atheist	3742	2,82	1,161	-4,759	5821,259	,000
	Agnostic	2618	2,95	1,097			

When the political preferences of the two groups are compared (Table 15), on a scale of 5 from left to right, it is seen that atheists stand farther to the left than agnostics ($M=2.95$) with an average of 2.82, and this difference between the two groups is significant ($p<.001$).

The confidence levels of the participants in the education system were examined. Participants rated how much they trust the education system from 1 (complete confidence) to 5 (no confidence at all). According to the independent sample t-test results, no significant difference was found between the two groups.

Table 16: Trust in science.

	Belief	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
Q9a Too much trust in science	Atheist	6462	3,98	1,244	9,698	11087	,000
	Agnostic	4627	3,75	1,199			

Likewise, the participants were given the expression “We trust too much in science and not enough in religious faith” and they were asked to indicate how much they agreed with this statement (5-point Likert type). Accordingly, 62.1% of the participants (disagree - 20.7% and strongly disagree - 41.4%) stated that they did not agree with this statement (Table 16). This result shows us that nonbelievers think that science is not trusted enough in society. When the two groups were compared in terms of the rate of thinking that science was not trusted enough, it was seen that this attitude among atheists was at a higher level ($M=3.98$, $p<.001$).

Finally, the level of happiness of the nonbelievers and their attitudes towards the purpose of life are investigated (Table 17). Participants were asked how happy or unhappy they were and were asked to rate them from 1 (very happy) to 4 (not at all happy). The majority of the participants (62.8%) responded by ticking the “2-Fairly happy” option. So, are atheists happier or agnostics? When compared, the level of happiness of atheists (1.96) was higher than that of agnostics (1.99) ($p<.029$).

Table 17: Happiness levels of atheists and agnostics.

	Belief	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
Q1 How happy or unhappy?	Atheist	6754	1,96	,681	-2,181	10879,83	,029
	Agnostic	4801	1,99	,619			

Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statement “In my opinion, life does not serve any purpose”. Choices range from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). As seen in Table 18, the majority of the participants (38.1%) stated that they strongly disagree with this statement. When atheists and agnostics were compared, as seen in the table below, it was found that atheists had a higher level of disagreement ($M=3.91$, $p<.046$). In the next question, they were asked to what extent they agreed with the idea that we assign meaning to life. When the answers given to this question were analyzed, it was found that 71.7% of the participants (strongly agree-

32.7%, agree-39%) agreed with this idea. The majority of nonbelievers think that life will be meaningful if we give meaning to life. No significant difference was found between atheists and agnostics in this regard.

Table 18: The purpose of life among atheists and agnostics.

	Belief	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
Q16d Life does not serve any purpose	Atheist	6380	3,91	1,231	1,994	10235,533	,046
	Agnostic	4537	3,86	1,130			

Conclusion and Discussion

In our research, it was shown that atheists diverge from agnostics on many subjects such as belief in God, former religious affiliation, religious behavior, spirituality, nonreligiosity level, anti-religion, religiosity of parents, belief in the afterlife, sexuality, political preference, belief in science and happiness.

Previous studies have shown a positive relationship between nonbelief and level of education (Beit-Hallahmi, 2007; Keysar and Navarro-Rivera, 2013) and trust in science (See Connolly, 1980; Edis, 2013; Joshi, 2011). In the current study, trust in education and nonbelief types were not found to be related. Regarding trust in science, participants stated that science is not trusted enough in society. This idea has a higher rate among atheists. In contrast to previous study results (see Keysar and Navarro-Rivera, 2013, p. 576), atheists and agnostics differed only in terms of marital status and income level among demographic variables. According to the results of the present study, the rate of atheists is higher among singles and divorced people. According to previous studies, nonbelievers are mostly single (Smith, 2013; Beit-Hallahmi, 2007; Cragun et al., 2012), and the rate of divorce among nonbelievers is higher than the rate of divorce in the general population (Heaton & Goodman, 1985; Sevinç, 2017b; Zuckerman, 2009; Streib & Klein, 2013). In addition, in many studies, there is a positive correlation between income level and nonbelief (Beit-Hallahmi, 2007). The separation of atheists and agnostics in terms of marital status and income level shows that atheists are more in line with the typical nonbeliever profile, given previous research findings.

Atheists have a higher level of nonreligiousness than agnostics, while agnostics have a higher level of spirituality than atheists. Atheists are more anti-religious. Atheists' parents have a higher nonreligion rate than agnostics. Atheists seem to think that religion brings conflict, that religious people are intolerant and that religion hinders gender equality. Obviously, atheists' high levels of anti-religion indicate that atheism has a more reactionary attitude towards religion, but that such a reactionary attitude is less in agnosticism. The reasons for deconverting to nonbelief include witnessing the negative behavior of religious people or clergy, feeling excluded by religious people, insincere attitudes of the group to which one is a member, making life difficult due to being a

member of a religious group, and thinking that the religious group to which one is a member is intolerant of other religions or groups (Exline & Rose, 2005, pp. 315-316). Whether this opposition of atheists is related to the reasons for their disbelief should be examined in a separate study. Considering that reactionary atheists are, especially positive atheists and as Smith (2011) states, positive atheists are mostly people with strong religious backgrounds, this reactionary attitude will be better understood.

The rate of those who stated that they believed in God before is higher among agnostics. Former studies indicated that the rate of not believing in a God is higher for atheists. These studies showed that 70% of nonbelievers have a previous religious affiliation (Streib & Klein, 2013; Sevinç, 2017b). In this study, it was found that 65.2% of the participants were raised as religious in childhood. This finding is similar to previous research findings. When we look at the rates of belonging to a religion in the past, we see that agnostics have a higher rate than atheists. The author concluded that atheists have a more definite disbelief about belief in the afterlife, but agnostics see a higher probability in this regard. The rates of praying and reading religious texts are higher among agnostics than atheists.

Atheists have a more positive view of extramarital sex and homosexuality. Bainbridge (2005, p. 15) found that nonreligious, atheists and agnostics are more inclined to live together without getting married. The rate of atheists among those living together without marriage is higher than the rate of atheists among married people (Uecker et al, 2007). In addition, nonbelievers are quite liberal about same-sex marriage (Streib & Klein, 2013, p. 725). Brewster (2013) states that there is a relationship between being a lesbian, bisexual, transgender and gay and being an atheist. Considering these characteristics of nonbelievers, it can be said that atheists fit this profile better than agnostics.

Finally, when evaluated in terms of political preferences, it is understood that atheists are more on the left. Many studies have shown that there is a relationship between right-wing political views and religiousness, and left-wing political views and nonbelief (see Scobie, 1994; Smith, 2013; Blazo, 2013; Keysar & Navarro-Rivera, 2013). Therefore, the findings of this study are in line with the findings of previous studies. Although atheists seem to have more left and liberal views in terms of political views, when the attitudes of atheists and agnostics on many issues are examined, it is seen that atheists are more “true believers”. Atheists hold more firm beliefs. With all these attitudes, atheists are positioned against the group that has religious beliefs. However, the same cannot be said for agnostics.

Huxley (1894), emphasizing the distinction of scientific knowledge from other types of knowledge and its superiority, stated that the existence or nonexistence of God would not be the subject of science, and he used the concept of agnosticism for the first time to exclude the discussion of God’s existence from the scientific field. According to him, agnosticism is the essence of science. A scientist must take an agnostic stance on

metaphysical matters, that is, on non-factual matters. If we consider that the propositions “God exists” or “God does not exist” have the same epistemological status (Nielsen, 2008, p. 246), Huxley’s proposal seems quite understandable. Beginning with Huxley, some of the people who did not believe in God began to describe themselves as agnostic. Bertrand Russell, one of the famous agnostics, was asked in his discussion with Father Copleston whether he was an agnostic or an atheist in proving the non-existence of God. He answered this question by stating that he was agnostic (Russell, 2004, p. 126). On the other hand, in a different work, Russell (1997) stated that his attitude as a philosopher is in favor of agnosticism because there is no evidence to prove the absence of God, but when talking to ordinary people he will say that he is an atheist (p. 91). Ordinary people will categorize us as believers or nonbelievers, categorizing those who accept the existence of God and those who do not. They would not be expected to engage closely in philosophical epistemological debates. However, it is an important issue for an intellectual to be precise in claims about metaphysical matters. Although atheism and agnosticism seem to stand in the same place in terms of not accepting the existence of God, they certainly stand in different places in claiming that God exists or does not exist. The results of the present research reveal that the difference between the two groups clearly manifests itself in many issues. Considering the differences identified in this research, we can conclude that agnosticism should not be considered as a type of atheism, but as a separate type of nonbelief.

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