

# Glossary

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It is important for the apologist to know the correct meaning of words. This is the third in a series of glossary articles. Previously we defined *fossils*, *natural selection*, *species*, and *kinds* (pages 6–8 in the spring 2018 *LSI Journal* ([www.LutheranScience.org/2018spring](http://www.LutheranScience.org/2018spring))). *Dark matter* and *dark energy* were explained on page 6 in the summer 2018 *LSI Journal* ([www.LutheranScience.org/2018summer](http://www.LutheranScience.org/2018summer)).

The italicized definitions below are the basic definitions. Beyond those short descriptions, there is great variance in the finer definitions of these terms.

**Agnostic**—from Greek: “without knowledge.”

*Agnostics claim that we cannot know if there is a God.* Agnostics deny the God of Scripture. In theory, an agnostic could believe that there is a god(s), or he could believe that there is no god at all; he simply thinks that the existence of god cannot be proven or disproven. In practice, it seems to me that many people calling themselves “agnostic,” are actually atheists who are unwilling to call themselves atheists.

**Atheist**—from Greek: “without god.”

*Atheists deny that God exists.* Some atheists so detest the concept of God that they work to convince others to reject God, sometimes in a strong and vocal way. In my opinion, that leads many atheists to call themselves “agnostic,” so as to avoid association with vocal atheists.

**Freethinker**

*Many atheists and agnostics consider themselves “freethinkers” who have “freethought.”* These terms stress that they base their beliefs on human logic—such as on science—not on faith, emotions, authority, or revelation. They are “free” from religion.

## Humanist

*Humanists (or “secular humanists”) are atheists and agnostics who advance human values in society.* The byline of the American Humanist Association is “Good Without God.” The top of their website proclaims in all caps, “ADVOCATING PROGRESSIVE VALUES AND EQUALITY FOR HUMANISTS, ATHEISTS, AND FREETHINKERS.”<sup>1</sup> There is tremendous variation in how the terms “humanist” and “humanism” are defined.

## Materialist

*Materialists believe that matter is all that exists.* There is no spiritual realm, no god, and humans have no spiritual soul. Human consciousness and mind are simply material (chemical and electrical) interactions in our brains. A materialist should by definition be an atheist, but some may consider themselves as agnostics. Some atheists and some agnostics are not materialists, since they may believe in some spiritual phenomena.

## Naturalist

*Naturalists base their beliefs upon science and they do not look to philosophy to justify that belief.* Most naturalists are also materialists, but they need not be if their scientific thinking leads them in another direction.

## Skeptic

*Skeptics are skeptical, particularly about the supernatural.* They use human reason—such as science—to evaluate all claims that they see as violating the laws of nature or violating common sense.

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Note a common thread through the above terms. Agnostics, atheists, freethinkers, materialists, naturalists, and skeptics look to human reason—such as to science—for knowledge, answers, and how to live. Agnostics at least favor human reason over other sources of knowledge (such as religious texts). The others fully reject all sources of knowledge other than human reason.

<sup>1</sup> <https://americanhumanist.org/> (accessed 9-17-21).

By definition, a person can be an agnostic OR an atheist, but not both. That does not stop some people from switching back and forth between the two terms to describe their own position. Many (most?) agnostics and atheists also consider themselves to be a free-thinker, humanist, materialist, naturalist, and skeptic.

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The following terms describe Christians. It is important that we not confuse these terms with any of the previous terms in this glossary. Some of these Christians have saving faith in Jesus.

All teachings that go against biblical doctrine are a danger to the faith. Evolution is especially dangerous, since evolution, if taken to its logical conclusion, destroys the Christian faith. If God used evolution to create, then God is the source of evil, since God used a billion years of suffering and death to create. See pages 11–12 of the summer 2021 *LSI Journal*<sup>2</sup> and the video “Part 3—Did God Use Evolution to Create?”<sup>3</sup>

### **Theistic Evolutionist**

*Theistic evolutionists believe that God used evolution to create.* They claim that God initiated the Big Bang. Some claim that was the full extent of God’s creating activity. Others think that God may have been involved with evolution in some additional ways—such as placing souls into the first humans (who had descended from ape-like creatures).

### **Old Earth Creationist**

Some theistic evolutionists call themselves “old Earth creationists,” since they do believe that God is our Creator, but that God used evolution to create.

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2. [www.LutheranScience.org/2021summer](http://www.LutheranScience.org/2021summer).

3. [www.LutheranScience.org/LBvideos](http://www.LutheranScience.org/LBvideos).