

**Call for Papers**  
**Rethinking Atheism in the Early Modern World**  
**An Interdisciplinary Workshop**



***To Be Held Online***  
**Friday 31 March 2023**

Disrupting the conventional assumption that people in the pre-modern era experienced the world around them through an all-encompassing religious lens, historians have increasingly identified individuals throughout the ancient, medieval, and early modern eras who were convinced that atheism was a palpable presence, not only among others, but also within themselves. These studies are beginning to reveal the multifarious ways in which people have understood and experienced the absence or rejection of God, uncovering narratives of those who seemed to live as if there were no God, those who denied his existence outright, those who wrestled with grave doubts about religious principles or practices, and those who endured – or surrendered to – moments of uncertainty, pangs of unbelief, or absences of faith that called God into question. These scenarios disrupt oppositional distinctions between ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘orthodox’ and ‘unorthodox’, ‘belief’ and ‘unbelief’, ‘theism’ and ‘atheism’. Beginning with the premise that these categories are fluid, overlapping processes rather than static, binary conditions, this workshop further develops novel approaches to atheism: In what ways have people perceived, understood, and encountered atheism and atheists? How have people described, depicted, or engaged with atheism through textual and non-textual means? To what extent can scholars study atheism as lived experience? What can past ‘atheisms’ tell us about present religious and non-religious identities? How can we continue to reinvigorate the study of atheism in early modern history?

The workshop welcomes **20-minute paper proposals** on any topic relating to the historical, theological, and cultural dimensions of ‘atheism’ in the early modern world broadly conceived.

Please submit a **paper title**, a **250-word abstract**, and a **100-word author biography**, to [patrick.s.mcghee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:patrick.s.mcghee@durham.ac.uk) no later than **5:00PM (GMT) on Friday 10 February 2023**.

Please specify whether your paper is intended for *pre-circulation* or *presentation at the event*. All presenters will have the opportunity to introduce their papers during the workshop.

Relevant topics might include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following **ten** areas:

1. **Atheism in Global Context**, including the intersection of religion with colonisation, imperial expansion, and Indigeneity; the ways in which attitudes towards atheism shaped and responded to cultural encounter and entanglement as well as enslavement and evangelism.
2. **Theology, Lived Religion, and Atheism**, including religious and non-religious perceptions and experiences of deviation from religious orthodoxy or truth, ranging from atheism, unbelief, non-belief, doubt or uncertainty to blasphemy, error, falsehood, and other manifestations of non-religion or heterodoxy.

3. **Atheism, Memory, and Decolonisation**, including the extent to which studies of atheism can develop or utilise oral histories, heritage projects, and databases to amplify diverse and under-represented identities and experiences, and interrogate legacies and enduring structures of inequality, marginalisation, and oppression.
4. **Atheism, Emotions, and Senses**, including the role of atheism in reflecting and shaping religious and non-religious aspects of the history of emotions; the ways in which the absence of belief in God has drawn from or impinged upon sensory experiences and feeling.
5. **Atheism, Science, and the Soul**, including religious and non-religious associations between atheism and materialism; the role of atheism in natural philosophy and the production of scientific knowledge; the extent to which science has reconfigured attitudes towards atheism.
6. **Atheism, Materiality and Landscape**, including depictions or expressions of atheism in visual and material culture; the role of objects or ‘things’ in expressing or regulating atheism; the ways in which atheism has shaped ideas about natural theology, natural history, ecology, and the environment.
7. **Atheism, Politics, and Conflict**, including religious and non-religious approaches to disorder, dissent, and deviance; radicalism, revolution, and warfare across popular and institutional contexts.
8. **Atheism, History, and Modernity**, including the ways in which atheism has been interpreted through the lens of historical continuity, change, periodisation, and processes, from the ‘age of faith’, the ‘pre-modern’, and the ‘early modern’ to ‘disenchantment’ and ‘secularisation’.
9. **Atheism, Technology, and the Creative Industries**, including the role of non-belief in devising and developing new technologies, tools, and media; the ways in which different genres in the creative industries portray, express, or omit histories of non-belief.
10. **Atheism, Education, and the Humanities**, including the ways in which the digital humanities, environmental humanities, and medical humanities can offer new ways of understanding historical and contemporary ‘atheisms’; the possibilities, challenges, and ethics of researching and teaching about non-belief.

The organisers will be happy to answer any queries in advance of the event. Please send these to: [patrick.s.mcghee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:patrick.s.mcghee@durham.ac.uk).



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