



**ANCIENT GREEK ATHEISM? A NOTE ON  
TERMINOLOGICAL ANACHRONISMS IN THE  
STUDY OF ANCIENT GREEK “RELIGION”**

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## ABSTRACT

During the last forty years, religion as a concept has bedeviled scholars not only in defining the term, which certainly goes way back in history, but also regarding its applicability as a first-order scholarly tool. Some have argued to dismiss the term altogether, others have sought to re-approach how the term is used, while other scholars have endorsed its usage, but based on scholarly stipulative definitions. Recently, further discussions have emerged regarding whether contemporary scholars can use the category “religion” to talk about ancient traditions and classifications. While the issue of anachronisms is undoubtedly present in such debates, the term “atheism” has not been approached in a similar way. What classical studies on ancient “religions” often lack is a theoretical background already available in the discipline of religious studies. This brief article seeks to open the path for further examination of the place of “atheism” in antiquity based on the problem of applying the term with its modern content and meaning to the ancient world. Even though this study is not exhaustive by all means, its aim is alerting both classicists and historians of religion of the pitfalls neatly hidden behind the scholarly tools often adopted for the description of practices, beliefs, and movements in the ancient world.

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## KEYWORDS

Atheism. Ancient Greek religion. Anachronisms. Religious Criticism. Translation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: FROM RELIGION TO “RELIGION”

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Since the publication of Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s seminal work, *The meaning and end of religion* (1963), scholars of religion have engaged in heated debates regarding the very place of the key concept of “religion” within their own discipline. Some suggested that the term must be abandoned altogether (FITZGERALD, 2000), while others have proposed a re-evaluation and a new treatment of the term based on stipulative definitions of the category, which are not limited to the Christian assumptions with which the concept is, admittedly, historically, charged (ASAD, 1993; MCCUTCHEON, 1997)<sup>1</sup>. Lately, these conversations have penetrated the study of ancient Greek religion as well, since the known issue of insiders and outsiders in the study of religion (MCCUTCHEON, 1999; CHRYSIDES; GEAVES, 2014) is even more vivid when studying ancient cultures. Russell McCutcheon (2003, p. 255) has eloquently presented this issue when he argued that:

Just as the concepts nation or nation-state – let alone individual or citizen – are today so utterly basic, even vital, to many of our self-understandings and ability to self-organize that we routinely cast them backward in chronological time and outward in geographic space, so too, it is difficult *not* to understand, say, ancient Romans or Egyptians as having a “religion”... [b]y means of such classifications we may very well be actively presenting back to ourselves the taxonomies that help to establish our own contingent and inevitably provincial social world as if their components were self-evident, natural, universal, and necessary.

What McCutcheon points out here is critical in approaching the ancient world – a position that can be traced back in the work of Jonathan Z. Smith (1982), who has deeply influenced McCutcheon’s work. Based on Smith’s and McCutcheon’s approaches to the category “religion”, various scholars have propagated such criticisms in their respective

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview, see Jensen (2014, p. 13-37).

subfields within religious studies. The most recent publication regarding the concept of “religion” and its inapplicability to the ancient world is that by Brent Nongbri (2013), entitled *Before religion: a history of a modern concept*. The main thesis of Nongbri (2013, p. 12) is that “religion is a modern and not an ancient concept”, with “modern” referring to the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. According to Nongbri (2013, p. 5), it is within this period that “distinctions between ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’” arose, thus demarcating the beginnings of the modern usage of this term. Given that the modern origins of the term have shaped the way the concept is understood and used when classifying traditions as “religious” (MASUZAWA, 2005), Nongbri (2013) goes back in time in order to trace the historical origins of the term within the ancient cultures themselves. Concentrating on three terms stemming from the Greek, Roman, and Arabic worlds, i.e. *thrēskēia* (θηρησκεία), *religio*, and *dīn*, respectively, Nongbri (2013, p. 26) argues that even though the aforementioned terms are translated as religion, “the contexts in which these terms occur often make such translations problematic”. The semantic contexts of these terms are not equivalent to the modern concept of “religion”, which is heavily influenced by the Western monotheistic understanding and usage of the category. As such, Nongbri (2013, p. 143) justifiably poses the following question:

[i]f the things that modern people conceive of as “religious” were not so conceived in the ancient worlds and vice versa, then how and why are ancient practices to be recognized as “religion” at all?.

In his conclusion Nongbri (2013, p. 158) proposes not to abandon the term, but to use it as “a second-order, re-descriptive concept” rather than a descriptive one, that is, using “religion” in studying ancient traditions as a valid scholarly tool that allows us to “attempt to reproduce the classifications of the group of people being studied” (NONGBRI, 2013, p. 157).

In what follows I argue that, whether we agree with Nongbri’s approach, the terminological and conceptual anachronisms that are obviously at work here also apply to the issue of identifying atheistic tendencies or statements within the ancient Greek culture, which is often not identified as another

anachronism that is enforced on our scholarly vocabularies without further reflection or explanation. Due to the nature of this article, which does not claim any exhaustiveness, I will concentrate on a few examples of individuals that were eventually categorized as atheists and argue that, even though the term is in this case indeed Greek (in contrast to the Latin etymological roots of “religion”), the meanings and contexts of its applications and treatments were radically different in antiquity than they have been since the Renaissance. This is followed by a few theoretical and methodological questions that seek further examination in order to propose a new context for the study of the so-called “atheism in antiquity”.

## 2. ATHEISM OLD AND NEW: A FRAMEWORK

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In his introduction to atheism, Julian Baggini (2003) points out that this is a phenomenon extremely simple to define. It is “the belief that there is no God or gods” (BAGGINI, 2003, p. 3), a definition that covers both monotheistic and polytheistic traditions. The denial of God’s existence is usually accompanied by a more general denial of the existence of every supernatural or metaphysical entity. Thus, “an atheist does not usually believe in the existence of immortal souls, life after death, ghosts, or supernatural powers” (BAGGINI, 2003, p. 3-4). On the etymological level, an atheist (*ἀ-θεός* = without a god) is a person who does not believe in a god. But this does not simultaneously mean that the same person does not believe in the existence of God or gods *in general* – she/he simply does not accept the existence of a *particular* God or gods. Michael Martin (2007, p. 1) has successfully presented this issue by arguing that there exists a distinction that must be emphasized: atheism should be broken down into positive and negative, where the former maintains that the atheist “is not simply one who holds no belief in the existence of a God or gods but is one who *believes* that there is no God or gods”, while the latter advocates that she/he “is someone without a belief in God; he or she *need not* be someone who believes that God does not exist”.

Atheism, like religion, has a history. Even though in this case we can easily trace the birth of the term back in ancient Greece, the meaning and application of the concept has since then changed considerably. The positive atheism that Martin (2007) distinguishes is historically traceable in the periods known as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, during which the modern concept of “religion” was developed as well (NONGBRI, 2013; HARRISON, 2002). What is argued here is that the semantic content of the word experienced substantial transformations due to the entirely different contexts encountered in ancient religious traditions and in Western monotheistic religions. As such, atheism “did not emerge as an overt and avowed belief system until late in the Enlightenment” (BAGGINI, 2003, p. 74), and it is during the Renaissance when “scholars first began to challenge across a broad spectrum the God-centered doctrines” (BILLINGTON, 2001, p. 2). However, it would be a mistake to think that the term gained a fixed and solid semantic content after this period; atheism meant different things even within the Western milieu, based on the ways God was conceived in different historical and geographical contexts (MARTIN, 2007, p. 1). Atheism was further developed in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the emergence of what is now called New Atheism. Scholars and writers such as Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens – to name a few – diverged from both ancient and modern understandings of atheism, thus changing and further transforming the concept, which now meant not simply a belief that God or gods do not exist, but that religion is something evil and people who do have a belief in a transcendent agent are, simply put, stupid (ASLAN, 2010, p. xv). Thus, what follows is that atheism has its own history that begins, more or less, with the simultaneous emergence of the term and category “religion” and, alongside, has been also used in different ways and within different contexts as a response to the cultural developments and transformations that accompany the history of the category “religion”. But if atheism, in its modern sense, is historically traceable and hence examinable, does this imply that the same meanings can be also attributed to the way the term was used in the ancient world?

Most historians of ancient Greek religion point out the need to use the term with caution. In his classic monograph *Atheism in pagan antiquity*, Anders B. Drachmann (1922) defined atheism as the denial of the existence of ancient gods. We could agree with such a definition if Drachmann (1922) would have included in his work *only* individuals who explicitly expressed such opinions; on the contrary, Drachmann (1922) also included thinkers who did not deny the existence of the ancient gods, but sought to prove the existence of a superior entity without arguing that the traditional gods should be dismissed. To his merit, Drachmann (1922, p. 2) rightly points out the popular assumption that educated people of antiquity treated religion in the same way as the modern educated persons do is a problematic and inaccurate statement (see also KAHN, 1997, p. 255). There is a thin line between critics and deniers of religion, while another classification that erroneously subsumes theorists of religion under the general rubric of “atheism” must be taken into account. By theorists, I am referring to individuals who sought to explain the origins and/or function of religion rather than simply explain it away. Unfortunately, many such thinkers of antiquity, most notably Euhemerus of Messene (to whom I will return in the next section), have been dealt as atheists. Jan Bremmer (2007, p. 12) has successfully argued that “atheism” must be used in a loose way, in order to avoid the imposition of the modern content of the term on the ancient world, while Bruce Lincoln (2007, p. 242) rightly pointed out the need to distinguish between critics of “religion as such” and “critics of specific forms” of religion. Undoubtedly, those critics that Lincoln (2007) refers to members of the educated *élite*, who were equipped to engage themselves in such a critical approach of traditional myths and beliefs. As Jan Bremmer (1982) has shown, while the stories of gods remain oral, they tend to transform and acquire new elements that, in turn, make them difficult to examine and eventually criticize. It is with the emergence of literacy that those stories were standardized and subject to further reflection.

Before turning our attention to some examples from antiquity, the very term “atheism” needs to be briefly addressed. The Greeks did invent the terms *atheos* and *atheotes* (ἄθεος/ἀθεότης), which were later taken over by the Romans and,

eventually, found their way into the European languages of the early modern period as “atheist” and “atheism”, respectively (BREMNER, 2007, p. 22). However, a more precise translation of the Greek terms might be ungodly and ungodliness (DRACHMANN, 1922, p. 5), which are closer to impious/impiety (*ἀσεβής/ἀσέβεια*) rather than atheism in the modern sense of the word. Even though Drachmann (1922) takes these terms as eventually meaning atheism – as it is nowadays understood – one should be skeptical about this inference. Nonetheless, what is of particular interest here is the meaning of the word *theos* (*θεός*). The term is loosely translated as “god”, but its meaning differs from the modern understanding of the concept of “god”. The term does not refer to a particular individual divine entity, but to the category of supernatural agents in general. In other words, “theos is not a proper name but a sortal... The expression *ho theos* ‘the god’, means whatever divinity happens to be relevant in the context” (KAHN, 1997, p. 252). There were several elements that distinguished an entity, elevating it to the divine sphere. Three are the main characteristics that made a god, god: immortality, anthropomorphism, and power (HENRICH, 2010; MEIJER, 1981, p. 224). Under the general form of power, we may add several others, such as joy, comfort, bliss, knowledge of past, present, and future, etc. As such, the term *atheos* is, by itself, etymologically related to a word that shares little with the Western monotheistic notion of an individual, unique, and personal God.

### 3. ATHEISTS OR CRITICS OF RELIGION? SOME EXAMPLES FROM ANTIQUITY

There is a long list of fragments coming from the ancient world in which terms such as *ἄθεος/ἀθεότης και ἀσεβής/ἀσέβεια* are conventionally translated as atheism. However, these must be warily approached, since their meanings vary according to the contexts and frameworks in which they appear, as well as their writers’ motives (WINIARCZYK, 1984). For instance, the term *ἀσεβής* – which may be translated as



impious/ungodly – was widely used, but it may hardly correspond to the modern use of the term “atheist”. A good example comes from Plato and the tenth book of his *Laws* (885 B), where he attacks the impious people classifying them under three groups: the deniers of the existence of gods; the deniers of providential care, but who acknowledge the existence of gods; and the people who accept both the existence and the providential care, but seek to gain more from the gods through bribery via sacrifices and prayers (MAYHEW, 2008; MEIJER, 1981, p. 217). The verb used here by Plato is *ὕβριζεν* – “being hubristic towards the gods”, according to Mayhew (2008, p. 11); “outrages that a man commits against the gods”, according to Bury (1926, p. 297-299) –, which was considered a serious accusation, but, again, not an expression of atheism in the modern usage of the term. In Socrates’ *Apology*, the hubris and impiety were the basic counts of the indictment against Socrates:

[W]ithout any truth, saying, “There is a certain Socrates, a wise man, a ponderer over the things in the air and one who has investigated the things beneath the earth and who makes the weaker argument the stronger.” These, men of Athens, who have spread abroad this report, are my dangerous enemies. For those who hear them think that men who investigate these matters *do not even believe in gods* (18 B-C) (FOWLER, 1914, p. 73, emphasis added).

Nevertheless, as Socrates famously argued, all of his actions were, indeed, the result of divine intervention, something that is both *θεῖόν τι καὶ δαιμόνιον* (31 D), and, in turn, he explicitly states that Socrates cannot be deemed an atheist based on the modern usage of the term. By the same token, the very accusation that Socrates does not believe in gods seems to lose its validity; after all, the statement *οὐδέ θεοῦς νομίζειν* (18 C) – do not even believe in gods – does not specify which gods, nor does it include all possible deities.

The most famous and oft-cited ancient critic of religion is the Presocratic philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570-c. 475 BCE). Xenophanes attacks the traditional stories about the gods we encounter in the great epic poems. According to him, it is inconceivable, if not lame, to accept that the gods act just like humans do. In his words: “Both Homer

and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods all deeds which among men are matters of reproach and blame: thieving, adultery, and deceiving one another” (CURD, 2011, B11). Xenophanes is particularly infuriated by this equalization of gods and human beings. Anthropomorphism lies at the very core of the Greek understanding of gods: “But mortals suppose that the gods are born, have human clothing, and voice, and bodily form” (CURD, 2011, B14). The anthropomorphic features found in the Greek gods are, according to Xenophanes, something that every living being could have attributed to their divinities, if only they had the ability to write or draw:

If horses had hands, or oxen or lions, or if they could draw with their hands and produce works as men do, then horses would draw figures of gods like horses, and oxen like oxen, and each would render the bodies to be of the same frame that each of them have (CURD, 2011, B15).

Xenophanes points out that the anthropomorphic characteristics of gods are not something one finds solely within Greek culture. Other peoples act alike, representing their gods according to their own physical traits: “Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and dark, Thracians, that theirs are grey-eyed and red-haired” (CURD, 2011, B16).

It would be easy to deem Xenophanes a straightforward atheist. However, he explicitly states that god – in the singular – does exist, but has no relation to what the traditional stories maintain: “One god, greatest *among gods* and men, not at all like mortals in form or thought” (CURD, 2011, B23, my emphasis). The existence of divinity is taken for granted by Xenophanes, a fact that rules out any atheistic – in the modern meaning of the word – approach to his work. It goes without saying that Xenophanes’ ideas about the divine are different from what were the dominant beliefs in his era. Even though Xenophanes has been dealt as an early monotheist (GREGORY, 2013), the very fact that he acknowledges the existence of other gods does not make him an atheist.

Almost a 150 years after Xenophanes, Euhemerus of Messene wrote a utopian novel entitled *Sacred inscription* (*Ἱερὰ Ἀναγραφή*). Very little is known about Euhemerus himself

and the scarce information we do have come from Eusebius' citations of Diodorus Siculus' Book 6 of his *Historical library* and from the work by Lactantius, *Divine institutions*. There we learn that Euhemerus was in the diplomatic service of Cassander, King of Macedon, but he was certainly living in Alexandria of Egypt, after Cassander's death, around 297 BCE. Euhemerus traveled to the Indian Ocean at the behest of King Cassander, where he visited an island called Panchaia and recorded his journey in the form of a travelogue.

The prominent feature of Panchaia is its sacred character, an island that was blessed by the gods themselves. The narrative Euhemerus distinguishes between two groups of divine agents: the heavenly and the earthly gods. The former are eternal and immortal, while the latter are mortal (*Historical Library*, 6.1.2). In the first group, we find the sun, the moon, the stars, and the winds. In the second, there are the mortals who have acquired immortal honor and glory due to their benefactions to mankind; among them we find Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus. Upon a great hill we find the sanctuary of Zeus Triphyllios (i.e. of the three tribes), which constitutes the main religious site of the island. Zeus himself established the temple when he was king of the whole inhabited world. In the temple, there was a ceremonial couch of the god, where stood a large golden stele on which was inscribed, in Panchaeian characters (Hieroglyphs), a summary of the deeds of Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus, written by Zeus himself. According to the text, Uranus, the first king, was a gentle and benevolent man, who was familiar with the movement of the stars. He was the first to honor the heavenly gods with sacrifices. Zeus travelled to different places of the known world: Babylon, Syria, Cilicia and back to Panchaia. After establishing altars in the places he visited, he finished his civilizing task and returned to his birthplace, the island of Crete, where he eventually died and buried (ROUBEKAS, 2012a, 2014).

Many scholars have regarded Euhemerus as an atheist, an accusation already made by Euhemerus' contemporaries, most notably Plutarch. As a matter of fact, the very term *euhemerism* is often deemed equivalent to atheism. Euhemerus was not an original exponent of religious criticism. As Fritz Graf (1993, p. 192) has pointed out,

[...] Euhemerus' account of the history of the gods shows the influence [...] of the theology of Prodicus, with his division of the development of religion into an early phase, in which man worshipped the constellations, and a later one, in which he deified human benefactors.

Euhemerus himself is careful enough to distinguish between the two groups of gods. If we are to accuse Euhemerus of atheism, then the same accusation goes for Xenophanes as well, since he also distinguished between the various gods and the one god who is above all and has nothing in common with the traditional deities. However, neither is proclaiming the destruction of religion or denying the existence of gods. On the contrary, they both seek to denude the traditional beliefs from any anthropomorphic or irrational elements. Euhemerus, at least according to the survived fragments and summaries, nowhere does he cast doubt on the existence of the heavenly gods. Euhemerus' narrative functions as an explanation of the origins and function of religion, but not as an atheistic stance in the modern sense of the word. The Olympian gods were mere humans deified due to their accomplishments, but the heavenly gods replaced them as the true divine agents. Thus, Euhemerus maintained divinity in a form that corresponded to the intellectual needs and demands of his time (ROUBEKAS, 2012a). Apart from Plutarch, the name of Euhemerus was associated with atheism mainly during the early Christian era. Euhemerism was deemed proof of the spuriousness of the pagan gods (ROUBEKAS, 2012b)<sup>2</sup>.

The last case is drawn from a new philosophical movement that emerged during the Hellenistic period, namely Epicureanism and its founder. Epicurus never denied the existence of gods, but he had great objections regarding their role in every occurring natural phenomenon:

Furthermore, we must not believe that the movement of the heavenly bodies, their turnings from one place to another, their eclipses, their risings and settings, and all such phenomena are brought about under the direction of a being who controls or

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<sup>2</sup> For an extensive discussion, see Winiarczyk (2013).

will always control them and who at the same time possesses perfect happiness together with immortality; for the turmoil of affairs, anxieties, and feelings of anger and benevolence do not go with happiness, but all that arises where there is weakness, fear and dependence on others (*Letter to Herodotus*, p. 76-77).

The gods do not favor nor hate men and, therefore, they do not reward nor punish them. On the contrary, they live in a state of absolute perfection and have no reason to interfere into human affairs. It is mainly this absence of providence in Epicurus' system that eventually led to the opinion that he was an atheist (MANSFELD, 1999). Epicurus' most explicit statement regarding the existence of gods is articulated in the following manner: "Certainly the gods exist – the knowledge that we have of them is clear vision – but these gods are not as the vulgar believe them to be" (*Letter to Menoeceus*, p. 124). The inclusion of Epicurus in the list of ancient atheists took place during two different historical periods. Initially it was his philosophical opponents, i.e. the Stoics, who saw his approach as denying a place for the divine in his system (BREMNER, 2007, p. 19), while a revival of subsuming Epicurus under the rubric of atheism occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as David Konstan (2011, p. 53) has shown.

Before concluding this section, an important common feature needs to be addressed. In 3 out of the 4 cases at hand, excluding Xenophanes, the labeling of these individuals as atheists came from opponents that obviously found in this term an ideal way to attack their rivals (BREMNER, 2007, p. 22). In Plato's *Apology*, the attack was more systematic and it was to be decided in a court of law, which led to Socrates' conviction and eventual death. Euhemerus was initially charged with atheism by Plutarch, a known despiser of Euhemerus' theory (ROUBEKAS, 2012b, p. 85), while the labeling was further developed during the early Christian era; and this time, the target was not Euhemerus in particular but paganism in general. Finally, Epicurus was labeled an atheist by his philosophical rivals and by much later interpreters, in both cases with different agendas in mind. Such practices associated with the labeling of ancient thinkers as "atheists" urge us to theoretically re-approach both the notion of "atheism" in antiquity and its relation to the modern meaning of the term.

## 4. CONCLUSION: ETIC BUT SCIENTIFIC

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In his excellent study *Redefining ancient Orphism*, Radcliffe Edmonds III (2013) offers a new polythetic definition of Orphism taking under consideration several factors that determine which text belongs to the Orphic tradition and which does not. Given that his work touches upon the crucial issue of classification, Edmonds III (2013, p. 77) approaches this issue by asking:

Who is labeling something as “Orphic” or describing it in terms that categorize it with other things labeled “Orphic”? What is the context for this classification? Even if the state of the evidence from antiquity often makes these questions difficult to answer, we can nevertheless try to determine whether the label is self-applied or applied by another.

In my brief discussion of how “atheism” was used in antiquity and the anachronisms we inevitably perform when we apply the term with its modern meaning back in antiquity, Edmonds III (2013) offers an interesting theoretical framework through which a similar project on “ancient atheism” may take place. A simple replacement of “Orphic” by “atheistic/ism” would reveal a similar path towards understanding how the term “atheism” was used in antiquity, as well as the ways modern scholars tend to ascribe the modern meanings of the term back in history. Henk Versnel (2011, p. 548, 551) was right when he argued that in scholarly discourse we solely use etic terminology; however, it is our obligation to define scholarly tools before actually applying them. Atheism, as a term, indeed existed in antiquity. However, its content and the contexts where it is found differed from the way the term was later on used in subsequent periods. There were individuals in ancient Greece who undeniably launched severe criticisms to the traditional beliefs and popular understandings regarding the nature of god(s). But to include all those thinkers and critics into a long list of atheists, without distinguishing the different meanings of the term in antiquity and in the modern era, only leaves us with the act of imposing our own

concepts upon cultures that, more or less, shared very little with our own. After all, as Jan Bremmer (1982, p. 50-51) has so nicely put it, the ancient criticism of traditional beliefs “stops just before the brink”, which, in turn, only implies that a straightforward atheism in the modern sense of the term was not existent in ancient Greek history and culture.

## ATEÍSMO GREGO ANTIGO? UMA BREVE DISCUSSÃO SOBRE ANACRONISMOS TERMINOLÓGICOS NO ESTUDO DA “RELIGIÃO” GREGA ANTIGA

### RESUMO

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Durante os últimos quarenta anos, o conceito de religião tem atormentado estudiosos não somente pela definição do termo, que, decerto, constitui um problema histórico, mas, também, pela sua aplicabilidade como uma ferramenta acadêmica de primeira ordem. Alguns pesquisadores defendem que o termo seja definitivamente descartado, outros têm buscado repensar o uso do termo, enquanto outros endossam seu uso, porém, com base em definições acadêmicas estipuladoras. Discussões recentes têm surgido a respeito da possibilidade do uso da categoria “religião” por acadêmicos contemporâneos para tratar de tradições e classificações antigas. Enquanto o problema dos anacronismos está, sem dúvida, presente em tais debates, o termo “ateísmo” não foi tratado de modo similar. O que os estudos clássicos sobre “religiões” antigas geralmente não possuem é uma base teórica já disponível na disciplina dos estudos religiosos. Este breve artigo busca abrir o caminho para um novo exame do lugar do “ateísmo” na antiguidade com base no problema de aplicar o termo com seu conteúdo e significado modernos ao mundo antigo. Apesar deste estudo não ser, de modo algum, exaustivo, ele tem por objetivo alertar tanto os classicistas como os historiadores da religião acerca das armadilhas nitidamente escondidas por trás das ferramentas acadêmicas frequentemente adotadas para a descrição de práticas, crenças e movimentos no mundo antigo.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

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Ateísmo. Religião grega antiga. Anacronismos. Crítica da religião. Tradução.

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