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## ***Descriptions of Major Worldviews***

**Theism.** *Theism* is the worldview that an infinite, personal God created the universe and miraculously intervenes in it from time to time (*see* MIRACLE). God is both transcendent over the universe and immanent in it. The three great theistic religions are Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Finite godism, deism, and, to some extent, even Western panentheism, grew out of the theistic (*see* THEISM) worldview. The central difference between theism and finite godism is the question of whether God is infinite or finite. Deism is primarily a theistic view minus supernatural intervention in the world (*see* MIRACLE). Panentheism modifies theism to posit a finite God with two poles, one being theoretical infinitude. It is sometimes called “neoclassical theism.”

***Different Kinds of Theism.*** One of the most helpful ways to distinguish among theist systems is to note the perspective from which each approaches God. There are *rational* theists such as René Descartes and Gottfried Leibniz, *existential* theists such as Søren Kierkegaard, *phenomenological* theists such as Peter Koestenbaum, *analytic* theists such as Alvin Plantinga, *empirical* theists such as Thomas Reid, *idealistic* theists such as George Berkeley, and *pragmatic* theists such as Charles Sanders Pierce. Each of these uses a somewhat distinct philosophical method to approach belief in God.

Theists can also be distinguished by what they believe about God and his relation to the world. Most believe the material world is real, but some believe it exists only in minds and ideas (Berkeley). Most theists believe God is unchangeable, but some (generally influenced by panentheism) believe God can and does change. Some theists believe it is possible that the created universe is eternal (Thomas Aquinas), while most believe the universe must be temporal (Bonaventure). Perhaps the most important difference among theists is that many believe God is only one person (monotheism), such as Judaism and Islam. Others, notably orthodox Christians, believe in a *trinitarian* form of monotheism: God has three centers of personhood within one perfect monotheistic unity.

Among the leading defenders of classical theism were Augustine (354–430), Anselm (1033–1109), and Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274). In the modern world Descartes (1596–1650) Leibniz (1646–1716), and William Paley (1743–1805) are some of the more noted defenders of theism. Perhaps the most popular exponent of theism in the twentieth century was C. S. Lewis (1898–1963). Since theism is described in detail in articles for these representatives, only a summary of theistic views will be included here.

***Outline of a Theistic Worldview.*** Those who hold a theistic worldview have a common core of beliefs. To the degree theists are consistent, their thoughts and actions are shaped from this core:

*God Exists beyond and in the World.* Theism holds to both the *transcendence* and *immanence* of God. God exists beyond and independently of the world, yet governs all

parts of the world as the sustaining Cause. The world was *originated* by God and it is *conserved* by him (*see* CREATION AND ORIGINS).

*The World Was Created Ex Nihilo.* The world is not eternal. It came into existence by God's fiat (decree). Its existence is totally contingent and dependent. The universe was not created from pre-existing material (*ex materia*), as in dualism or materialism, nor was it made out of God's essence (*ex Deo*), as in pantheism. It was brought into existence by God, but from nothing (*ex nihilo*; *see* CREATION, VIEWS OF).

*Miracles Are Possible.* Although God operates his universe in a regular and orderly way by the laws of nature, nevertheless, God does transcend those laws. Nature is not the "whole show." There is a supernatural realm (*see* NATURALISM). This supernatural can invade the natural realm. The sovereign Creator cannot be locked outside his creation. Although God normally works in a regular way, on occasion he directly intervenes. This occasional invasion of nature by the supernatural is called a "miracle."

Most theists not only believe that miracles can happen; they believe some actually *have* happened (*see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST). Jewish theists point to the miracles surrounding the exodus, Muslims to God's revelations to Muhammed, and Christian theists point to the birth and resurrection of Christ as chief examples of miracles.

*People Are Made in God's Image.* Theism believes in the creation of humankind in God's image. This means man has both freedom (*see* FREE WILL) and dignity that ought to be treated with utmost respect. Humans are God's representatives on earth. Human life is sacred. Humans should be loved as persons, not used as things.

As creatures of God, men and women are not sovereign over their own lives. No one has the right to take his or her own life nor end the life of another, except as killing is directly sanctioned. Only God gives life, and only God can take it or command that it be taken.

Humanity had a beginning in time. There was no preexistent soul, so no eternity, but the soul was created to be immortal (*see* IMMORTALITY). Nor is there annihilation of the soul (*see* ANNIHILATIONISM), as is the belief of atheism and some theists. Each person is immortal, not by his essence, but because God will sustain us forever.

*There Is a Moral Law.* Since the theist God is a moral being and since humankind is created in God's image, a moral corollary of theism is that the ultimate duty of people is to obey the moral law. This law is absolutely binding since it comes from God (*see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF). It is over and above any human laws. It is prescriptive, not merely descriptive, as are laws of nature.

*Rewards and Punishment Await.* Each individual life, like all of history, is pointed toward an end or goal. Human moral actions will be rewarded or punished. There will be no reincarnated nor post-death second chance. Each person will be rewarded or punished according to the individual relation to God during life (*see* HELL). This has to do with what the person has "done," or on God's grace. Some modern theists minimized (or negate) the punishment aspect of human destiny in hope that all might be saved (*see* UNIVERSALISM) or at least annihilated if unsaved. But traditional theists believe this is wishful thinking. All theists, however, acknowledge a day that will bring about justice.

*Evaluation.* Many nontheists literally believe that theism is too good to be true. Sigmund Freud wrote, "We say to ourselves: it would indeed be very nice if there were a God, who was both creator of the world and a benevolent providence, if there were a

moral world order and a future life, but at the same time it is very odd that this is all just as we should wish it ourselves” (Freud, 57–58).

The real question, of course, is not how satisfying a view is, but whether it is true. Many nontheists believe it is not true (*see* GOD, ALLEGED DISPROOFS OF). Other are content with simply attempting to show that arguments for the existence of God fail (*see* GOD, OBJECTIONS TO PROOFS FOR). Both are unsuccessful, and there are good arguments that a theistic God exists (*see* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT; MORAL ARGUMENT; TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT), that there are moral absolutes, and that there is a life after death—all of which are essential parts of a theistic worldview.

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**Deism.** *Deism* is the belief in a God who made the world but who never interrupts its operations with supernatural events. It is a theism minus miracles (*see* MIRACLE). God does not interfere with his creation. Rather, he designed it to run independent of him by immutable natural laws (*see* SPINOZA, BENEDICT). In nature, he has also provided all that his creatures need to live.

Deism flourished in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries but began to die in the nineteenth century. Today its tenets live on in ant-supernatural denial of miracles (*see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST), critical views of the Bible (*see* BIBLE CRITICISM), and the practice of those who believe in a supreme being who has little or nothing to do with their lives.

Deism flourished in Europe, especially France and England, and in late-eighteenth-century America (*see* Orr, chaps. 3–4). Some of the more prominent European deists were Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), the Father of English deism; Matthew Tindal (1656–1733); John Toland (1670–1722), and Thomas Woolston (1669–1731). Some of the notable American deists were Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), Stephen Hopkins (1707–1785), Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), and Thomas Paine (1737–1809). The effects of views of the American deists, especially Paine and Jefferson, are more widely felt today through the United States' political foundation and heritage (*see* Morais, chaps. 4, 5).

**Various Kinds of Deism.** All deists agree that there is one God, who created the world. All deists agree that God does not intervene in the world through supernatural acts. However, not all deists agree on God's concern for the world and the existence of an afterlife for human beings (*see* IMMORTALITY). Based on these differences, four types of deism are discernible. The four range from ascribing minimal concern on the part of God to allowing his maximum concern for the world without supernaturally intervening in it (Morais, 17, 85–126).

*The God of No Concern.* The first type of deism was largely of French origin. According to this view, God is not concerned with governing the world he made. He created the world and set it in motion, but has no regard for what happens to it after that.

*The God of No Moral Concern.* In the second form of deism, God is concerned with the ongoing happenings of the world but not with the moral actions of human beings. Man can act rightly or wrongly, righteously or wickedly, morally or immorally. It is of no concern to God.

*The God of Moral Concern for This Life.* The third type of deism maintains that God governs the world and does care about the moral activity of human beings. Indeed God insists on obedience to the moral law that God established in nature. However, there is no future after death.

*The God of Moral Concern for This Life and the Next.* The fourth type of deism contends that God regulates the world, expects obedience to the moral law grounded in nature, and has arranged for a life after death, with rewards for the good and punishments for the wicked. This view was common among both English and American deists.

**Basic Beliefs.** Although there are points upon which deists differ, beliefs they hold in common allow an understanding of their common worldview.

*God.* All deists agree that there is one God (*see* THEISM). This God is eternal, unchangeable, impassable, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good, true, just, invisible, infinite—in short, completely perfect, lacking in nothing.

God is an absolute unity, not a trinity. God is only one person, not three persons. The Christian theistic concept of the trinity is false, if not meaningless. God does not exist as three coequal persons. Of this Jefferson scoffed that “the Trinitarian arithmetic that three are one and one is three” is “incomparable jargon.” Paine believed that the trinitarian concept resulted in three Gods, and thus was polytheistic (*see* POLYTHEISM). In contrast, deists contend that God is one in nature and one in person.

*The Origin of the Universe.* The universe is the creation of God (*see* CREATION AND ORIGINS). Before the universe existed, there was nothing except God (*see* CREATION, VIEWS OF). He brought everything into being. Hence, unlike God, the world is finite. It had a beginning while he has no beginning or end.

The universe operates by natural laws. These laws flow from the very nature of God (*see* ESSENTIALISM, DIVINE). Like him they are eternal, perfect, and immutable, representing the orderliness and constancy of his nature. They are rules by which God measures his activity and rules he expects to be the standard for his creation.

*The Relation of God and the Universe.* God is as different from the universe as a painter is from a painting, a watchmaker is from a watch, and a sculptor is from a sculpture (*see* TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT). But, like a painting, watch, and sculpture, the universe reveals many things about God. Through its design it displays that there exists a cosmic Designer, what this Designer is like, and what he expects. The universe also reveals that it must have been caused to exist by Another and that its regularity and preservation in existence is attributable to Another. There is a God who created, regulates, and sustains the world. And this world is dependent on God, not God on the world.

God does not reveal himself in any other way but through creation. The universe is the deist’s Bible. Only it reveals God. All other alleged revelations, whether verbal or written, are human inventions (*see* REVELATION, SPECIAL).

*Miracles.* Miracles do not occur (*see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST). God either cannot intervene in nature, or he will not. Those deists who believe God cannot perform miracles often argue from the immutability of the laws of nature. A miracle would violate natural laws. But natural laws are immutable, hence cannot be violated, for a violation would involve a change in the unchangeable. Therefore, miracles are impossible. Those deists who think God could perform a miracle but would not, often argue from the proneness of humans toward superstition and deception, the lack of sufficient evidence in support of a miracle, and the unbroken human experience of nature as uniform. They insist that it magnifies the nature of the perfect Mechanic that he made the machine of nature to run without constant need of repair. For deists all miracle accounts are the result of human invention or superstition.

*Human Beings.* Deists agree that humanity has been created by God and is adequately suited to live happily in the world. The human being is personal, rational, and free (*see* FREE WILL), endowed with natural rights that should not be violated by any individual, group, or government. The human being has the rational ability to discover in nature all that needs to be known to live a happy and full life.

Like all other animals, *Homo sapiens* was created with strengths and weaknesses. Strengths are reason and freedom. Among weaknesses is a tendency toward superstition and a desire to dominate others of his race. Both of these innate weaknesses have led to supernatural religions and oppressive governments.

*Ethics.* The basis of human morality is grounded in nature (*see* LAW, NATURE AND KINDS OF; REVELATION, GENERAL). In nature each person discovers how to be self-governing, to associate with other creatures, and to relate to God. For many deists the only innate human principle is the desire for happiness. How this innate desire is satisfied is governed according to reason. A person who fails to act by reason becomes miserable and acts immorally.

Deists differ on the universality of moral laws. They agree that the basis of all value is universal, because it is grounded in nature. But they disagree as to which moral laws are absolute and which are relative. The fact that there is a right and a wrong is not in dispute. The problem is in determining exactly what is right and wrong in each case and circumstance. Some deists, such as Jefferson, conclude that specific moral rules are relative. What is considered right in one culture is wrong in another (*see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF). Other deists would argue that a correct use of reason will always lead one to an absolute right and an absolute wrong, though the application of these absolutes may vary with culture and circumstance.

*Human Destiny.* Though some deists deny that humanity survives death in any respect, many believe that people live on. For most of these deists, the afterlife is of an immaterial nature where the morally good people will be rewarded by God and the morally bad ones will be punished.

*History.* In general, deists had little to say about history. They commonly held that history was linear and purposeful. They also held that God did not intervene in history through supernatural acts of revelation or signs called miracles. They differed on whether God concerned himself with what occurs in history. Many French deists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries believed God was utterly unconcerned. Most English deists looked to God to exercise a certain degree of providential care over the affairs of history, yet without miraculous intervention.

Many deists held that the study of history had great value. For, if nothing else, history demonstrates the human tendency toward superstition, deception, and domination, and the terrible consequences which follow when this tendency goes unchecked and unchallenged.

***An Evaluation of Deism. Contributions.*** Positive things may be learned from deism. Many have agreed with the deists' insistence on the importance and use of reason in religious matters (*see* APOLOGETICS, NEED FOR; FAITH AND REASON; LOGIC). The many claims made about miracles and supernatural revelation must be verified. No reasonable person would step into an elevator if he had good reason to believe that it was unsafe. Neither should anyone trust a religious claim without good reason to believe that it is true.

Deists have been commended for their belief that the world reflects the existence of a God (*see* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT). The regularity and orderliness of the world suggests a cosmic Designer. The inadequacy of the world to account for its operations and existence seems to imply an ultimate explanation beyond the world—God. The

limited perfections discoverable in nature may imply that there is an unlimited perfect Being beyond nature who created and sustains all things. This natural evidence is available for all to view and respond to in a reasonable way.

Deists have also been credited with exposing much religious deception and superstition. Their relentless attacks on many beliefs and practices have helped people to evaluate their religious faith and to purge it of corruption.

*Criticisms of Deism.* Yet there is reason to criticize the deistic worldview. A being who could bring the universe into existence from nothing could certainly perform lesser miracles if he chose to do so. A God who created water could part it or make it possible for a person to walk on it. The immediate multiplication of loaves of bread and fish would be no problem to a God who created matter and life in the first place. A virgin birth or even a physical resurrection from the dead would be minor miracles in comparison to the miracle of creating the universe from nothing. It seems self-defeating to admit a great miracle like creation and then to deny the possibility of lesser miracles.

The deists' understanding of universal natural law is no longer valid. Scientists today consider the laws of nature to be general, not necessarily universal. Natural laws describe how nature generally behaves. They do not dictate how nature must always behave (*see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST).

If God created the universe for the good of his creatures, it seems that he would miraculously intervene in their lives if their good depended on it. Surely their all-good Creator would not abandon his creation. Instead it would seem that such a God would continue to exercise the love and concern for his creatures that prompted him to create them to begin with, even if it meant providing that care through miraculous means (*see* EVIL, PROBLEM OF).

Assuming, then, that miracles are possible, then one cannot reject out of hand every claim to supernatural revelation without first examining the evidence for its support. If it lacks supporting evidence, it should be rejected. But if the evidence does substantiate the claim, then the alleged revelation should be considered authentic. It certainly should not simply be ruled out of court without further investigation.

Further, simply because many individuals and groups have invented and abused religious beliefs is not sufficient ground for rejecting supernatural religions. Scientific discoveries have been abused, but few suggest that abuse makes the discoveries false or a reason to abolish science. Also, the mutability of human language and the fact of human error does not appear to be a valid argument against supernatural revelation (*see* BIBLE, ALLEGED ERRORS IN; BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR). An all-powerful, all-knowing God could conceivably overcome these problems. At least such problems should not rule out the possibility that God has revealed himself, either verbally or in written form. Again, the evidence should first be consulted.

Finally, the deists' case against Christianity and the Bible has been found wanting (*see* BIBLE CRITICISM). What antisupernaturalist has adequately answered such Christian theists as J. Gersham Machen, and C. S. Lewis (*see* Lewis, esp. *Miracles*; Machen)? They have built an extensive and solid case from science, philosophy, and logic against the belief that miracle stories in the Bible are necessarily mythical (*see* MYTHOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT).

For example, Paine's belief that most of the books of the Bible were written by people other than the ones who claimed to write them and written very late is still

proclaimed as indisputable fact by many critics. But there is not one credible shred of evidence that has not been rejected for good reason by archaeologists and biblical scholars. More than 25,000 finds have confirmed the picture of the ancient world given in the Bible (*see* ARCHAEOLOGY, NEW TESTAMENT; ARCHAEOLOGY, OLD TESTAMENT). There is sufficient evidence to support the authorship claims and early dates for most biblical books (*see* NEW TESTAMENT, DATING OF; NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS, RELIABILITY OF).

Further, the deistic attack against such Christian teachings as the Trinity, redemption, and deity of Christ (*see* CHRIST, DEITY OF), shows a superficial and naive understanding of these teachings.

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**Pantheism.** *Pantheism* means all (“pan”) is God (“theism”). It is the worldview held by most Hindus, many Buddhists, and other New Age religions. It is also the worldview of Christian Science, Unity, and Scientology.

According to pantheism, God “is all in all.” God pervades all things, contains all things, subsumes all things, and is found within all things. Nothing exists apart from God, and all things are in some way identified with God. The world is God, and God is the world. But more precisely, in pantheism all is God, and God is all.

Pantheism has a long history in both the East and the West. From the Eastern mysticism of Hindu sages and seers to the rationalism of such Western philosophers as Parmenides, Benedict Spinoza, and G. W. F. Hegel, pantheism has always had advocates.

**Kinds of Pantheism.** There are differing types of belief within pantheism. An *absolute* pantheism is represented by the thought of the fifth-century B.C. Greek philosopher Parmenides and the Vedanta school of Hinduism (*see* HINDUISM, VEDANTA). Absolute pantheism teaches that there is only one being in the world, God, and that all else that appears to exist actually does not. Another type is *emanational* pantheism, which was set forth by the third century A.D. philosopher, Plotinus. According to this view, everything flows from God in the same way a flower unfolds from a seed. There is also the *developmental* pantheism of Hegel (1770–1831). Hegel viewed the events of history as the unfolding manifestations of Absolute Spirit. The *modal* pantheism of the seventeenth-century rationalist Spinoza argued that there is only one absolute substance in which all finite things are merely modes or moments. The *multilevel* pantheism is found in some forms of Hinduism, especially as expressed by Radhakrishnan. This view sees various levels of manifestation of God, with the highest level manifesting God as the Absolute One, and lower levels showing him in increasing multiplicity. *Permeational* pantheism is the view popularized by the *Star Wars* movies of George Lucas, in which the Force (Tao) penetrates all things. This belief is found in Zen Buddhism.

**Basic Beliefs.** There are other types of pantheism, but these lay out the worldview’s commonalities. Each of these types identifies God with the world, but they vary in the conception of this identity. All pantheists believe that God and the real world are one, but they differ as to how God and the world are united. The following are basic beliefs of a pantheistic worldview.

*Nature of God.* God and reality are ultimately impersonal. Personality, consciousness, and intellect are characteristics of lower manifestations of God, but they are not to be confused with God in his being. In God there is the absolute simplicity of one. There are no parts. Multiplicity may flow from it, but in and of itself it is simple, not multiple.

*Nature of the Universe.* Those pantheists who grant any kind of reality to the universe agree that it was created *ex deo*, “out of God,” not *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing,” as theism maintains (*see* CREATION, VIEWS OF). There is only one “Being” or Existent in the universe; everything else is an emanation or manifestation of it (*see* ONE AND MANY, PROBLEM OF). Of course, absolute pantheists hold that the universe is not even a manifestation. We are all simply part of an elaborate illusion. Creation simply does not exist. God exists. Nothing else.

*God in Relation to the Universe.* In contrast to theists, who view God as beyond and separate from the universe, pantheists believe that God and the universe are one. The

theist grants some reality to the universe of multiplicity, while the pantheist does not. Those who deny the existence of the universe, of course, see no real relation between God and the universe. But all pantheists agree that whatever reality exists, it is God.

*Miracles.* An implication of pantheism is that miracles are impossible. For if all is God, and God is all, nothing exists apart from God that could be interrupted or broken into, which is what the nature of a miracle requires. For more discussion of this, see the article on Spinoza. Since pantheists agree that God is simple (has no parts) and is all there is, then God could not perform any miracles, for a miracle implies a God who is in some sense “outside” of the world in which he “intervenes.” The only sense in which God “intervenes” in the world is by a regular penetration of it in accordance with repeated higher spiritual laws, such as the law of *karma* (see REINCARNATION). Therefore, the pantheistic worldview rules out miracles (see MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST).

*Human Beings.* Pantheists either believe that the human as a distinct being is absolutely unreal (absolute pantheism) or else that humanity is real but far less real than God. The primary teaching of absolute pantheism is that humans must overcome their ignorance and realize that they *are* God. Those who put a distance between God and humanity teach a dualistic view of the person—a body and a soul. The body holds the human down, keeping him or her from uniting with God. So each must purge his or her body so the soul can be released to attain oneness with the Absolute One. For all pantheists, the chief goal or end of humanity is to unite with God.

*Ethics.* Pantheists usually strive to live moral lives and to encourage others to do so. Often their writings are filled with exhortations to use good judgment, to be devoted to truth, and to selflessly love others.

However, these exhortations usually apply to a lower level of spiritual attainment. Once a person has achieved union with God, he has no further concern with moral laws. Nonattachment or utter unconcern for one’s actions and their results are often taught as a prerequisite to achieving oneness with God. Since God is beyond good and evil, the person must transcend them to reach God. Morality is stressed as only a temporary concern, and underlying this is no absolute basis for right or wrong (see ABSOLUTES, MORAL). Prabhavananda and Christopher Usherwood admit as much when they say, “Every action, under certain circumstances and for certain people, may be a stepping-stone to spiritual growth—if it is done in the spirit of nonattachment. All good and all evil is relative to the individual point of growth. . . . But, in the highest sense, there can be neither good nor evil” (*Bhagavad-Gita*, 140).

Thus, for the pantheist, ethical conduct is a means, not an end in itself. It is used only to help one attain a higher level of spirituality. Ultimately reality is neither good nor evil. As Prabhavananda puts it: “If we say, ‘I am good,’ or ‘I am bad,’ we are only talking the language of *maya* [the world of illusion] (see ILLUSIONISM). ‘I am Brahman,’ is the only true statement regarding ourselves that any of us can make” (*Spiritual Heritage*, 203).

*History and Human Destiny.* Pantheists hardly ever talk about history, except in modified forms of pantheism usually influenced by Western theism (as in Hegel). They are not concerned with it, for either it does not exist, or it is regarded as an aspect of the world of appearances, a thing to be transcended. History has no ultimate goal or end. Whenever it is granted a kind of reality, it is always (except in Hegel’s pantheism) considered to be cyclical. Like the wheel of *samsara*, history forever repeats itself. There

are no unique events or final events of history. There is no millennium, utopia, or eschaton.

As to individual human destiny, most pantheists, especially Eastern varieties, believe in reincarnation. After the soul leaves the body it enters into another mortal body to work off its *karma*. Eventually the goal is to leave the body and, in the case of most pantheists, merge with God. This is called *Nirvana*, and it means the loss of individuality. Ultimate salvation in this kind of pantheistic system is *from* one's individuality, not *in* it as Christians believe (*see* IMMORTALITY).

***Evaluation. Contributions of Pantheism.*** Pantheism attempts to explain all of reality, rather than parts of it. If we are part of a *uni*-verse, than any worldview must seek to embrace that unity. Pantheism does have a holistic view of things. Any comprehensive view of God must include God's immanent presence and activity in the world. A God who will not or cannot relate to humanity will not receive worship from many, nor will many think he deserves it. Pantheism rightly stresses that God is in the world and intimately related to it. He is not transcendently remote and totally removed from the universe.

Pantheism teaches that only God is absolute and necessary. Anything and everything else must be less than absolute and be utterly dependent upon God. Unless God exists, nothing else could exist either. Surely, it is necessary for a worldview to so relate everything to the ultimate.

Finally, the stress pantheism places on not ascribing limitations to God in our language about him is appropriate. If God is unlimited and transcendent, then all limitations must be negated from terms that are applied to him. Without this, verbal idolatry results. The Infinite cannot be encompassed by our finite conceptions.

***Criticisms.*** Absolute pantheism is self-defeating. The absolute pantheist claims: "I am God." But God is the changeless Absolute. However, humanity goes through a process of change called enlightenment because he has this awareness. So how could people be God when people change but God does not?

Pantheists attempt to escape this criticism by allowing some reality to humanity, whether it be emanational, modal, or manifestational. But if we are really only modes of God, then why are we oblivious to it? H. P. Owen describes this as a "metaphysical amnesia" that pervades all our lives. If we are being deceived about the consciousness of our own individual existence, how do we know that the pantheist is not also being deceived in claiming to be conscious of reality as ultimately one?

In fact, if the world is really an illusion, how can we distinguish between reality and fantasy at all? Lao-tse puts the question well: "If, when I was asleep I was a man dreaming I was a butterfly, how do I know when I am awake I am not a butterfly dreaming I am a man?" (Guinness, 14). If what we continually perceive to be real is not, how could we ever distinguish between reality and fantasy? Maybe when we cross a busy street, with three lanes of traffic coming toward us, we should not worry, for it's all an illusion anyway. Indeed, should we even look when crossing the street, if we, the traffic, and the street do not really exist? If pantheists would live out their pantheism consistently, there would be no pantheists left.

***Self-Refuting Nature of Pantheism.*** Pantheism is self-refuting (*see*), at least all forms that claim individuality is an illusion caused by my mind. For according to pantheism, individual minds are themselves aspects of the illusion and can therefore provide no basis for explaining it. If the mind is part of the illusion, it cannot be the ground for explaining the illusion. Hence, if pantheism is true in asserting that my individuality is an illusion, then pantheism is false, since there is then no basis for explaining the illusion (see D.K. Clark, chapter 7).

Pantheism also fails to handle the problem of evil in a satisfactory manner (*see* EVIL, PROBLEM OF). To pronounce evil an illusion (*see* ILLUSIONISM) or as less than real is not only frustrating and hollow to those experiencing evil, but it seems philosophically inadequate. If evil is not real, then what is the origin of the illusion? Why have people experienced it for so long, and why does it seem so real? Despite the pantheist's claim to the contrary, he or she also experiences pain, suffering, and eventually will die. Even pantheists double-over in pain when they get appendicitis. They jump out of the way of an on-coming truck so as not to get hurt.

If God is all, and all is God, as pantheists maintain, then evil is an illusion and ultimately there are no rights and wrongs. For there are four possibilities regarding good and evil:

1. If God is all-good, then evil must exist apart from God. But this is impossible since God is all—nothing can exist apart from It.
2. If God is all-evil, then good must exist apart from God. This is not possible either, since God is all.
3. God is both all-good and all-evil. This cannot be, for it is self-contradictory to affirm that the same being is both all good and all evil at the same time. Further, most pantheists agree that God is beyond good and evil. Therefore God is neither good nor evil.
4. Good and evil are illusory. They are not real categories.

Option four is what most pantheists believe. But if evil is only an illusion, then ultimately there is no such thing as good and evil thoughts or actions. Hence, what difference would it make whether we praise or curse, counsel or rape, love or murder someone? If there is no final moral difference between those actions, absolute moral responsibilities do not exist. Cruelty and noncruelty are ultimately the same. One critic made the point with this illustration:

One day I was talking to a group of people in the digs of a young South African in Cambridge. Among others, there was present a young Indian who was of Sikh background but a Hindu by religion. He started to speak strongly against Christianity, but did not really understand the problems of his own beliefs. So I said, "Am I not correct in saying that on the basis of your system, cruelty and non-cruelty are ultimately equal, that there is no intrinsic difference between them?" He agreed. . . . The student in whose room we met, who had clearly understood the implications of what the Sikh had admitted, picked up his kettle of boiling water with which he was about to make tea, and stood with it steaming over the Indian's head. The man looked up and asked him what he was doing and he said, with a cold yet gentle finality, "There is no difference between cruelty and non-cruelty." Thereupon the Hindu walked out into the night. [Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 101]

If pantheists are correct that reality is not moral, that good and evil, right and wrong, are inapplicable to what is, then to be right is as meaningless as to be wrong (Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*). The foundation for morality is destroyed. Pantheism does not take the problem of evil seriously. As C. S. Lewis put it, “If you do not take the distinctions between good and bad seriously, then it is easy to say that anything you find in this world is a part of God. But, of course, if you think some things really bad, and God really good, then you cannot talk like that” (*Mere Christianity*, 30).

In this and other ways, the pantheistic concept of God is incoherent. To say God is infinite, yet somehow shares his being (*ex deo*) with creation, is to raise the problem of how the finite can be infinite, which is what absolute pantheists say. Otherwise, one must consider the finite world less than real, though existing. We have seen the problems with the first, absolute option. But the second option makes God both infinite and finite, for it is said to share part of its being with creatures which entails an Infinite Being becoming less than infinite. But how can the Infinite be finite, the Absolute be relative, and the Unchanging changed?

Pantheism’s God also is unknowable. The very claim, “God is unknowable in an intellectual way,” seems either meaningless or self-defeating. For if the claim itself cannot be understood in an intellectual way, then it is self-defeating. For what is being affirmed is that nothing can be understood about God in an intellectual way. But the pantheist expects us to intellectually know this truth that God cannot be understood in an intellectual way. In other words, the pantheist appears to be making a statement about God to the effect that no such statements can be made about God. But how can one make a positive affirmation about God which claims that only negative affirmations can be made about God? Plotinus admitted that negative knowledge presupposes some positive awareness. Otherwise, one would not know what to negate.

Critics further claim that the denial of many pantheists of the applicability of logic to reality is self-defeating. For to deny that logic applies to reality, it would seem that one must make a logical statement about reality to the effect that no logical statements can be made. For example, when Zen Buddhist D. T. Suzuki says that to comprehend life we must abandon logic (Suzuki, 58), he uses logic in his affirmation and applies it to reality. Indeed, the law of noncontradiction (A cannot both be A and not-A) cannot be denied without using it in the very denial (*see* FIRST PRINCIPLES). Therefore, to deny that logic applies to reality, one must not make a logical statement about reality. But then how will the position be defended?

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**Panentheism.** *Panentheism* is not to be confused with *pantheism*. Pantheism literally means all (“pan”) is God (“theism”), but panentheism means “all *in* God.” It is also called *process theology* (since it views God as a changing Being), *bipolar theism* (since it believes God has two poles), *organicism* (since it views all that actually is as a gigantic organism), and *neoclassical theism* (because it believes God is finite and temporal, in contrast to classical theism).

Differences between theism and panentheism can be summarized:

<b>Theism</b>	<b>Panentheism</b>
God is Creator.	God is director.
Creation is ex nihilo.	Creation is ex materia.
God is sovereign over world.	God is working with world.
God is independent of world.	God is dependent on world.
God is unchanging.	God is changing.
God is absolutely perfect.	God is growing more perfect.
God is monopolar.	God is bipolar.
God is actually infinite.	God is actually finite.

Rather than viewing God as the infinite, unchanging sovereign Creator of the world who brought it into existence, panentheists think of God as a finite, changing, director of world affairs who works in cooperation with the world in order to achieve greater perfection in his nature.

Theism views God’s relation to the world as a painter to a painting. The painter exists independently of the painting; he brought the painting into existence, and yet his mind is expressed in the painting. By contrast, the panentheist views God’s relation to the world the way a mind is related to a body. Indeed, they believe the world is God’s “body” (one pole) and the “mind” is the other pole. This is why the term *bipolar* is used. However, like some modern materialists who believe the mind is dependent on the brain, panentheists believe God is dependent on the world. Yet there is a reciprocal dependence, a sense in which the world is dependent on God.

**Variations on Panentheism.** All panentheists agree that God has two poles, an actual pole (the world) and a potential pole (beyond the world). All agree that God is changing, finite, and temporal in his actual pole. And all agree that his potential pole is unchanging and eternal.

The major difference in how they view God is whether God in his actual pole is one actual entity (event) or a society of actual entities. Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) holds the former view, and Charles Hartshorne holds the latter.

Most other differences are primarily methodological. Whitehead’s approach is more empirical, while Hartshorne’s is more rational. Hence, Whitehead has a kind of teleological argument for God, whereas Hartshorne is famous for his ontological argument. Some panentheists, such as John Cobb, reject the disjunction between the two poles in God. He claims that God acts as a unity, not simply in one pole or the other. But all agree that God has two poles which can be diagrammed:

Primordial Nature	Consequent Nature
potential pole	actual pole
eternal	temporal
absolute	relative
unchanging	changing
imperishable	perishable
unlimited	limited
conceptual	physical
abstract	concrete
necessary	contingent
eternal objects	actual entities
unconscious drive	conscious realization

**Representatives of Panentheism.** There were many forerunners of a process view of God. Plato's (428–348 B.C.) Demiurgos eternally struggled with the chaos to form it into the cosmos. This provided the dualistic (*see* DUALISM) background for God's two "poles." Even earlier (ca. 500 B.C.), Heraclitus's flux philosophy asserted that the world is a constantly changing process.

In the modern world, G. W. F. Hegel's (1770–1831) progressive unfolding of God in the world process took a significant step toward a Panentheism. In the Cosmic Evolutionism of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) the universe is viewed as an unfolding and developing process. Henri Bergson (1851–1941) then proposed a creative evolution (1907) of a life force (*elan vital*) which drives evolution forward in "leaps." Later he identified this Force with God (1935). Even before this, Samuel Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity* (1920) pioneered a process view of God's relation to the temporal universe. The main fountainhead of panentheism, however, is Whitehead. His influence is manifest in Hartshorne, Schubert Ogden, Cobb, and others.

**Basic Beliefs of Panentheism.** Although there are intramural differences among panentheists, their basic worldview has the same essential elements. Elements included are:

*The Nature of God.* All panentheists agree that God has two poles. The consequent or concrete pole is God in reality. It is God as he actually is in his moment-by-moment existence. It is God in the actual particulars of his becoming. In this pole God is finite, relative, dependent, contingent, and in process. God's other pole is the primordial or abstract one. This is God in abstraction, what is common and constant in God's character no matter what world exists. The divine abstract pole gives a mere outline of God's existence without filling it out with concrete or particular content. In this pole God is infinite, absolute, independent, necessary, and immutable.

Panentheists agree that God's abstract pole is included in his concrete pole. His becoming or process characterizes all of reality. But this reality of God is not to be thought of as being, which is static and uncreative. Creativity pervades all that exists. And God is supremely creative.



God is also viewed as personal. There is disagreement over whether he is one actual entity (as in Whitehead) or an ordered series of actual entities (as in Hartshorne). But almost all panentheists believe that God is personal.

*Nature of the Universe.* The universe is characterized by process, change, or becoming. This is so because it is constituted by a multitude of self-creative creatures that are constantly introducing change and novelty into the universe. Also, the universe is eternal. This does not necessarily mean that the present universe is eternal. Rather it could mean that there have been many universes throughout the infinite past. Some world has existed in some form always and some world in some form will always exist into the infinite future. Lastly, all panentheists reject the traditional theistic understanding of creation out of nothing, that is, *ex nihilo* (see CREATION, VIEWS OF). Some, including Ogden, accept the phrase *ex nihilo* but reinterpret creation to mean only that the present world or world-state once was not and was created out of a previous world. Others (like Whitehead and Hartshorne) reject even the notion of creation *ex nihilo* and affirm creation *ex materia* (out of preexistent material). Of course, since the material is really God's physical pole, so creation is also *ex deo*. In fact, the present universe is cocreated by God and man out of the preexisting "stuff." God, of course, is the prime Transformer or Shaper of each world and of each world-state.

*Relation of God to Universe.* In a panentheistic worldview, God's consequent pole is the world. This does not mean that God and the world are identical, for God is more than the world, and the individuals that make up the world are distinct from God. It does mean, however, that the world is God's cosmic body and that those creatures who make up the world are like cells in his body. This is why God cannot exist without some kind of physical universe. He does not need this world, but he must coexist in *some* world. Similarly, the world cannot exist without God. Hence the world and God are mutually dependent. Moreover, the creatures in the universe contribute value to God's life. The inclusive aim or goal of all creatures is to enrich God's happiness and thus help him fulfill what he lacks.

*Miracles.* An implication of panentheism is that supernatural acts are impossible (see MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST). Since the world is the body of God there is nothing apart from God that can be broken into or interrupted. Indeed, God is largely a passive recipient of his creatures' activity rather than an active force in the world. God is a cosmic Sympathizer rather than a cosmic Activist (see FINITE GODISM; KUSHNER, HAROLD). Consequently miraculous intervention in the world is out of character with the nature of the panentheistic God. Many panentheists reject miracles because the contemporary scientific view of the world rules them out. Ogden takes this stance. This is one reason why he adopts Rudolph Bultmann's program to demythologize the miracle stories recorded in the Bible (see MYTHOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT).

*Human Beings.* Panentheists agree that humanity is personal and free. In fact, humanity as a whole is a co-creator with God and of God. He not only helps decide the course of human and world events but also those of God. Human identity is not found in some enduring "I" or self. Rather, like the rest of the world, identity is found only in the events or actual occasions of history in which humanity is becoming. The human being is partially creating himself or herself in every decision and act each moment. The goal is to serve God by contributing value to his ever growing experience.

*Ethics.* Many panentheists believe that there are no absolute values (*see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF). Since God and the world are in great flux, there can be no absolute, unchanging standard of value. On the other hand, such panentheists as Hartshorne contend that there is a universal basis for ethics, namely, beauty, harmony, and intensity. Anything that promotes or builds upon or acts from this basis is good; anything that does not do so is evil. But even granting this universal aesthetic foundation, specific ethical commands or rules are not universal. Though in general one should promote beauty and not ugliness, exactly how this should be done is relative. Therefore, even though there may be an ultimate basis or ground for ethics, values themselves are not absolute but relative.

*Human Destiny.* The destiny of humanity is not to be looked for in an actual heaven or hell or a conscious afterlife (*see* IMMORTALITY). Rather, human beings, like all of God's creatures, will live forever only in God's cosmic memory. A person who contributes richly to God's life, will have the satisfaction of knowing that God will fondly remember him or her forever. Those who live without contributing much value to God, who, in other words, live unfaithfully, will not be remembered with much fondness by God.

In panentheism an ongoing evolutionary process helps move events forever forward. God and humanity are also seen as co-creators of history. However, unlike theism, there is no ultimate end of history. There will always be the unsurpassable deity who is constantly growing in perfection. And there will always be some world filled with self-creative creatures whose inclusive aim is to enrich the experience of God. History has no beginning and it has no end. There is no ultimate destiny, utopia, eschaton, or end. History, as everything else, has always been, is coming to be now, and will always be in process. History is not going anywhere, it is just going on.

*Evaluation. Contributions of Panentheism.* Panentheists seek a comprehensive view of reality. They recognize that a piecemeal understanding of things is inadequate. Instead they have sought to develop a coherent and reasonable view of all that exists, a complete worldview.

Panentheism manages to posit an intimate relation between God and the world without destroying that relation, as does pantheism. God is *in* the world but not identical to it. The presence of God in the universe does not destroy the multiplicity that humans experience, but rather preserves it and even bestows upon it purpose and meaning. Granting the existence of a supreme Being, panentheists show that the world must depend upon God for its origin and continuation. Unless God exists, the world could not continue to exist. They insist that there must be an adequate cause to account for the world.

Panentheists seriously relate their worldview to contemporary theories of science. Whatever worldview one holds, science cannot be ignored. Valid human discoveries in any field or discipline must be incorporated into one's worldview. If reality is truly reasonable and noncontradictory, then all of knowledge can be consistently systematized, no matter who discovers it or where it is found. Panentheists take this to heart.

*Criticisms of Panentheism.* Some of the more important criticisms will be noted here.

The idea of a God who is both infinite and finite, necessary and contingent, absolute and relative, is contradictory. A contradiction results when opposites are affirmed of the same thing at the same time and in the same manner or respect. For example, to say that a

bucket is both filled with water and not filled with water at the same time and in the same respect is contradictory. Such a thing could never occur, for it is logically impossible.

Hartshorne has responded to the charge of contradiction by pointing out that the metaphysical contraries are not attributed to the same divine pole. Rather those attributes that belong together, such as infinity and necessity, are applied to one pole while the other attributes that belong together, such as finitude and contingency, are applied to a different pole. Infinity and finitude, necessity and contingency, though applied to the same being at the same time, are applied to the appropriate poles in God (Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God*, 22–24). The Christian theist, H. P. Owen, has responded that there seems to be no real distinction between the two divine poles. Since the abstract pole has no concrete or actual existence, then it must be a mere idea, having mental reality but no existence (Owen, 105). Therefore God must not really be infinite, and necessary, for those attributes are in the potential pole that does not exist in reality. God in reality is only finite and contingent. Or God must be both sides of the metaphysical contraries at the same time and in the same pole. The first option makes panentheism's doctrine of God meaningless, and the second makes it contradictory. In either event the bipolar concept of God is incoherent.

The idea of God as a self-caused being is contradictory. It is difficult to see how any being could cause itself to exist. To think this could occur is to believe that potentials can actualize themselves. Cups could fill themselves with coffee and steel could make itself into a skyscraper. How could a being exist prior to itself in order to bring itself into existence? This is what a self-caused being would have to do in order to exist. A panentheist might respond that God did not bring himself into existence; he has eternally existed. Rather, the panentheistic version of a self-caused God creates his becoming. That is, God produces changes in himself. God actualizes his own potentials for growth.

But this leads to another problem. If God causes his own becoming and not his own being, then what or who sustains God in existence? How can a being change without there existing an unchanging being that grounds the changing being's existence? Everything cannot be in flux. Whatever changes passes from potentiality to actuality, from what it is not to what is. Such change could not actualize itself or be self-caused, for potentials are not yet the something they have the potential to be.

Nothing cannot produce something. Neither could such changes be uncaused, for there must be a cause for every effect or event (*see CAUSALITY, PRINCIPLE OF*). It seems, therefore, that the universe of change, which is the concrete pole of God, must be caused by something that does not change. Something outside of the changing order must sustain the entire order in existence. Therefore there must be a being other than what the process philosopher views as "God" that sustains him in existence. If this is true, then the panentheistic God is not really God, but the Being that grounds him is really God. Such a God is not an immutable-mutable being, as is the process deity, but would have to be simply immutable.

Another aspect of this problem is that the panentheist knows that everything, including God, is relative and changing. How can anyone know that something is changing when there is no stable reference point by which to measure the change? The theist has God and his absolute, unchanging character and will. The panentheist has no such standard. A panentheist could answer that his unchanging measure is the immutable primordial nature of God. But this does not seem adequate. For God's primordial pole is

only an abstraction—it has no reality. It can be a conceptual measure, but not an actual one. Besides, a panentheist who says that God is immutable means that God is immutably mutable—He cannot fail to always change and always change for the better (Hartshorne, *Natural Theology*, 110, 276). Hence we seem to be back where we started, with everything changing and nothing that is being changed.

The panentheistic concept of personhood appears to conflict with our experience of ourselves. We, at least, believe ourselves to be personal beings who, to some degree, endure change. Most of us do not believe that we become new persons each moment we exist. In fact, to even say that “I become a new person each moment I exist” assumes that there is something that endures, the “I” to whom the changes occur. Otherwise, what changes? If nothing endures from moment to moment, then can it really be said that anything changes? If there is no sense in which the self is a continuous identity, then it appears that we can only speak of a series of unrelated actual “I” occasions (ibid., 58). And the only thing that can be said to change in that series of “I’s” is the series itself, not each individual “I” in the series. This seems to destroy self-identity and to contradict human experience. This problem is particularly acute for Hartshorne. In accord with his view, one goes out of existence every time there is a moment with no conscious “I.” That would include periods of sleep or under anesthesia or other moments of lapsed consciousness. A parent awakening a child from sleep would actually call the young one back into existence.

To say with the panentheist that some world or other must have always existed begs the question. Of course it is impossible that total nothingness could ever be experienced, for no one could be there to experience it. Otherwise it would not be *total* nothingness. But this presupposes that only what can be experienced can be true. Why should this criteria for truth be accepted? Hartshorne implies that it should be accepted because there can be no meaning without experience (ibid.). Thus a concept that cannot be experienced must be meaningless. But if this is so then Hartshorne seems to have won his case by definition. For if there can be no meaning without experience, then total nonbeing, which cannot be experienced, must be meaningless. Hartshorne has established his case by defining meaning in such a way that makes total nonbeing a meaningless concept. He has not proved the meaninglessness of “nothing exists” but only assumed it, which is question-begging.

Even if Hartshorne can establish that total nothingness is not possible, the panentheistic view does not follow. For this would simply be a way of saying that everything cannot be contingent. But this leads naturally to a theistic position (*see* THEISM) in which there must be a Necessary Being beyond the contingent world. It is not necessary to conclude that panentheism is true, simply because a total state of nothingness is not possible.

If the proposition “Nothing exists.” is logically possible, then the existence of Hartshorne’s and Ogden’s God is tenuous. Such a God must keep the universe rolling and change universes quickly, or he poofs out of the picture. He is tied as with an umbilical cord to some world. But if it is logically possible that “some world exists” has not always been true, then it is logically possible that “God exists” has at some time been false. But, according to Hartshorne and Ogden, if God is not logically necessary, a necessary being that must always exist no matter what, then the existence of God must be logically impossible. By this rule the God of Hartshorne and Ogden is necessarily false.

Process theology faces a serious dilemma (Gruenler, 75–79). God comprehends the whole universe at one time, yet God is limited to space and time. But anything limited to space and time cannot think any faster than the speed of light, which takes billions of years to cross the universe at about 186,000 miles a second. However, there seems to be no way that a mind which takes this kind of time to think its way around the universe could simultaneously comprehend and direct the whole universe. On the other hand, if God’s mind does transcend the universe of space and time and instantly and simultaneously comprehend the whole, then this is not a panentheistic view of God but a theistic view.

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**Polytheism.** Polytheism is the worldview that many finite gods exist in the world. There are differing versions of polytheism. In some forms, all the gods are more or less equal. Each has a personal sphere or domain. In others, the gods form a hierarchy. Henotheism has a chief god, such as Zeus. In some forms, such as the Greek and Roman pantheons, the number of gods is limited. Mormonism supports an indefinite number of gods. Some forms of polytheism stand alone, unconnected with any other worldview. In Hinduism, however, polytheism and pantheism go hand-in-hand with one impersonal Brahman and 330 million-plus personal manifestations of the one impersonal ultimate Reality.

***The Rise of Polytheism.*** The fortunes of polytheism, at least in the West, are inversely related to the health of theism (belief in one God). Greek polytheism declined with the rise of Plato and Aristotle’s philosophical theism. Roman polytheism all but died with the rise of Christianity in the West. Augustine’s *City of God* narrates the Christian response to Roman polytheism. Polytheism has experienced a revival with the decline of Judeo-Christian views in the broader culture. This has been accompanied with a rise in witchcraft that also embraces polytheism. Margo Adler’s book, *Drawing Down the Moon*, chronicles this movement.

David L. Miller, author of *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*, argues that polytheism is alive and well in contemporary society. He urges people in Western society to get in tune with the gods in order to liberate themselves to be the kind of people they really are. All citations in this article are to Miller’s book.

***Basic Beliefs. Rejection of Monotheism.*** The establishment of polytheism necessitates the demolition of monotheism. God must be rejected before the gods can be accepted.

Monotheism is the belief in one God above and beyond the world. Monotheistic thinking gathers all human “explanation systems, whether theological, sociological, political, historical, philosophical, or psychological” under one all-embracing system. This system operates “according to fixed concepts and categories” that are controlled by an either/or kind of logic. Something is “either true or false, either this or that, either beautiful or ugly, either good or evil.” But this kind of thinking, says Miller, a people in a time when experience becomes self-consciously pluralistic, radically both/and.” This is what Western society is today—radically pluralistic (*see* PLURALISM, RELIGIOUS). The contemporary Westerner lives in a world where truth and morality are relative. “Life often feels anarchistic: no horizons, fences, boundaries, and no center to prove one securely close to home” (7, 9). The contemporary situation is so pluralistic that its modern interpreters “have had to rely on a strange set of words” in their attempt to explain it. Charles Baudouin speaks of *polyphonic meaning* and being. In speaking of the nature of thinking required for contemporary understanding, Philip Wheelwright points to *plurisignificative knowing* and communicating. Norman O. Brown talks about *polymorphous reality* as a key to our history, and Ray Hart names the deepest aspect of our literature articulations of reality with the phrase *polysemous functioning of imaginal discourse*. If we try to make sense of our society Michael Novak suggests it will help to think of America as a pluralistic community of radically unmeltable ethnics. Concerning government and political science, Robert Dahl speaks of “*polyarchy*” (3).

This “poly” kind of thinking betrays the fact that “we have suffered a death of God” (*see* ATHEISM). No longer is there “a single center holding things together.” God is dead,

as Friedrich Nietzsche so boldly declared. Western civilization has buried the monotheistic way of thinking and speaking about God, being, and reality (37). Released from the “tyrannical imperialism of monotheism,” people can discover new dimensions and diversity. There is a new potential for imaginative hopes and desires, laws and pleasures (4).

Significantly, Miller avoids using references to deities in defining what he means by *polytheism*. Polytheism is “a specific religious situation, . . . characterized by plurality, and plurality that manifests itself in many forms.” Socially speaking, it is a “situation” in which pluralism intermingles various values, social patterns, and moral principles. Sometimes these values and patterns work together, but more often they are incompatible and each worldview vies to dominate the “normal social order” (4).

Philosophically, polytheism is experienced when no single “truth” guides people to “a single grammar, a single logic, or a single symbol-system” (ibid.). Polytheism mediates the worldview warfare by introducing “relativism, indeterminacy, plural logic systems, irrational numbers; substances that do not have substances, such as quarks; double explanations for light; and black holes in the middle of actual realities” (5).

Behind this peace-making role, however, polytheism works by seeking to absorb other religious ideas into itself. It remains the worship of multiple gods and goddesses. In the curious popular form, these deities are not worshiped all at the same time. Rather, only one god or goddess at a time can be worshiped. In this, polytheism gives a nod to monotheism, the worship of one God. “Polytheistic religion is actually a polytheistic theology, a system of symbolizing reality in a plural way in order to account for all experience, but that the religious practice is composed of consecutive monotheisms.” And this “implies that our experience of social, intellectual, and psychological worlds is religious—that is, it is so profound and far-reaching that only a theological explanation can account for it fully” (6).

At one time polytheism reigned in Western culture. But when Greek culture collapsed, polytheism died and was replaced by monotheism. Although polytheism remained “in the underground or countercultural tradition of the West” throughout the 2000-year reign of monotheistic thought, it did not have any significant effect. With the death of monotheism, says Miller, polytheism may be resurrected again to its proper place. (11).

Miller believes human beings are naturally polytheistic in consciousness, giving polytheism “advantages” over monotheism. “Only a polytheistic consciousness will account realistically for our lives” (81). People are freed from the idea that they must “get it all together”; polytheism allows an irrationalism in which one may avoid a fully constructed view. Polytheism puts people in touch with the richness and diversity of life. Monotheism encourages thought about what lies behind life, rather than thought about life itself (27, 28).

*The World.* Miller suggests that the new polytheism gives “a new function for the old Gods and Goddesses” (81) through three aspects. First, the new polytheism “is a modern sensibility.” It is not just that “our contemporary society is pluralistic, nor that our roles are many, nor that our morality is relativistic, nor even that our political ideology is fragmented.” These are manifestations of something more fundamental. “The more basic feeling is that the Gods and Goddesses are reemerging in our lives” (64).

Second, the new polytheism rethinks old religious and conceptual ways of thinking. Western thought is rooted in the early Greeks, who were largely polytheistic, so the ideas, concepts, and categories deep in the Western psyche fit the thought or logic of mythic tales (40).

Third, the new polytheism helps confused moderns put into order the “many potencies, many structures of meaning and being, all given to us in the reality of our everyday lives” (64, 65).

Given the death of monotheism and the rebirth of polytheism—even a new polytheism—who or what are the gods and goddesses of this polytheism? Miller maintains that the gods are powers or forces. These forces transcend the personal, the historical, and the social. They are not affected by events or desires. Yet they are immanent in the world as potencies in individuals, in societies, and in nature (6, 60). Miller believes these powers provide a structure of reality that informs human social, intellectual, and personal behavior. (6, 7). These powers are “the Gods and Goddesses of ancient Greece—not Egypt, not the Ancient Near East, not Hindu India, not Ancient China or Japan. Greece is the locus of our polytheism simply because, willy-nilly, we are Occidental men and women” (80, 81).

Do these many different gods act harmoniously? Miller says no. They often act in “contention.” Life may even be characterized as “a war of the Powers”:

Man—his self, his society, and his natural environment—is the arena of an eternal Trojan War. Our moods, emotions, unusual behaviors, dreams, and fantasies tell us those rough moments when the war is no longer a cold war or a border skirmish, but an all-out guerilla conflict. These indicators also tell us, by feeling and intuition, when one God has absented himself and another has not yet rushed into the vacuum. We know the war well. [60]

If modern people acknowledge these gods, new life will be infused into old ways of seeing and thinking. There would be a fresh philosophical structure through which to speak and think about our “deepest experience” (62).

Miller suggests how this new function of the gods and goddesses could work. The tremendous growth in technology can be thought about and informed by the stories of Prometheus, Hephaestus and Asclepius. “Prometheus steals the fire and ends trapped on a rock, gnawed at by the power he has himself supplanted by his knowledge. Hephaestus is the divine smith, the technologist supreme, who is the bastard of his mother and at a total loss for sensuousness and feeling. . . . Asclepius is the technologist of the feelings; he is the psychotherapist whom technology and its civilization will make into the high priest of mental health culture” (66).

The story of the goddess Hera, who “tried to socialize Mount Olympus,” is relieved when “computers and statistical procedures come to be revered as true wisdom” and “consultants and experts must attend every decision in business and government” (67). The work of the “ever-present God Pan (“All”) is seen in the irrational that is always just below the surface of the human experience, breaking out into violence or mysticism (68).

At one time the view of the world was framed around the ideas of the second-century A.D. Alexandrian astronomer Ptolemy. The earth was thought to be “an immovable sphere at the center of the universe, around which nine concentric spheres revolve.” Thus, all that existed was “organized around a single center,” the earth, with the end of the universe imagined to be “fixed and secure.” This monotheistic view of the world



collapsed with Copernicus (and subsequent scientists). Now the universe has no known center and its horizons are neither fixed nor secure. Instead, it is seen as an “infinitely expanding universe whose center is . . . unknown” (9).

*Humankind.* Men and women are “the playground” of the gods (55). The gods parade “through our thoughts without our control and even against our will.” We do not possess the gods, but they possess us (34). They “live through our psychic structures” and “manifest themselves always in our behaviors.” We do not grab the gods, but the “gods grab us, and we play out their stories” (59).

Psychologically, polytheism is experienced in the separate “selves” of personhood. Each self has an autonomy, a life of its own that comes and goes without regard to the will (5). No one can be gripped by more than one God at a time. In this sense Miller and the modern polytheists are monotheistic, or henotheistic. Each person worships one God at a time, the one in control of personhood, out of a large pantheon of gods. However, the story of the one god who is in temporary domination may involve marriages with other gods, parentage by still others, offspring and maiden goddesses. So the conception is always ultimately polytheistic. To think differently is to partake of the self-deception that has been perpetrated by monotheistic thinking (30, cf. 28).

The purpose of humankind is to incarnate the gods, to become aware of their presence, to acknowledge and celebrate them (55). This can occur only when we begin to see our world through polytheistic, mythological glasses (63, 83).

*Values.* All values are relative (*see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF). Truth and falsehood, life and death, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, are all mixed together (29). Monotheistic thinking separates values into either/or concepts and categories (7). But this way of thinking does not adequately account for the many sides of human experience. What does is the polytheistic both/and sort of thinking, which recognizes the relativity of all values.

*Evaluation. Some Positive Values of Polytheism.* Polytheism is a reminder of separate realities, though it doesn’t adequately decipher them. There is a widespread and growing recognition that humanity is not alone in the universe. Reported contacts with UFO beings or extraterrestrials persist. Even many scientists believe that there are intelligent beings in space. Even many nonpolytheistic religions recognize the existence of super human beings, such as angels and demons. If there is a divine reality, it follows that we should seek to discover our relationship to that reality and how we should respond to it. The emphasis that polytheists place on human beings getting “tuned in” to the divine reality and adjusting their behavior accordingly is commendable.

Polytheists are often praised for positing an analogy between man and the gods. If divine beings exist, and if they had something to do with the creation of humankind, then it would seem that human nature would in some way reflect deity. A cause cannot give characteristics to others it does not possess itself. As a painting displays some truths about its painter (e.g., the level of skill, the breadth of imagination, or the care taken) so human beings should display some truth about their Creator(s). Hence, if a person is a creation of some divine reality, some human characteristics should resemble the Maker(s). Thus, it would appear reasonable to conclude that there is some analogy between humanity and the gods (*see* ANALOGY, PRINCIPLE OF).

Polytheists recognize that there are various forces in the world, some uncontrollable. Many scholars today have concluded that behind most myths, be they religious or not, lie true stories of human encounters with forces that press in. These may be forces of nature (e.g., wind, rain, earthquakes, tornadoes, or floods), forces prevalent in culture (e.g., greed, hope, love, or a desire for power), or forces believed to lie behind the universe (e.g., gods, angels, demons). Polytheists, through various story forms, have managed to vividly relate human encounter to such forces (*see* SATAN, REALITY OF).

*Criticisms of Polytheism.* While polytheists have some insights into the nature of reality, nonetheless, their worldview is false. Ultimate reality does not consist of many finite gods. There is good evidence that there is only one God, not many (*see* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT; GOD, EVIDENCE FOR; GOD, NATURE OF; THEISM). This God is Creator of all else. Hence, there are not many divine beings.

If the natural elements, say heaven and earth, had given birth to the gods, then the gods would not be ultimate beings. Whatever is derived from something else is dependent on that something, at least for its origin. How could a being that received its existence from another be above its maker? This would be like a cookie claiming to be greater than its cook, or a computer declaring itself above its creator. Similarly, if nature created the gods, then nature is ultimate. And if, as Paul Tillich thought, worship involves an ultimate commitment to an ultimate, then nature, not the gods, should be worshiped. This would be true regarding whatever was believed to have given birth to the gods or to have preceded them. If the gods are derivative beings, then they are not worthy of ultimate commitment. Why worship something that has no ultimate worth?

Also, as Plotinus noted, all plurality presupposes a prior unity. Many are just a multiple imitation of the One. Thus, many gods are not self-explanatory. What is their basis of unity? And who superintends conflict between them? This is not a polyverse but a universe. If ultimately there is a personal Power behind the universe, it must be a unity.

The anthropic principle reveals that the entire universe was one—with one purpose and Purposer—from the very beginning. From the moment of the big bang the entire universe was fine-tuned for the emergence of human life. This bespeaks of one intelligent Creator. The idea of an eternal universe posited by polytheism has other serious philosophical and scientific objections. One philosophical argument stems from the impossibility of an actual infinite series of events in time. An eternal universe would be a beginningless series of events in time. But how could such a series possibly exist? To illustrate, suppose there were a library with an infinite number of books on its shelves. Imagine that each book is numbered. Since there is an infinite number of books, every book is numbered and every possible number must be printed on the books in the library. From this it would follow that no new book could be added to the library, for there would be no number left to assign. All the numbers have been used up. But this seems absurd, for all objects in reality can be numbered. Further, it would be easy to add to the library, since one could make a new book by tearing a page out of each of the first fifty books, adding a title page, binding them together and putting the finished product on the shelf. Hence, the idea of an actual infinite series of books appears to be impossible. Therefore, the polytheistic belief in an eternal universe would appear to be impossible (*see* Craig, *passim*).

A scientific argument against the idea of an eternal universe can be derived from the modern notion that the universe is expanding. Astronomer Edwin Hubble concluded that

the universe is expanding in all directions. If true, it would follow that at some point in the past the universe was only a single point from which it has been expanding. This single point would be one of “infinite density.” However, no object could be infinitely dense, for if it contained any mass at all it would not be infinitely dense but finitely dense. Hence, a totally shrunken or contracted universe is really no universe at all. The concept of an expanding universe requires a point at which no universe existed. If this is so, then the universe must have begun from nothing (*see* CREATION, VIEWS OF).

Polytheistic gods are within that universe, not beyond it. But the evidence is that the universe came into existence. If the universe is not eternal but came to exist from nothing (*see* CREATION, EX NIHILO), then the gods posited by polytheism would not be eternal; they would have come into existence. But if they came into existence, then they are not gods but creatures made by some eternal Cause (God). But if the gods of polytheism derive their existence from another, then this other is really the supreme God of monotheism. Thus, polytheism collapses into monotheism. Therefore, if the gods exist, they would ultimately be dependent on a Cause beyond them and beyond the universe. But this conclusion coincides with the claims of theism, not those of polytheism.

The polytheistic analogy between humankind and the gods has been criticized as too anthropomorphic (interpreting what is not human on the basis of human characteristics). Certainly the creature should bear some resemblance to the Creator. But to apply human imperfections to deity renders the divine reality as less than worthy of respect and worship. Gods of polytheism appear to be made in human image, rather than we being made in their image. This tends to give credence to the view that polytheism is a human invention or superstition rather than a depiction of what actually is.

**Conclusion.** As a worldview, polytheism lacks rational and evidential support. The many spiritual beings that exist are limited and imperfect. Hence, they imply an unlimited and perfect Creator. Polytheism does not account for either ultimate causality or ultimate unity, which is needed to explain a diverse, changing universe.

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**Pluralism, Metaphysical.** Pluralism affirms that reality is found in many, as opposed to one (*see* ONE AND MANY, PROBLEM OF). It stands in contrast to monism, which claims that reality is one. Pantheism is a form of monism, and theism is a form of pluralism. Monists hold a univocal or equivocal notion of being (*see* PLOTINUS). Theists hold an analogical view of being (*see* ANALOGY, PRINCIPLE OF).

**Pluralism, Religious.** To better understand religious pluralism, several terms related to religion need to be distinguished: *pluralism*, *relativism*, *inclusivism*, and *exclusivism*:

- *Religious pluralism* is the belief that every religion is true. Each provides a genuine encounter with the Ultimate. One may be better than the others, but all are adequate.
- *Relativism* (*see* TRUTH, ABSOLUTE) claims that there are no criteria by which one can tell which religion is true or best. There is no objective truth in religion, and each religion is true to the one holding it.
- *Inclusivism* claims that one religion is explicitly true, while all others are implicitly true.
- *Exclusivism* is the belief that only one religion is true, and the others opposed to it are false.

Christianity is exclusivistic; it claims to be the one and only true religion (*see* CHRIST, UNIQUENESS OF). This places Christians at odds with the modern movements to study comparative religion and work at interfaith communing. Asks Alister McGrath, “How can Christianity’s claims to truth be taken seriously when there are so many rival alternatives and when ‘truth’ itself has become a devalued notion? No one can lay claim to possession of the truth. It is all a question of perspective. All claims to truth are equally valid. There is no universal or privileged vantage point that allows anyone to decide what is right and what is wrong” (“Challenge of Pluralism,” 365).

***Equality among World Religions.*** Pluralist John Hick argues, “I have not found that the people of the other world religions are, in general, on a different moral and spiritual level from Christians.” For “The basic ideal of love and concern for others and of treating them as you would wish them to treat you is, in fact, taught by all the great religious tradition” (Hick, “A Pluralist’s View,” 39). Hick offers as proof the fact that statements similar to the “Golden Rule” of Christianity can be found in other religions (*ibid.*, 39–40).

It is debatable whether practitioners in non-Christian religions can really display what Galatians 5:22–23 calls “the fruit of the Spirit”: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Certainly non-Christians do loving things and feel the heart emotion of attachment that we call love. And others are gentle, good, kind, and self-controlled. But are they able to manifest *agape* love? One can lead a philanthropic life and even die in a stand for personal beliefs, yet not show God-founded holistic true love (*see* 1 Cor. 13:3). Christians are to have a qualitatively different kind of love for one another and especially for God. While God’s common grace enables evil people to do good (*see* Matt. 7:11), only the supernatural love of God can motivate a person to express true *agape* (*cf.* John 15:13; Rom. 5:6–8; 1 John 4:7).

Before one conclude too quickly that William James demonstrated the equality of all forms of saintliness in *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, Jonathan Edwards’ *A Treatise*

*on Religious Affections* should be perused. Edwards argues forcefully that manifestations of Christian godliness are unique, a difference in the highest level of Christian and non-Christian piety.

Even if one could demonstrate a kind of moral equality of practice among most adherents of the great religions, this would not in itself prove moral equality among the religions. A person perfectly practicing a lesser moral code may appear to be more moral than a person imperfectly living according to a higher ethical standard. In order to make a fair comparison one must compare the highest moral teachings of the various religions. For another thing, one must compare the best examples of the adherents to each. A close comparison of the attitudes, goals, and motivations, as well as the actions, of Mother Teresa and Mohandas Gandhi would demonstrate the superiority of Christian compassion for the needy. On the modern religious scene, one must also sort out what is inherent to the moral system of another religion and what has become incorporated into it as the result of Christian missionary activity. Hinduism as a system did not generate social compassion in Gandhi. Gandhi was a student of Christianity who seriously considered conversion. He proclaimed his admiration for Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The social compassion found in some forms of current Hinduism is a foreign import from Christianity, the influence of those like Gandhi who had been touched by Christian principles. Even then it fell short of the full-orbed Christian compassion of Mother Teresa.

Finding a moral principle akin to the Golden Rule (cf. Matt. 7:12) is not enough to show moral equality. This is a manifestation of general revelation, the law written by God in the hearts of all (Rom. 2:12–15). When it was lived out at moments of national spirituality, Christian morality has produced dynamic social compassion, while Eastern religions have produced stagnant societies and Islam has brought intolerant ones (Pinnock in Okhlan, 61).

Hick's analysis begs the question. Only by assuming that the moral common denominator of all religions is the standard by which they should all be judged does he arrive at the not-surprising conclusion that they are all equal. But one had to negate the superior aspects of Christian morality or teaching in order to show that Christianity is not superior. Hick seems to acknowledge this tacitly when he confessed that the "Acceptance of some form of the pluralistic view prompts each to de-emphasize and eventually winnow out that aspect of its self-understanding that entails a claim to unique superiority among the religions of the world" (ibid., 51).

Further, the moral manifestation of a belief does not settle the truth question. For example, the fact that there are outwardly moral Mormons does not prove that Joseph Smith was a true prophet. Indeed, there is strong evidence that he is not a true prophet (see Tanner). Among evidence to the contrary are his demonstrably false prophecies (*see* MIRACLE; PROPHECY AS PROOF OF BIBLE). There is evidence for whether something is true other than the lifestyle of its adherents. Truth is what corresponds to reality (*see* TRUTH, NATURE OF) and, hence, a religion is true if its central tenets correspond to the real world, not merely whether its followers live a good life or even a better one than adherents of another religion.

Fifth, in the final analysis the moral superiority of Christianity does not rest on our imperfection as Christians but on Christ's unique perfection as our exemplar. It is not based on our fallible moral character but on his impeccable character (John 8:46; 2 Cor.

5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:3). In this context, there is clearly a moral superiority of Christianity over all other religions.

***Redemptive Equality of Religions.*** As for the Christian claim of a superior mode of salvation, Hick believes this either begs the question or is not evident in practice. “If we define salvation as being forgiven and accepted by God because of Jesus’ death on the cross, then it becomes a tautology that Christianity alone knows and is able to preach the source of salvation.” And “if we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifest in the ‘fruit of the Spirit,’ then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions—and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent” (ibid., 43). Further, what is common to all world religions is an adequate response to the Ultimate. “But they seem to constitute more or less equally authentic human awareness of and response to the Ultimate, the Real, the final ground and source of everything” (ibid., 45). There are, of course, “a plurality of religious traditions constituting different, but apparently more or less equally salvific, human responses to the Ultimate. These are the great world faiths” (ibid., 47).

Hick’s analysis of salvation beliefs is based on the assumption that all religions have a proper relation to what is really Ultimate. This begs the question. Maybe some are not connected at all to what is really Ultimate (i.e., the true God). Or, perhaps they are not properly related to what is really Ultimate (God).

Hick wrongly assumes that all religions are merely a human response to the Ultimate. But this assumes an antinaturalistic view of religion. In fact, it assumes an Eastern pantheistic view of the Ultimate as what transcends all particular cultural manifestations in the various world religions.

This denial of the truth of any particular religion is itself a form of exclusivism. It favors the particular view known as pantheism in order to deny the particularity of a view known as Christian theism. To assume this kind of pantheistic position as a basis for one’s analysis of all religions, including nonpantheistic ones, simply begs the question. Or to put it another way, the pluralist who denies that any particular religion is any more true than others is making a particular truth claim.

The pluralist view often degenerates to the position that whatever is sincerely believed is true. This means that it matters not whether one is a passionate nazi, satanist, or member of the Flat Earth Society. Any view would be truth. Sincerity is clearly not a test of truth. Many people have been sincerely wrong about many things.

Finally, this implies that all truth claims are a matter of “both-and,” rather than either-or. By this reasoning there could be square circles, wise fools, and educated illiterates. Mutually exclusive propositions cannot both be true. Opposing truth claims of various religions cannot both be true (see LOGIC; FIRST PRINCIPLES). For example, Hindu pantheism and Christian theism affirm mutually exclusive worldviews. Islam denies and Christianity proclaims Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the dead three days later. One or the other must be wrong.

***The Uniqueness of Christ.*** As for the Christian dogma about the uniqueness of Christ (see CHRIST, UNIQUENESS OF) to be God incarnate in human flesh, Hick contends that

there are two main problems: First, Jesus did not teach this uniqueness himself. Second, the concept that Jesus was both God and human lacks coherence.

Hick rejects apparent statements about the uniqueness of Christ in the Gospels because he sees New Testament scholars doing the same thing. “Among mainline New Testament scholars there is today a general consensus that these are not pronouncements of the historical Jesus but words put in his mouth some sixty or seventy years later by a Christian writer expressing the theology that had developed in his part of the expanding church” (ibid., 52–53). Hick cites a list of biblical writers who allegedly agreed that “Jesus did not claim deity for himself” (ibid.).

Hick is misinformed on both points. The historical reliability of the Gospels is now beyond serious dispute (*see* ACTS, HISTORICITY OF; NEW TESTAMENT, DATING OF; NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF). Claims that Jesus’ statements were edited many years later to fit a religious program simply do not square with the facts. The Gospels were available in the forms we now know within the lifetimes of eyewitnesses and contemporaries of the events. Recent evidence seems to be pushing dates earlier. John, thought to be the last Gospel written, was by a participant of the events (John 21; 24). Luke was written by a contemporary disciple who knew the eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1–4). The Gospels are reporting, not creating, the words and deeds of Jesus. There is firm support for his unique claims to be God incarnate (*see* CHRIST, DEITY OF).

Hick’s second allegation is that “it has not proved possible, after some fifteen centuries of intermittent effort, to give any clear meaning to the idea that Jesus had two complete natures, one human and the other divine?” (ibid., 55). Hick asks, “Is it really possible for infinite knowledge to be housed in a finite human brain” (ibid., 55). Again, “Do we really want to claim that Jesus was literally omnipotent but pretended not to be, as in Mark 6:5?” And “while he was good, loving, wise, just, and merciful, there is an obvious problem about how a finite human being could have these qualities in an infinite degree. . . . A finite being cannot have infinite attributes” (ibid., 56).

Hick falls short of claiming that the incarnation involves an outright logical contradiction, though his language could imply that. If it is not a logical contradiction, there is no demonstrated incoherence in the view. Indeed, Hick himself admits that “It is logically permissible to believe anything that is not self-contradictory” (*Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 104). As for the claim that it is difficult to show just how this is so, on the same grounds one would have to reject both much of our common experience as well as modern science (which has difficulty explaining just how light can be both waves and particles).

Second, Hick appears to be misinformed about the orthodox view of the two natures of Christ. His objections assume an unorthodox view known as the monophysite heresy, which confuses the two natures of Christ. His question: “is it really possible for infinite knowledge to be housed in a finite human brain?” (ibid., 55) reveals this confusion. The orthodox view does not claim that there was infinite knowledge in the finite brain of Christ. Rather, it affirms that there were two distinct natures of Christ, one infinite and the other finite. The person of Christ did not have infinite knowledge. He had infinite knowledge only in his infinite nature. As God, he knew all things. As human, Jesus grew in knowledge (Luke 2:52). The same thing applies to Jesus’ other attributes. As God, He was omnipotent. As human, he was not (*see* CHRIST, DEITY OF).

***Allegations of Intolerance.*** Another charge is that exclusivism is intolerant. This is directed at the exclusivists' view that one religious view is true and those opposed to it are false. This, to the pluralists, seems a bit of bigotry. Why should only one view have a franchise on the truth?

By this reasoning, pluralists are also "intolerant." They claim their views are true, to the exclusion of opposing views (including exclusivism). And they certainly would not tolerate the position that pluralistic and opposing nonpluralistic views are both true.

If the charge of intolerance is leveled because of the manner in which some exclusivists express their views, nonpluralists have no monopoly on rudeness, intimidation, and poorly thought-out statements. As is demonstrated in the "politically correct" movement on university campuses, pluralists can be as intolerant as anyone else. In fact, there might be more exclusivists than pluralists who act with respect and restraint. However, it should be noted that the very concept of tolerance implies a real disagreement. One does not tolerate that with which he or she agrees. Tolerance presupposes a self-confident view of truth.

***Narrow-Mindedness.*** The tolerance issue is closely related to a favorite allegation of pluralists that nonpluralists are narrow-minded. They claim that their view is true, and everyone else is in error. This seems presumptuous. Why should only exclusivists be in possession of the truth?

The response is that pluralists (P) and exclusivists (E) make an equal claim to truth and error. Both claim that their view is true and whatever opposes it is false. For example, if E is true, then all non-E is false. Likewise, if P is true then all non-P is false. Both views are "narrow." All truth is narrow. After all, 2 plus 3 has only one true answer—5. That is the way truth is.

***Intellectual Imperialism.*** Another charge is that exclusivists are guilty of intellectual imperialism. Exclusivists are totalitarian with regard to truth. They should be more open to input from many sources, not just to one. Some postmodern pluralists go so far as to claim that the very ideas of truth and meaning smack of fascism (cited in McGrath, "Challenge of Pluralism," 364).

This allegation has a certain appeal, especially to those of a particular political mind set, but it is without merit with regard to determining what is true. The way this allegation is often made is as a form of the *ad hominem* logical fallacy. It attacks the person rather than the position.

This objection also makes an unjustified presumption that truth should be more democratic. But truth is not decided by majority vote. Truth is what corresponds to reality (*see* TRUTH, NATURE OF), whether the majority believe it or not. Do pluralists really believe that all views are equally true and good and should be settled on by majority rule? Is fascism or Marxism as good as democracy? Was nazism as good as any other government? Should we have tolerated the burning of widows at Hindu funerals of their husbands?

***Presuppositions of Pluralism. There Are Transreligious Moral Criteria.*** To make the moral equality argument work, one must assume a set of moral criteria not unique to any particular religion by which all can be evaluated. Pluralists generally deny that there is any universally binding moral law. If there were such absolute moral laws there would need to be an absolute Moral Law Giver. But only theistic type religions accept this



criteria, and some of them reject the absolute perfect nature of God (for example, Finite Godists). If there is a moral law common to all religions, then it is not unique to one, and no religion can be judged inferior for lacking it.

Finally, if there are no such universal moral laws, then there is no way to judge morally all religions from any standard beyond them. And it is not fair to take the standards of one religion and apply them to another, claiming that the other falls short.

*Phenomena Can Be Explained.* Beneath the pluralist's attack on exclusivism is a naturalistic presupposition. All religious phenomena can be explained naturalistically. No supernatural explanations are allowed. But this presumptive naturalism is without justification. Miracles cannot be ruled out *a priori* (see MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST). Neither, as David Hume claimed, are miracles incredible. Nor are miracles without evidence. Indeed, there is substantial evidence for the greatest "miracle" of all, the *ex nihilo* creation of the world out of nothing (see BIG BANG and KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT). There is also abundant evidence that the resurrection of Christ occurred (see RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE FOR).

*The World Is "Religiously Ambiguous."* Hick believes that "the universe, as presently accessible to us, is capable of being interpreted intellectually and experientially in both religious and naturalistic ways" (*Interpretation of Religion*, 129; see Geivett, 77). We cannot know the truth about God; what is real cannot be differentiated from what is false.

It is a self-defeating claim that we know that we cannot know the real. Simply because we do not know reality exhaustively does not mean we cannot know it truly (see AGNOSTICISM; REALISM). As Geivett notes, "to the extent that God is known at all, he is known truly." The very notion of an undifferentiated Real is implausible, if not self-defeating. Hick's claim that the Real can be symbolized by the concept of *sunyata* in Buddhism is a case in point. For if the Real is so undifferentiated, then how can any symbol represent it? Neither can the Real be manifested in various traditions, as Hick claims. In order for something to be manifested, at least some of its characteristics must be revealed. But the Real, if totally undifferentiated, has no discernible characteristics. Hence, it could not be manifested in our experience in any meaningful way. There is a kind of mystical epistemology presumed in this "God is Unknowable" approach (see MYSTICISM). It rather imperiously decrees how God can and cannot reveal himself (Geivett, 77).

*Dialogue Is the Only Way to Truth.* Another seriously flawed presupposition is the position that pluralistic interreligious dialogue is the only valid way to discover truth. No genuine religious dialogue is possible if one assumes his religion is true in advance of the dialogue. This is sure proof that he is not "open" to truth. True dialogue assumes one is tolerant, open, humble, willing to listen and learn, and engage in a shared search for truth and a self-sacrificing, other-oriented love (ibid., 239).

However, true dialogue is possible without adopting a pluralistic position on truth. One can have the attitude of humility, openness, and tolerance without sacrificing convictions about truth. Even the pluralist is not willing to give up a commitment to pluralism as a condition for such dialogue. This violates the pluralist's own imperative. In fact, the call to dialogue is usually a disingenuous attempt at evangelism on behalf of the worldview of the one calling for dialogue.

*Hick's View Is Religiously Neutral.* Hick feigns religious neutrality, but it does not exist. His alleged pluralism is patterned after Hinduism's conception of the Transcendent.

And it is antagonistic to the core principles of Christianity. It does not really encourage genuine dialogue between the traditions. Indeed, it renders virtually vacuous the concept of being “in a given religious tradition.” After all, according to pluralists, every tradition is essentially the same. So, to accept pluralism is to reject one’s own tradition and accept the pluralist’s tradition.

*A Relativistic View of Truth Is Correct.* Beneath the pluralists’ assertion that all major religions have equal claim to the truth is a relativistic view of truth (*see* TRUTH, NATURE OF). But the denial of absolute truth is self-defeating. It claims that relativism is true for everyone, everywhere, and always. But what is true for everyone, everywhere, and always is an absolute truth. Therefore, the relativist claims that relativism is absolutely true.

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**Naturalism.** Philosophical or metaphysical *naturalism* refers to the view that nature is the “whole show.” There is no supernatural realm and/or intervention in the world (*see* MATERIALISM; MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST). In the strict sense, all forms of nontheisms are naturalistic, including atheism, pantheism, deism, and agnosticism.

However, some theists (*see* THEISM), especially scientists, hold a form of *methodological naturalism*. That is, while acknowledging the existence of God and the possibility of miracles, they employ a method of approaching the natural world that does not admit of miracles (*see* SCIENCE OF ORIGINS). This is true of many theistic evolutionists (*see* EVOLUTION; EVOLUTION, BIOLOGICAL), such as Douglas Young (*see* Young) and Donald MacKay (*see* MacKay). They insist that to admit miracles in nature to explain the unique or anomalous is to invoke “the God of the gaps.” In this sense they are bedfellows with the antisupernaturalists, who deny miracles on the grounds that they are contrary to the scientific method.

**Forms of Metaphysical Naturalism.** Metaphysical naturalists are of two basic kinds: materialists and pantheists. The materialist reduces all to matter (*see* MATERIALISM) and the pantheist reduces all to mind or spirit. Both deny that any supernatural realm intervenes in the natural world. They differ chiefly about whether the natural world is composed ultimately of matter or of mind (spirit). Those who hold the latter often admit the possibility of *supernormal* events by tapping into this invisible spiritual Force (*see* MIRACLE; MIRACLES, MAGIC AND). However, these are not supernatural events in the theistic sense of a *supernatural* being intervening in the natural world he created.

**Bases for Naturalism.** Metaphysical naturalists reject miracles outright. They vary only in the basis for their criticism of the supernatural. Benedict Spinoza believed miracles are impossible because they are irrational. David Hume claimed that miracles are incredible. Rudolph Bultmann held that miracles are unhistorical and mythical (*see* MIRACLES, MYTH AND; MYTHOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT). Based on the unrepeatability of the miraculous, Antony Flew argued that miracles are unidentifiable. Immanuel Kant contended that miracles are not essential to religion. All of these allegations have been carefully analyzed and found to be without foundation in the articles MIRACLE and MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST.

**Evaluation. Theistic Inadequacy of Naturalism.** Naturalistic views either admit that a deistic sort of God exists or deny or doubt existence of any divine Being. But the alleged disproofs for God are notoriously unsuccessful (*see* GOD, ALLEGED DISPROOFS OF). The evidence that God exists is strong (*see* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT; MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD; TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT). As for views that admit the existence of a supernatural God but deny miracles (such as deism), many critics have pointed out their basic incoherence. For if God can and has performed the greatest supernatural act of all—creating the world out of nothing (*see* CREATION, VIEWS OF), then there is no reason to deny the possibility of lesser supernatural events (i.e., miracles). For making water out of nothing (as God did in Genesis 1) is a greater supernatural event than making water into wine (as Jesus did in John 2).

**Scientific Insufficiency.** Modern science has pointed to its own miracle—the origin of the material universe out of nothing. The evidence for the big bang origin of the universe

is strong. This evidence includes the second law of thermodynamics (*see* THERMODYNAMICS, LAWS OF), the expanding universe, the radiation echo and the discovery of the large mass of energy predicted by the big bang theory (*see* KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT). If so, then matter is neither eternal nor all there is. And if there is a Creator of the whole universe from nothing, the greatest miracle of all has occurred.

*Philosophical Insufficiency.* Two premises common to all forms of secular humanism (*see* HUMANISM, SECULAR) are nontheism and naturalism. These can be treated together, since if there is no supernatural being (Creator) beyond the natural universe, then nature is all there is. Often naturalism means that everything can be explained in terms of chemical and physical processes. At a minimum it means that every event in the universe can be explained in terms of the whole universe (the whole system). Naturalists believe there is no need to appeal to anything (or Anyone) outside the universe to explain any event in the universe nor to explain the whole universe itself.

But the very scientific naturalists who insist on explaining *everything* in terms of physical and chemical laws cannot explain their own scientific theories or laws in terms of mere physical and chemical processes. For a “theory” or “law” about physical processes is obviously not itself a physical process. It is a nonphysical *theory* about physical things. A physics professor was once asked: “If everything is matter, then what is a scientific theory about matter?” His response was, “*It is magic!*” When asked his basis for believing that, he replied “Faith.” It is interesting to note the inconsistency that a purely materialistic worldview resorts to faith in “magic” as the basis of their materialistic beliefs.

Another argument revealing the inconsistency of pure naturalism was offered by C. S. Lewis. Quoting Haldane, Lewis wrote: “If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motion of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true . . . and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms” (Lewis, 22). If naturalism is claiming to be true then there must be more than mere natural processes; there must be “reason,” which is not purely a natural physical process.

Another way to state the inconsistency of naturalism is to show that a basic premise of science, which even naturalists hold, is contrary to their conclusion that every event in the universe can be explained in terms of the whole universe. This premise that “every event has a cause” is at the philosophical heart of scientific research (*see* CAUSALITY, PRINCIPLE OF). For scientists—certainly naturalistic ones—are trying to find the natural explanation or cause for all events. But if *every* event has a cause, then it follows that the *whole* universe has a cause. For the universe as conceived by modern science is the sum total of all events at a given time. But if *each* event is caused, then *every* event is caused. And if the universe is the sum total of every event, then the whole universe is caused. For instance, if each tile on the floor is brown, then the whole floor is brown. And if each part of the table is wooden, then the whole table is wooden. Likewise, if every event in the universe is an effect, then adding up all the events (effects) does not equal a cause. Rather, the sum total of all caused events needs a cause to explain it (*see* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT).

It is not sufficient for the naturalist to say there is something “more” to the universe than the sum of all the events or “parts,” for then he is not really explaining *everything* in terms of the physical “parts” or events but in terms of something beyond them. It is,

however, perfectly consistent for the nonnaturalist to insist that all the events of the universe cannot be explained *solely* in terms of the physical universe of events. But naturalism is not able to explain either itself or the universe on a purely naturalistic premise.

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**Atheism.** While polytheism dominated much of ancient Greek thought and theism dominated medieval Christian view, atheism has had its day in the modern world. Of course not all who lack faith in a divine being wish to be called “atheist.” Some prefer the positive ascription of “Humanist” (see HUMANISM, SECULAR). Others are perhaps best described as “materialists.” But all are nontheists, and most are antitheistic. Some prefer the more neutral term a-theists.

In distinction from a theist, (see THEISM) who believes God exists beyond and in the world, and a pantheist, who believes God is the world, an atheist believes there is no God either beyond or in the world. There is only a universe or cosmos and nothing more.

Since atheists share much in common with agnostics (see AGNOSTICISM) and skeptics, they are often confused with them (see Russell, “What Is an Agnostic?”). Technically, a skeptic says “I *doubt* that God exists” and an agnostic declares “I *don’t know* (or can’t know) whether God exists.” But an atheist claims to *know* (or at least believe) that God does not exist. However, since atheists are all nontheists and since most atheists share with skeptics an antitheistic stand, many of their arguments are the same. It is in this sense that modern atheism rests heavily upon the skepticism of David Hume and the agnosticism of Immanuel Kant.

**Varieties of Atheism.** Broadly speaking, there are differing kinds of atheism. *Traditional* (metaphysical) atheism holds that there never was, is, or will be a God. The many with this view include Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Antony Flew. *Mythological* atheists, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, believe the God-myth was never a Being, but was once a live *model* by which people lived. This myth has been killed by the advancement of man’s understanding and culture. There was a short-lived form of *dialectical* atheism held by Thomas Altizer which proposed that the once-alive, transcendent God actually died in the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ, and this death was subsequently realized in modern times. *Semantical* atheists (see VERIFICATION, EMPIRICAL) claim that God-talk is dead. This view was held by Paul Van Buren and others influenced by the logical positivists who had seriously challenged the meaningfulness of language about God. Of course, those who hold this latter view need not be actual atheists at all. They can admit to the existence of God and yet believe that it is not possible to talk about him in meaningful terms. This view has been called “acognosticism,” since it denies that we can speak of God in cognitive or meaningful terms. *Conceptual* atheism believes that there is a God, but he is hidden from view, obscured by our conceptual constructions (see BUBER, MARTIN). Finally, *practical* atheists confess that God exists but believes that we should live *as if* he did not. The point is that we should not use God as a crutch for our failure to act in a spiritual and responsible way (some of Dietrich Bonhöffer’s writings can be interpreted in this category).

There are other ways to designate the various kinds of atheists. One way would be by the philosophy by which they express their atheism. In this way one could speak of *existential* atheists (Sartre), *Marxist* atheists (Marx), *psychological* atheists (Sigmund Freud), *capitalistic* atheists (Ayn Rand), and *behavioristic* atheists (B. F. Skinner).

For apologetics purposes the most applicable way to consider atheism is in a metaphysical sense. Atheists are those who give reasons for believing that no God exists

in or beyond the world. Thus we are speaking about philosophical atheism as opposed to practical atheists who simply live as though there were no God.

**Arguments for Atheism.** The arguments for atheism are largely negative, although some can be cast in positive terms. Negative arguments fall into two categories: (1) arguments against proofs for God's existence (*see* GOD, OBJECTIONS TO PROOFS FOR), and (2) arguments against God's existence (*see* GOD, ALLEGED DISPROOFS OF). On the first set of arguments most atheists draw heavily on the skepticism of Hume and the agnosticism of Kant.

Atheists offer what they consider to be good and sufficient reasons for believing no God exists. Four such arguments are often used by atheists: (1) the fact of evil (*see* EVIL, MORAL PROBLEM OF); (2) the apparent purposelessness of life; (3) random occurrence in the universe; and (4) the First Law of Thermodynamics—that “energy can neither be created or destroyed” as evidence that the universe is eternal and, hence, needs no Creator.

**Responses to the Arguments. The Existence of Evil.** A detailed response to the problem of evil is given elsewhere (*see* EVIL, PROBLEM OF), so it will be treated here only in general terms. The atheist's reasoning is circular. Former atheist C. S. Lewis argued that, in order to know there is injustice in the world one has to have a standard of justice. So, to effectively eliminate God via evil one is to posit an ultimate moral standard by which to pronounce God evil (*Mere Christianity*). But for theists God is the ultimate moral standard, since there cannot be an ultimate moral law without an Ultimate Moral Law Giver.

Atheists argue that an absolutely good God must have a good purpose for everything, but there is no good purpose for much of the evil in the world. Hence, there cannot be an absolutely perfect God.

Theists point out that just because we do not know the purpose for evil occurrences does not mean that there is no good purpose. This argument does not necessarily disprove God; it only proves our ignorance of God's plan. Along the same reasoning, just because we do not see a purpose for all evil now, does not follow that we never will. The atheist is premature in his judgment. According to theism, a day of justice is coming. If there is a God, he must have a good purpose for evil, even if we do not know it. For a theistic God is omniscient and knows everything. He is omnibenevolent and has a good reason for everything. So, by his very nature he must have a good reason for evil.

**Purposelessness.** In assuming that life is without purpose, the atheist is again both a presumptuous and premature judge. How does one know there is no ultimate purpose in the universe? Simply because the atheist knows no real purpose for life does not mean God does not have one. Most people have known times that made no sense for the moment but eventually seemed to have great purpose.

**The Random Universe.** Apparent randomness in the universe does not disprove God. Some randomness is only apparent, not real. When DNA was first discovered it was believed that it split randomly. Now the entire scientific world knows the incredible design involved in the splitting of the double helix molecule known as DNA. Even actual randomness has an intelligent purpose (*see* TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT). Molecules of carbon dioxide are exhaled randomly with the oxygen (and nitrogen in the air), but for a

good purpose. If they did not, we would inhale the same poisonous gases we have exhaled. And some of what seems to be waste may be the product of a purposeful process. Horse manure makes good fertilizer. According to the atheist's time scale the universe has been absorbing and neutralizing very well all its "waste." So far as we know, little so-called waste is really wasted. Even if there is some, it may be a necessary byproduct of a good process in a finite world like ours, just like sawdust results from logging.

*The Eternality of Matter (Energy).* Atheists often misstate the scientific first law of thermodynamics. It should not be rendered: "Energy *can* neither be created *nor* destroyed." Science as science should not be engaged in "can" or "cannot" statements. Operation science deals with what *is* or *is not*, based on observation. And observation simply tells us, according to the first law, that "The amount of actual energy in the universe remains constant." That is, while the amount of *usable* energy is decreasing, the amount of *actual* energy is remaining constant in the universe. The first law says absolutely nothing about the *origin* or *destruction* of energy. It is merely an observation about the continuing presence of energy in the cosmos.

Unlike the second law of thermodynamics, which tells us the universe is running out of usable energy and, hence, must have had a beginning, the first law makes no statement about whether energy is eternal. Therefore, it cannot be used to eliminate a Creator of the cosmos.

***Tenets of Atheism.*** Atheists do not have identical beliefs, any more than do all theists. However, there is a core of beliefs common to most atheists. So while not all atheists believe all of the following, all of the following are believed by some atheists. And most atheists believe most of the following:

*About God.* True atheists believe that only the cosmos exists. God did not create man; people created God.

*About the World.* The universe is eternal. If it is not eternal, then it came into existence "out of nothing and by nothing." It is self-sustaining and self-perpetuating. As astronomer Carl Sagan put it, "The Cosmos is all there is, all there was, and all there ever will be" (Sagan, *Cosmos*, 4). If asked "what caused the world?" most atheists would reply with Bertrand Russell that it was not caused; it is just there. Only the parts of the universe need a cause. They all depend on the whole, but the whole needs no cause. If we ask for a cause for the universe, then we must ask for a cause for God. And if we do not need a cause for God, then neither do we need one for the universe.

If one insists that *everything* needs a cause, the atheist simply suggests an infinite regress of causes that never arrives at a first cause (i.e., God). For if everything must have a cause, then so does this "first cause." In that case it really isn't first at all, nor is anything else (see Sagan, *Broca's Brain*, 287).

*About Evil.* Unlike pantheists (see PANTHEISM) who deny the reality of evil, atheists strongly affirm it. In fact, while pantheists affirm the reality of God and deny the reality of evil, atheists, on the other hand, affirm the reality of evil and deny the reality of God. They believe theists are inconsistent in trying to hold to both realities.

*About Human Beings.* A human being is matter in motion with no immortal soul. There is no mind apart from brain. Nor is there a soul independent of body. While not all atheists are strict materialists who identify soul and body, most do believe that the soul is



dependent on the body. The soul in fact dies when the body dies. The soul (and mind) may be more than the body, the way a thought is more than words or symbols. But as the shadow of a tree ceases to exist when the tree does, so the soul does not survive the body's death.

*About Ethics.* No moral absolutes exist, certainly no divinely authorized absolutes. There may be some widely accepted and long enduring values. But absolutely binding laws would seem to imply an absolute Law Giver, which is not an option (*see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF).

Since values are not *discovered* from some revelation of God, they must be *created*. Many atheists believe values emerge by trial and error the way traffic laws developed. Often the right action is described in terms of what will bring the greatest good in the long run (*see* UTILITARIANISM). Some frankly acknowledge that relative and changing situations determine what is right or wrong. Others speak about the expedient behavior (what "works"), and some work out their whole ethic in terms of self-interest. But virtually all atheists recognize that each person must determine personal values, since there is no God to reveal what is right and wrong. As the *Humanist Manifesto* put it, "Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values" (Kurtz, 8).

*About Human Destiny.* Most atheists see no eternal destiny for individual persons, though some speak of a kind of collective immortality of the race. But the denial of individual immortality notwithstanding, many atheists are utopians. They believe in an earthly paradise to come. Skinner proposed a behaviorally controlled utopia in *Walden Two*. Marx believed an economic dialectic of history would inevitably produce a communist paradise. Others, such as Rand, believe that pure capitalism can produce a more perfect society. Still others believe human reason and science can produce a social utopia. Virtually all, however, recognize the ultimate mortality of the human race but console themselves in the belief that its destruction is millions of years away.

***Evaluation. Positive Contributions of Atheism.*** Even from a theistic point of view, not all views expressed by atheists lack truth. Atheists have provided many insights into the nature of reality.

*The reality of evil.* Unlike pantheists, atheists do not close their eyes to the reality of evil. In fact, most atheists have a keen sensitivity to evil and injustice. They rightly point to the imperfection of this world and to the need for adjudication of injustice. In this regard they are surely right that an all-loving, all-powerful God would certainly do something about the situation.

*Contradictory concepts of God.* In contending that God is not caused by another, some have spoken of God as though he were a self-caused being (*causa sui*). Atheists rightly point out this contradiction, for no being can cause its own existence. To do this it would have to exist and not exist at the same time. For to cause existence is to move from nonexistence to existence. But nonexistence cannot cause existence. Nothing cannot cause something (*see* CAUSALITY, PRINCIPLE OF). On this point atheists are surely right.

*Positive human values.* Many atheists are humanists. With others they affirm the value of humanity and human culture. They earnestly pursue both the arts and the sciences and express deep concern in ethical issues. Most atheists believe that racism,

hatred, and bigotry are wrong. Most atheists commend freedom and tolerance and have other positive moral values.

*The Loyal Opposition.* Atheists are the loyal opposition to theists. It is difficult to see the fallacies in one's own thinking. Atheists serve as a corrective to invalid theistic reasoning. Their arguments against theism should give pause to dogmatism and temper the zeal with which many believers glibly dismiss unbelief. In fact, atheists serve a significant corrective role for theistic thinking. Monologues seldom produce refined thought. Without atheists, theists would lack significant opposition with which to dialogue and clarify their concepts of God.

*A Critique of Atheism.* Still, the position that God does not exist lacks adequate rational support. The atheist's arguments against God are insufficient (*see* ATHEISM). Further, there are good arguments for the existence of God (*see* GOD, EVIDENCE FOR). For many things, atheism provides no satisfactory answer.

*Why is there something rather than nothing?* Atheism does not provide an adequate answer as to why anything exists when it is not necessary for anything at all to exist. Nonexistence of everything in the world is possible, yet the world does exist. Why? If there is no cause for its existence, there is no reason why the world exists (*see* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT).

*What is the basis for morality?* Atheists can believe in morality, but they cannot justify this belief. Why should anyone be good unless there is a Definer of goodness who holds people accountable? It is one thing to say that hate, racism, genocide, and rape are wrong. But if there is no ultimate standard of morality (i.e., God), then how can these things be wrong? A moral prescription implies a Moral Prescriber (*see* MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD).

*What is the basis for meaning?* Most atheists believe life is meaningful and worth living. But how can it be if there is no purpose for life, nor destiny after this life? Purpose implies a Purposer. But if there is no God, there is no objective or ultimate meaning. Yet most atheists live as if there were.

*What is the basis for truth?* Most atheists believe that atheism is true and theism is false. But to state that atheism is true implies that there is such a thing as objective truth. Most atheists do not believe that atheism is true only for them. But if atheism is true, there must be a basis for objective truth (*see* TRUTH, NATURE OF). Truth is a characteristic of a mind, and objective truth implies an objective Mind beyond our finite minds.

*What is the basis for reason?* Most atheists pride themselves on being rational. But why be rational if the universe is the result of irrational chance? There is no reason to be reasonable in a random universe. Hence, the very thing in which atheists most pride themselves is not possible apart from God.

*What is the basis for beauty?* Atheists also marvel at a beautiful sunset and are awestruck by the starry heavens. They enjoy the beauty of nature as though it were meaningful. Yet if atheism is true, it is all accidental, not purposeful. Atheists enjoy natural beauty as though it were meant for them, and yet they believe no Designer exists to mean it for them.

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**Finite Godism.** Theism believes an infinite God is both beyond and in the world. Finite godism, by contrast, posits a god who is only finite. Polytheism claims there are many such gods, but finite godists believe there is only one God.

Ancient Greek versions of a limited God included Plato's (428–348 B.C.) philosophy (see Plato, 17–92). But in the modern Western world, most finite god views arise out of a theistic background. Generally speaking, many finite godists come to that conclusion because they cannot reconcile their theistic tradition with the pervasive presence of evil (see EVIL, PROBLEM OF).

**Typology of Finite Godism.** There are many different possibilities for a finite god position, not all of which have well-known representatives. Most finite godists hold that God is personal, though some, including Henry Wieman, posit an impersonal Being (Wieman, 6–8, 54–62). The limitations on this God could be internal, as John Stuart Mill believed, or external to the world, as Plato believed. The limitations could be in his goodness but not his power (a minority view), or in his power but not his goodness, as in Edgar Brightman (see Brightman) and Peter Bertocci. Or, God could be limited in both power and goodness (Mill's view).

A finite god can have either one or two poles. For coverage of bipolar finite godism, see the article PANENTHEISM. Monopolar examples are discussed here. Although many finite godists believe god to be transcendent (beyond the universe), some have a finite god who is immanent (within the universe). Henri Bergson, an example of the latter view, holds that God is the Vital Force that drives the process of evolution onward (see Bergson, chap. 3).

**Tenets of Finite Godism.** Finite godists tend to disagree among themselves about God and the world. While this article stresses points in common, some differences will be noted.

*View of God.* The most fundamental characteristic of the finite god view is that this god is limited in his very nature. Some say he is limited in power and not goodness; few, if any, claim he is limited in goodness. Some claim God is limited in both power and goodness. Almost all agree that God is not infinite in power.

Properly speaking, a finite-god view holds that God is intrinsically limited in his nature. Although Plato seemed to hold that God is not intrinsically limited in his nature, most believe that the eternal world (which God did not create) places limits on God's ability to act within it (see DUALISM). If God did not create the world and does not sustain its existence, then he is not able to do just anything with it; for example, he cannot destroy it.

*View of Evil.* In contrast to pantheists, finite godists affirm that evil is real. In fact, the presence and power of evil limits God. Evil is both physical and moral. Physical evil is not always possible to avoid, but we can do something about moral evil. Cooperating with God's efforts for good, even going beyond them if necessary, is part of our moral duty in the world.

There are various explanations for the origin of evil. *Dualists* (see DUALISM) say it was always there in some form. Others attribute much of it to human free choices. But all agree there is no guarantee that evil will ever be totally destroyed. If God were all

powerful, then he would destroy evil. But since evil is not destroyed, there must not be an all-powerful God. The argument goes like this:

1. If God were all powerful, he could destroy evil.
2. If God were all good, he would destroy evil.
3. But evil has not been destroyed.
4. Therefore, there cannot be an all-powerful, all-good God.

*View of Creation.* Finite godism has no uniform stand on creation. Those who come out of the dualistic Greek tradition, following Plato, hold to creation *ex materia*, that is, out of preexisting eternal matter (*see CREATION, VIEWS OF*). God did not bring the world into existence; he merely *shaped* the matter that was already there. In view of this, one limitation on God's power is external. Thus, there is something about the extent and nature of matter over which even God has no ultimate control. He simply has to work with the world and do the best he can under the limitations it places on his creative powers.

An alternative view is that God brought the universe into existence *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. In this case, God is limited by his own nature, not by something "out there" with which he has to cope and over which he has no final word.

All finite godists agree that creation was not *ex Deo* (out of God). This is not a pantheistic position, though God is limited in or by creation.

*View of the World.* Few statements regarding the world unite finite godists. All agree that the world exists and runs by natural laws. Beyond this there is no unanimity about whether it always existed and/or always will exist. The only other widely held view among finite godists is that the physical universe is not eternal or unlimited in energy. The universe is subject to the law of entropy (*see THERMODYNAMICS, LAWS OF*) and is running down.

*View of Miracles.* Most finite godists reject miracles. Some admit that supernatural interventions are possible in principle but deny they happen in practice. In this respect finite godism is similar to deism, which claims a supernatural Creator but disclaims any supernatural acts in the creation. However, deism is properly distinguished from finite godism in that the deistic God has no intrinsic limits on his power. Both views see miracles as a violation of natural law. And since they place a high emphasis on the regularity and uniformity of the world, they do not wish to concede that miracles interrupt it (*see MIRACLE; MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST*).

*View of Human Beings.* Ultimately humanity is created by God. However, since Darwin, finite godists have been convinced that God used a natural evolutionary process. As noted, some finite godists even equate God with the evolutionary force in nature.

Most finite godists admit humans have a soul, and some believe persons are immortal. All reject a purely materialistic (*see MATERIALISM*) view of humanity, but not all are sure there is life after death.

*View of Ethics.* Few finite godists believe in ethical absolutes. Since God is not unchangeable, it follows that no value based in him would be immutable either. Many, however, believe that values are objective and enduring. Some even hold certain values are unconditional. However, for the most part, since God has revealed any unequivocal ethical norms, persons are left to decide for themselves the right course of action in each situation. The general guidance in these decisions is provided in different ways by different views.

*View of History.* Regarding the movement of history and humanity, some are more optimistic than others. Some point to a steady evolutionary progress of the universe as the hope for final victory. Most are less assured that good will vanquish all evil. All admit it is possible there will be no final victory at all. It is even conceivable that evil may overcome good, though most finite godists find this possibility intuitively repugnant. Nevertheless, since God is limited and (at best) is struggling with evil himself, there is no assurance. The struggle may simply go on endlessly.

***Evaluation.*** Finite godism contains significant insights into reality. However, as a system it has serious problems.

*Positive Contributions. Evil is treated realistically.* Unlike such worldviews as pantheism, finite godism cannot be blamed for attempting to avoid the reality of evil. It is in facing the problem squarely that most finite godists have come to their position.

*The exercise of divine power is limited.* Whatever can be said about the meaning of the word *omnipotent*, it cannot mean that God can literally do anything. Finite godists are right to point out that God is limited in his use of power. For example, God cannot use his power (limited or unlimited) to create and destroy the same thing at the same time. God cannot make square circles. God cannot give creatures free choice and at the same time force them to act contrary to their choices.

Likewise, finite godism points to a real problem in many theistic views of evil. The position recognizes that “the best possible world” may not actually be possible. Just because we can *conceive* of our present universe with less or no evil, does not mean that God can *achieve* such a universe. A world of free creatures, whether freely created by God or not, does place some limitations on the use of God’s power (*see* EVIL, PROBLEM OF).

*There is a need to struggle against evil.* Another value that emerges from most forms of finite godism is an antidote for fatalism. The outcome of the struggle of good and evil does in a real sense depend on man. Our efforts can make a difference. Complete determinism is fatal to the needed motivation to fight evil. Finite godists cannot be charged with a passive resignation to the inevitable. Their view calls for real involvement by persons to overcome evil.

*Problems with the View.* In spite of its many positive insights into the nature of things, finite godism as a system is fatally flawed.

*Its view of God is inadequate.* Philosophically, the concept of a finite god is contrary to the principle of causality, which affirms that every finite being needs a cause. A finite god is only a large creature, and all creatures need a Creator. A finite being is a contingent being, not a Necessary Being, which *cannot not* exist. A contingent being *can be nonexistent*. But whatever could not exist depends for its existence on what cannot not exist, a Necessary Being.

Further, those who believe God is limited in perfection as well as power do not identify what is really God, at least not God in an ultimate sense. For one could measure God’s imperfection only by an ultimate standard (*see* Lewis, 45–46). But the ultimate standard of perfection is by definition God. So an imperfect finite god would be something less than the ultimate God. Actually, there seems to be no way to posit a finitely good god without having an infinitely good God as a standard by which to measure.

Anything incompletely good is not worthy of worship. Worship means to attribute ultimate worth to something or someone. But why should one attribute absolute worth to what is not absolutely worthy? Every finite thing is a creature, and worship of the creature, rather than the Creator, is idolatry. Or to borrow Paul \*Tillich's terms, an ultimate commitment should not be given to anything less than an Ultimate. But a partially good being is not an ultimate Good. Why, then, should anyone worship a finite god?

*Its view of evil is inadequate.* The problem of evil does not eliminate God. In fact, we cannot even know there are ultimate injustices in the world unless we have some ultimate standard of justice, God, beyond the world. Conversely, only an all-powerful God can defeat evil, and only an all-good God desires to defeat evil. Hence, if evil will ever be defeated, then there must be an all-powerful, all-good God. A finite god will not suffice for the task.

Furthermore, there is an alternative in the argument for a finite god. Remember that the argument goes:

1. If God were all-powerful, he could destroy evil.
2. If God were all-good, he would destroy evil.
3. But evil is not destroyed.
4. Therefore, there cannot be an all-powerful, all-good God.

A theistic worldview, need only change the third premise:

3. But evil is not *yet* destroyed.

The word *yet* immediately opens up the possibility that evil will yet be destroyed (i.e., defeated) in the future. And the finite godist who insists this will never happen is presuming to know more than a finite creature is able to know.

Some finite godists even admit this point. Bertocci, for example, said there is evil "whose destructive effect, *so far as we know*, is greater than any good which may come from it." But that is precisely the problem: How can a finite man know far enough into the future to say nothing will be done to ultimately defeat evil and bring in a greater good? However improbable it may seem, the future can bring good news.

Furthermore, if there is an all-powerful and all-good God, this automatically guarantees that evil *will* be defeated in the future. The reasoning is:

1. An all good God has the desire to defeat evil.
2. An all powerful God has the ability to defeat evil.
3. But evil is not yet defeated.
4. Therefore, evil will be defeated in the future.

Put in this form, the question would not be whether evil is compatible with an infinite God; it certainly seems to be. In fact, if an infinite God exists, then it is a guarantee that evil will be defeated, since such a God would have both the desire and the power to do it. Thus it appears that finite godism has not successfully eliminated an infinite God by way of evil.

Another problem for modern forms of finite godism is that, if God is not completely good, then what is the standard for measuring his goodness? We cannot measure him by the standard of his own nature, for that he measures up to perfectly. But if we measure God by some absolute moral law beyond God, then the Legislator of this absolute law would be God. For laws come from law-givers, and moral prescriptions come from moral

prescribers (*see* MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD). If so, would not absolutely perfect moral laws come from an absolutely perfect Moral Law-giver? If a finite god falls short of an absolute standard of goodness, then he is not God. The absolute moral Being *beyond him* would be God.

Perhaps this is why most finite godists desire to limit only God's power and not his goodness. But to an outsider this looks like an arbitrary judgment and wishful thinking. Further, how can God be an infinitely good Being when he is only a finite being? How can one be more of anything than he has the capacity to be? How can the attributes of God be extended farther than his actual nature allows? Can one's knowledge, for example, be extended farther than the brain allows?

Finite godism claims God cannot destroy all evil. Some say this is because of an intrinsic limit in his nature. Others claim it is because of an extrinsic limitation on him. But the only extrinsic limitation which the Creator could not destroy would be an eternal uncreated and Necessary Being. For a created or contingent being could be destroyed by an uncreated or Necessary Being. But if there is an eternal, uncreated, and Necessary Being beyond God, then it is the Creator, and the "finite god" turns out only to be a limited creation. If, on the other hand, the being outside God is only created and contingent, yet God is uncreated and necessary, God could destroy it. But if he can create and destroy anything, why not admit he is all powerful?

This is the dilemma: If God can destroy all else in the universe besides himself, then he is all-powerful. If there is some other indestructible being outside God, then he is not an all-powerful God; this other being can resist his power. But in either case the finite god view would seem to be wrong, for there would be an all-powerful Being who could destroy the finite god.

Finite godists admit there is no guarantee good will ultimately triumph over evil. If so, those who work for good may work for naught. Of course, in the everyday course of events our efforts are frustrated. However, a religious commitment is not an everyday commitment; it is an ultimate commitment. Can a finite god, who cannot guarantee victory, even if we put our all into it, really inspire an ultimate commitment? How many people will really make an ultimate commitment to work for what they have no assurance will ultimately win? We can be inspired to confess courageously "I would rather lose in a battle that is ultimately going to win, than to win in a battle that will ultimately lose."

*Other Inadequate Views.* In addition to their flawed views of God and evil, finite godists fail to adequately defend their views of annihilationism and antisupernaturalism (*see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST).

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