

Phil 2301 Intro to Philosophy
Knowing God

"More consequences for thought and action follow from the affirmation or denial of God than from answering any other basic question. They follow for those who regard the question as answerable only by faith or only by reason, and even for those who insist upon suspending judgment entirely."

—*Great Books of the Western World*, volume 2, p. 543.

I. Can God Be Known?

A. Agnosticism: knowledge about God is impossible or unknown

1. Hard agnosticism: knowledge about God (and/or ultimate reality) is impossible.

2. Soft agnosticism: knowledge about God is unknown (to me)

B. Skepticism: knowledge of God (pro or con) is uncertain

C. Knowledge of God is possible

1. Faith:

2. Reason:

3. Experience and the mystical:

II. Models or Conceptions of God

A. Theism

1. Position

a. God exists and is eternal and infinite, just and loving.

b. God is transcendent and immanent

c. Creation ex nihilo and the separation of creator and creation.

d. God acts supernaturally or miraculously in the world.

2. Proponents: Bible (Moses, Christ, Paul); St. Augustine; St. Anselm; St. Thomas Aquinas; Martin Luther; John Calvin; Blaise Pascal; Gottfried Leibniz; C. S. Lewis; Francis Schaeffer

B. Deism

1. Position:

- a. God exists and is the creator of the world
- b. God is transcendent, but not immanent
- c. Hence, miracles do not occur either because
 - 1.) God can't because of the immutability of natural laws
 - 2.) God won't because he does not want to interfere with human freedom
- d. The world operates naturally according to natural law
- e. Deism encourages piety, prayer, worship, morality

2. Proponents: French: Voltaire; English: Herbert of Cherbury; American: Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, Thomas Paine

C. Atheism

1. Position

- a. There is no God, or gods, or goddesses, of any kind, any where.
- b. The physical, material, natural universe, is all there is, ever was, and ever will be.

2. Proponents: Ludwig Feuerbach; Karl Marx; Sigmund Freud; Fredrich Nietzsche; Bertrand Russell; Jean Paul Sartre; Madeline Murray O'Hare.

D. Pantheism

1. Position

- a. God encompasses and is identified with all there is; God is all; all is God.
- b. God is non-personal (beyond knowing, being, feeling, etc.)
- c. Creation is *ex deo* (out of God-the creation is an emanation, development, or unfolding out of God)
- d. The world and evil are illusions, not real, since only the pantheistic God is real.

2. Proponents

- a. Eastern pantheism: Radhakrishnan (Hinduism)
- b. Greek: Parmenides
- c. Western: Plotinus; Benedict Spinoza; GWF Hegel; Alan Watts

E. Panentheism

1. Position

- a. All is in God; God is in all, or God is in the world, like a soul is in the body.
- b. God has two parts (bipolar) of one overall reality:
 - 1. Potential pole or part beyond the world (infinite, eternal)
 - 2. Actual pole or part which is the world (temporal and finite, and constantly changing or in process, hence process philosophy or theology)
- c. God and the world are interdependent; God depends on the world for his embodiment; and the world depends on God for its existence; the world is the actualization of God's pure potential pole; God's purely potential pole (primordial nature) enters space and time and is actualized in the organistic whole of the world (consequent nature)
- d. All happenings of the world are absorbed, preserved and stored in God's actual and/or consequent nature whereby God is enriched; all events are either positively accepted into God (prehension) or negatively rejected as evil.

e. Both poles, actual and potential, are eternal (dualism). God's body--the world--is always there and is in a continual process of being formed out matter eternally there. Hence, God is not a sovereign creator, but a director of the world process.

F. Finite godism (Finite conceptions of God)

1. Positions

a. God is the creator of the universe, but limited in power and therefore not in control of it.

b. The persistent and pervasive fact of evil is the primary reason for concluding that God is limited for

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. Hence, either God does not exist or He is limited
5. But there is evidence that God exists.
6. Hence, God must be limited in either power or goodness or both.

c. The limitations of God motivate human beings to improve the world (which would not be necessary if God was unlimited)

2. Variations of the finite conception of God:

a. Finite monotheism: there is only one finite god

b. Henotheism: there are many finite gods with one supreme.

c. Polytheism: there are many finite gods, each with his/her own sphere of activity and domination

d. Panentheism: the actual pole of God (world) is finite and temporal

3. Proponents

Plato's demiurge; Aristotle's Unmoved mover; David Hume; John Stuart Mill; William James; Edgar Brightman; Peter Bertocci; Rabbi Harold Kushner; Homer and Hesiod

G. Polytheism

1. Position

- a. There are two or more personal gods or goddesses that have distinct spheres of activity and influence in the universe
- b. Polytheistic gods are not viewed transcendentally but immanently; they operate within the world.
- c. Polytheistic gods are not the creators of the universe, but its shapers and transformers; they reward and punish men and women; they influence events in the world.
- d. Supernatural or supernormal events occur in the universe, and history is the outworking of the god's activities

2. Proponents

Zoroaster and Mani (dualism); Hinduism (combined with pantheism); Confucianism; Shintoism; Taoism; Janism; Greek, Roman and Teutonic pantheons (Hesiod and Homer); Mormonism; Divinelight mission; Scientology; Unification Church; David L. Miller; Feminist goddess worship; New age occultic practices; UFO religions and belief in extraterrestrials

H. Summary and conclusion

1. Summary: reality is either (1) the universe only; (2) God only; (3) the universe and God(s).
 1. If the universe is all that exists, then atheism is right.
 2. If God is all that exists, then pantheism is right.
 3. If God and the universe exist, then there is either one God or many gods.
 4. If there are many gods, then polytheism is right.

5. If there is only one God, then this God is either finite or infinite.
 6. If there is one finite God, then finite godism is correct.
 7. If this finite God has two poles or parts (one beyond and one in the world), then panentheism is correct.
 8. If there is one infinite God, then either this one infinite God intervenes or does not intervene in the world.
 9. If this one infinite God does not intervene in the world, then deism is correct.
 10. If this one infinite God does intervene in the world, then theism is correct.
2. Conclusion: "The most important thing is not what man thinks about God, but what God thinks about man." Karl Barth