

THEISM DISTINGUISHED FROM OTHER THEORIES OF GOD

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PROFESSOR JAMES taught that for the mind to function effectively it must not only say, I mean this, but also, I do not mean the other. The ability to recognize distinctions, and so to distinguish between things that are otherwise alike, is among the first requisites of sound thinking. It would be difficult to overestimate the spiritual value of rigorous thinking.

In the following effort to isolate Theism from other theories of God, a definition of Theism is implicit, but in order that this definition shall be kept clearly in mind I want first to make it explicit. *Theism is the hypothesis that the ultimate ground of the universe is intelligent will working out a moral purpose, in the course of which he consciously and specifically influences human fortunes.* Keeping in mind this definition, which I believe to be true to the main current of historic Theism, let us isolate Theism from certain other non-Theistic hypotheses.

1. The hypothesis of Deism is not Theism. Deism is a theory of God as the First Cause, who created the universe, wound it up, set it going, and then left it to itself. Deism is concerned primarily with getting things started. It is a sort of cosmic "kick-off". But it flattens out under the impact of the stock question of childhood, "Who made God?" Its self caused cause is seen to be merely a device for removing the problem of beginnings one step farther into the eternities.

Deism was once a rather popular theory among heretical thinkers. It was held by Voltaire, Spencer, Thomas Payne, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. But later heretics have developed a better method of doing away with the apparently insoluble problem of beginnings. They frankly rule

it out of court as "incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial". Deism never aimed to provide the kind of God that Theism demands. The God of Deism restfully surveys the centuries in philosophical detachment. The God of Theism "worketh hitherto".

2. The hypothesis of Pantheism is not Theism. Pantheism is the theory that God is the ultimate organism in whom all else exists; like cells in a living body, like atoms in molecules, like electrons in an atom, like kinks in the ether. He slumbers in the rock, blooms in the flower, and thinks in man. Stones, vegetables, beasts and men are parts and parcels of God. Hence man's will, purpose, and doings are of the very essence of God, and consequently cannot be the object of the conscious and specific influence of God. The God of Pantheism is the All; the God of Theism is in and through all but not constituted of all.

3. The hypothesis of the Absolute is not Theism. The Absolute is a philosophical God, not a theological God. In many pulpits of the more liberal sort this philosophical God is preached by and to persons who think they have the practical God of religion. But already competent thinkers, both theologians and philosophers, are reminding the less critical to beware of this Houdini-like substitution of one thing for another. Of the Absolutist philosophers Bradley and Bosanquet have stated positively that the Absolute is not the equivalent of the God of religion. Of the theologians Macintosh and Beckwith have rejected the Absolute as a substitute for the God of religion. The Absolute is static; Theism is dynamic.

4. The hypothesis of the logico-mathematical entity is not Theism. This entity is found at the end of a syllogism, when certain premises are accepted. It is a necessity of some types of mind. It is the ultimate frame work of the old logic. It is the ground of order; the scheme of system; the major premise of mathematics. But it is not the God of Theism. It is cold; Theism is warm, it is austere; Theism is friendly. It is implacable; Theism is forgiving.

Those who have what they want in the God of Theism could not possibly be satisfied with the entity of logio-mathematical necessity.

5. The hypothesis of the cosmic tendency toward harmony is not Theism. That there is a unifying principle in reality, that all things work together for one grand goal, that team-work is of the very nature of being is a theory widely held and ably defended. The idea is that however different and conflicting things seem to us in the short run, in the long run the inherent trend toward universal

harmony will win out; that good is the final goal of ill. It is not my purpose to marshal the evidence in behalf of this or any of the hypotheses here stated. Suffice it to say that many keen minds and good hearts have found this hypothesis both intellectually and emotionally satisfactory. But there is a world of difference between an inherent trend and the God who speaks worlds into existence.

6. The hypothesis of subsistential values is not Theism. In his *The New Rationalism*, Spaulding states at great length and in much detail, with extravagant underlining, the distinction between subsistential values and existential facts. The absolute good which never was on land or sea, is subsistential. The goodly man is existential. It is the old distinction between the absolute circle and the round thing. There is a hierarchy of values which never existed, but which forever dwell in a factual void. To Spaulding, "God is Value, the active, 'living' principle of the conservation of values and of their efficiency." But this is hardly the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,—not to mention the God of both modernists and fundamentalists.

7. The hypothesis of the principle of concretion is not Theism. This theory is set forth by Whitehead in *Science and the Modern World*, and is meant to serve a metaphysical purpose,—as was Aristotle's "Prime Mover." Somehow the hierarchic patterns must give form to actual occasions. The principle of this process is God. But God as the principle of concretion is hardly suitable for religious purposes. He is manifestly the handiwork of metaphysicians; not the God who creates and guides metaphysicians. Informed Theists will not accept the principle of concretion in exchange for the God who created patterns of being and who wove principles into the fabric of existence.

8. The hypothesis of the spirit of Humanity is not Theism. This theory has intrigued many otherwise competent persons. It has a certain fascination for spiritually inclined radicals. It personifies collective humanity, or humanity as it should be, or humanity as it is exemplified in its greatest souls. The God of this movement is a sort of Uncle Sam of Humanity, or a planetary John Bull, or a living flag. He is a symbol with power to stir multitudes. He sails the seven seas with the ship of Humanity. But if the good ship goes down, he goes with it. Hence it may be easily seen that the spirit of Humanity is not the equivalent of the God of Theism, for

the God of Theism will sail the seas of eternity after suns and moons and worlds have sunk into oblivion.

9. The hypothesis of the *elan vital* is not Theism. While the *elan vital* theory was originally the private property of Henri Bergson, it has been espoused by innumerable worthies of the cloth, and has had temporary flirtations with men of letters. The whole theory of evolution lends itself beautifully to this cosmic romance. And the terminology of the theory stirs one to the depths. "Urge", "struggle", "fight", to mention only a few, are dynamic words. I have known ministers to preach this gospel with all the fervor of a saint defending his Lord and Master. Nevertheless the *elan vital* is experimental. He does not know where he is going. He often turns around and goes back and starts again. He is constantly looking about for new and hitherto unthought of experiences. But the God of Theism knows from all eternity what he wants and how to get it.

So much for distinctions.

Clearly there are sharp lines of demarcation between Theism and the other cosmological theories; and while Theism has much to commend it, it still seems to me to be inadequate as a cosmology,—but that is another story.