# Chapter Four – Philosophy and Ultimate Reality Is Anyone in Charge?

Roots of Wisdom
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**Chapter Review** 

#### The Issued Defined

- Does God exist?
- What is the nature of God?
- In the West, questions about the nature of ultimate reality center on the existence or nonexistence and the nature of God. However, some Western investigations into the nature of ultimate reality discover a nontheistic, or at least a nontraditional God. Although much of this chapter will explore Western theism, keep in mind that the question of ultimate reality is much broader in world philosophy.

## Agnosticism

- Suspends the question of God's existence as ultimately unknowable
- Rejected as untenable by William James
- Pascal's wager intended as breaking the deadlock proposed by agnosticism

## Pascal's Wager

- GOD exists, and we do not believe.
- GOD does not exist, and we believe.
- GOD does not exist, and we do not believe.
- GOD exists, and we believe.
- What is the best bet?

#### Atheism

- The denial of Theism
- Usually rests on the assumption that everything can be explained satisfactorily without God
- Asserts that God is an unnecessary and unverifiable hypothesis

#### Deism

- Eighteenth-century development; particularly in France and America
- Christianity is reconceived so as to make it consonant with scientific understandings
- Supernatural elements (revelation, miracles, divinity of Jesus) eliminated
- An impersonal, mechanical genius began the world and has since left it alone

#### Pantheism and Panentheism

- Pantheism is the belief that God is fully expressed in nature or the material world.
- Panentheism sees God as immanent in the world but also independent of that same world and unchanging
- In Alfred North Whitehead's process thought, God both affects and is conditioned by events in the temporal world

#### Theism

- Arguments for God's existence
  - Knowledge based on Reason
    - Ontological Argument
      - Formulated by Anselm as a logical argument, based on the nature of thought; God's perfection implies his existence; later refuted by Kant as illogical
    - Cosmological Arguments
      - Formulated by Aristotle and popularized in the Middle Ages by Aquinas; God seen as the unmoved mover, the uncaused cause, a necessary being, the standard of perfection, and a source of order and purpose
    - Teleological Argument
      - Formulated by Aquinas and later attacked by Hume; an argument based on the design, order, and apparent purpose of the universe, which argues for a divine cause

#### Theism

- Knowledge based on Intuition
  - Mystical experience, as described by Rudolf Otto and exemplified by figures like Mechthilde of Magdeburg and Hildegard of Bingen, regarded as a reliable source of the knowledge of God
- Hindu practice
  - Divine reality with attributes, or Saguna Brahman, realized in images used for puja and darshan

## Traditional Images of God

- God as eternal; refuted by Nietzsche
- God as omnipotent and omniscient, as defended by Aquinas and refuted by Whitehead
- God as good, raising challenges in accounting for the existence of evil
- God as human-like -- anthropomorphism

## Theodicy

- Theodicy is concerned with explaining and justifying the existence of evil in light of the goodness of God.
- Does it make sense for God to be all-good and, yet, evil to exist?

## Nontraditional Images of God

- God as Mother, as proposed by Mary Baker Eddy and Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- Jesus as Mestizo, as proposed by Virgil Elizondo
- Religious Existentialists: the important thing is the nature of the God-person relationship
- God as verb, as proposed by Rabbi David Cooper
- Akan views of Creator deity as cosmic architect, not creator-out-of-nothing

## Implications of Theism for Human Nature, Cosmology

- Whether or not God exists has implications for human life and meaning, as suggested by William James
- Convictions regarding the possibility or impossibility of life after death can also be momentous in terms of the impact on the meaning of human life

## Ultimate Reality

- Described in Zen as beyond words and concepts ... and right in front of us
- Described in Taoism as the Tao manifest in the natural world and available to us as a teacher [the metaphysics of nature]
- Described by Eastern mystics and Quantum
  Theory as an inseparable web, whose connections
  are dynamic and not static

### Key Terms

- Theism
- Atheism
- Agnosticism
- Pascal's Wager
- Deism
- Pantheism
- Immanent
- Transcendent
- Panentheism
- Theology
- Monotheism
- Polytheism
- Trinity
- Natural Theology
- Ontological Argument
- Cosmological Argument
- Teleological Argument

- Mystical experience
- Dhikr
- Fana
- Baqa
- Noetic
- Puja
- Henotheism
- Darshan
- Brahman
- Saguna Brahman
- Nirguna Brahman
- Imago dei
- Omnipotence
- Omniscience
- Theodicy
- Logos
- Theocracy
- Anthropomorphism
- Existentialism
- Occam's Razor
- Secular Humanism