ON POLYTHEISM – OR, WHERE HAVE ALL THE GODS GONE?

FRANCIS MYERS

Monotheism has so dominated religious discourse in the Western world, at least nominally, that it must seem either unnecessary or exotic for anyone nowadays to make a point of it. I shall press the point anyway. I was surprised to find that the 1966 Encyclopaedia Britannica has no separate articles either on monotheism or on polytheism. The author of the article on "Theism" does not see fit to mention polytheism. He writes: "The etymology of the word Theos would suggest that it might cover any conception of the universe which admitted the existence of Deity (sic!); but in practice Theism has come to mean a belief in one God, and the word is not easily distinguished from Monotheism, save that Theism has a more theoretical implication."

The author limits himself to the orthodox, or at least to the traditionally dominant, god concepts of the Christian era. But even unorthodox thinkers, such as those who have formulated concepts of a limited god, or of a naturalistic god, have usually confined themselves to a single deity. Atheists and agnostics mostly, if not entirely, see themselves as denying or as asserting their ignorance of God, singular. A. E. Haydon and Erwin Goodenough, in their different ways, suggest that man was "naturally" a polytheistic animal.[1] They pointed out that the labors of the theologians of monotheism did little to curb the perceptions and imaginations of common believers, or indeed to curb their own imaginations, to judge from the variety of monotheisms. Haydon and Goodenough relished the tropical abundance of gods issuing, under cover of verbal uniformity, from abstruse thinkers as well as from more earthy communicants. And yet they

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[1]Perhaps both men were influenced by William James: "Philosophic theism has always shown a tendency to become pantheistic and monistic, and to consider the universe as one unit of absolute fact; and this has been at variance with popular or practical theism, which has ever been more frankly pluralistic, not to say polytheistic." *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* New York, 1902, p. 131.

themselves took their own stances—one as an atheistic Humanist, the other as an agnostic—primarily in opposition to monotheism.

At first I took their remarks about man's "natural" polytheism as, I judged, they did themselves—as amusing obeservations, calculated to irritate theologians, about the rest of mankind who had not yet disenthralled themselves from god concepts. But I have come in time to take their more or less playful suggestions with increasing seriousness. I found myself beginning to wonder what might be involved theoretically if one were to treat polytheism not just as a manifestation of the waywardness of human nature, but as having to do with the nature of things. This idea, too, was a form of play, or more accurately the sort of thing C. S. Peirce might have called a "musement." More recently, I have come to take the idea of polytheism seriously, and with something like commitment, even though I am not very sure just what is involved in it or where it may lead. I am quite sure it will not "save" anyone, although it might help us in more important ways.

I am not interested in proving or disproving the existence of many gods. Nor am I interested in making converts. I want to explore some ideas that have religious and moral dimensions. If these ideas are as pertinent as I believe them to be, we will not find ourselves talking about hidden entities, but rather about ways of working with the natural world of which we are a part.

What I am trying to say is akin to the message of the solitary and fanatical Englishman in *The Roots of Heaven*, who fought to preserve the elephant herds of Africa. When someone asked him why he was struggling so desperately to save them while there were so many suffering people, he replied: "Because we need all the friends we can get." At another time he said, referring to the elements of the landscape: "These are the roots of heaven."

I

The various problems of traditional monotheism have been argued back and forth at great length and with almost supernatural ingenuity. I am just now concerned with only one such problem: the discrepancy between the meaning of monotheism as a type of religious belief and ordinary religious experience. I recognize that many theologians have gloried in the discrepancy, while others have denied it. These last, however, are closer to another group who have said that although there seemed to be such a discrepancy, it diminished or disappeared on investigation; given the correct theological interpretation of monotheism and of human experience one would find them compatible. The third position is especially interesting for our purposes, implying as it does

that theological doctrines and human experience ought to be compatible, but that they suffer at least an apparent incompatibility that can be resolved only with much effort.

I agree with the first group that there is a discrepancy—or rather, that there are discrepancies—between monotheism and the varieties of human experience. (This in no way implies that human experience is incompatible with all beliefs associated with monotheism.) I also agree with the others that this should not be so. I presume that I am in disagreement with all of them in my conviction that human experience rather than theological doctrine should be the test.

There is no need to deal at length with the problem of discrepancies or incompatibilities. The history of theology is full of dialectical arguments on the subject. If the arguments prove anything it may only be, to paraphrase Pogo, that old doctrines never die—they only get faded ways. Besides, my purpose is not to prove anything, but to explore some ideas, to which the problem of discrepancy is an introduction.

To begin with, it seems clear to me still that the traditional monotheism of an absolute, unlimited or infinite God reduces the varieties of experience, in one way or another, to some principle of uniformity. Monotheism, in this respect, is not significantly different from classical materialism. The concept of a limited monotheism may avoid some difficulties but I have strong reservations about that way out, as I shall indicate later. Secondly, the use of the concept of a creator God as an excuse for monotheism is an exploitation of triviality in default of profundity. I am unable to see that the idea has religious value, and when it is smuggled in as a type of explanation, it suffers the difficulty of explaining nothing. Whitehead's preference for the Greek creation myths was sound.

Thirdly, the Problem of Evil and its implications for traditional monotheism are so well known that there is no need to say more than this: Granting the reality of evil, even if it is only the evil of believing that there is evil, the alternatives formulated by those who were determined to retain monotheism have not laid the Problem to rest. Fourthly, Monotheism has an illusory moral appeal. The appeal is that the concept seems to provide for a moral criterion of judgment. But here we find another of the classic dilemmas: Is something right because God commands or endorses it, or does He command or endorse it because it is right? On the first alternative, it is the divine authority and sanction that make something right, thus leading to the conclusion that it is might that makes right. On the second alternative, right is

indepedendent of any divine authority or sanction, thus reducing, if not eliminating, the moral significance of the god concept, monotheistic or otherwise. But in either case the ground of rightness is so abstract as to be of little or no concrete guidance. Fifthly, monotheism has been regarded as important in providing a supreme object of reverence. But this claim is at best misleading, and is perhaps something worse. The God of monotheism distracts men's reverence from concrete objects and possibilities to something removed and abstract.

In short, the dominant religious doctrines of the Western world are at least nominally monotheistic, and in so far as they are really so they are in conflict with ordinary human experience. Further, those people who are inclined to make a strong correlation between "higher" religion and dominant monotheisms (Western or Eastern) are designating as higher that which is also further from human experience.

It is not at all clear what we are moving toward. If it were clear we—many of us, not just young people—would not be groping as we are. It *is* becoming clear, I think, that whether or not the idea of God as the Almighty Creator, for example, ever had the religious significance often attributed to it, increasing numbers of people have become positively uninterested. Some people, further, have become disturbed by the concept of an Almighty Creator who has made all things for the benefit of man, who has given us the natural world for our use. They are also disturbed by that tradition within Christian theology according to which only God is intrinsically worthy of reverence and respect. The natural world has a secondary or reflected value only because it is His Handiwork. It is not worthy of respect for itself but only extrinsically, as symbolic of the Supreme Being. When this second doctrine is combined with the first, one has license to exploit the world we live in.

During recent centuries, whatever peoples' conscious beliefs may have been, they began to think of the cosmos according to the tradition of philosophical materialism, and especially to that modern form of it according to which the universe was thought of as an essentially self-contained machine. It was regarded as self-contained in the sense that even if God called it into being, its *nature* was unaffected by that act; and also in the sense that *human* nature was a different mode of existence, foreign to Nature, even though we human beings happened to be spatially with it.

Those who believed that God created material nature, true, usually professed to see the divine majesty reflected in it; and atheistic

materialists still attributed majesty and goodness to nature. But these attitudes were historical hang-overs. The modern perspective was to see nature as a reservoir of material and machinery, so to speak, for human exploitation. I was shocked, recently, to come across the following passage by Ortego y Gasset, a writer I had thought of as far from the attitude I have just indicated. In referring to man's capacity to withdraw into himself, he says that man does not do so in order to be dominated by things, but for him to be able to govern them, to impose his will on them and design them, in order to impose his ideas on the outside world, in order to mold the planet to his heart's desire. Far from losing himself in his return to the world, he imposes himself on things, he projects himself energetically, he lords over things—that is, he makes the world his. Man humanizes the world, he impregnates it with his ideal substance. One can imagine that someday, in the depths of time, that terrible exterior world may be so saturated with human effort that our descendants will be able to stroll through it as we walk through our inner life . . . ."[2]

Strange as this attitude may seem in the case of Ortega, one can find it much more pervasively in others: Nature is there—as God's gift, or simply there—to be used as we want. It is an inexhaustible as it is indifferent to what we may use it for. Respect is an attitude one might have toward fellow men, if one were so inclined or should feel it as a moral obligation; but there it ends, with perhaps exceptions in the case of household pets or other domestic animals. For the rest it does not much matter what we do to or with the world we live in. We can care for our fellows and yet be careless of nature.

II

I have already suggested that monotheism has dominated religious thinking in the Western world to such an extent that those who rebelled against the various types of orthodox monotheism were themselves under its spell. Atheism is so obvious an example that I see no need for additional argument. The point is not so clear in the case of some religious liberals.

I have especially in mind some members of the "Chicago School" of thinkers who were influential in the area of religious liberalism during roughly the first third of this century.[3] The work of Edward Scribner Ames in developing a naturalistic interpretation of God is a notable example. Ames likened God to Alma Mater:

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[2]From "Ensimismamiento y alteración," *Obras Completas*, Madrid, 1961, Volume V, p. 302.

[3]I am especially indebted to Darnell Rucker for his fine work on *The Chicago Pragmatists*, Minneapolis, 1969.

> Alma Mater is not a myth or a mere idea. It is the reality of an organization of things and people. Any school boy can appreciate the fact this his college is an entity, objective in himself and yet closely identified with himself and others. Buildings and grounds, endowment money, alumni, donors, faculty, and students belong to it. These are welded together in a life-process, definite and describable. Alma Mater exists in certain forms of activity, in a character which involves specific requirements, offering appreciable rewards for stated conduct and achievement. Toward her, attitudes of devotion and loyalty are awakened. Songs are sung to her, gifts are made in her honor and for her use. Her life flows on through the years, often from father to son, generation after generation.[4]

The type of god-concept implicit in Ames' statement is still fruitful. It is close to the realities of human experience, concrete, tentative, flexible, and yet offering a source of "devotion and loyalty." That it does not provide ultimate explanations of the nature of things, or guarantee that all is well despite appearances to the contrary—two of the most popuular appeals of orthodox monotheism—is in its favor. With the prodding of men like Ames, this mode of interpretation led to a conception of one God who was limited and natural." But interpreted monotheistically the idea becomes more constricted and impoverished than it need be. More properly, I think, this mode of interpretation leads to polytheism.

I can best explain what I mean by using John Dewey's concept of God as an example, although what I say must be highly tentative. I have a hunch—nothing more, perhaps—that although Dewey had strong elements of what I would call a pagan sense of experience, he still tended to formulate his religious ideas in a generally Christian, and more specifically Protestant, fashion. By "generally Christian" I mean here a belief that some emotions, say, are by their nature intrinsically better than others. Love as such—whatever that is—is better than anger or hate. Love of all men is better than love of some men. *Agapé* is better than *eros*. Sacrifice is better than enjoyment. By "more specifically Protestant," I mean in this context, a moralistic compulsion to hem in still further one's emotional life. Roman Catholicism, on the whole, has been closer than Protestantism to pagan experience, and also closer to polytheism: it has been more open to emotional spontaneity and variety.

Dewey defined God as "*the* unity of *all* ideal ends arousing us

[4]Quoted by Rucker, *ibid.*, p. 118

to desire and action." He emphatically and insistently differentiated this concept from traditional theism. He also insisted that the "unity of all ideal ends" is not subjective, but is "connected with *all* the natural forces and conditions . . .that promote *the* growth of *the* ideal and that further *its* realization."[5]

I have emphasized those words that convey monistic overtones to what Dewey says. This is somewhat unfair, as is the brevity of the quotations. One can find passages even in this little book that point in other directions. His larger argument (here and in works of metaphysics, such as *Experience and Nature,* or of strong metaphysical thrust, such as *Art As Experience*) stresses and relishes the diversities of experience. He clearly recognizes the reality of evils. His emphasis in *A Comman Faith* is on personal religious attitudes and actions, rather than on institutional religion, and his concept of God is clearly related to the personal problem of developing a unified self. To the extent that he does focus on that personal problem, one is tempted by the possibility that he does indeed provide for many gods, but only one to a person. But of course Dewey would not be content with such an individualistic formulation.

Dewey's orientation is so generous to the varieties of human experience, so open to the roles of emotion and action, so concerned with individual and social growth, and in general so un-doctrinaire, that I hesitate to say that I find important aspects of his God-concept to be unexpectedly intellectualistic. But that is what I think I find. "Intellectualism," as I am using the word, means the unnecessary, irrelevant, or arbitrary imposition of some intellectually formulated pattern on experience. This would not be characteristic of Dewey. And yet I am troubled by a phrase like "*the* unity of *all ideal* ends arousing us *to* desire."

If we take that phrase in isolation, Dewey would seem to be referring to some sort of entity which, from the outside, so to speak, prompts people to act. Dewey denies this interpretation, and I am not eager to reject what I see him as working to say. There is a real sense in which elements of our world make demands of us—not, Dewey would say, because they are pre-existent entities sending out a call, but because they are parts of our world-in-relation-to-us to which we respond. I am more concerned to wonder why people should have to formulate *all* ideal ends into *a* unity. *The* unity? If Dewey is referring solely to personal ends, his phrasing could be appropriate. But if he is referring to groups of persons, one begins to wonder what he would

[5]*A Common Faith,* New Haven, 1934, pp. 42, 50. Italics added.
[6]See, e.g., pp. 33 and 42-44.

encompass under "all ideal ends," and why they should have the sort of unity he seems almost to take for granted.

Why should *all* ends form a unity? Ideal ends are diverse. The diversity often involves conflict, to be sure, and where the conflict is destructive we need to attempt resolution. But diversity does not necessarily involve conflict, and not all conflict is destructive. Diversity, in any case, need imply neither unity nor conflict. One might argue that Dewey was thinking of harmony rather than unity. Harmony suggests a musical analogy. But Dewey seems not to have been very musically inclined. And besides, recent developments in music suggest that even harmony is not as basic as people used to assume it was.

My musings are groping and inconclusive. But at least they suggest that even with an idea like Dewey's conception of God, polytheism is more fruitful than monotheism.

III

The basic advantage, perhaps, that polytheism has over monotheism and its mirror image, atheism, is what I have called the pagan sense of experience. The phrase "pagan sense" may be unfortunate, especially since I have no desire to romanticize "paganism," which in my middlewestern youth was usually associated with the Hollywood image of the exotic South Seas. I mean nothing more exotic, or erotic, than an everyday openness to the varieties and possibilities of experience, which are excluded, or at least diminished, by that aspect of Christianity according to which some modes of experience are intrinsically superior to others, or by another aspect according to which it does not matter what one does as long as one feels guilty about it.

The idea of openness that I am trying to express does not imply that the important thing is to be vaguely romantic, because it makes no difference what one does, or that all experiences are equally valid. It neither excludes certain dimensions of experience automatically, nor does it include all dimensions. Openness is risky, to be sure. A person increases his vulnerability as he sheds his shields, screens, and masks, and he does not even receive, in turn, a guarantee that he will not harm others. But openness does have its own discipline, the discipline of being receptive to new possibilities in human experience, and with it a fighting chance to be productive.

My concern here is the significance of such openness, or pagan sense, in helping us to recognize, accept, and respect religious realities. The problem of evil provides one example. Evil is as real as good. Evils have as much claim to divinity as goods do, and precedents for

this abound within the Christian *mythos* itself. To say so does not mean that we should passively accept evils, and still less that we should worship them. It does mean that we should, in a different sense, accept and respect evils, by recognizing them for what they are and by treating them with dignity. Evils are in a sense even worthy of reverence. One may have reverence for calamity or horror — or to take lesser examples, for nuisances and irritations — without liking them, regarding them as benign, or still less as unimportant. Evil, again, is real, and it is worthy of being recognized, respected, even revered, for what it is — like Ahab and the Whale — and, yes, for being hated.

The creator God and the omnipotent God are abstract, and the pantheistic God, if not abstract, is an object of diffuse piety. The gods and devils I am interested in are concrete: objects, events, and continuities of the world we live in, to which we can relate ourselves in experience. They are many, diverse, fecund, and concrete. Each needs to be taken on his or her own terms.

In short, gods abound in our world, whether lurking or flaunting themselves. They may be evil as well as good. They may not even be nice. Many of them are vulgar or worse. Here again I think we need a pagan sense, which in at least some traditions was willing to accept defecation, fornication, and prevarication as realities, as well as aspiration, cultivation, and purification. Acceptance, respect, and even reverence do not by themselves imply a judgment of value, in the sense of good and bad, or right and wrong. They do not mean there is no antagonism among ideals and realities. One must accept an opponent, and respect him, before one can fight him competently. Something like awe, or even reverence, may be in order toward realities that we find antagonistic, or even destructive.

IV

The problem of respect is both fascination and difficult. I refer not just to respect for other persons, but to respect for other organisms and indeed for non-living aspects of our world. As I said earlier, there is a tradition according to which we should respect the "natural" world because, and only because, it is God's Handiwork. Respect ought to be much more elemental, concrete, immediate, and pervasive than that. Human feelings, emotions, sensibilities, ideas, beliefs, and theories are rooted in human and more than human realities of which they are manifestations. Let me begin with an elemental example of respect. A dog comes to have, as we say, a healthy respect for porcupines after he has had a few quills in his nose. He becomes careful, and he

accepts porcupines for whatever they are, however unpleasant. But to be careful, here, means to be wary and guarded, to have a care. The dog cares little about the individual porcupine, and still less *for* him. Yet there are some animals the dog can accept without fear and for which he can care in an unguarded way.

On the human level, we can find a morality, a metaphysics, and even a theology, in carpentry, We esteem a carpenter who respects the materials and tools he works with. He accepts their potentialities and limitations, and he cares about how he works. Because he is competent he has earned self-respect; but without self-respect he would not be likely to develop genuine competence. His respect for his tools and materials and for himself go together. It is determined as much by the nature of his materials as by the human being who works them. No person can *be* a carpenter in isolation from his tools and materials; they are aspects—at least extensions—of his very self.

All this is commonplace—or should be. But we as human beings are still oblivious of how, like the carpenter and his materials and equipment, we and our environments are intimately interdependent. There is a casual gesture of disrespect, even of disdain, in tossing aside a can, a cigaret, or just a piece of paper. Magnified and made impersonal, the act is one of dumping industrial wastes and urban sewage; and we don't care until finally water becomes a personal inconvenience because we can't drink it or swim or fish in it.

There is something about human beings at this stage of our history that impels us to put our personal or social stamp, like names painted on rocks. This seems to be true of increasing numbers of people in most parts of the world, and not just in the United States. A Peruvian *campesino* will not do it, but his offspring will when they have become "modern." Something happens to the psyche, it would seem, in the process of cultural modernization.

I doubt that we know much yet about why we must be incessantly in motion and sound, transforming our world even when there is no special need, and usually scarring it. Although there are many proposed explanations, we should pay closer attention to those who tell us that much of our destructiveness comes from a lack of respect for ourselves. To some undetermined extent we cannot accept ourselves for what we are or care about what we are becoming; and without self-respect we cannot accept and respect the physical and biological realities for what they are.

Respect is religiously important, whether one is a carpenter, a highway engineer, or a plain citizen. We respect something when we

accept it and value it for being as it is. We do not then feel obliged to transform it. If we do act to change it, we do so only in response to overwhelming reasons, and then we work so far as possible to maintain its integrity. So understood, respect leads a person to open himself to that which he respects. He absorbs it, so to speak, growing by that much, and in the process, he is able to grow in respect for himself. If, in this fashion, we can learn to respect the qualities of things as part of the stuff of existence, we can in the process also deepen our respect for ourselves.

V

It would be foolish to hold any doctrine directly responsible for the personal and social aggressiveness that has been characteristic of so much of the Western world. Some important part of that aggressiveness, besides, has been an exhuberance in discovering that human beings could do a lot of things that previously had been left to Fate or Providence. But I have already suggested that monotheism—as the idea that there is a central, directing force in the universe that will guide all things, eventually, somehow, to the best possible outcome—has in fact supported, if it has not caused, much of the aggressive aspect or Western culture.

But we cannot shuck off our vices onto any theory, monotheism or any other. Nor is there "salvation" in polytheism. We do not even need it to respect the diverse objects and events of our world. And yet polytheism may help us get a better sense of ourselves and the world we live in. To find gods all around us, furthermore, can take us beyond respect for objects and events to reverence for some of them, and to a sense of concrete mystery. At least some forms of traditional monotheism have, ironically, served to eliminate or to reduce the dimensions of mystery in this world. I refer especially to the idea of God used as an ultimate principle of explanation, often used to explain whatever we are ignorant of—except of the nature of God. Such concepts draw mystery out of the natural world, to deposit it in the Great Inexplicable.

The polytheism I am exploring explains nothing whatsoever. With it we do not *know* anything more about the nature of things than we did before. The gods are those aspects of our world to which we address ourselves, with which we live and work and play, plus our attending, respecting, and revering; and these attitudes include a sense of mystery.

Gilbert Murray suggested years ago that we replace the traditional distinction between the natural and the supernatural with a distinc-

tion between the "charted" and the "uncharted" domains of experience:

> Man must have some relation towards the uncharted, the mysterious tracts of life which surround him on every side. And for my own part I am content to say that his method must be to a large extent very much what St. Paul calls . . . faith: that is, some attitude not of the conscious intellect but of the whole being, using all its powers of sensitiveness, all its feeblest and most inarticulate feelers and tentacles, in the effort somehow to touch by these that which cannot be grasped by the definite senses or analyzed by the conscious reason. What we gain this is an insecure but precious possession. We gain no dogma, at least no safe dogma, but we gain much more. We gain something hard to define, which lies at the heart not only of religion, but of art and poetry and all the higher strivings of human emotion.[7]

Murray clearly is not opening the door to unreason:

> As far as knowledge and conscious reason will go, we should follow resolutely their austere guidance. When they cease, as cease they must, we must use as best we can those fainter powers of apprehension and surmise and sensitiveness by which, after all, most high truth has been reached as well as most high art and poetry: careful always really to seek for truth and not for our own emotional satisfaction, careful not to neglect the real needs of men and women through basing our life on dreams; and remembering above all to walk gently in a world where the lights are dim and the very stars wander.[8]

Although Gilbert Murray clearly regarded his words as foreign to traditional monotheism, and probably to any theism, I now think, as I did not when I first read those words some years ago, that polytheism is better suited than other religious orientations to express and to enact what he was writing about. He was giving brief but rich formulation to what I have called the pagan mood: a spontaneous—but not thereby irrational or arbitrary—response to the variations, diversities, complexities, and conflicts of the world we live in. The gods emerge as we respond to them. Meanwhile they lie hidden in the uncharted realms of experience.

And the uncharted, Murray reminds us, is all about us. As our knowledge grows in extent, it impinges, as Sir William Dampler says,

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[7] *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, London, pp 7 f
[8] *Ibid*, p. 171

on larger areas of the unknown; and as our knowledge becomes more precise, or seems to, it brings us more clearly into contact with real ambiguities. The real world is in many ways vague, indistinct, ambiguous, aweful, and mysterious as we move on further in it. The pioneers—artists, poets, musicians, prophets, scientists, even at times philosophers—move first into the uncharted, marking trails. Then some paths appear, later roads and highways, which in time are charted on maps that one can find readily available. But it is only routine and careless—and nowadays speedy—travel that fosters the conviction that roads and their maps eliminate mystery. Air travel seems, oddly, to reinforce that careless attitude. At least in my experience, it is sailors more than others who retain the sense that charts do not eliminate mysteries—they only, at best, help one along, in and through the realms of mystery.

But the different modes of travel, both literal and metaphorical, should not make that much difference. We are all, as Ortega y Gasset likes to say, shipwrecked. Less dramatically, we are all frontiersmen, conscously or not, willingly or not. Each of us is unavoidably at the frontiers of human experience. We need to recognize how intimate the elusive and mysterious dimensions of experience are to commonplace and pedestrian events. Sometimes we meet gods along the road, somtimes they come when we call, but often we have to exert ourslves to engage in communion with them.

We need all the spontaneous and disciplined feelings and emotions that we can cultivate: our feelings as elemental probings of the elusive and mysterious aspects of experience, and our emotions as more complex responses to more complex events. Our spontaneous responses to elusive qualities, to complex events, and to the rhythms of inanimate and animate nature, the ways in which these responses become formed and disciplined through work, play, ritual, ceremony, and art—all these are religiously important. I say important—not necessarily valid. Religious activity, or passivity, and the judgment of it are not the same, and we should not let the importance of an activity, or passivity, delude us into thinking that it is therefore valid.

In short, if it is permissible to use the word "god" as a name for those structures and continuities that elicit and support significant modes of human experience, I should prefer to have to do with gods, rather than God. The gods are those significant aspects of our world that we respond to and work with in whatever we do. They are not necessarily good, or beautiful, or harmonious, but we owe them rev-

erence and awe, at the same time that we must be able to judge them, as well as ourselves. They are part of our being, as we are of theirs; and we need to respond to them both spontaneously and thoughtfully, in order to come to terms with them, and with ourselves, honestly and rationally.

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