

GOD IN A BOX?

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I remember being in an airport talking to John who considered himself a pantheist. John was doing his best to persuade me that all religions were equally true and the apparent differences among religions was the result of different personal perspectives of the same truth. As I tried to reason with him, he quickly informed me that it was my use of logic that was holding me back from understanding ultimate truth. He encouraged me to let go of reason and to stop trying to put God into a logical box. He continued to explain how God transcended logic and if I wanted to be “spiritually enlightened,” I must be willing to do the same. Some Eastern religions refer to this “enlightenment” as “nirvana” (Buddhism) or “moksha” (Hinduism), it is the self-realization of divinity.

Most of us have probably had the experience of talking to someone who believed in an Eastern view of religion. In our culture the most popular Eastern view of religion is known as the New Age Movement (the Western form of Pantheism). Keeping this in mind let me share

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part of my conversation with John. It went something like this:

Peter: John, do you really believe that the more logical one gets when talking about God, the less one understands God?

John: I believe that the more logical one gets, the more restricted one becomes in trying to understand the ultimate. It keeps you from getting to the higher realities that are not bound by logic.

Peter: So you do believe it is possible to understand the ultimate?

John: Yes, but only in an intuitive way that is higher than logic. I feel this to be true, but to give you logical reasons for it would be foolish.

Peter: But John, you believe God exists based on your feelings and many people intuitively believe that God does not exist based on their feelings. The very question of God's existence or non-existence would be purely intuitive and Atheism would be just as plausible as Pantheism. Hence we would enter into the endless cycle of "question begging."

(At this point John is engaged in the logical fallacy called "begging the question." In other words, he is reasoning in a circle. It

would appear that feeling is the only way to test the truth of a proposition about God's existence. However, the only way to know that feeling is a valid test, is to feel it! This makes any belief about God purely subjective. There is no logical way for John to defend his feelings about God as being superior or truer than anyone else's feelings about God. So how does John respond?)

Pantheists may deny the laws of logic, but they cannot escape using them in their own denials.

John: Well, I would have to say that my feelings are truer than the atheists' feelings, but I cannot give any reasons for it.

Peter: Now wait a minute, haven't you already given me the greatest reason for what you believe? In other words, haven't you already told me that feelings or intuition is your reason for believing in an ultimate or higher form of knowledge? Isn't feeling or intuition a reason?

John: Yes, but I feel that intuitively, not logically.

Peter: Is intuition logical or illogical? As we have been talking about God, were all your descriptions about God, namely, that He is beyond logic, intuitively apprehended, etc., are they reasonable statements or unreasonable statements?

John: I guess they are reasonable statements.

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Peter: So you agree that logic does apply to God?

John: Well, I guess some logic does apply to God.

At this point John went to get help from his mentor, which may be a relevant story to write about in some future article. For now I believe it is quite obvious to see that John is caught in a dilemma. John, along with other pantheists, may deny the laws of logic, but they cannot escape using them in their own denials. John saw this to be true and needed help. He found himself in the exact situation described by C.S. Lewis who tells us,

“If anyone argues with them [those who deny logic] they say that he is rationalizing his own desires, and therefore, need not be answered. But if anyone listens to them they will then argue themselves to show that their own doctrines are true. You must ask them if any reasoning is valid or not. If they say no, then their own doctrines, being reached by reasoning, fall to the ground. If they say yes, then they will have to examine your arguments and refute them on their merits: for if some reasoning is valid, for all they know, your bit of reasoning may be one of the valid bits” (Lewis, *Pilgrims Regress*, pp. 71-72).

We could approach John from another angle. The most powerful type of argument is the one constructed by using your opponent’s principles. Basically, John was right in a

sense. The most fundamental laws of logic are self-evident. I cannot prove the law of noncontradiction nor can I disprove it. It is undeniable or inescapable. We assume it to be true the moment we begin to say or even think anything meaningful. It was Aristotle who pointed out that every field of knowledge begins with certain universal axioms that must be accepted before building a body of trustworthy knowledge. The human mind uses logic as one of its fundamental starting points. The very thought that I am having in my mind implicitly denies its own contradiction, if it is to have any meaning. It is impossible to make logic a secondary or tertiary level of thinking because when you have an intuitive thought, it is governed by logic. Without logic, we would never come to know anything meaningful about anything at all.

Now we have found the most fundamental common ground upon which to build bridges of thought from John’s world view to our world view. If John continued to insist that logical thought is inferior to intuitive thought, we only need to ask him, “How do you differentiate or separate the two?” There is no way to do it without being logical! However, we must acknowledge that there is something true about the fact that God transcends our logic. We would agree that human reason has its limits. God has said,

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

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“Higher” is the key word to note in this verse. It is an indication of the transcendence of human logic, not the violation of it. Transcending human logic and violating it are two very different perspectives. A higher kind of logic, for example a multi-dimensional logic, may certainly exist in the divine realm and can transcend the lower human form without violating the lower form. For example, think of the law of gravity (lower law) and the laws of aerodynamics (higher laws). When an airplane transcends the law of gravity, it does not violate that law. Gravity is still in existence at 35,000 feet. We do not create the laws of logic; we discover them. Just as Newton did not create the law of gravity; he discovered it. We cannot change the universal nature of gravity or logic, we are bound by the attributes of these laws. Mortimer J. Adler gives us a very fitting association:

“In my view, the fundamentals of logic should be as transcultural as the mathematics with which the principles of logic are associated. The principles of logic are neither Western nor Eastern, but universal” (Adler, Truth In Religion, p.36).

Computers operate on the same logic in India as they do in the West. Thoughts in India operate under the same logical parameters as thoughts in the West. Our thoughts about God are limited, but if they are true they must be logical. Since logic is universal and based on God’s nature, any thought about Him must not contradict itself. When we hear

a doctrine about God that seems twisted, we usually check that statement against His word in the Bible. We do this because we believe the Bible to be an accurate record of God’s thoughts about Himself (2 Corinthians 2:10-13). We now need to convince our pantheist friends that the laws of logic are the best starting point for any discussion about God.