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Title: Pantheism and Penentheism

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8/21/2018—One of the issues for a hallowed secularism that is open to the divine is to ask where and how the divine could manifest?

If you are a traditional monotheist, God is a pretty simple idea. God is separate from the world. But this leads to all kinds of issues that for me are unsolvable. The problem is supernaturalism that breaks into the causal connections of the world, creating miracles and creation, but contradicting what we actually know and experience of the world.

But, once the idea of a god separate from the world is given up, God is somehow in the world—or, if the word God can only be conceived of as separate, as a being--then in the world are holiness, the good, the true, the beautiful and justice.

The route often taken by thinkers at this point is called panentheism—God within the world but not the same as the world. God as a kind of blueprint underlying all that we see, know and experience. So, much of the world is ugly and violent, but that is not the divine principle, which is constantly working at purifying the world and becoming more manifest.

In panentheism, you don't ask about where the divine comes from, anymore than you ask that about God in traditional monotheism. The divine is baked in at the heart of reality.

But panentheism still suffers from a kind of dualism—this is not God, that is God. This is the ugly part, this is the good part.

Panentheism is not entirely satisfying, but it is better than a pantheism that appears to make everything holy when we know most of the world—much of the world?—is not holy at all, but horrible.

But I learned yesterday during a study with my mentor of Alfred North Whitehead—Process and Reality, for those wondering—of a different kind of pantheism. In this thinking, God is indeed the whole of reality, but only the whole. We see and experience only partially and from this perspective there is much that is ugly and violent. But we are called through experience always to more, and in that lure to the more, to the fuller, there is our experience of the divine. And if we could somehow see and experience all of reality, we would see God face to face, so to speak. This is like St. Paul who sees through a glass now but will one day see all clearly.

Evil now becomes resistance to the whole. We try to sanctify the partial—our experience, our group, our way of doing things, even our one lifetime—and forget about the whole. We deny the lure of the more and shrivel in our racisms and nationalisms and partialisms. And we all do this. Instead, we should try all our lives to open ourselves to all that reality offers.

I don't know about this. It exalts the aesthetic at the expense of the good, of morality, to some extent at least. I'm more comfortable condemning evil than seeing it as partial. In this pantheism's way of seeing and understanding, even a Hitler serves a kind of good—helping Germans recover pride and economic security—but errs in holding the German race as supreme, an idolatry of racism.