Eidetic Pantheism

Gotta find a catchier name.

I’ve arranged this in different sections. You can skip around.

 THESIS (main idea)

Human beings make images, theories, systems and stories to get a grip on the reality they experience. Many of these Ideas are useful, but none of them really covers everything adequately. Even the 2nd greatest of these systems, the scientific method, does not work for everything. Physicists tell us some problems are better explained by Einsteinian physics, some by Newtonian physics. And many scientific questions remain unsolved. Further, questions about morality, politics and religion are not covered well at all, though science can provide some help. The first greatest system, language, has long since been shown to be supremely useful, but also inadequate.

So eidetic pantheism is the Idea, system or religion, which states that most religions, ideas etc are useful in their own ways, but there is no master system which covers everything. Now ED (hmm, let’s say ID) is itself a system, you may say. Well, it is many systems. And ID makes no claim to be flawless either. Just more comprehensive and eclectic.

So the concept is that you choose what system works for a particular problem, and you never let a system or principle lead you down a path contrary to common sense or what you really feel to be true. In reality, people already pick principles which confirm their intuitions, rather than following principles to reductio ad absurdum. You see the Justices of the Supreme Court, who supposedly are our finest legal minds, consider questions using oral testimony, briefs, and reasoned arguments. They ponder and argue the points. And somehow, the liberal ones end up concluding that the liberal position on the issue is the correct constitutional interpretation, and the conservative members conclude that the conservative position is the correct one. You wonder what the point of it all is, when any 9 random people, chosen for the same balance of liberal and conservative, would come up with the same judgment, without even thinking about it

 ADVANTAGES

The biggest advantage is that ID is what most people believe anyway, whether they admit to it or not. I was once discussing training routines with a power lifter who worked out in the same Y I did. “No two guys lift the same,” he observed. The same is true for what people believe. Everyone cherry picks a cafeteria style religion of his own. As one example, the number of American Catholics, many devout and committed, who adhere to the Church’s teaching on contraception is so small that it is statistically insignificant. Essentially, no American Catholics believe that particular piece of Catholic dogma, and yet they continue to describe themselves as Catholic.

People not only disagree with other people, they disagree with themselves. They change their minds, or their positions are internally inconsistent. ID gives everyone a chance to adapt, consider alternatives, without being excommunicated.

When someone asks an IDer if they are a Christian, or a Muslim, say a terrorist with a big sword in his hand, the IDer can legitimately say, “Yes, I am. I believe in all the good things the holy Prophet said, peace be upon him.” (It would be tactful not to mention that you do not believe in some of what you consider to be the bad things he said, in view of the sword and all.)

 A PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

So here’s another advantage of ID. It tends to alarm people if you say you are an atheist or agnostic, or it used to, but I can just answer yes to that particular question, “Do I believe in God?” Sure, if it’s a yes or no.

Do you believe in the existence of the number one? How about “Justice,” at least as an ideal? Or
“The United States of America”? All of those things clearly exist, if not in exactly the same way. They do not exist in the same way I do, or North America does, or a given rock does.

So does God exist? Absolutely. He’s the main character in a wonderful and influential book commonly known as the Bible. I mean, what do you know about George Washington, other than what you have read? God has been hugely influential, He’s (or She’s) a deep underlying component of everyone’s thinking, even athiests’.

Now this is not going to satisfy people who subscribe to the Guy with The White Beard, Who personally answers their prayers, but that kind of person is not likely to grasp the difference between those kinds of existence, above, so a simple Yes might at least leave them puzzled rather than offended.

My Proof does remind me a little of Bishop Wilberforce’s Compromise. By 1830, it had become clear to geologists that, given the fossil record, the earth could not possibly be 12,000 years old. This is the number of years which calculating the generations in Genesis yields. By the way, I’m certain from graduate Bible studies that Genesis is not intended to be read that way. The ancient Hebrews’ sense of number was kind of like mine. When I say dozens, I just mean a lot. When they said 40, they did not mean exactly 40. They meant a lot. Anyway, the good Bishop posited that God created the earth 12,000 years ago, but he created it with the fossils already fossilized in the rock layers.

Surprisingly enough, this didn’t make EITHER side happy at all, much to the Bishop’s dismay.

 PROBLEMS WITH ID

There isn’t really a way to decide which particular system applies, or which is the best answer. Other than the ways we have of doing that now.

You could say IDers have no principles. It’s cute to say “No, we have many,” but the objection is valid. However, as I have said, people actually make judgments first, and then decide which principle to invoke. And their principles can lead them to conclusions even they are reluctant to advocate. As another example of how this works, take pro-life principles. A person believes that human life begins at the moment the sperm cell reaches the nucleus of the egg cell, even though no one has ever seen that happen or knows exactly when it occurs, even though you could say human life actually started 30 million years ago, and even though a majority of people put the decisive point either before that, as people who are totally against contraception do, or after it, as people who accept IUDs or morning after pills or first trimester abortions do. But then you get the case of a 14 year old girl who has been raped by her father, and also has an irremediably damaged fetus due to drug abuse, and the principle says that that girl must carry her rapist’s baby to term, and then be responsible for raising it, even if its life is short and mostly in hospital, at titanic expense. Most pro-lifers balk at that point and say there must be exceptions. Quite sensible, I feel, but other pro-lifers will say they have betrayed their principle.

With ID, either position could be taken. That doesn’t mean ID is wishy washy. When science applies to a question, use it. Look at the bulk of the evidence, don’t just cherry pick the data that confirms what you want to believe.

 FOUNDERS, PROPHETS, LEADERS, SAINTS

I think we can kind of do without them, maybe. If you have a scientific question, you go to scientists who study that field, and they become the leaders for the time being. Ditto economics. People kind of have to discuss the issues among themselves and come to a consensus, kind of like Quakers. Kind of.

I’m implying I’m the inventor of this faith or philosophy, but not really. As I said, above, it’s what everyone believes already. And if you look at what I say about Isaiah Berlin below, you will find that he came up with this almost a century ago, if not in the same words.

 BACKGROUNDS

When I was a very serious young fellow in high school, it concerned me that I did not have a philosophy or belief. I mean, Hugh Hefner had his Playboy Philosophy, the Catholics had their Church, the Buddhists…

I studied Zen Buddhism for quite a while off and on. I particularly liked their feeling that the ground of being, or whatever you call it, has to be preverbal, and thus words are quite useless as means to find existential truth. So they had meditation exercises instead, and koans, which make no literal sense, but knock you loose from your preoccupations, so you can become enlightened. What was your face before you were born?

Nietzsche is right though, Buddhism is kind of a death cult. It values not being attached to your emotions. But being emotional is what human life is all about. Peace is really appealing, but we will get quite a bit of it soon enough anyway.

A center of peace within strong emotion is still an appealing concept, but also impossible to maintain. As the Preacher says, “This I have proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.” I think up until ID I liked Ecclesiastes the best. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”

I studied the Fathers of the Catholic Church quite a bit too. Very interesting. Catholicism remains the most comprehensive and rigorous attempt to systematize everything into one logical structure. Unfortunately, their experiment did not work, to the point that even Catholic theologians now say that faith is the necessary component, before reason. The Schoolmen ran into all those contradictions and places where the system broke down, the way all system builders have. For example, if you have to accept Jesus Christ to go to Heaven, it means infants, people who have never heard of Jesus, and people who were born before Him, cannot go to heaven, no matter how good they are. The Fathers invented Limbo to take care of the problem, but that never satisfied anyone, even them.

They had three canonical proofs of the existence of God, as other examples. 1 The First Cause. If everything has a cause, there must be A First Cause. But that doesn’t mean the first cause has to be God. Most people now like the Big Bang better for this spot. 2 The Watchmaker. If the universe, or solar system, or human body, is kind of like a watch, working in intricate, ingenious ways, then there must be a Watchmaker. Nice analogy, but the body is not exactly like a watch, actually. Newton’s laws of physics and evolutionary biology proved to be more useful theories. 3 My favorite. The Ontological Proof, as invented by St Anselm. Ready? First, define our terms. Let us define God as “that being than which no greater can be imagined.” Sound OK, so far? GOTCHA! If God does not exist, then there is a being you can imagine which is even greeter, one that does exist, so therefore He exists. Well, besides confusing everyone, no one quite bought this, and it really didn’t change anyone’s mind either. That was the first problem. Then, a number of philosophers, including medieval schoolmen themselves, note that existence is not a quality. A green fox may exist or not, and it will have four legs, pointy ears and other defining fox-like attributes, as well as being green, but you can’t define it as existing. Just cause you say it, don’t make it so.

Well, that was fun. Check out my proof of the existence of God, above! I’ll cut the rest of my adventures in philosophy by quoting Max Beerbohm. “[The philosopher] M. Bergson says…well, he says many things; but none of these, though I have just read them, do I clearly remember, nor am I sure that in the act of reading I understood any of them. It distresses me, this failure to keep up with the leaders of thought as they pass into oblivion.” Philosophy was really hard to read, and ultimately didn’t get me anywhere. It didn’t prove anything.

I came to agree with Ludwig Wittgenstein, who concluded that the function of philosophy is to learn to avoid philosophical errors, which so many people make, owing to the inability of language to do what they would like it to do, accurately and comprehensively describe reality.

I came to agree with Isaiah Berlin, who said all systems fail. None of them really work. You have to judge every problem and issue on its own merits. Maybe your principle or system of belief will help you, but sometimes it will not. In any case, a moral decision has to be made by looking specifically at that problem, not by applying some system to it. This is very annoying for a lot of people. It is much easier to just apply your principle, ‘the free market is always good,’ or whatever, rather than to actually have to study the results, and decide if those are the ones you really want.

Isaiah Berlin. The Father of Eidetic Pantheism. Except instead of pantheistic he was no-theistic. He was accused of being kind of a nihilist, a person who believes in nothing, but he did believe in many things, actually. For example, the ability of human beings to do the right thing if they have the time and calmness of mind to work it out with the help of other people.

 JOB OPPORTUNITIES

We (editors, kings and people with fleas are entitled to refer to themselves as “we”) need acolytes, disciples, priests, proselytizers. Many exciting and rewarding positions remain open! First, though, we need a PR specialist who can come up with a catchier name.