

New developments in the theism vs. atheism debate

The theism/atheism debate has taken on a new meaning for me as a result of my idealist beliefs. In my view, much of the controversy surrounding the theism vs. atheism debate has been related to a false, dualistic view of reality. God and the material world have been juxtaposed in this debate. In the past, all atheists have sided with the materialists who believe that the material world is all that exists. Theists have sided with the dualists who believe that God, who is spirit, created the material world and exists separately from it.

However, over the past 100 years or so, the distinction between the spiritual and physical worlds has become somewhat blurred. I am neither a materialist nor a dualist. I am an idealist. I believe there is no distinction between the spiritual and the physical. The basic components of the physical world are particles, which continually blink into and out of existence. Sometimes they exist and behave as particles, and at other times they only exist as unrealized quantum potential and behave as waves of energy, with no mass or substance to them. In other words, the world is basically immaterial and only quasi-physical in nature.

If we adopt a different view of reality, one that makes no distinction between the spiritual and the material, then the materialism vs. immaterialism aspect of the atheism vs. theism debate disappears. The debate then moves into a different arena. If we are all immaterial, spiritual beings, in what ways are we different from God? Does God exist as a spiritual entity who is separate from us? Is God some kind of higher entity, who created all the other spiritual entities and the world in which they live? Or is the universe, including all human beings living in it, although spiritual in nature, self-existent, and not caused by God?

If I were to define God as the sum of everything that exists, I could theoretically be a theist and an atheist at the same time. In other words, I could believe in a spiritual entity, called God, but not in a God who has a personality that is separate from everyone else, and that everyone is a part of a single divine godhead or personage. Under this scenario, we would be like bees in a beehive who have separate identities but who on a larger scale behave as a single entity. Under this analogy, God would be the hive, or colony, and would not exist or act independently from the hive. Nothing at all would exist outside the hive. The world in which the bees live, including all the flowers and the honey, would not exist separately from the hive. Instead, that world would in a sense be co-created and maintained by the conscious observations of the members of the hive. It would only technically exist in the thoughts and minds of the bees, and would have no separate external physical existence, as in a dream.

To some, the idea of God being no more and no less than the collective consciousness of all that exists sounds a lot like atheism. So the new questions are these. Does God exist only as the hive (Pantheism), or does He exist as the hive and also separately from the hive (Panentheism), or does God exist completely separate from the hive and interact with the hive without actually being a part of it (traditional Theism).

For me, an atheist who understands and believes in the immaterial nature of reality, as described by general relativity and the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, is moving in the right direction. This opens the door to a belief in human consciousness as separate from, and not dependent upon, a physical body. It opens the door to a belief in life after death. It opens the door to a belief in God.

For those of us who have been theists from the beginning, it will be interesting to observe further developments in the theism vs. atheism debate, as these new concepts of reality begin to take hold in the scientific community.