

James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*

Chapter Seven:

Journey to the East:

Eastern Pantheistic Monism

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<http://www.pantheism.net>

I. Eastern Pantheistic Monism

In the history of Western World Views, we finally come to a dead end: Naturalism leads to nihilism; Nihilism is unacceptable and is hard to transcend via existentialism. Christian theism is seemingly no longer a viable alternative. So many have turned to Eastern Pantheistic Monism with its characteristics of anti-rationalism, syncretism, quietism, simplicity, and non-technologism. Importers of Eastern Pantheistic Monism include D. T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, and many popularizers including the Beatles and Shirley McClain. Here are the basic tenets of EPM.

A. Atman is Brahman; that is, the soul of each and every human being is the Soul of the cosmos.

1. Pantheism: God is called Brahman, the One, infinite-impersonal, ultimate reality who is to be identified with the cosmos. God is everything; everything is God. Nothing exists that is not God. Anything that appears to exist that is not God is an illusion or maya.
2. Atman is Brahman: Atman is the soul of each human being and the fact that Atman is Brahman means that the human soul is the divine soul such that human beings are God. In essence, we are "chips off the ol' block." Human beings are not separate from God though they think they are; one must realize his oneness or unity with the godhead resting there beyond any distinction whatsoever.

B. Some things are more one than others.

Some things are closer than others to being one with the One. There is a hierarchy of being in the Eastern scheme and the goal of each is to become one with the One:

1. Matter pure and simple (least real)

2. Vegetable or plant life
3. Animals
4. Human beings (the master, Buddha, guru are closest among humans)

How does an individual become one with the One?

C. Many if not all roads lead to the One.

The way to oneness is not a matter of finding the one, true path but of heading the right direction on one's own path; it is not a matter of doctrine but of technique and the techniques vary greatly but include the following:

1. Chanting a mantra (especially OM from the phrase: "Om Mane Padme Hum" = "Hail to the jewel in the lotus.")
2. Meditation on a mandala (circular image or symbol of total reality)
3. Contemplation of Zen koans or haiku poems until the soul leaps to satori or enlightenment or union with the One.
4. Prayers and acts of obeisance.
5. Quiet and solitude to arrive at the one solid, nonharmonic, nondual, ultimate vibration: Brahman, the One.

D. To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond personality.

1. Since atman, the human soul, is Brahman; and since Brahman is impersonal, then human beings are impersonal as well.
2. The goal of human beings is "pure consciousness" that is, sheer union with the One, total personal oblivion, non-duality. Like a drop of wine in the ocean. The means is quietude, inaction, the cessation of desire, rest. Hence the picture of the smiling, enlightened Buddha under the Bo tree.

E. To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond knowledge. The principle of non-contradiction does not apply where ultimate reality is concerned.

1. Ultimate reality, Brahman is One and beyond duality; but knowledge demands duality, that is, a knower and a known. But since in Brahman there is no duality, and atman is Brahman, (i.e., human beings are Brahman), human beings in their union with Brahman are beyond knowledge.

2. Furthermore, since reality is one and since reality requires duality, language cannot convey truth about reality. EPM is thus nondoctrinal.

F. To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond good and evil; the cosmos is perfect at every moment.

1. Since Brahman is unity, one and beyond distinction, there is therefore no ultimate distinction between good and evil. Morality collapses in pantheism.
2. Yet there is the principle of Karma. Karma is the cause/effect principle—you reap what you sow. Bad karma leads to a bad reincarnation in the next life (as well as bad consequences in this life). One must so live so as to increase the chances of a better reincarnation. But it would be wrong to mistake the principle of karma for morality for at least two reasons:
 - a. One does good deeds not for others but for self in order to attain unity with the one or at least a better incarnation.
 - b. All allegedly moral actions are part of the world of illusion or maya. Ultimate reality is one, beyond differentiation, good and evil. Thus any distinction between actions is an illusion. All acts end up being the same. Thus the cosmos is perfect at every moment. "Therefore, it seems to me that everything that exists is good—death as well as life, sin as well as holiness, wisdom as well as folly."
—Siddhartha.

G. Death is the end of individual, personal existence, but it changes nothing essential in an individual's nature.

No human being in the sense of individual person survives death (like naturalism). Atman survives, but Atman is impersonal. When Atman is reincarnated, it becomes another person. Only the atmanic soul immortal. There is no such thing as personal or individual immortality. In this scenario, death is insignificant. Since the only significant thing that survives death is Atman, nothing of value perishes; hence human life in this perspective can become cheap and insignificant.

H. To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond time. Time is unreal. History is cyclical.

Only the Absolute is real; the flow of unique, historical, sequential events is not real and so time and history is not ultimately real. History is valuable only as myth which takes us out of the particular and lifts us up to essence. An image revealing the cyclical nature of time is the mandala or wheel: "Whither will my path lead me? This path is stupid, it goes in spirals, perhaps in circles, but whichever way it goes, I will follow it." (—Siddhartha).

II. East and West: A Problem in Communication

Simply put: an understanding that the East and the West operate on two very different sets of assumptions. To begin a dialogue, at least one party must know the assumptions of the other, but for communication to proceed very far, both parties must know them.

