

What Makes Theism Theism?

Put differently, the question is about the constitutive factors of theism, properly so-called. On the face of it, these factors include the notion of a personal God, or God conceived after the analogy of the human person or self. Granting that theism as a *religious* belief may have good reasons for thus conceiving God as supreme person (and so as mind, experience, consciousness, etc.), one may well ask whether the same is true of theism as a *metaphysical* belief—or, at any rate, in what sense this is true.

I should think that one could define theism *metaphysically*, as distinct from religiously, as the belief according to which *the* ultimate principle of all things is as individual as it is universal, and vice versa. Thus "God" designates, in Hartshorne's words, "the most individual of universals, the most universal of individuals" (*A Natural Theology for Our Time*: 36). "Individuality," then, as a transcendental concept applicable to the divine or extraordinary case as well as all nondivine or ordinary cases can be defined in terms of interaction, i.e., both acting on and being acted on by self and others, being both active and passive, cause and effect, and so on—either in relation to *all* others, in the divine or extraordinary case, or in relation to *some* others only, in all nondivine or ordinary cases. But, then, being a person (and so mind, experience, consciousness, etc.), although it certainly illustrates individuality as a transcendental concept, need in no way be regarded as simply convertible, or coextensive, with that concept.

In short, being a metaphysical individual, whether ordinary or extraordinary, is something more purely formal and abstract than being a person, unless, of course, "person" has been so redefined as to be only a verbally different way of saying "individual."

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