

Everything, Something, and Nothing

It is arguable that the uniqueness of the idea of God, as “that which concerns us ultimately,” or “that than which none greater can be conceived,” is constituted by somehow conjoining these three fundamental concepts. What we mean by “God” is that which is at once *everything, something, and nothing*. Were God less than everything, God would be but a mere part of everything, which would then be a more encompassing whole. On the other hand, if God were *every-thing*, God could not be *some-thing*, merely *a* thing, and so could only be *no-thing*. But, finally, unless God were not simply nothing but in some sense something, God could be nothing with which we have to do that also has to do with us, and so, again, God could not be God.

On the face of it, however, these assertions are mutually exclusive either as contradictories or as contraries, since the threefold distinction. “all-some-none” has these kinds of logical properties—“all” and “none” being extreme contraries, “some” (taken in its negative as well as its positive sense) being their common contradictory. Obviously, then, the *respects* in which these three mutually exclusive terms are applicable to God cannot be the same but must be different—as is already evident from their brief elucidation above. But how is one to give an exact account of this difference?

One approach, perhaps, is to suggest that neither of the three terms can be applied to God except in the sense it has when appropriately qualified by the other two. Thus, if God is said to be “something,” the point in saying this is to say that “God” refers to that which, as a distinct center of interaction, is as internally related to other things as they are internally related to it. But, then, “everything” and “nothing” so function as qualifiers of “something” as to make clear that God is (1) *the* something internally related to *all* other things, all of which are also internally related to it; and therefore (2) neither *a* something in the ordinary sense, as that which is internally related merely to *some* other things, nor even all such other things as a mere aggregate having no real unity or integrity. Or, again, if God is said to be “everything,” what is meant is that

“God” refers to that which is all-inclusive, which excludes nothing, which has no external environment, which is not a mere part of some still more encompassing whole. But, then, “something” in this case so qualifies “everything” as to make clear that it is the real unity or integrity of all things, while “nothing” functions to make clear that it is not merely *a* something, and so on.

Assuming that this approach has some systematic value, one may also suppose it to shed some light on the various historical types of the idea of God and thus on the structure and dynamics of religious and philosophical history. One may especially expect it to illumine the apparent tendency of “higher” forms of any of the major types to converge toward one another, and thus toward the conjoint assertion that God is precisely something-everything-nothing. Thus, compared with a vulgar form of theism (monotheism, polytheism, or henotheism) or a vulgar form of pantheism, a sophisticated form of atheism is closer to a sophisticated form of theism and a sophisticated form of pantheism, and so likely to be closer to the truth that each in its way expresses.

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