

The Logic of Reincarnation

“Is an impersonal Force higher than a person? Is it higher to be something like electricity than to be something like Aristotle?” ~ Peter Kreeft¹

A recent visit from the Dalai Lama² brings the subject of East meets West to mind in comparing worldviews and following such views to their logical conclusion. It has been said, if you want to see the fruits of a religious belief you must go to the country they are most firmly rooted in and see them for yourself. Too often, people in the West pick-and-choose from religious beliefs whatever suits their fancy, whatever sounds good to them, and then mix it into a hodgepodge of beliefs throwing in a dash of compassion – which is really rooted in the Judeo-Christian worldview. Moreover, this compassion inserted into the Eastern worldviews and religious philosophies is foreign to them.³ This brings us to a major distinction between Western and Eastern thinking that Buddhists, Hindus, New Age adherents as well as neo-pagans (such as wiccans⁴) believe in -- and that is, the doctrine of reincarnation.⁵ In fact, through the transmigration of the soul⁶ the Dalai Lama is said to be the fourteenth reincarnation of Avalokiteshvara^{7,8} Thus, reincarnation is intimately tied up in



¹ *The Journey: A Spiritual Roadmap for Modern Pilgrims* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 95.

² *Washington Times*, “Bush ignores China, to meet Dalai Lama,” (October 12, 2007), National News.

³ Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2001), 96, 105.

⁴ One researcher explains Wicca's outlook on reincarnation:

Many witches subscribe to some form of reincarnation and the moral law of karma which governs it. Raymond Buckland says regarding reincarnation: "For its own evolution, it is necessary that the soul experience all things in life. It seems the most sensible, most logical, explanation of much that is found in life." In their book *The Secrets of Ancient Witchcraft with the Witches Tarot* Arnold and Patricia Crowther comment, "Witches believe in reincarnation, and hope they will be born again among their own people. When they die, they believe that they go to the 'summerlands of the gods,' where they are rested and purified before being reborn on this earth." However, the witches' version puts a new spin on the old wheel of reincarnation. Aidan Kelly remarks on the wiccan understanding of reincarnation, "Most Witches believe that human beings do not necessarily have immortal souls. The Craft promises 'rebirth among those you love' as the reward of the true initiates (the complete opposite of Eastern concepts). Would rebirth be a reward if it were automatic for all human beings? Perhaps, but most Witches tend to think not." Thus, unlike Eastern religions or their Western adaptations, witches do not seek to escape the wheel of reincarnation but to ride it to the fullest extent. It is seen as a blessing and not a curse.

Craig S. Hawkins, *Witchcraft: Exploring the World of Wicca* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books/Academic, 1996), 49.

⁵ This is not a thorough exegetical excoriation of the differing views of reincarnation, nor how each religion or sect views whether the soul keeps its ego or travels through the animal kingdom. I will generally deal with the doctrine as many here in the West view it, rightly or wrongly.

⁶ Defined simply as the “rebirth as an animal, tree, or inanimate thing,” H. Byron Earhart, *Religious Traditions of the World* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 371.

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the Wheel of Life.⁹ The two are inseparable in fact, so when I speak of *reincarnation*, *karmic* or *cosmic wheel*, *transmigration of the soul*, I mean to say that the soul...

“...wanders through eternity, undergoing successive birth and rebirth, death and re-death, until it finally attains liberation. Birth and rebirth are not random happenings, however; everything is connected by the chains of karma. Every action has a consequence, and some consequences are so far-reaching that they must be played out over several lifetimes.”¹⁰

People here in the West look upon karma in a good light (as we are prone to not casting judgment on other cultures¹¹), however, in the East it is something that is disdained and the goal of the adherent is to try and escape its grasp.¹² It has been said that Gandhi spoke of reincarnation as a burden too heavy for India to carry,¹³ I concur. As mentioned, the Dalai Lama believes in the *karmic or cosmic wheel*, again, not as popularly thought of by the Western mind but by the Eastern. For example, many of us have seen photos or video from the Asian continent showing large groups of children running up in droves and begging for food, money, and the like when a westerner comes through town. Anything these children can attempt to do to curb the obvious hunger and lack of necessities that they and their families daily feel, they will. After viewing such video or photographs, do you ever then wonder why these children typically flock to the western woman or man? If you have not, you should start. It is primarily because



⁷ *Avalokiteshvara* - “...(frequently pictured with eleven heads and multiple arms), who came out of Indian Mahayana as the ultimate embodiment of mercy and was adapted into various other schools of Mahayana. In Tibetan Buddhism, under the name Chenresi, he is believed to be the incarnated by the Dali Lama. In China, Avalokiteshvara became merged with the folk goddess of mercy, Guanyin, and thus appears in feminine form. Finally, in Japan he/she is revered as the feminine Kannon.” Winfred Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 229.

⁸ Dean Halverson, *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), 53.

⁹ *Samsara* - “the wheel of rebirth in yogic religions. It is the passing through successive lives as a consequence of the actions of karma. Bondage is implied and liberation seen as release from both the bonds of karma and samsara,” Irving Hexham, *Concise Dictionary of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), cf. samsara, 195.

¹⁰ Diane Morgan, *The Best Guide to Eastern Philosophy & Religion* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2001), 35.

¹¹ Thomas Sowell, “The Multiculturalism Cult,” *Barbarians Inside the Gates: And Other Controversial Essays* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), 17-19.

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Along with the idea of karma, Indian thinkers introduced the concept of *samsara*, literally “to wander across.” Indian religions believe that the life force of an individual does not die with the death of the body, but instead “wanders across.” The life force moves on to another time and body, where it continues to live. Many Western thinkers have proposed this idea as “reincarnation” or the “transmigration of souls.” Some see this process as a blessing; but in Indian thought, *samsara* may be thought of as a curse. One is bound to life in ignorance and pain, living over and over again through countless generations. Indeed, the goal of most Indian religions is to break the cycle of *karma* and *samsara* and be free from the burden of life. This breaking free from life is called *moksha*. In the Upanishads, release from life comes when there is true knowledge of the illusion of life.

Lewis M. Hopfe and Mark R. Woodward, *Religions of the World, 10th ed.* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006), 81 (emphasis added).

¹³ There is some dispute as to whether Gandhi used those exact words.

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of the *caste system*¹⁴ where people are believed to reincarnate into groups that are segregated “according to a system of classification known as *Varian*, which means color.”¹⁵

These classes are supported by Krishna¹⁶ in the Bhagavad-Gita but most probably have their origins in the “Aryan invaders... keep[ing] the dark skinned Dravidians they conquered in quite subjection.”¹⁷

These social classes include:

- *Brahmins* (priests)
- *Ksatriyas* (warriors or rulers)
- *Vaisyas* (merchants)
- *Sudras* (laborers/servants)
- and the “untouchables.”¹⁸

The *untouchables* are considered impure and are forbidden to have contact with the rest of society. The law of karma, then, dictates one’s social status. *Karma*¹⁹ comes from a root meaning “to do or to act;”²⁰ karma thus involves the idea that every action yields a consequence. According to this law, then, one will be born in a higher status in the next life if one builds up good karma in the present life. Alternatively, one will be born in a lower status in the next life if one builds up bad karma in the present life. Your particular status in this life is, or has been, caused by the building up of good or bad karma from a previous cycle of death and rebirth -- known as *samsara* (transmigration). *Samsara* literally means, “to wander across.”^{21,22} Scholar Lewis M. Hopfe tells us that, “Indian religions believe that the life force of an individual does not die with the death of the body. Instead, it ‘wanders across.’ The life force moves on to another time and body where it continues to live.”²³ Salvation, then, “involves

¹⁴ Caste System - “The system of cultural ranking and structuring of Hindu society,” Larry A. Nichols, George A. Mather and Alvin J. Schmidt, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2006), cf. caste, 375.

¹⁵ Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 171.

¹⁶ “[An] incarnation of Vishnu whose teachings in the Bhagavad-Gita have inspired millions,” Linda Johnsen, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Hinduism* (Indianapolis, IN: Alpha, 2002), 382; Vishnu: “One of three manifestations of Brahman, the eternal Trimutri, or three-in-one god, of Hinduism. The great triad of Hindu gods is composed of Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu. Hindus believe Brahma is the creator of all things. Because creation is complete, this god is rarely worshiped. Shiva represents the destroyer and is worshiped for its power in eradicating the old to make way for the new. Shiva and its representative gods play a prominent part in the purification process that will precede the global transformation into the New Age. The final and most popular aspect of the Hindu triad is Vishnu, the preserver. This deity is sometimes referred to as the god of love or the savior of humanity,” Debra Lardie, Dan Lioy and Paul Ingram, eds., *Concise Dictionary of the Occult and New Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), cf. Vishnu, 296.

¹⁷ Rabi R. Maharaj, *Death of a Guru: A Remarkable True Story of One Man’s Search for Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1984), 201.

¹⁸ Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions*, 171-172.

¹⁹ See the **appendix** for a partial explanation/definition of karma taken from a previous debate I had via the Internet.

²⁰ Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions*, 172.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Lewis M. Hopfe and Mark R. Woodward, *Religions of the World, 10th ed.*, 81.

²³ *Ibid.*

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breaking away from this wheel of life via reincarnation.... [it - salvation] comes when one realizes that one's individual soul (*atman*) is identical with the Universal Soul (*Brahman*)."²⁴

So far I have dealt with the Hindu belief of reincarnation and salvation, however, the general idea of the karmic wheel and reincarnation are well-understood not only within Hinduism,²⁵ but Sikhism, Buddhism, as well as most eastern religious philosophies as well as the New Age movement here in the West.²⁶ That being said, we can begin to understand the "flocking" of children around westerners. In India and Tibet and other areas that hold to reincarnation as the predominate philosophy, one is in his or her predicament, so-to-speak, because of the choices (actions) made in previous lives. The Dalai Lama and other "holy men" believe that to help these poor unfortunates is to tamper with their karma,²⁷ when doing otherwise they are living "outside" their worldview. These afore-mentioned personalities will literally walk right past the poor, invalid, maimed, un-educated, starving, and mentally ill people completely ignoring their pleas for help and assistance, all because of the effects of their karmic past! An example is warranted:

- Consider my marriage to my wife, now consider that I beat her mercilessly, treating her like the dirt on my shoes, etc. I would be storing up some pretty bad karma. When I come around for my next human life I would come back as the woman being beat.

This is karma's answer to evil, which is really no answer at all. In fact, it perpetuates evil. How so? It necessitates a *beatee*, which mandates a *beater*. It creates, then, a seemingly never-ending circle of violence or evil. In addition, it states emphatically that we *choose* our current destiny (or events) in this

²⁴ Ron Rhodes, *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions*, 172.

²⁵ I deal primarily with the Sankara school of Hinduism (a critique of the others will be in later foot notes):

Although there have been a variety of philosophical and religious systems of thought in India, according to most Indian thinkers the only truly live options within orthodox Hinduism today are elaborations and variations of three major Hindu theologies systematically formulated by Sankara (pronounced: shum cah ra) in the eighth century A.D., by Ramanuja (pronounced: Rah mah noo jah) in the eleventh century A.D., and that formulated by Madhya (pronounced: Mudh vah) in the twelfth century A.D. All three of these individuals attempted to develop a systematic Hindu theology based on the Vedas, the Upanishads, the short summary and systematization of the Upanishads called the Brahma-sutra or Vedanta-sutra, along with other texts, especially the Bhagavad-Gita in the case of Ramanuja and Madhya.

Michael J. Murray, ed., *Reason for the Hope Within* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 186.

²⁶ Elliot Miller points out that New Age adherents believe along the same lines as well:

In addition to the above universal beliefs, most New Agers adhere to the ancient Hindu doctrines of reincarnation and karma. By the law of karma it is understood that whatever a person does--good or bad--will return to him experientially in an exact proportion of good or bad. Since most people are unable to experience all of the "bad karma" that they have accumulated in one lifetime, they are compelled to return in new incarnations until all of their bad karma has been balanced by good karma. Thus for those who accept such a scenario, *salvation is clearly a matter of works*.

A Crash Course in the New Age: Describing and Evaluating a Growing Social Force (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books/Academic, 1989), 17-18.

²⁷ Dean Halverson, *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions*, 56-57, 98.

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life due to past life experiences and choices. Another illustration with some personal dialogue between some aid workers will help explain this concept some more:

While speaking in Thailand, Ron Carlson was invited to visit some refugee camps along the Cambodian border. Over 300,000 refugees were caught in a no-man's-land along the border. This resulted from the Cambodian massacre under Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in the mid-70's (which is known as the "killing fields") and then subsequently by the invasion of the Vietnamese at the end of the 70's. One of the most fascinating things about these refugee camps was the realization of who was caring for the refugees. Here, in this Buddhist country of Thailand, with Buddhist refugees coming from Cambodia and Laos, there were no Buddhists taking care of their Buddhist brothers. There were also no Atheists, Hindus, or Muslims taking care of those people. The only people there, taking care of these 300,000[+] people, were Christians from Christian mission organizations and Christian relief organizations. One of the men Ron was with had lived in Thailand for over twenty-years and was heading up a major portion of the relief effort for one of these organizations. Ron asked him: "Why, in a Buddhist country, with Buddhist refugees, are there no Buddhists here taking care of their Buddhist brothers?" Ron will never forget his answer:

"Ron, have you ever seen what Buddhism does to a nation or a people? Buddha taught that each man is an island unto himself. Buddha said, 'if someone is suffering, that is his karma.' You are not to interfere with another person's karma because he is purging himself through suffering and reincarnation! Buddha said, 'You are to be an island unto yourself.'" - "Ron, the only people that have a reason to be here today taking care of these 300,000 refugees are Christians. It is only Christianity that people have a basis for human value that people are important enough to educate and to care for. For Christians, these people are of ultimate value, created in the image of God, so valuable that Jesus Christ died for each and every one of them. You find that value in no other religion, in no other philosophy, but in Jesus Christ."²⁸

Do you get it now? It takes a "Mother Teresa" to go into these embattled countries with a Judeo-Christian worldview and bathe, feed, educate, care for these people – who otherwise are ignored due to harmful religious beliefs. Another example, albeit more poignant, is that of a mock conversation between a Buddhist named Zen, and a Christian named Chris:

Chris: What if in my reality, my "island," it is wrong for people to own things, and so when you're not looking, I elect to play "Robin Hood" by relieving you of your new two-thousand-dollar-crystal and giving it to someone else?

²⁸ Ron Carlson & Ed Decker, *Fast Facts on False Teachings* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 28-29.

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Zen: Well, uh, I guess I'd have to conclude that my Higher Self wanted me to learn a lesson about material things [as Buddhism teaches and New Age thought teaches].

Chris: Okay, if stealing is not a sin, let's take it further. Now let's pretend I'm a "pedophile" – it's part of my reality to "love" children in every way possible. So, while you're at work I'm going to invite your children into my home to play a "game" that I've made up. Is that all right with you?

Zen: It most certainly is not! It would be part of my reality to report you to the police.

Chris: Why? After all, it's the reality I've sovereignly chosen to create for myself. What gives you the right to interfere in the reality of another god? [Which are what Eastern religions teach, coming to the realization that you are one with the Brahmin.]

Zen: Simple. Your reality is infringing on my children's reality.

Chris: But according to your belief system, before your child incarnated she chose you [by past actions] as her parent and she also chose whatever happens to them, including my act, and you've no right to interfere.

[Ravi Zacharias makes the point that one doesn't even know ultimately if it was something in your previous life or something in the *parents* previous life or the *child's* previous life (or *others* involved) that dictated this karmic outcome!²⁹]

Zen: I do too... in this case.

Chris: Can you see my point now? You are naturally and rightly outraged at the very suggestion of such an act. Something within you knows that it is wrong in and of itself! This reality is in direct contrast to what you should believe if your Buddhist philosophy holds true.

Zen: You are right.

Chris: But that can only be so if there are absolute rights and wrongs independent of our personal reality [which Eastern religions don't teach]. Yet, try as you may, you will not find a ground for such moral absolutes and human value in your worldview. Your God is impersonal and amoral, "beyond good and evil," so you can't

²⁹ Ravi Zacharias, *The Lotus and the Cross: Jesus Talks with Buddha* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001), 23-24.

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appeal to It [as “It” is impersonal]. In addition, since in your view [Buddhism or Hinduism] we are all equally gods, my truth about any subject is as good as your truth. So you see, Eastern beliefs fail the test of human experience – it cannot be consistently lived out.³⁰



I hope, with this graphic example, one can see the problem with karma, reincarnation, and the philosophy that naturally follows when fleshed out to its logical outcome. Believing that if my son were to be raped (sodomized) and very probably killed by the perpetrator (all over the news these days)... and then believing that something my son did in a previous lifetime demanded that this happen to him in this lifetime is a religious philosophy that just doesn't compute with reality and lays a large burden on the pantheist. Moreover, to deny this karmic reality is to insert a Western view of human nature that is foreign to the Eastern thinker. In doing this, said person is Christianizing Eastern religion to fit their pre-conceived ideals and moral values learned in a culture that pre-supposes the Judeo-Christian concept of man and reality – which is at odds with Eastern pre-suppositions of man and reality.

Only recently have some Indian people rejected Eastern thinking and started to kill the massive infestation of disease-ridden rodents that inhabit India's cities.³¹ These rodents carry and transmit many diseases as well as destroying and infecting large crops that could have made it to the starving population. Most, however, continue to nurture or ignore these disease-carrying animals in the belief that they are a soul transmigrating [in-situ] through the cosmic wheel, even sacred.³² This is just one example of a horrible religious practice that is part of the many destructive practices that are hurting precious persons. The caste system mentioned before is another that promotes and encourages racism, malnourishment, lack of education, and ultimately death, both physical and spiritual.



³⁰ Elliot Miller, *A Crash Course on the New Age Movement*, 209-210.

³¹ From a show seen by myself a few years ago on *The Learning Channel*, exactly which show I do not remember.

³² For instance, at the Karni Mata temple they feed and care for these rodents believing they are sacred. Karni Mata was a female Hindu sage and is worshipped as the incarnation of the goddess Durga by her followers. In fact, the photo of the women holding a man's head and surrounded by rats is Karni.

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Of importance to this conversation is the belief in pantheism and their adherence to the above in some form or fashion.³³ Pantheism defined broadly means “that god is everywhere and, more important, in everyone.”^{34,35} With the above concepts and definitions in mind I wish to quickly show some of the self-defeating aspects of pantheism. Mind you that this is a philosophical problem rather than a historical or theological one. To begin, pantheists claim that *God* is unknowable because *it* [God] is above and beyond human logic. In other words, we are told that we cannot intellectually comprehend God because he is beyond all understanding. However, this is nonsensical and self-defeating statement. Why? “Because the very act of claiming that God is beyond logic is a logical statement about God.”³⁶ Also, to say that we cannot know or comprehend God, as do the agnostics, **is to say that we know God.** How? I will answer this with a response to agnostic claims by the associate professor of philosophy and government at the University of Texas at Austin:

To say that we cannot know anything about God is to say something about God; it is to say that if there is a God, *he* is unknowable. But in that case, he is not *entirely* unknowable, for the agnostic certainly thinks that we can know one thing about him: *That nothing else can be known about him.* Unfortunately, the position that we can know exactly one thing about God – his unknowability in all respects except this – is equally unsupportable, for why should this one thing be an exception? How could we *know* that any possible God would be of such a nature that nothing else could be known about him? On what basis could we rule out his

³³ There are always distinction to be made, for instance, Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins in their book *Worlds Apart: A Handbook On World Views, 2nd ed.* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003) make these varying views quite apparent (77-78):

- **Absolute** pantheism is represented by the thinking of the early Greek philosopher Parmenides, who lived in the fifth century before Christ and by the Advaita Vedanta school of Hinduism. This type of pantheism teaches that there is only one being in the world, God. All else that appears to exist does not actually exist.
- **Emanational** pantheism, as set forth by Plotinus in the third century after Christ, holds that everything flows from God, just as a flower unfolds from a seed.
- In **developmental** pantheism, as reflected in the thinking of G. W. E. Hegel (1770-1831), the events of history are viewed as the unfolding manifestations of Absolute Spirit.
- **Modal** pantheism, as espoused by the rationalist Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677), argues that there is only one absolute Substance in which all finite things are merely modes or moments.
- **Multilevel** pantheism is found in some forms of Hinduism, especially as expressed by Radhakrishnan. This view proposes that there are various levels or manifestations of God, the highest level manifesting God as the Absolute One and the lower levels successively manifesting God in greater multiplicity.
- Finally, there is **permeational** pantheism where the Force [Tao] penetrates all things. This kind is found in Zen Buddhism and was popularized in the Star Wars films.

³⁴ Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions In America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 27.

³⁵ Sahakian points out two deficiencies in this view:

[P]hilosophers have pointed out that two basic deficiencies are inherent in Pantheism: the allocation of error to God's mind; and the attribution of evil to God's nature. The **first** deficiency involves self-contradiction. Since every person is part of God, it follows that if a child (also part of God) believes erroneously that $2 + 2 = 5$, while at the same time his teacher (part of God as well) knows that $2 + 2 = 4$ and that the child is mistaken, the entire situation is one in which God must be assumed to be simultaneously aware and not aware that lie is in error. Thus, Pantheism injects contradiction in the mind of God, an inconceivable impossibility. The **second** deficiency, as set forth in the writings of Borden Parker Bowne, stems from the Pantheistic view that portrays God as the most evil of all beings; inasmuch as God is the sum total of all persons, lie is more wicked than any single individual. The argument that God is also the sum total of all good persons does not acquit him of the responsibility for evils committed.

William S. Sahakian and Mable Lewis Sahakian, *Ideas of the Great Philosophers* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 1966), 88.

³⁶ Dan Story, *Christianity on the Offense: Responding to the Beliefs and Assumptions of Spiritual Seekers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 112.

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knowability in all other respects but this one? The very attempt to justify the claim confutes it, for the agnostic would have to know a great many things about God in order to know he that couldn't know anything else about him.³⁷

Although not the time nor place to explain the law of non-contradiction, for those who do not know, a brief perusal may be warranted. The law of non-contradiction is simply this: “‘A’ cannot be both ‘non-A’ and ‘A’ at the same time.”³⁸ In the words of Professor J. P. Moreland:

When a statement fails to satisfy itself (i.e., to conform to *its own* criteria of validity or acceptability), it is self-refuting.... Consider some examples. “*I cannot say a word in English*” is self-refuting when uttered in English. “*I do not exist*” is self-refuting, for one must exist to utter it. The claim “*there are no truths*” is self-refuting. If it is false, then it is false. But is it true, then it is false as well, for in that case there would be no truths, including the statement itself.³⁹

With this in mind, let us continue to explore a few more problems with the pantheist thought process. For instance, a major problem that faces the pantheist is that there is no reality except the all-encompassing God, everything else is illusory. Again, this nonsensical statement is logically self-refuting. If everything is illusion, then those making that statement are themselves illusions.⁴⁰ This problem is pointed to by Norman Geisler, “*One must exist in order to affirm that he does not exist.*”⁴¹ When we claim that there is no reality except the all-encompassing God, we are proving just the opposite. The fact that we exist to make the claim demonstrates that there is a reality distinct from God, which makes this key doctrine of pantheism a self-defeating proposition. It is an untruth – by definition.

I wish to illustrate with a conversation (unfinished by the way) between myself and a Zen Buddhist. This conversation can almost happen with any religious Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, or the like. The conversation takes place after an interesting post by the person on his blog about self-defense, the Dalai Lama, WWII,

³⁷ Norman Geisler & Paul Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian: Leading Thinkers Explain Why They Believe, revised ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 58 (emphasis added).

³⁸ Dan Story, *Christianity on the Offense*, 24-25.

³⁹ *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1987), 92 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Dan Story, *Christianity on the Offense*, 112.

⁴¹ Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976), 187.

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and the Buddha. I will post my reply to his original thought, and then he responds, followed again by me. (Keep in mind I am using our "blog" names, they are almost like "handles" like in the movie *Top Gun*).⁴²

- **My initial engagement:**

Does the idea of "violence" as a *moral good* or a *moral evil* truly exist in the Buddhist mindset? What I mean is that according to a major school of Buddhism, isn't there a denial that distinctions exist in reality... that separate "selves" is really a false perception? Language is considered something the Buddhist must get beyond because it serves as a tool that creates and makes these apparently illusory distinctions more grounded, or rooted in "our" psyche. For instance, the statement that "all statements are empty of meaning," would almost be self refuting, because, that statement -- then -- would be meaningless. So how can one go from that teaching inherent to Buddhistic thought and say that self-defense (and using WWII as an example) is really meaningful. Isn't the [Dalai] Lama drawing distinction by assuming the reality of Aristotelian logic in his responses to questions? (He used at least three Laws of Logic [thus, drawing distinctions using Western principles]: The Law of Contradiction; the Law of Excluded Middle; and the Law of Identity.) Curious.

- **They Call Him James Ure, responds:**

You're right that language is just a tool and in the end a useless one at that but It's important to be able run a blog. That or teach people the particulars of the religion. It's like a lamp needed to make your way through the dark until you reach the lighthouse (Enlightenment, Nirvana, etc.) Then of course the lamp is no longer useful unless you have taken the vow to teach others. Which in my analogy is returning into the dark to bring your brothers and sisters along (via the lamp-i.e. language) to the lighthouse (enlightenment, Nirvana, etc.)

- **I respond:**

Then... if reality is ultimately characterless and distinctionless, then the distinction between being enlightened and unenlightened is ultimately an illusion and reality is ultimately unreal. Whom is doing the leading? Leading to what? These still are distinctions being made, that is: "between knowing you are enlightened and not knowing you are enlightened." In the *Diamond*

⁴² I use quite liberally in this exchange two resources, they are follows: Michael J. Murray, ed., *Reason for the Hope Within*, 212-214; Ernest Valea, "Possible difficulties in Buddhism," *Many Paths To One Goal?* Found at: <http://www.comparativereligion.com/Buddhism.html> (last accessed 8-11-09), the main site is: <http://www.comparativereligion.com/index.html>

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Sutra, ultimately, the Bodhisattva loves no one, since no one exists and the Bodhisattva knows this:

- “All beings must I lead to Nirvana, into the Realm of Nirvana which leaves nothing behind; and yet, after beings have been led to Nirvana, no being at all has been led to Nirvana. And why? If in a Bodhisattva⁴³ the notion of a “being” should take place, he could not be called a “Bodhi-being.” And likewise if the notion of a soul, or a person should take place in him.

So even the act of loving others, therefore, is inconsistent with what is taught in the Buddhistic worldview, because there is “no one to love.” This is shown quite well (this self-refuting aspect of Buddhism) in the book, *The Lotus and the Cross: Jesus Talks with Buddha*. A book I recommend with love, from a worldview that can use the word love well. One writer puts it thusly: “When human existence is blown out, nothing real disappears because life itself is an illusion. Nirvana is neither a re-absorption into an eternal Ultimate Reality, nor the annihilation of a self, because there is no self to annihilate. It is rather an annihilation of the illusion of an existing self. Nirvana is a state of supreme bliss and freedom without any subject left to experience it.”

(<http://www.comparativereligion.com/Buddhism.html>)

• My Final Response

I haven't seen a response yet. Which is fitting... because whom would be responding to whom? Put another way, would there be one mind trying to actively convince the other mind that no minds exist at all?

Here's another way to see the same thing, Dan Story weighs in again:

It may be possible that nothing exists. However, it is impossible to demonstrate that nothing exists because to do so would be to deny our own existence. We must exist in order to affirm that reality doesn't exist. To claim

⁴³ “One who has taken a vow to become a Buddha.” David Burnett, *The Spirit of Buddhism: A Christian Perspective on Buddhist Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2003), 329. “Celestial” Buddha's and *bodhisattvas* are said to be able to assist in guiding believers towards salvation as supernatural beings. These *bodhisattvas* vary in their rolls and offices as the many gods of Hinduism, from which Buddhism comes. See: Michael D. Coogan, *Eastern Religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 133-139.

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that reality is an illusion is logically impossible because it also requires claiming that the claim itself is unreal—a self-defeating statement. If reality is an illusion, how do we know that pantheism isn't an illusion too?⁴⁴

Another author put it thusly, “if pantheism is true (and my individuality an illusion), it is false, since there is no basis by which to explain the illusion.”⁴⁵ The challenge then becomes this: “if reality is an illusion, how do we know then that pantheism isn’t an illusion as well?”⁴⁶ You see...

... most people assume that something exists. There may be someone, perhaps, who believes that nothing exists, but who would that person be? ... no one ever consciously tries to defend the position that nothing exists. It would be a useless endeavor since there would be no one to convince. Even more significantly, it would be impossible to defend that position since, if it were true, there would be no one to make the defense. So to defend the position that nothing exists seems immediately to be absurd and self-contradictory.⁴⁷

Another problem in pantheism is God’s inability to deal with or solve the problem of evil.⁴⁸ Dan Story points out what should be becoming obvious, “He is the cause of it (remember, all *is* God).” Mr. Story continues:

⁴⁴ Dan Story, *Christianity on the Offense*, 112-113.

⁴⁵ Francis J. Beckwith and Stephen E. Parrish, *See the Gods Fall: Four Rivals to Christianity* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1997), 210.

⁴⁶ Dan Story, *Christianity on the Offense*, 112-113.

⁴⁷ L. Russ Bush, *A Handbook for Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 70.

⁴⁸ Michael J. Murray critiques quickly the Ramanuja and Madhya philosophies:

Stated in terms of Christian terminology, Ramanuja's view implies that every soul that has ever existed endured an eternity in “hell” (i.e., the cycle of rebirths) before it could enter “heaven” (i.e., union with God). Now unlike Madhya, Ramanuja claims that God freely, and beginninglessly, created the world, and all existing souls, out of his own being. This latter claim, however, presents Ramanuja with a very severe problem of evil: that of reconciling his belief that God is perfectly good and all-loving with God's ultimate responsibility for the beginningless existence of souls in a state of sin and suffering. The problem of evil faced by Ramanuja here is much more severe than that faced by Western theists. First, unlike Western theists, Ramanuja cannot say that this evil is a necessary consequence of God's creating creatures with free will. Although the suffering of a soul in any individual life could be blamed on the bad karma resulting from its free choices in previous lives, the fact that the suffering is beginningless -- and hence infinite -- cannot be blamed on free choice. The reason for this is that, no matter what free choices souls make in this life, or have made in any previous life, they cannot change the fact that they have beginninglessly endured an infinite amount of suffering; but one cannot be responsible for what one was powerless to change. Followers of Ramanuja, therefore, do not seem to have recourse to the traditional free will theodicy invoked in the West to explain evil. Second, the amount of evil that needs to be explained is infinitely larger than that faced by Western versions of theism, since, according to Ramanuja each soul has committed an infinite number of evil acts and endured an infinite period of suffering. Unfortunately, as Julius Lipner points out, neither Ramanuja, nor any other orthodox Hindu theologian, ever attempted to address this particular problem of evil since they took the eternity of the world and souls as an “unquestioned datum for life and thought.” Unlike Ramanuja (and Western theism), however, Madhya's theology largely avoids the problem of evil. The reason for this is that in his theology God is neither responsible for the beginningless existence of souls in a state of bondage, nor for the fact that they continue to remain in bondage, this being ultimately the result of their inherent, uncreated nature. Nonetheless, his system suffers from two drawbacks when compared to Ramanuja's view. First, Madhya's system leaves one with a plurality of ultimates -- souls, matter, and God -- without accounting for their existence. Although this is not a devastating criticism of Madhya, everything else being equal, views that hypothesize a single, unified source of everything (such as God), are in virtue of their simplicity, philosophically more satisfactory. Second, even though Madhya claimed to base his view on scripture, from the perspective of many orthodox Hindus his theology seems to contradict both those passages of Hindu scripture that appear to imply a deep sort of identity between God and souls and those that appear to imply that the world emerges out of God.

Reason for the Hope Within, 200-202.

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Pantheism and the New Age may try to ignore this problem by claiming that sin and suffering is merely illusion. But let's bring this philosophy down to the real world. Try to convince a man dying of cancer or a parent who has just lost a child that evil and suffering are illusion. Even if evil is an illusion, the illusion itself is real. In either case, evil exists. As Geisler noted, "If evil is not real, what is the origin of the illusion? Why has it been so persistent and why does it seem so real? ... How can evil arise from a 'God' who is absolutely and necessarily good?"⁴⁹ The answer must be that if pantheism is true, God *cannot* be good, and He *must* be the source of evil.⁵⁰

Between karmic destiny and the god[s] of pantheism and its dealing with pain and suffering (and consequently the promotion of it) by claiming everything is an illusion is not an answer at all. Must we not live *as if* this illusion is reality? In other words, "look both ways:"

As the professor waxed eloquent and expounded on the law of non-contradiction, he eventually drew his conclusion: "This [either/or logic] is a Western way of looking at reality. The real problem is that you are seeing contradictions as a Westerner when you should be approaching it as an Easterner. The both/and is the Eastern way of viewing reality."

After he belabored these two ideas on either/or and both/and for some time, I finally asked if I could interrupt his unpunctuated train of thought and raise one question.

I said, "Sir, are you telling me that when I am studying Hinduism I either use the both/and system of logic or nothing else?"

There was pin-drop silence for what seemed an eternity. I repeated my question: "Are you telling me that when I am studying Hinduism I either use the both/and logic or nothing else? Have I got that right?"

He threw his head back and said, "The either/or does seem to emerge, doesn't it?"

"Indeed, it does emerge," I said. "And as a matter of fact, even in India we look both ways before we cross the street - it is *either* the bus *or* me, not both of us."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 189 (emphasis added).

⁵⁰ Dan Story, *Christianity on the Offense*, 113.

⁵¹ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 128-129 (emphasis added).

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Pantheists may pawn this inane philosophy on people, but no one can live it out consistently as Ravi pointed out. Moreover, when a large population tries to live it – like in India – one can see the fruits it produces, the destruction of the family a case in point.⁵² The promulgation of suffering and the inability of the religious Hindu to stop and help a suffering child or the rampant infestation of disease ridden -- crop eating -- pests, is all a loud refutation of trying to live an unlivable religious proposition. *A lie.*

APPENDIX

~ Adapted from an online debate many years ago ~

The law of cause and effect to which on the “spiritual” plain is called *Karma*. One writer says of the law:

Karma simply means that there remains naught after each personality but the causes produced by it. No “personality” – a mere bunch of material atoms and of indistinct mental characteristics – can of course continue as such, in the world of pure Spirit. *The fundamental idea behind karma is that of action followed by reaction. The Bhagavad-Gita, one of the best-known Hindu scriptures, defines it quite simply as “the name given to the creative force that brings beings into existence” (8:3). Thus, it may be viewed as the fundamental creative action that is perpetuated in each individual soul.*⁵³

Practically, karma is somewhat like Isaac Newton’s law: “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.”⁵⁴ Mark Albrecht continues:

It could be pictured as a set of moral scales; all the bad deeds piled up on one side must be balanced by good deeds on the other. Yet it is more complicated than that. Perhaps the best way of picturing karma and its relationship to rebirth (reincarnation) is something like this: Each person is a sort of electronic sensor or microphone with a wire hooked up to a great computer in the heavens; the computer is ‘God’ Each thought, motive and act, as well as all the things that happen to us, are relayed back to the computer and filed away.

⁵² Rabi R. Maharaj, *Death of a Guru*, 13 and 14:

No matter how fulfilling life becomes, there are always certain regrets when one looks back. My deepest sense of loss involves my father, Chandrabhan Ragbir Sharma Mahabir Maharaj. How I wish he were still alive! Nor does the fact that this extraordinary man died so young and under such mysterious circumstances entirely explain my regret. So much that is even more remarkable has happened since then. I often wonder what it would be like to share it all with him, and what his reaction would be. To share it with him! We never shared anything in our lives. Because of the vows he had taken before I was born, not once did he ever speak to me or pay me the slightest heed. Just two words from him would have made me unspeakably happy. More than anything else in the whole world I wanted to hear him say, “Rabi! Son!” Just once. But he never did. For eight long years he uttered not a word, not even a whispered confidence to my mother.... “Why is Father that way?” I would ask my mother when I was still too young to understand. “He is someone very special—the greatest man you could have for a father,” she would reply, always patient with my persistent questions and puzzled expression. “He is seeking the true Self that lies within us all, the One Being, of which there is no other. And that’s what you are too, Rabi.”

⁵³ Mark Albrecht, *Reincarnation: A Christian Critique of a New Age Doctrine* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1982), 20 (emphasis added).

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Upon death the data bank in the computer is activated, and the 'readout' of our next life or lives, is cranked out and handed to us. If our negative karma (deeds, thoughts, motives, circumstances, and so on) outweighs our positive karmic pattern, we are assigned a more miserable existence in the next round, and vice versa. We have nothing to say about it. There is no mercy, forgiveness or court of appeals.⁵⁵

Earlier Albrecht made the point that:

Hinduism and Buddhism teach that humans can only achieve final liberation from the round of rebirths by this doctrine. Only through the pitfalls and travails of the human condition can a soul earn sufficient merit to warrant its release or liberation (Sanskrit: *moksha* or *samadhi*). Thus, a soul must evolve through various life forms to the human state, the evolutionary plateau where moral lessons are learned through multitudes of reincarnations.⁵⁶

If you are born into a family that is well off, and you have a good family relationship, then you are being rewarded for some good work[s] from a previous life. If you are born into a famine-ridden area, destitute, or mentally or physically incapable of caring for yourself, then you are in retribution for the "cause and effect" law of karma. This is the reason that there is no firm "right or wrong" in this life according to Eastern thought. All people who are treated unfairly or unjustly -- like slaves were in America, racial wars, famine and disease in undeveloped nations -- are merely reaping what they sowed in a previous incarnation. In addition, to interfere with this process -- outlaw slavery, end racial strife, feed and heal the hungry and sick -- is to interfere with a person's karma, which is strictly forbidden in the eastern philosophies! (Alternatively, doing so has no intrinsic value -- e.g., *no real positive moral benefit*, as any benefit must be illusory as well.)

It is laughable that some defend this doctrine tooth and nail. However, if really believed, they would come to realize there is no *real* good or evil! The Inquisitions, the Mumbai terror killings at the hands of Muslims, as examples, were merely the outgrowth of the victim's previous karmic lives. Therefore, when those here defend karmic destiny in other posts speak of the horrible atrocities committed by *religion*, they are not consistently living out their philosophy of life and death, which are *illusory*. The innocent victims of the Inquisitions, terror attacks, tsunamis, or Crusades then are merely being *paid back* for something they themselves did in a previous life. It is the *actions* said people did prior that

⁵⁴ *The American Heritage Science dic-tion-ar-y* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005), cf. Newton's laws of motion, 429.

⁵⁵ Mark Albrecht, *Reincarnation*, 20.

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creates much of the evil upon them now. So in the future when people who are believers in reincarnation say that Christianity isn't what it purports to be because of the evil it has committed in the past, you should remind them that evil is merely an *illusion* (*maya* – Hinduism; *sunyata* – Buddhism) to be overcome, as karmic reincarnation *demands*.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 19.