

A Brief Introduction to Process Theology by Danny Coleman

Discussion for Part 1

Do you believe in a God who is outside time or inside time?

How do you define God as eternal, omniscient, and omnipresent?

What is the difference between knowing the future and knowing all possible futures?

What is the revelation of God's vision and our response in process theology?

How would you define time?

Does block time or presentism fit your idea of time and universe more?

Discussion for Part 2

Does God only influence our actions and universe or can God coerce to God's will?

Is Jesus our model for how to follow God?

Does God suffer with the universe or is God immutable?

Are humans the pinnacle of creation and are we alone in the universe?

How much of a free will choice do humans have?

Is God present in all lives or can we really be abandoned by God?

If God is so good, why is there evil? How does process theology define omnipotence?

How then is prayer and worship defined?

Key Ideas:

Omniscience:

Omniscience and free will



Omnisciencia, mural by José Clemente Orozco

Whether omniscience, particularly regarding the choices that a human will make, is compatible with free will has been debated by theologians and philosophers. The argument that divine foreknowledge is not compatible with free will is known as theological fatalism. It is argued that if humans are free to choose between alternatives, God could not know what this choice will be.

A question arises: if an omniscient entity knows everything, even about its own decisions in the future, does it therefore forbid any free will to that entity? William Lane Craig states that the question subdivides into two:

If God foreknows the occurrence of some event E, does E happen necessarily

If some event E is contingent, how can God foreknow E's occurrence?

However, this kind of argument fails to recognize its use of the modal fallacy. It is possible to show that the first premise of arguments like these is fallacious

Omnipresence:

Christianity

In Christianity, as well as in Kabbalistic and Hasidic philosophy, God is omnipresent. However, the significant difference between them and other religious systems is that God is still transcendent to His creation and yet immanent in relating to creation. God is not immersed in the substance of creation, even though he is able to interact with it as he chooses. He can make his human-divine body visible anytime and everywhere, whatever he wants: he cannot be excluded from any location or object in creation. God's presence is continuous throughout all of creation, though it may not be revealed in the same way at the same time to people everywhere. At times, he may be actively present in a situation, while he may not reveal that he is present in another circumstance in some other area. God is omnipresent in a way that he is able to interact with his creation however he chooses and is the very essence of his creation. While contrary to normal physical intuitions, such omnipresence is logically possible by way of the classic geometric point or its equivalent, in that such a point is, by definition, within all of space without taking up any space. The Bible states that God can be both present to a person in a manifest manner (Psalm 46:1, Isaiah 57:15) as well as being present in every situation in all of creation at any given time (Psalm 33:13-14).

Specifically, Oden states that the Bible shows that God can be present in every aspect of human life:

God is naturally present in every aspect of the natural order, in every level of causality, every fleeting moment, and meaningful event of natural history... (Psalm 8:3, Isaiah 40:12, Nahum 1:3)

God is bodily present in the Incarnation (Christianity) of his Son, Jesus Christ. (Gospel of John 1:14, Colossians 2:9)

God is sacredly present and becomes known in special places where God chooses to meet us, places that become set apart by the faithful remembering community (1 Corinthians 11:23-29) where it may say: "Truly the Lord is in this place". (Genesis 28:16, Matthew 18:20)

Marbaniang points out that omnipresence does not mean divine occupation of all space, nor divine distribution overall space, nor indwelling of every entity, nor that God cannot move in space, nor the diversification of the universe, but means that God is fully present everywhere and that God can do different things at different places at the same time.

Omnipotence:

Omnipotence is the quality of having unlimited power. Monotheistic religions generally attribute omnipotence only to the deity of their faith. In the monotheistic religious philosophy of Abrahamic religions, omnipotence is often listed as one of a deity's characteristics, along with omniscience, omnipresence, and omnibenevolence. The presence of all these properties in a single entity has given rise to considerable theological debate, prominently including the problem of evil, the question of why such a deity would permit the existence of evil. It is accepted in philosophy and science that omnipotence can never be effectively understood.

Philosophical grounds

Process theology rejects unlimited omnipotence on a philosophical basis, arguing that omnipotence as classically understood would be less than perfect, and is therefore incompatible with the idea of a perfect deity. The idea is grounded in Plato's oft-overlooked statement that "being is power."

My notion would be, that anything which possesses any sort of power to affect another, or to be affected by another, if only for a single moment, however trifling the cause and however slight the effect, has real existence; and I hold that the definition of being is simply power.

— Plato, 247E

From this premise, Charles Hartshorne argues further that:

Power is influence, and perfect power is perfect influence ... power must be exercised upon something, at least if by power we mean influence, control; but the something controlled cannot be absolutely inert, since the merely passive, that which has no active tendency of its own, is nothing; yet if the something acted upon is itself partly active, then there must be some resistance, however slight, to the "absolute" power, and how can power which is resisted be absolute?

— Hartshorne, 89

The argument can be stated as follows:

1) If a being exists, then it must have some active tendency.

- 2) If a being has some active tendency, then it has some power to resist its creator.
- 3) If a being has the power to resist its creator, then the creator does not have absolute power.

For example, although someone might control a lump of jelly-pudding almost completely, the inability of that pudding to stage any resistance renders that person's power rather unimpressive. Power can only be said to be great if it is over something that has defenses and its own agenda. If a deity's power is to be great, it must therefore be over beings that have at least some of their own defenses and agenda. Thus, if a deity does not have absolute power, it must therefore embody some of the characteristics of power, and some of the characteristics of persuasion. This view is known as dipolar theism.

The most popular works espousing this point are from Harold Kushner (in Judaism). The need for a modified view of omnipotence was also articulated by Alfred North Whitehead in the early 20th century and expanded upon by Charles Hartshorne. Hartshorne proceeded within the context of the theological system known as process theology.

Thomas Jay Oord argues that omnipotence dies a death of a thousand philosophical qualifications. To make any sense, the word must undergo various logical, ontological, mathematical, theological, and existential qualifications so that it loses specificity.

Eternity:

Eternity, in common parlance, is an infinite amount of time that never ends or the quality, condition or fact of being everlasting or eternal. Classical philosophy, however, defines eternity as what is timeless or exists outside time, whereas sempiternity corresponds to infinite duration.

Cosmology:

- Deism – the belief that God creates the world, like a watchmaker, and then withdraws to let the world take its course
- Theism – the belief in an unchanging God, external to the world, who nevertheless miraculously and supernaturally acts
- Pantheism – the belief that God and the world constitute one reality, essentially indistinguishable from one another
- Panentheism – the belief that God intersects every part of the universe and also extends beyond time and space

Causality:

Causality (also called causation, or cause and effect) is influence by which one event, process, state, or object (a cause) contributes to the production of another event, process, state, or object (an effect) where the cause is partly responsible for the effect, and the effect is partly dependent on the cause. In general, a process has many causes, which are also said to be causal factors for it, and all lie in its past. An effect can in turn be a cause of, or causal factor for, many other effects, which all lie in its future. Some writers have held that causality is metaphysically prior to notions of time and space.

Phenomenology:

Phenomenology is the philosophical study of objectivity – and reality more generally – as subjectively lived and experienced.

It seeks to investigate the universal features of consciousness while avoiding assumptions about the external world, aiming to describe phenomena as they appear to the subject, and to explore the meaning and significance of the lived experiences.

This approach has found many applications in qualitative research across different scientific disciplines, especially in the social sciences, humanities, psychology, and cognitive science, but also in fields as diverse as health sciences, architecture, and human-computer interaction, among many others. The application of phenomenology in these fields aims to gain a deeper understanding of subjective experience, rather than focusing on behavior.

Phenomenology is contrasted with phenomenalism, which reduces mental states and physical objects to complexes of sensations, and with psychologism, which treats logical truths or epistemological principles as the products of human psychology. In particular, transcendental phenomenology, as outlined by Edmund Husserl, aims to arrive at an objective understanding of the world via the discovery of universal logical structures in human subjective experience.

There are important differences in the ways that different branches of phenomenology approach subjectivity. For example, according to Martin Heidegger, truths are contextually situated and dependent on the historical, cultural, and social context in which they emerge. Other types include hermeneutic, genetic, and embodied phenomenology. All these different branches of phenomenology may be seen as representing different philosophies despite sharing the common foundational approach of phenomenological inquiry; that is, investigating things just as they appear, independent of any particular theoretical framework.

Philosophy:

Philosophy (love of wisdom in ancient Greek) is a systematic study of general and fundamental questions concerning topics like existence, reason, knowledge, value, mind, and language. It is a rational and critical inquiry that reflects on its own methods and assumptions.

Historically, many of the individual sciences, like physics and psychology, formed part of philosophy. But they are considered separate academic disciplines in the modern sense of the term. The main traditions in the history of philosophy include Western, Arabic-Persian, Indian, and Chinese philosophy. Western philosophy originated in Ancient Greece and covers a wide area of philosophical subfields. A central topic in Arabic-Persian philosophy is the relation between reason and revelation. Indian philosophy combines the spiritual problem of how to reach enlightenment with the exploration of the nature of reality and the ways of arriving at knowledge. Chinese philosophy focuses on practical issues in relation to right social conduct, government, and self-cultivation.

Major branches of philosophy are epistemology, ethics, logic, and metaphysics. Epistemology studies what knowledge is and how to acquire it. Ethics investigates moral principles and what constitutes right conduct. Logic is the study of correct reasoning and explores how good arguments can be distinguished from bad ones. Metaphysics examines the most general features of reality, existence, objects, and properties. Other notable subfields

are aesthetics, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, and political philosophy.

Philosophers use a great variety of methods to arrive at philosophical knowledge. They include conceptual analysis, reliance on common sense and intuitions, use of thought experiments, analysis of ordinary language, description of experience, and critical questioning. Philosophy is related to many other fields, like the sciences, mathematics, business, law, and journalism. It provides an interdisciplinary perspective and studies their scope and fundamental concepts. It also investigates their methods and ethical implications.

Quantum World:

Quantum mechanics is a fundamental theory in physics that provides a description of the physical properties of nature at the scale of atoms and subatomic particles. 1.1 It is the foundation of all quantum physics including quantum chemistry, quantum field theory, quantum technology, and quantum information science.

Classical physics, the collection of theories that existed before the advent of quantum mechanics, describes many aspects of nature at an ordinary (macroscopic) scale, but is not sufficient for describing them at small (atomic and subatomic) scales. Most theories in classical physics can be derived from quantum mechanics as an approximation valid at large (macroscopic) scale.

Quantum mechanics differs from classical physics in that energy, momentum, angular momentum, and other quantities of a bound system are restricted to discrete values (quantization); objects have characteristics of both particles and waves (wave–particle duality); and there are limits to how accurately the value of a physical quantity can be predicted prior to its measurement, given a complete set of initial conditions (the uncertainty principle).

Quantum mechanics arose gradually from theories to explain observations that could not be reconciled with classical physics, such as Max Planck's solution in 1900 to the black-body radiation problem, and the correspondence between energy and frequency in Albert Einstein's 1905 paper, which explained the photoelectric effect. These early attempts to understand microscopic phenomena, now known as the "old quantum theory", led to the full development of quantum mechanics in the mid-1920s by Niels Bohr, Erwin Schrödinger, Werner Heisenberg, Max Born, Paul Dirac and others. The modern theory is formulated in various specially developed mathematical formalisms. In one of them, a mathematical entity called the wave function provides information, in the form of probability amplitudes, about what measurements of a particle's energy, momentum, and other physical properties may yield.

Dualism:

Dualism most commonly refers to:

Mind–body dualism, a philosophical view which holds that mental phenomena are, at least in certain respects, not physical phenomena, or that the mind and the body are distinct and separable from one another

Property dualism, a view in the philosophy of mind and metaphysics which holds that, although the world is composed of just one kind of substance—the physical kind—there exist two distinct kinds of properties: physical properties and mental properties

Cosmological dualism, the theological or spiritual view that there are only two fundamental concepts, such as "good" and "evil", and that these two concepts are in every way opposed to one another