

naturalism and science

The World Pantheist Movement's statement of principles involves a completely naturalistic view of life - that is, we see everything that exists as part of nature. Nothing is supernatural. That doesn't mean that humans already know or can explain everything: the quest for knowledge and understanding is an endless one. There may even be some questions which by their very nature can never be answered, such as why anything exists at all.

We believe that everything in the Universe is made up of energy or matter. Most of us don't believe there is a spiritual substance separate from energy/matter. Body and mind are not two different things, they are one - we are made of the very same stuff as animals, and plants, and rocks, and stars. This sense of fraternity with all physical things allows us to relate all the more intensely to nature.

We respect evidence and logic, and we do not accept religious claims that fly in the face of these. At the same time, we have a deep emotional and aesthetic feeling of connection with nature and the universe.

We believe that the scientific method, with all its rigorous tests and scrutinies, is the best way to get closer to the truth about the way the Universe works. But we also feel a sense of profound awe at the discoveries



of science which enrich and deepen our knowledge of the world - from the stunning images of the Hubble Space Telescope, to the mysterious workings of quantum physics and the complex architecture of the human brain.

We don't see any contradiction between understanding and appreciating, between studying and standing open-mouthed with wonder. Science does not explode the mystery and beauty of existence or reduce it to a meaningless mechanism: it deepens the mystery and beauty. It reveals that energy/matter itself, from quantum events right up to the swirling of galaxies and the coalescence of solar systems, is wonderfully unpredictable and infinitely creative.

This doesn't mean that we endorse unethical science, for example experiments involving suffering for animals. Nor does it mean that we endorse everything that is done to turn the findings of science into technology. Most of us feel a deep unease about genetic engineering and a need to define its limits. We recognize that a lot of pollution and waste stem from poor technology - but we will need better, more environmentally friendly technology to remedy these problems.

In sum, if you respect evidence and logic, but also feel the need for a profound connection with and celebration of Nature and the Universe, then you will feel at home in the World Pantheist Movement.

Religion, Reason and Science

WORLD PANTHEISM

Check us out or join us on the Web at <http://www.pantheism.net>
or email us at info@pantheism.net. For current mailing address see the link "Contact Us."

benefits and costs of religion?

Religion has a powerful hold on humans, satisfying many basic social and psychological needs. Religions provide us with a sense of our place in human society, in nature and in the universe. They offer ways of dealing with the suffering and grief that are part of life. They provide ceremonies to mark life's major stages, supportive communities to help in times of need, and religious professionals who act as informal therapists and social workers. Finally, they offer ethical systems people can buy off-the-shelf - far easier than devising your own.

The problem is that these benefits are often bought at considerable cost. When we enter the religious sphere, we are expected to leave our reason and respect for logic and evidence in the entrance. We are asked to believe things written in ancient books that most of us would never believe if we were told by a door-to-door salesman.

The three major Western religions require faith in events that by common sense standards are impossible, such as miracles and divine intervention. They demand belief in an invisible judging creator god who has provided no clear proof of his

existence. None of them can explain how a good, all-powerful and all-knowing god could allow natural disasters and epidemics to strike young and old, good and bad alike.

In the World Pantheist Movement we believe that it is possible to enjoy the deep emotional benefits of religion without abandoning common sense, logic and concern for evidence. The basis of our approach is profound reverence for the Universe and Nature, just as they are. We wonder at the fundamental mystery, power and beauty of the Universe and Nature. But we don't believe in supernatural beings or spirits.

We don't see this life as a prelude to the afterlife, rather we believe that we should celebrate the joy of life and the beauty of nature, and have weddings and funerals in keeping with nature.

We believe that a humanistic and green ethics can offer guidance for behavior, more relevant to our times than the codes of ancient religions. We believe that natural forms of meditation and therapy can help people deal with stress and grief, and we aim to foster local groups that can provide all the social benefits of closer community.

reverence of nature and the universe

Our central object of reverence is not some supernatural entity whose existence we know about only from scripture or sermons. It is the real universe and nature in front of our eyes, as they present themselves to our senses and instruments.

We accept the Universe as it is, in all its creative and destructive power. We find that Nature itself contains more mystery, power and beauty than any deity described in scripture. It is neither good nor bad, it simply is, and it is what it is. We believe that all the wonderful diversity and beauty of the Universe evolved by natural means, given the basic laws of nature.

Some of us use the term God to sum up the degree of our reverence for the Universe and Nature, without implying any personality or mind through this term. Many of us prefer not to, and feel that this word carries too much baggage from other religions. Whatever vocabulary you prefer, the choice is yours.

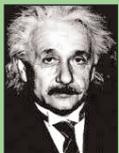
A naturalistic afterlife

Religions keep much of their hold on people by promising personal life after death. We don't exclude the possibility that science might

one day establish the existence of such an afterlife, but until that happens we assume that our personal conscious lives end at death.

We prefer to focus on the natural ways in which we really do persist after death. These make up a sort of natural afterlife consistent with facts that no-one disputes. Our genes, our physical and mental traits, live on in our families. As individuals we live on in the memory of other people, in the ripples spreading out from actions we have undertaken in our lives, in our creations and contributions to human welfare and conservation of nature. Since all of these depend on doing good rather than evil, they constitute a compelling reason for ethical behavior.

We believe that after death our elements return to nature where they are endlessly recycled in the soil and waters and on the winds. To facilitate this we believe in forms of burial and cremation that allow this recycling to take place, rather than isolating our embalmed bodies in elaborate caskets of rare tropical woods and metals.



Enough for me the mystery of the eternity of life, and the inkling of the marvellous structure of reality. There is in this neither a will nor a goal, nor a must, but only sheer being.

Albert Einstein

A religion old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science, might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge.

Carl Sagan, Pale Blue Dot (1994)

