

Deus sive Natura

Ethical-ecological consequences of our views of God

Lee F Greer, © 2006, Loma Linda, CA (15th [Theological Conference](#), April 21-23, Atlanta Bible College)

Deus sive Natura – <Tableau of pictures from the physical sciences>

Deus sive Natura – <Tableau of pictures from the biosciences> – explanation of Latin phrase

●“A religion 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 traditional faiths. Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge.” – Carl Sagan

●Why isn't Christianity that religion? Can Christianity become that religion?

Immanence: God as knowable

I. Eternity-causality-transcendence

II. Unity-immanence

–Unified seamless causality & symmetries of Nature's laws

III. Provident

–Existence-giving (grace)

IV. Reason & Conscience

– Cause-effect & Is-Ought

V. Life as reciprocity (interdependence)

●“For all that may be known of God by men lies plain before their eyes; indeed God Himself has disclosed it to them. His invisible attributes, that is to say His everlasting power and deity, have been visible, ever since the world began, to the eye of reason, in the things He has made. There is therefore no defence for their conduct...”

– Paul of Tarsus, c 55-56 CE (*Romans* 1:19-20 NEB)

Only one world <tableau of ecological-environmental crisis of today>

●“There are many here among us

Who believe this world is theirs

When it's beaten and depleted

They will rise into the air

And the ones who don't believe them

Face a dark, eternal grave

No one knows, but they are certain

Who will save us from the saved?” – David Gans (2005)

Our goals <in outline>

●Question: What are ethical-ecologically (ir)responsible ways to think about God?

●Indigenous monotheism & polytheisms

●The Hebrews – transcendence & immanence

–Jewish wisdom tradition: Hellenistic, Rabbinic, etc.

●The Greeks – transcendence & immanence

–Epicurean & Stoic

–Platonic & neo-Platonic

●Christianity – What happened?

●Recovering God's immanence!

●Discussion

Mysticism – Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Sikh, etc.

Auto-immanence – In all major religions the mystic tradition

●‘God’ is ‘encountered’ in the depths of the human mind-soul

●There is really ‘nothing out there’

(K Armstrong, 1993)

In the beginning was one God – Primordial indigenous monotheisms

From the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego, Africa, Australia (Schmidt, 1912; 1931; 1933; Armstrong, 1993):

●In the skies – the blessings of rain and sunshine, etc.

●“Father” or “Creator” of everything

●Dwells all One – no wife or family or relatives

●Rules over all other gods / spirits and beyond the tribe

●Not expressed by the physical – no effigy, cult, priests, shrine

- Before all else and will always be
- All-knowing and all-powerful
- Good and teaches how to be good and avoid evil
- Judge of every person's life
- Humans alienated from Him – some misdemeanor in distant past
- His memory persists despite more accessible gods, spirits, or *numina*, e.g., sun, moon, earth, sea, sky, winds, rain, forest, and animals.

Polytheism I – animism

- *Numina* associated with objects in nature

–River

–Mountains

–Skies, heavenly bodies

–Trees

–Various animals

- Hypostatizations of personal qualities like envy, hatred, jealousy, ancestral remembrance, etc., as 'spirits' inhabiting the world....

- Transition to the deities

Polytheism II – deities

- Hypostatization of divine qualities into separate self-existent beings (Ohlig, 1999, 2002)

–Ra; Aten; Apollo (Sun-life)

–*Ma'at* (truth, order)

–*Mesaru* (righteousness)

–Venus-Aproditite (love)

–Mars (war)

–Jupiter-Zeus (rulership)

- Civilizations – city-states – tribal deities

- Empires (suzerain-vassal)

Near Eastern tri-partite cosmos

A) Mesopotamian

- Multi-personal deities

- Creation = battles & sex of the gods

- Nature mythologized (hypostatized)

- Humans = pawns of the divine

B) Hebrew

- One Deity – transcendent & immanent

- Creation = world formed by one God

- Nature de-mythologized (non-hypostatized)

- Humans = image of the divine

'Wisdom tradition' – immanence of one God

- Poetic personifications – picturesque metaphors for God as immanent (Dunn, 1989; JewishEncyclopaedia.com):

–Hebrew Bible – word, wisdom, spirit, righteousness, peace, name, glory, honor/majesty, light/truth, faithfulness, steadfast love

–Aramaic *Targumim* (paraphrases) – *Memra* (word), *Shekinah*

–Hellenistic Judaism – word (*logos*), wisdom (*sophia*); in Philo (1st c CE) – Stoic and some Platonic influence

–Palestinian Judaism – angels (messengers)

–Rabbinic Judaism – Name, Torah, glory

- The one God immanent as Wisdom, Word, Name, Glory, *Memra*, etc., – monotheism uncompromised

Immanence of God – spirit

- YHWH Himself present (I *Sam* 16:14; 18:12)

- blast of God's nostrils (*Ex* 15:8)

- breath of the Almighty (*Job* 33:4)

- breath of God = YHWH's creative word (*Pss* 33:6)

- Your presence (*Pss* 139:7)

- hand of YHWH (*Ezek* 3:14)

- breath of life (*Gen* 2:7) = spirit of God in my nostrils (*Job* 27:3)

- divine 1st person "I" (*Isa* 30:1; 40:13)

- God's swift word as wind melting ice (*Pss* 147:15; 18)

● Ecstatic inspiration – “spirit of YHWH” upon prophets; spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might upon Davidic king (*Isa* 11)

● finger of God (cit. Jesus; *Luke* 11:20 = *Matt* 12:28)

Immanence of God – word

● “the word of YHWH came to...[a prophet] saying” – >90 times, cf. “the spirit of YHWH” – >20 times

● utterance of God creating the heavens (*Pss* 33:6)

● healing messenger (*Pss* 107:20)

● warrior-herald against Israel (*Isa* 9:8)

● agent returning after task (*Isa* 55:10ff)

● stern warrior who went through Egypt (*Wisd.* 18:14-18)

● Divine reason (*logos*) ruler, steersman of all (Philo, *Cher.* 36)

● wisdom is mother of *logos* (Philo, *Fuga* 108ff) & *logos* is fountain of wisdom (*Fuga* 97)

Immanence of God – wisdom

● Primordial wisdom found by God (*Job* 28)

● God’s companion in creation (*Prov* 2; 3; 8-9; *Sira* 24:9)

● With God in creation (*Wisd.* 9:9; cf. *John* 1:1)

● Went to dwell among men, but found no place (I *En* 42:2; cf. *John* 1:11); Rock in wilderness wandering (*Leg. All.* II:86; I *Cor* 10:4)

● Sent by God to pitch her tent in Jacob (*Sira* 24:8; cf. *John* 1:14)

● All in Wisdom created (*Pss* 104:24 LXX; cf. *Col* 1:16)

● She is the radiance of (God’s) eternal light (*Wisd.* 7:26; cf. *Heb* 1:3)

● *Wisdom of Solomon* (Stoic influence)

– Kindly spirit (1:6); attribute of God’s words (6:9)

– Like gems, like a woman (6:12-16), mother of all good (7:11ff)

– The cosmic order (7:17-21; 8:1)

– breath-spirit pervading all things (7:22ff)

● By whose agency universe was brought to completion (*Det.* 54)

Immanence of God – wisdom

Proverbs 8:1 “Does not wisdom call,

And understanding lift up her voice?

12 I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,

and knowledge of discrete purposes I discover....

15 By me kings reign, and judges decree justice....

22 YHWH created me in the beginning of His way,

before His works of old

23 From everlasting was I set up

from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.

24 When there were no depths I was brought to birth....

27 In His establishing the heavens, there I (was),

in His inscribing the foundations of the earth....

30 Then was I (at) His side, a master worker;

and I was His delight day (after) day; dancing always before Him.”

Wisdom & her children

Luke 7:31 “What do people of this generation remind me of? What are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to one another:

‘We played the flute for you, and you didn’t dance

We sang a dirge, and you didn’t weep.’

Wisdom & her children

33 For John the Baptizer came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He is demented!’ 34 The Son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a crony of toll collectors and sinners!’

35 But wisdom is vindicated by all her children (cf. *Luke* 11:49).

Greek legacy: Atomism (Epicurean)

● Leucippus, Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, (5th-3rd & 1st centuries BCE)

– Cosmos = Void + atoms in motion (fundamental particles)

– observable / interpretable

–demystified / freed from ‘the terror of the gods’ (Lucretius, 1st c BCE)

–All are mortal (non-immortality)

●Ethical-ecological effect = Actualist-positive; the basis of modern science

Immanent *logos* (Stoic)

●Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus (4th-3rd centuries BCE), Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius (1st-2nd centuries CE)

–Cosmos = bodies & extension (space)

–*logos* – Immanent divine reason & plan manifest in the order and structure of the world

–Sage: Wisely orders life in harmony with reason (*logos*) of nature

–ethics of moderation; happiness independent of advantages / disad.; contentment under hardships

–World cycles end in *ekpyrosis* (conflagration)

●Ecological effect = Positive; integrated whole

Stoics, Epicureans & 1st century Christians

Paul on Mars Hill (*Acts* 17)

●Unknown deity & natural theology

●Cited Greek/Stoic poets on divine immanence – Epimenides, Aratos

●Resurrection of Jesus by God

The epistles (Stoic influence)

●Wisdom / Stoic language of the Christ as embodying God’s wisdom – I *Cor* 1; 8; *Col* 1; *Rom* 10.

●Ethics – moderation-contentment

●Ethical lists of virtues / vices

●One God and Father over all, through all, and in all (*Eph* 4:30; immanence – Stoic)

●God immanent ‘from, in, through, for, into,’ all (Stoic)

●*Ekpyrosis* – world to end in a conflagration (Stoic)

“Men, Athenians, I observe how very religious you (are). For passing along and looking up at the objects of your worship I found an altar in which had been inscribed, To an unknown God [*agnostos Theos*]. What therefore you unknowingly reverence, this I announce to you: The God, the (One) having made the world [*kosmou*] and everything in it, this One being Lord of heaven and earth dwells not in hand-made temples, nor is served by human hands, having need of nothing [since] He (is) giving to all life and breath and everything.

“And He has made of one, every nation of men dwelling on all the face of the earth, fixing their appointed times and the boundaries of their dwelling, to seek God, if perhaps they might feel after Him and find Him, although He is not far from each of us. For ‘in Him we live, and move, and exist,’ as indeed some among your poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring [*genos*]’.

“Therefore being offspring of God we ought not to suppose the Deity’s nature to be like gold or silver or stone or an engraved work formed by the art and meditation of man. So then God, having overlooked the times of not knowing, now calls human beings everywhere to repent, because He has set a day in which He is about to judge the inhabited world, by a man He designated [*’orizo*], offering a guarantee to all [by] having raised him from the dead.”

On the immanence of God: Paul’s citation of a Greek poet

“They fashioned a tomb for you, O holy and high one –

The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!

But you are not dead: You live and remain forever

For in you we live and move and have our being.”

– Epimenides of Knossos in *Cretica*

(mid-6th century BCE) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epimenides>)

On the immanence of God: Paul’s citation of a Stoic poet

“Let us begin with Zeus, whom we mortals never leave unspoken

For every street, every market-place is full of Zeus.

Even the sea and the harbor are full of this deity.

Everywhere everyone is indebted to Zeus.

For we indeed are his offspring....”

– Aratos of Soli, Stoic poet, *Phaenomena* 1-5 (4th-3rd centuries BCE) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aratus>)

Immanence of God – word

“1 In the beginning was the word and wisdom [*logos*],

and the word and wisdom was with God,

and the word and wisdom was what God was.

2 This [*outos*] was in the beginning with God;

3 Everything through it came to be,
and without it nothing came to be that came to be.

4 In this was life,
and the life was the light of men.

5 The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

9 There was the true light
enlightening every man coming into the world.”

God's wisdom – the *logos* of the cross

● *John* 1

14 And the word and wisdom [*logos*] became [*egeneto*] human, and lived among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of an only begotten from a Father brimming with grace and truth.

● *I Corinthians* 1

18 For the word [*logos*] of the cross is...to us who are being saved the power of God

24...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

30 He [God] is the source of your life in the Messiah, Jesus, who became [*egenethe*] our wisdom from God, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption!

***Logos* in early Christianity (2nd-3rd c CE)**

● The *logos* in early Christianity:

–“The vision was with God and the vision was God” (Theophilus of Antioch, c117-181 CE, inventor of *trias*; Fackré, 1978 cit. in Buzzard & Hunting, 1998)

–“it is the simple use of our people [Christians] to say [re *John* 1:1] that the word of revelation was with God.”

“...God... had it both with and in reason within Himself” (Tertullian, c155-230 CE, inventor of term *trinitas*)

–“numerous Christians who employed only the name of the *logos* for the pre-existent Christ...only in the sense of an utterance of the Father... express[ed] in a Son when Jesus was conceived” (Origen of Alexandria, 185-254 CE; Buzzard & Hunting, 1998)

–Nazarene Christians – “one God and He is the Father of Jesus” (a hostile witness, Epiphanius of Salamis, 315-403 CE)

● Hypostatization of the *logos* (as pre-existent, created Son) by Justin Martyr in 2nd century CE

Early Christianity (2nd-3rd c CE)

● **Early Hellenistic Christian incarnational christologies** (Dunn, 1989): Christ = incarnation of....

–i) the Spirit (Hermas; Tertullian; Cyprian; Hilary)

–ii) an angel / archangel (Tertullian; Epiphanius; Clement)

–iii) the chief archangel (Hermas)

–iv) ‘the angel of the Lord’ / *logos* brought into being in the distant past (Justin Martyr, died mid-2nd c CE)

● None Trinitarian, i.e., incarnation of the 2nd divine person of a tri-personal ‘godhead’

Greek legacy: Metaphysical dualism (Platonic)

● Plato (427-347 BCE) – Student of Socrates, teacher of Aristotle, founder of the Academy,...

–Observable world = imperfect shadow of an invisible, unchanging ideal realm of eternal Forms (incl. the pre-existent human soul)

–Ethics = a life of love for these divine Forms

–*Republic* = first prescription for a totalitarian state

–Some later writings self-contradictory to Form theory

–Emanations of supreme principle (intellect) – demiurge (creator), *nous* (spirit), *logos* (word)

● Ethical-ecological effect = disastrous, because real world is imperfect and shadowy, etc.

Divine emanations-hypostatizations (middle- to neo-Platonic)

● ...Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Plutarch (3rd-5th centuries CE)

–to ‘en (one), ‘o *nous* (the spirit), ‘e *psyche* (world soul) – sequential emanations (triadic elaborations), soul receives Form as ‘reason principles’ (*logoi*)

–Lower part of soul (nature) projects self on ‘matter’ (no positive existence) which is ‘evil’, i.e., soul suffers a ‘fall’ (cf. Gnostic myth from ‘middle Platonism’)

–Emanations to 2 ‘ones’: One transcendent, the other source of creation (not accepted by all neo-Platonists)

● Ethical-ecological effect = disastrous, because matter not only evil but ‘unreal’

Hypostatic emanations & trinities (Part 1)

Begetting humans...

1. Sumerians gave birth to...

2. Babylonians-Assyrians adopted...
3. & also begat astral triad...
4. Egyptians sired and brought forth...
5. Ancient Romans mothered...
6. Imperial capitoline Romans labored and brought forth...
7. Ancient pre-Vedic Indians gave birth to...
8. Post-Vedic Indians forgot the one Lord of all and begot the...

Begotten gods...

1. *An* (heaven), *Emlil* (storm), *Enki* (ground water)
2. *Anu*, *Ellil* or *Bel/Ea* (Marduk)
3. *Sin* (moon), *Shamash* (sun), *Ishtar* (morning-evening star)
4. Isis, Osiris, and Horus
5. Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus
6. Jupiter, Juno, and by mystic procession Minerva
7. Agni (fire), Vayu (wind), and Surya (sun) – emanations of one Creator
8. *trimurti*: Brahma (creator), Vishnu (preserver), Shiva (destroyer) – co-equal, co-eternal, polytheism

Hypostatic emanations & trinities (Part 2)

Begetting humans...

9. Platonic Greeks sired and begot...
10. neo-Platonic Greeks birthed and brought forth...
11. Gnostic Hellenists gave birth to...
12. Hellenistic Christian fathers fathered (2nd-3rd centuries CE)...
13. neo-Platonic Christian fathers sired (Nicea, 4th century)...
14. Trinitarian Christian fathers (Chalcedon, 5th century)...
15. Augustine of Hippo (5th-8th centuries) labored & wavered...
16. Medieval Thomistic synthesis

Begotten gods...

9. demiurge (creator), *nous* (spirit), *logos* (word) – emanations of One
10. *to 'en* (one), *'o nous* (the spirit), *'e psyche* (world soul) – emanations
11. Father, Mother (Sophia), Son
12. One God Father, begotten *logos-son*, (later proceeding spirit)
13. God Father, eternal generation – Son, eternal procession – Spirit
14. One *ousia*: Father, Son, Spirit (co-equal, co-eternal, i.e., tritheism)
15. Trinity: Three undifferentiated hypostases in One
16. One in Three subsistences

Hypostatic emanations & trinities (Part 3)

●West – *filioque*: Spirit 'proceeds' from both Father & Son

●East – Spirit 'proceeds' from Father through Son

6 post-Nicean councils fail to sort out all the paradoxes (5th-8th c CE)

3 ecumenical councils (4th c) adopted Arian creeds

Deep angst: Imperial politics, multi-mediators, iconolatry, *perichoresis* & trinity-of-love, and a whole lot of blood-letting

The church's choice: Divine immanence vs hypostatizations

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Deus sive Natura</i>: one God, one universe 2. Direct, universal 3. 'real world' to be experienced 4. Anti-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian 5. Virtue = moderation (Stoic ethic) 6. Piety = doxology (gratitude) 7. Reverence-awe: Natural 8. Enlightenment thought / Deist insight – human rights, democracy 9. Peace & justice (planetary) 10. Environmentally sustainable 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mediated transcendence – multiple personalities 2. Particular, historical 3. 'ideal world' to be mediated 4. Hierarchical, authoritarian 5. Virtue = tendency toward asceticism (dualism ethic) 6. Piety = paradoxology 7. Reverence-awe: supernatural (signs) 8. Reactionary, anti-Enlightenment, distrust democracy & freedom 9. Pro-war, genocidal, tribal, provincial-nationalistic <p>Environmentally predatory</p>
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Jesus' kingdom prayer (Only sheep & goats in the end; *Matt 25:31ff*)

⁶Our Father, the (One) in the heavens,
Hallowed is Your name.
¹⁰Your kingdom, let it come;
Your will, let it be done,
As in heaven so on earth.
¹¹Give us today our daily bread.
¹²And forgive us our debts
As we forgave our debtors.
¹³And lead us not into temptation;
But rescue us from the evil (one).
– *Matthew 6*

An eschatological Jubilee Yom Kippur prayer (*Lev 16; 25-26; Isa 58; 61~Luke 4; Dan 9; Hebrews*)

- Vertical forgiveness-grace before God (Mercy-seat, *Rom 3*)
- Debt release-forgiveness & freedom to fellow beings, return of land inheritance
- God vs mammon: Stewardship society vs Ownership society
- God's stewardship society → servicing our indebtedness to all our fellow beings
- Mammon's ownership society → mere charity from 'our' possessions
- To pray for God's kingdom & personal deliverance; to pray for our daily bread & forgiveness means praying / acting to extend these to all our fellow beings (cit. Dr. Bernard Taylor, LLU church), i.e., our 10,000 talent debt needing forgiveness

Recovering a christology of God's immanence

✓4th-5th c CE: Athanasian-trinitarian – “Christ was God reconciling the world unto Himself...” (*II Cor 5:19*)

✓2nd c CE: Patripassian modalism – “God was Christ reconciling the world unto Himself...”

●1st c CE: Paul of Tarsus (unitarian) – “God was in Christ reconciling the world...” – the language of divine immanence (cf. *Acts 38:10; Eph 4:30; Col 1:19; 2:9; John 14:10; 17;...*)

●2nd *Isaiah* model: YHWH in His messiah, Cyrus, Persian king

–Foreknown-foreordained by name (45:3-4); man of My purpose (46:11)

–Raised up in righteousness over the nations → chaff (41:2; cf. *Dan 2*)

–YHWH's co-regent / vassal in eternal purposes (41:4)

–Exalted over rulers (41:25) only for YHWH's glory (42:8)

–My shepherd doing all My desire, jubilaic redemption of Jerusalem (44:28)

–All bow and worship him, 'God is in you' hiding Himself (45:14-5) – every knee will bow & tongue confess (45:20-5; cf. *Phil 2! Contra NT Wright, 1993*)

–Defeats luciferian king of Babylon (46:10-12; cf. ch 13-4)

Over the last hill.... <*Tableau of 1st century Jerusalem reconstructed*>

●Mount of Olives (*Mark 11:1; 13:3; Luke 19:37ff*)

●Temple mount take over (*Mark 11:15-17*) – Royal Stoa (Wall St), Temple area (relig establ), Antoninia Fortress (military establ)

●Golgotha (*Mark 15:22ff; Matt 27:33ff; John 19:17ff*)

●Mount of Olives (*Acts 1:8-12; Zech 14ff*)

●Since when did Jesus become pro-oil, pro-corporate, pro-American, pro-rich, and pro-war? A different Jesus entirely!

●Modern corporation = hypostatization of the god of human greed; a legal 'person' with rights but no personal responsibility or conscience (noted by my father)

Paul's 'logos of the cross'

●*logos* in nature – yielding of life to perpetuate life:

–From stars/galaxies to living things (reciprocity)

●Nothing in nature grasps for personal immortality

●“Unless a kernel of wheat falls... and dies...” (*John 12:24*).

Deus sive Natura

●Laws of Nature flow from the necessity of God's nature

–Baruch Spinoza

Deus sive Natura

I. Eternity-causality-transcendence

II. Unity-immanence

–Unified seamless causality & symmetries of the laws of Nature

III. Provident

–Existence resource-providing (grace)

IV. Reason & Conscience

–Cause-effect & Is-Ought

V. Life as reciprocity

–interdependence

VI. “An inordinate fondness for beetles!” (JBS Haldane) ©

●“For all that may be known of God by men lies plain before their eyes; indeed God Himself has disclosed it to them. His invisible attributes, that is to say His everlasting power and deity, have been visible, ever since the world began, to the eye of reason, in the things He has made. There is therefore no defence for their conduct....” Paul of Tarsus, c 55-56 CE (*Romans* 1:19-20 NEB)

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