

position 1 EXISTENCE?

Some of the Ionian philosophers (9th c. BC/BCE-) thought not, as did Gautama Buddha (d. 483 BC/BCE). And the French philosophers (AD/CE 18th c.), though most of them were deists (who taught that even if the divine exists, its only as a watchmaker exists vis-a-vis a watch). And, in general, today's secularism.

position 2 PERSONHOOD?

"Must you believe in a personal God?" is what my beloved teacher, Henry Nelson Wieman, wrote on papers he returned to me. He was deeply devout, & under him I had four great courses that had for me no degree-value. He was God-infatuated, & truly felt that attributing personhood to God was blasphemous. He was, in my opinion, closer to the biblical God than a non-devout conventional Christian.

position 3 GENDER?

Another of my teachers, Paul Tillich, held that God, the god he called "God above God," had no gender (i.e., was neither masculine nor feminine). He was an evangelist to those whom Schleiermacher (d.1834), who had the same evangelistic target-group, called "religion's cultured despisers." But he did not want to abandon his home base, the biblical God. "God is neither subject nor object" but "a transpersonal presence....he is not 'somebody'...." (p.187, THE COURAGE TO BE, Yale/52/69). But he had no hesitance in calling God, Bible fashion, "he." His way of straddling the paradox was, as philosopher, to use no pronouns (he, she, it) for God, but as theologian-preacher, to use only "he," as do the Bible and the creeds and confessions of Christendom. That, too, is my way, though I'm less philosopher and more theologian-preacher than he was (and I sometimes wonder whether he was not almost entirely invested in philosophy).

position 4 SEX?

To many, splitting between sex & gender is hair-splitting, a distinction without a difference. But these overlapping concepts cannot be reduced as ellipse to circle. A general dictionary may seem to identify them, indicating only that they occupy the same semantic domain; but a dictionary of synonyms will present the usage distinctions. Of late, "sex" has come to mean a (physical) activity & "gender" a (categorical) identity. This makes the question *Does God have a physical, or at least quasi-physical, body?* None in the Christian historical trajectory, except the Mormons, would answer yes. (WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH USAGE [Merriam-Webster/89] claims that "gender is a grammatical term only," then nuances it vis-a-vis "sex." But it's now become a devotional-metaphysical issue.)

--Let's now look at the four positions historically in reverse order:

Pater Schmidt held that an original monotheism degenerated into polytheism, out of which emerged the biblical monotheism. However that was, we can say that the **gender ditheism** (the divine male/female couple) of Israel's neighbors had the weight of logic, heaven & earth reflecting each other symmetrically. In Israel's **language**, "-ah" is added to make wo-man ("ish-ah") from man ("ish"), and to make goddess ("el-ah") from god ("el"). (So among Israel's Semitic neighbor, e.g., Canaanites, Arameans, Babylonians). But not so in Israel's **religion**, which was--as is the whole Bible--asymmetrical: the feminine divine is absorbed into the masculine divine (Baal-Astarte, e.g., yield to Yahweh). This absorption of the feminine is, from the viewpoint of the feminine, the suppression or repression of the feminine (from which standpoint, the repression of the divine feminine is a characteristic of biblical religion). In the Bible, "Elah" *never* refers to a goddess but only to the God of monotheism. Further evidence: In Ivrit (modern Hebrew), "Elah" means goddess. Even wisdom, though feminine in both Testaments, is masculine in the NT: "Jesus Sophia."

On philosophical & dynamic-equivalence argument, radical feminism is now repressing the masculine divine: no "he," little or no "Father," "Lord," "King," "Son."