

how many is reality?

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A nonquestion? A silly question? A crucial question? A hot question, at least — so I found while teaching religion in the University of Hawaii last summer.

A philosophy is a way of seeing the world, whether or not you live by that picture. But a religion is a way of seeing **and living in** the world. People need not think: they can avoid philosophy. But all nonsuicides live, and must live by a picture or pictures of the world. To the extent that the picture one lives by is one, one is "integrated" (Lat.: "wholed"): the person, family, church, culture or sub- or counter-culture, nation, world is gathered, at-oned, owning what conforms to the picture and disowning (in oneself and others and in processes and structures and movements) what does not conform. "Faith" is the word for owning, and some words for disowning are "repentance," "resistance," "reformation," "renewal," and "revolution."

The cost of (punishment for) **not** being so gathered is being scattered, distraught, alienated from "reality," aimless, "lost." In contrast, "having your thing together" is to be, in some sense, "saved." If in Jesus you participate in God's getting his thing — that is, his creation — together, you are **really** in the way of **real** salvation. Which means that I who say this, seeing and living in the world in this way, am a Christian.

But of course most of my students, in that most global of American universities, were not Christians. My way of Christian witness in that situation was to spread out the commitment options (in "The World's Great Religions") and help students explore and commit themselves (in "Religion and the Meaning of Existence"). Each year, thousands of students at U. of H. take these two courses: such is the spiritual hunger.

Well, what are the options in the ontic-numeric problem stated in the title of this article? (1) Reality is **many** — as in animism, Leibnitz's monads, William James' theistically modified pluralism, Irwin Lieb's quadrism — and I do or do not choose one dimension to unify, cosmize and sacralize my life. (2) Reality is **one** — as in Vedanta, Hindu mysticism preaching "advaita" (non-duality) and occasionally flooding the West in secular forms, as now in Transcendental Meditation with its double fraud (claiming not to be a religion, and to be a science, "the Science of Creative Intelligence"). (3) Reality is **two**: metaphysical dualism (Zoroastrianism, gnosticisms). (4) Reality is **two from and at one**: Western creationism, mysticism, and the convergence of God and his creation (Judaism, Christianity, Islamic Sufism); "Kingdom Come" in the union of justice and joy.

While I had more conversions to Jesus than to anybody else, I had some to Moses and a few to Laotzu. So it goes in global consciousness-raising.

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