

# The self-annihilation of God

Pandeism postulates that God annihilated herself in the moment of creating the Universe. Although the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (born 1940) does not use the term pandeism, his writing is full of references to the self-annihilation of God:

“Since God is the world, the result is a self-beginning by self-annihilation, by the annihilation of the origin—the concealment of the beginning, in a both nihilistic and anarchic ontology.”

“If we follow Nancy’s line of thought, the theme of the indivisibility of the monotheistic God, therefore, is to not be understood only as a reduction in number—there is only one god. More importantly, the mono- is to be understood in the sense that god is indivisible not only in and for himself (the traditional theological interpretation) but in the sense that God is indivisible from the world. In the act of creation, ‘‘God annihilates itself as a ‘self’ or as a distinct being in order to ‘withdraw’ in its act—which makes the opening of the world’’ (The Creation of the World, p.70/93). Nancy adds that theology has, in fact, gradually “stripped itself of a God distinct from the world’’ and calls the moment of the coincidence or the indivisibility between God and the world absentheism.”

“ Representation understood as conditioned by an ‘‘absence within’’ gives way to a notion of an open image, an image that does not represent in a univocal manner. I would call this a self-deconstructive image, an image whose only model is the absence of a model. Such an absence can be understood as a trace of the monotheistic articulation of God, who, according to Nancy’s interpretation, is not a model of his creation. On the contrary, he empties himself into his creation (which is ‘‘his image,’’ as theology has it) and thus annihilates or deconstructs the difference between creator and creature....”

*(Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy by Ignaas Devisch and others)*

Nancy also stresses the idea of “kenosis”, the “emptying” of God into her creation. The word kenosis is derived from the Greek word meaning “to empty out”:

“The unique God, whose unicity is the correlate of the creating act, cannot precede its creation, any more that it can subsist above it or apart from it in some way. It merges with it: merging with it, it withdraws in it and withdrawing there it empties itself there, emptying itself it is nothing other than the opening of this void. Only the opening is divine, but the divine is nothing more than the opening.”

“The most famous mystical version of the creation, the zimzum of the Lurianic Kabbalah, states that the ‘nothing’ of creation is what opens up in God when God retreats into himself (in his entirety) in the act of creating. God annihilates himself as ‘self’ or as distinct being in order to retreat into his act—which is the opening of the world’”.

*(From The Creation of the World by Jean-Luc Nancy)*

Nancy disagrees with the Nietzschean idea of the death of God:

“This is certainly no dead God. God has passed into the world, and now we have the altogether more interesting story of an ongoing, never-finished, natal activity of emerging despite being posited by nothing.”

*(From The Sense of the World by Jean-Luc Nancy)*

The idea of kenosis underlies the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation:

“If in Nancy’s interpretation creation deconstructs the relationship between creator and a creature—the formula ‘in the image of’—then the incarnation is the idea in Christianity that makes explicit the tension between the

creator and his image. The idea that God empties himself of divinity to become human—the idea of kenosis—is the continuation of the ex nihilo.”

“The theme of incarnation recurs several times in Nancy’s treatment of kenosis, through which ‘‘God empties Himself and lays aside His divinity, in order to enter the human state’’. The death of God through becoming human is immediately pursued in the death of the human into whom He had entered: that is, in the death of Christ. It is not God’s becoming human as a unique ‘‘historical’’ event that is at stake here, but the fact that ‘‘the divine in humans becomes a dimension of retreat, of absence, and even of death’’

“Nancy argues that the world emerged as a proper philosophical problem against the background of a self-deconstruction of onto-theology. He characterizes the becoming-world of the world as a ‘‘detheologization,’’ insofar as the God of metaphysics has merged with the world, indeed, has become the world. This is why, for Nancy, the God of onto-theology, in a peculiar kenosis, or self-emptying, was ‘‘progressively stripped of the divine attributes of an independent existence and only retained those of the existence of the world considered in its immanence’’ (CW 44/39), which amounts to saying that the subject of the world (God) disappears in order for the world to appear as subject of itself.”

*(Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy)*