
Dualism

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Dualism divides reality into two realms and apportions all things between them. The realms may be characterized in terms of upper and lower, truth and illusion, one and many, the permanent and the changing, spirit and flesh, soul and body, mind and matter, order and chaos, light and darkness, good and evil, God and Satan… the list goes on. In Platonic dualism, the One or Good combines with matter to produce the Forms or Ideas, which in turn combine with matter to produce the things we perceive with the senses. In the Zoroastrian dualism of Persia, we may remove the word "and" from each of the pairs and substitute "versus." Zoroaster (Zarathustra) conceived reality in terms of a battle between the two realms.

When the Evangelist John says, "the Word became Flesh," he is speaking the language of dualism, asserting that, through the coming of Jesus, the division is broken: the upper realm has become accessible, through belief in Jesus as Christ, to those who until now have been stuck in the lower.

We of the 21st century have inherited dualism. It pervades not just our way of understanding reality, but even our way of experiencing it. (I may be "physically" present, though my "mind" is elsewhere.) It is hard for dualists like us to imagine what it would be like to experience things otherwise.

Yet not every distinction signifies the presence of dualism. The Hebrew prophets make many distinctions between good and evil, but they weren't dualistic. It would be wrong, for example, to say that their concern was with "this" world, for that would imply the existence of another. Their concern was with the world.