

Introduction:

If you don't believe the Bible is true, I get it. I really do. I disagree with you, but I understand. The Bible makes some pretty unique and seemingly outlandish claims. These claims do not mesh with the modern rationalism and enlightenment in which our culture has been steeped for the past few centuries, neither do they mesh with the post-modern pluralism and tolerance our culture is increasingly accepting. In fact, the Bible actually begins with one of the hardest claims to accept: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (**Genesis 1:1**, ESV). Followed up by "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (**Genesis 1:31**, ESV). But let me ask you. When you look around at the world today, when you watch the news, when you keep up with your social media does it look to you like a very good world? Or does it seem to be broken? I get it. There are some pretty cool things about our world. When I see the sunset on the beach or the sunrise over a valley in the mountains, I see a hint of a very good world. When I think about the fact that just right gravitational forces of our world, the moon, the sun, allowing us to live here, and so many other details like that, I see hints of a very good world. But, in general, I'm with you. There is a nearly universal nagging sense that things are not as they should be. This world seems messed up. It seems wrong. It feels broken. When I see the news about a devastating hurricane in Florida's panhandle, when I hear about wars and genocides, when I read about crime rates and death tolls, I think this is not a very good world. It is a messed-up world. It is a broken world. And so, I get it. I really do. I get why you are tempted to dismiss this very first claim in the Bible. However, I want to make a very bold claim. I know our world seems so messed up and so irrational and so broken; however, if the Bible were true, the world just as it is right now and our nagging sense that it is not the way it is supposed to be, actually makes sense. And the Bible's very first claim is the only explanation that actually does make sense of the world as we experience it. Bold claims. But by the time we are done, you will have heard the three possible stories that attempt to explain the world as it is and then I will explain why the Bible's story is the only one that actually makes sense of our world. And based on that, I'm going to invite you to read the Bible for yourself to learn how it explains our world.

Discussion:

- I. Story #1: **Stuffism**:<sup>1</sup> "In the beginning, Stuff existed. Nothing hovered on the Stuff because there was nothing but Stuff. In fact, there was no beginning to Stuff, it has just always been there."
  - A. Stuffism is my name for the story that claims only Stuff, in the form of matter and energy, exists. Some folks call this materialism, naturalism, Darwinism, etc. There is no Spirit, there is only Stuff.
  - B. Apart from the scientific laws of Stuff that claim Stuff simply cannot exist eternally (The Law of Entropy, the Second Law of Thermodynamics) but neither can it come into existence or cease to exist but can only change forms (The Law of Conservation of Matter and Energy, the First Law of Thermodynamics), I see some very significant flaws with this story.
  - C. The problem is Stuff, matter and energy, cannot act. It can only react. Stuff cannot make choices, neither in a volitional sense nor in a moral sense. In fact, we have a scientific law of Stuff that claims, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction" (Newton's Third Law of Motion). Because all there is is Stuff, all we are experiencing now is actually the ongoing reaction to previous reactions to previous reactions ad infinitum. Again, we will not even consider what this story says about the very first action, it simply cannot provide a first action. In the world of Stuffism, because an object at rest will stay at rest (Newton's First Law of Motion, the Law of Inertia) there can't actually be a first action, there are only infinite reactions. But understand what this means. What we perceive of as consciousness, thought, moral choice are not those things at all. They are merely electro-chemical reactions. Nothing exists except Stuff, matter and energy, and everything we experience is merely the natural and unavoidable equal and opposite reaction to earlier reactions. We have no idea why these reactions appear to us as consciousness, thoughts, emotions, moral choices, they are not.
  - D. In Stuffism, we are actually in the middle of a giant chain reaction that can neither be changed nor avoided. We are like a long chain of falling dominoes that must fall exactly the way they fall because they cannot choose

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<sup>1</sup> My use of the terms "Stuffism" and "Spiritism" are not intended in any way to be pejorative, discriminatory, or condescending. Rather they are intended to be explanatory. I hope the explanations in the lesson are clear on this.

to fall otherwise. Isaac Asimov's Foundation series, a series of science fiction stories, is based on this atheistic, naturalistic, Stuffist understanding. I encourage you to read them if you are interested in seeing that I'm not making this idea up. Thus, though it seems to us that our world is broken and things are not as they should be, that is a misperception. According to Stuffism, the world is not broken. It is not messed up. Rather, it is exactly as it should be. In fact, it wouldn't matter how it is, it would be exactly as it should be because it can't help being any other way. In fact, we can't even really say the world is as it "should" be because "should" is a moral concept and there is no morality in Stuffism, there is only reaction and continuing reaction. "Should be" implies a volitional and moral choice that simply cannot exist in Stuffism. (Do not misunderstand. I'm not saying Stuffists are all immoral people as we often speak of morality. Many are very moral in that way. I'm pointing out that when we get to the heart of the story of Stuffism no matter how it seems to us or how we talk about it, no one is actually moral or immoral. That implies choice, which we don't have in Stuffism. Because all we are is matter and energy that cannot act, but can only react in equal and opposite ways.)

E. Does this story really seem to fit with what you have experienced in reality? In this story, that nagging sense that the world is broken and needs to be fixed, that things are not as they should be is a misperception, it is not reality.

II. Story #2: **Spiritism**: "In the beginning, Spirit existed. In fact, Spirit is all that existed. Spirit hovered over nothing because there is nothing other than Spirit."

A. Spiritism is the story that only Spirit, in perfect, undivided unity, is all that exists. Some folks call this Monism, pantheism, Buddhism, Hinduism, new age mysticism, etc. A popular representation of this idea is the Force of the Star Wars universe. In this story, God is not a personal creator, God is all that exists, He (or She, as is popular today) is in and through all things. In fact, is made up of all things.

B. In Spiritism, you are not separate from God, but are part of God. The ground is not separate from God, but is part of God. The tree is not separate from God, but is part of God. Imagine a great ocean of water. Everything you see are merely drops of water in that ocean. However, that brings us to an understanding. How distinct are drops of water in an ocean? Not at all. Since everything and everyone is actually the same divine oneness, we are all actually the same. Any distinction between you and me, between rock and tree, between plant and animal, between earth and sky is an illusion. We and everything around us are actually all just drops of water in the vast ocean of water that is all that exists. However, think about it, how many drops of water are there in the ocean. Absolutely none. Because once a drop is in the ocean, it ceases to be a drop of water.

C. The key here is Oneness. The great goal is to be at Oneness, to be One with the Universe, that is to be one with God who is the Universe. But understand, being One with the Universe does not mean to get back to being one because you have become divided off from the Universe, from God. That simply cannot happen. Rather, being at One with the Universe is actually to remember the Oneness that already and always exists, to remember that you are merely the drop of water in the vast ocean. When that is accomplished, you, as an individual, distinct person cease to exist, being swallowed up in the vast ocean. And yet, that isn't even correct, because you actually do not exist as a separate, distinct drop of water. That is merely an illusion that you must abandon in your quest to remember your Oneness with all life, the universe, and God.

D. Unlike Stuffism, we have no falling chain of dominoes, we only have one giant domino. It isn't falling; it simply is what it is and can be no other way than it is. I know this gets a little complex, but try to grasp this: in Spiritism there is only one. There cannot be two. There are no dichotomies. There are no distinctions. There is not really night and day, earth and sky, sea and land. All is one. In like manner, there is no good and bad, wrong and right, justice and injustice. All is one. These kinds of distinctions are actually illusions, tricks of the mind that cause us to forget the unity everything has with the Oneness that is the Universe, that is God.

E. According to Spiritism, therefore, the world is exactly as it should be, because it is exactly the way it is, the only way it can possibly be. Thus, though it seems to us that our world is broken and things are not as they should be, that is merely an illusion. The great goal in Spiritism is coming to peace with the idea that all is exactly as it should be. Of course, we really can't say "should be" because that implies a moral choice between two, what should be and what should not be. And there is no real choice because there is only one. (Do not misunderstand. I'm not saying Spiritists are all immoral people as we often speak of morality. Many are very moral in that way. I'm pointing out that when we get to the heart of the story of Spiritism no matter how it seems to us or how we talk about it, no one is actually moral or immoral. That implies distinction and division. That implies two and in Spiritism there is only one.)

F. In Stuffism, the nagging sense of brokenness, that all is not as it should be is a misperception; in Spiritism, it is an illusion.

### III. Story #3: **Creationism**: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...”

- A. Stuffism is the story that all that exists is Stuff. Spiritism is the story that all that exists is Spirit. Creationism is the story that both Stuff and Spirit exist. In the beginning there was Spirit, with a different nature from Stuff, not governed by the laws of Stuff. This Spirit brought Stuff into existence. Spirit and Stuff interact in interesting ways. In fact, some of the Stuff is imbued with Spirit.
- B. In the Biblical account, we see varying interactions between Spirit and Stuff in God’s creative process. There is God, the Divine, Self-Existing Spirit. As Creator, He is by nature different from all that He creates even as He imbues some of His creation with Spirit. Then we see angelic beings, seraphim, and cherubim which are Created Spirit. Though fully and completely Spirit they are of a different nature than the Divine Spirit which is God. Around us we see Created Stuff—earth, dirt, rocks, water, air, etc. There is Created, Living Stuff—plants, flowers, grass, trees, etc. There is Created, Living, Conscious Stuff—birds, fish, dogs, cats, etc. Then there is Created, Living, Conscious, Spiritual Stuff—men and women.
- C. In this story, the Divine Spirit brought everything else into existence. God, this Divine Spirit, the Uncaused Cause, the Prime Mover, is a personal and distinct existing being, separate from what He created. Being distinct and separate from what He created, He is not bound by the laws of His creation, but rather the creation is bound by the laws with which He created it. By nature of creation, there is a purpose for which the Creator brought all this into existence. In other words, there is a way that it should be. According to **Genesis 1:31**, when God first created it, all was working according to purpose. All was as it should be. It was very good.
- D. While we might be tempted to dismiss this story because we claim today all is not as it should be and therefore we want to say this story got it wrong, don’t jump to that conclusion so quickly. The mere fact that in the beginning God can make this moral judgment declares something about the Stuff he created. God’s label of “good” only makes sense if “bad” is a possibility. Things are only as they should be, if it is possible for things to be otherwise. Otherwise, “good” and “bad,” “right” and “wrong,” “should” and “should not” are meaningless. In this Bible story, this distinction is quite meaningful. God, who is Spirit, created Stuff for a purpose. In the beginning, all was exactly as it should be, but, if this story is true as I believe it is, things could change.
- E. In fact, the Bible explains what that change was. Really, we could read the rest of the Bible to understand the change. It begins just one page over from where have already read. However, perhaps the best summary of the change is found in **Romans 5:12**. God created a very good world that was behaving just as God purposed it, just as it should. However, man sinned. That is, man violated God’s purpose for the world. Man broke God’s law. And that broke the world. In other words, while in Stuffism the nagging sense that things are not as they should be is nothing more than a misperception, and in Spiritism it is merely an illusion, in Creationism it is actually spot on. There is a nagging sense that things are not as they should be, because, in fact, they are not as they should be. In Stuffism and Spiritism, nothing is to be done about this problem we see in the world because, in fact, nothing can be done about it. In Creationism, something needs to be done about it.

#### Conclusion:

If you believe the world is exactly as it should be, then by all means don’t worry about what the Bible says. However, if you have that nagging realization that things in our world are not as they should be, then I encourage you to get a Bible (we’ll be happy to provide you with one) and read its explanation for yourself. Creationism is the only story that actually makes sense of our world as we experience it. As we said, Creationism demonstrates that things are not as they should be, leaving us with the sense that something needs to be done about it. The great thing about the Bible is it explains exactly what had to be done about it, who had to do it, and what He did about it. And that is the story of Jesus. Instead of judging the world immediately when Adam and Eve broke it, instead of judging us immediately when we follow in their footsteps sinning and breaking His law, God waited and prepared. Judgment is coming for the sins of the world and for our sins as part of it. But God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, came into this broken world, lived as one of us, then took our sins upon Himself becoming the sacrifice that will save us from the coming judgment. If you want to know more about Jesus and what He has done about this broken world, see me after the assembly. However, if you know all you need to know and don’t want to put it off any longer, let Jesus start fixing you and your brokenness. We can baptize you into Jesus Christ right now.