



Guest editorial preface: special issue on pantheism and panentheism

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Published online: 5 January 2019
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It is unlikely that many analytic philosophers or analytic theologians working on the metaphysics of the divine today will be surprised if told that the dialectic in analytic circles over the nature of God in the past 50 years has largely excluded any consideration of alternatives to variants of classical theism. By ‘classical theism’ we mean to pick out any conception of God on which God is understood as the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, creator and sustainer of the universe who is ontologically distinct from God’s creation. Of course, there is no shortage of debates over how to understand eternity, the omni-attributes, etc., but a shared assumption has been that the shape of the dialectic should center around some species of classical theism. Whether or not this focus has been explicitly taken to imply that any alternative conceptions of God or ultimate reality ought to be ignored as *prima facie* untenable and, hence, unworthy of engaging with seriously, the amount of attention devoted to alternatives to classical theism has been minimal. There have, of course, been exceptions. In this regard, the work of Bishop (1998), Forrest (1996, 2007), Leslie (2001), Jantzen (1984), Oakes (1983), and Schellenberg (2013) all stand out. But, unfortunately, there has been very little engagement with each of these authors’ respective models of God or ultimate reality. Still there are some signs of things changing.

Recently, the editors of this special issue, as part of a project funded by the John Templeton Foundation (Grant ID#: 20308), edited a book, *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine* (2015). The volume’s contents consisted of essays in which the authors variously presented and defended alternative accounts of the divine, critiqued aspects of classical theism, or engaged critically with alternatives to classical theism.

The current issue of this journal is one of the outputs of yet another project funded by the John Templeton Foundation (Grand ID#: 59140) devoted to

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exploring alternatives to classical theism in more depth. But rather than being about alternatives to classical theism in general, the focus of the current project and this issue is pantheism and panentheism. By ‘pantheism’ we mean the doctrine that God is identical with the universe. We understand ‘panentheism’ to refer to any view of God on which the universe is an aspect of God, where this may include taking the universe to constitute or bear some other relation besides identity to God. While we can group conceptions of God as versions of pantheism or panentheism, to expect that one can predict the commitments of a theory of the divine just on the basis of being told that it is either pantheistic or panentheistic would be a mistake. The articles in this issue are evidence of the diversity.

The articles explore variants of pantheism, panentheism, and a version of panpsychism that is officially neutral between pantheism and panentheism, but which we expect many proponents of both will appreciate. In her contribution, “How to prove the existence of God: an argument for conjoined panentheism,” Elisabeth Burns develops a version of panentheism that makes a distinction between “God the World” and “God the Good.” The distinction is necessary because, while everything is *in* God, given the existence of evil and suffering, not everything is *of* God. God the Good is an agent of positive change that provides moral agents, such as humans, an evaluative standard for their actions that leads them to morally better actions that change the world for the better.

Mikael Stenmark argues for the, perhaps surprising, thesis that panentheism should be taken to be scalar in his essay, “Panentheism and its Neighbors.” Deism and pantheism represent the polarities. According to Stenmark, failure to recognize this has resulted in a failure to appreciate how shallow some disagreements are between panentheists and classical theists—e.g., on the nature of divine power. But Stenmark argues that there are real differences, nonetheless.

In “God’s omnipresence in the world: on possible meanings of ‘en’ in Panentheism,” Georg Gasser argues for understanding panentheism less as a monolithic doctrine of God and more as a research project that consists of a core hypothesis about God’s relationship to the universe and a host of auxiliary hypotheses that distinguish different versions of panentheism. Gasser explores various ways of thinking about the relationship between God and the world that stress divine immanence in a way characteristic of panentheism.

In his article, “What God Might Be,” John Leslie further explores his Platonic axiological multiverse pantheism. On his metaphysic of the divine, the cosmos’s existence is ethically necessary and each of the infinite number of universes constitutive of the multiverse consists of a mind that knows all that is worth knowing. Leslie explores a number of issues related to his pantheistic metaphysic of the divine, including some problems for his account stemming from skepticism about intrinsic value.

It is commonly assumed that pantheism is inconsistent with taking God to be a person. In his article, “Pantheism and Personhood,” Sam Coleman explores the case against the possibility of God being a person if pantheism is true. He argues that the problems for the pantheist are shared by the common classical metaphysic of theism found amongst analytic philosophers today.

Finally, in his contribution, “Did the Universe Design Itself?,” Philip Goff presents a version of panpsychism to which we expect some proponents of versions of both pantheism and panentheism will be sympathetic. Goff explores difficulties faced by both theistic and multiverse-based accounts of the “fine-tuning” of the laws of nature. He argues that if we adopt a form of panpsychism he labels “agentive-panpsychism” we can explain fine-tuning in terms of the mental powers of the universe and that this is a more promising solution.

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