



How to prove the existence of God: an argument for conjoined pantheism

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Abstract

This article offers an argument for a form of pantheism in which the divine is conceived as both ‘God the World’ and ‘God the Good’. ‘God the World’ captures the notion that the totality of everything which exists is ‘in’ God, while acknowledging that, given evil and suffering, not everything is ‘of’ God. ‘God the Good’ encompasses the idea that God is also the universal concept of Goodness, akin to Plato’s Form of the Good as developed by Iris Murdoch, which is inextricably conjoined with God the World because it is the nature of the world which determines the nature of perfect Goodness. This form of ‘conjoined’ pantheism yields a concept of divine personhood which includes both divine agency and human/divine engagement. God the Good is an agent of change by providing human persons with a standard of Goodness against which to measure the goodness of their own actions, while God the World provides the physical embodiment through which God acts. Human engagement with the divine may take a number of forms and may lead to moral action, the means by which the divine acts upon the world and changes it for the better.

Keywords Conjoined pantheism · Pantheism · Classical theism · Divine personhood · Metaphorical religious language · Problem of evil

Introduction

The term ‘pantheism’ is derived from the Greek words meaning ‘everything’ (*pan*), ‘in’ (*en*), and ‘God’ (*theos*). Whereas pantheists hold that the totality of the universe and God are identical without remainder, pantheists think that, although the totality of the universe is, in some sense, ‘in’ God, the existence of God also, in

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some way, transcends the totality of the universe. Bradley Shavit Artson suggests that ‘as good a definition of panentheism ... as we are likely to find’ is given in the Jewish Midrash, in which it is said that ‘God is the place of the world, but the world is not God’s place’ (Artson 2014, 24, quoting Bereshit Rabbah 68:9). This paper argues that divinity can best be represented as ‘God the World’ and ‘God the Good’, a conjunction of which may be described as, in at least some respects, personal. I argue that divinity construed in this way avoids not only some of the most intractable difficulties of classical theism and pantheism, but also difficulties with pantheistic concepts of God which have more recently come to light.

Varieties of panentheism

Karl Krause (1781–1832) is usually credited with the invention of the term ‘panentheism’ (in German, *Allingottlehre*, literally ‘everything in God doctrine’) in 1829. For Krause, the term enabled him to situate his own position in the middle ground between classical theism, in which God permeates the world but is essentially separate from it, and pantheism, in which God and the world are inseparable (Krause 1829, 484; Cooper 2007, 18, 26, 121; Culp 2017, sections 1 and 2).

The term panentheism was not commonly used until the middle of the twentieth century, however, following the work of Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000) (e.g. Hartshorne 1964 [1948], xvii; 2000 [1953], 1–25). Hartshorne suggests that early attempts to understand the nature of God were based on examinations of contrasting pairs of attributes, such as one/many, permanent/changing, being/becoming, necessary/contingent, self-sufficient or non-relative/dependent or relative, and actual/potential. In each case, the highest form of the term regarded as good was attributed to God, while its opposite was denied. Hartshorne suggests that this method produced classical theism in the West, and pantheism in the East (2000 [1953]), 1–2). He questions whether the allegedly superior term of each pair can retain its meaning in the absence of its opposite, however (2). Even when it was claimed that no human concept can apply univocally to God because human concepts can never be understood as anything more than analogically applicable to the divine, in both classical theism and pantheism some attributes continued to be preferred to their opposites (3). Hartshorne argues, instead, that that which is supremely excellent ‘must somehow be able to integrate all the complexity there is into itself as one spiritual whole’ (4) and therefore arrives at ‘dipolar theism’, a way of describing the divine which affirms ‘both poles of each pair of ultimate contraries’ (4).¹

Panentheism has become increasingly popular during the subsequent decades. This is, first, because it appears to avoid some of the philosophical problems of classical theism which have been much discussed by analytic philosophers of religion. For example, if everything is contained within God, who changes as we change, there is no apparent conflict between divine knowledge and human freedom. And

¹ Artson notes that Hartshorne derived the concept of dipolarity from the writings of Morris Raphael Cohen (Artson 2014, 34).

if, as Gregory Peterson suggests, the God of pantheism influences the world in a manner analogous to the way in which a human mind influences a human body, the question of whether divine agency involves violation of divinely-created natural laws does not arise (Peterson 2001, 397).

Secondly, pantheism promotes the growth of ideas which may contribute to the flourishing of the world and its inhabitants. For example, Peterson argues that, for feminists who regard the all-powerful, transcendent deity of classical theism as destructive for women because it values, on the one hand, power and authority which has historically been used to the detriment of women and less-powerful members of societies, and, on the other hand, abstract distance from the world and its inhabitants and their practical, everyday problems, varieties of theism which emphasise God's connection with the world are particularly attractive (see, e.g. Jantzen 1984, 1998; Peterson 2001, 396–397). Peterson also notes that pantheism is particularly valued for its application to environmental ethics, since to say that the world is in God, perhaps to the extent of saying that the world is part of God, means that the world is more highly valued than it is in forms of theism which emphasise God's separateness and distance from the world, in which the world functions mainly as the place where humankind perform the actions which determine their post-mortem destiny. Peterson points out that, if the world is regarded as God's body, when we damage the world we also damage God. Pantheism, then, is a way of 'countering the forces of exploitation and consumption that surround us' (Peterson 2001, 397).

Pantheism, too, avoids some of the philosophical difficulties of classical theism and promotes inclusive theologies and environmental ethics in much the same ways as pantheism, with the added advantage that there is no need to argue for the existence and explain the nature of the aspect of divinity which encompasses the universe but also, in some sense, transcends the universe. But if, on pantheism, divinity is ontologically equivalent to the world without remainder, in what sense can we say that there is divinity at all? That is, in what sense can we say that there is something 'more' than the universe which provides meaning and purpose, and draws us towards a better way of life for individuals, communities, and the totality of sentient beings?

Pantheism, therefore, provides a way to avoid common difficulties in both classical theism and pantheism. John W. Cooper argues that the origins of pantheism—if not the term itself—may be traced back to Plato (428/427–348/347 BCE) and the neo-Platonism of Plotinus (203–270). In Plato's *Timaeus* (2008 [fifth century BCE]), God is the eternal Mind who creates from pre-existing matter the World-Soul which has the world as its material body. Since Plato calls the World-Soul 'a god' and the world is said to be 'in' the World-Soul, this, Cooper suggests, is the origin of the pantheist's claim that the world is 'in' God. Cooper argues that two forms of pantheism have developed from this. The most common form follows the interpretation of Plotinus, who argues that there is a hierarchy of divinity at the highest point of which is the One God, from which emanates the Mind, and thence the World-Soul, and finally the world. Each lower level of the hierarchy is contained within the level above it, so that all lower levels of the hierarchy are contained within the One God (Cooper 2007, 18). Cooper suggests that descendants of this form of pantheism may be traced as far as the concept of dipolarity, the

claim that God has two natures, in the process theism of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and Hartshorne (Cooper 2007, 19). In the other form of panentheism, God is predominantly identified with the World-Soul and is seen as ‘the Life Force, the dynamic Spirit that generates life, intelligent order, and oneness in the universe’ (Cooper 2007, 19). This type of panentheism, Cooper submits, is found in ‘Schliermacher’s Living God, New England transcendentalism’s Over-Soul, Bergson’s *élan vital* (“spark of life”), in the ecological feminism of Ruether and McFague, and in Wiccan paganism’ (Cooper 2007, 19).

This article will argue for a version of panentheism which is, in some respects, a hybrid of Cooper’s two types of panentheism. It is therefore conjoined both in that it preserves the two natures of the neoplatonic panentheism of scholars such as Whitehead and Hartshorne (although the two natures are not the same as those found in the work of these scholars), but also in that it conjoins key elements from both of the pantheistic traditions identified by Cooper.

Conjoined panentheism

On this version of panentheism, then, divinity is manifested in both God the World and God the Good. Whereas types of panentheism which build on the neoplatonic tradition tend to argue for some version of the view that a divine mind contains the idea of the world which is necessary for the creation of the world, the type of panentheism for which I argue here begins with the notion of God the World, according to which everything which exists, both in the actual universe and in every possible universe, is ‘in’ God. The question of what is to be understood by ‘in’ has been much debated. I do not intend to claim that the totality of the actual universe and all possible universes is ontologically identical with divinity. Given that the actual world contains a great deal of evil, and that, as Nagasawa (2016) has pointed out, the set of all possible worlds contains every possible kind of evil, this would entail that God is both good and evil. Some would simply accept this; for example, John Shelby Spong (1931–) acknowledges that evil is part of the Ground of Being (2001, 167). Eric Steinhart (2016) notes the objection to such a view that, since the sacred has commonly been thought to contain only that which is intrinsically of great value, if the sacred is not defined as something which is positive in its entirety, there is no positive focus for religious activity as it would be wrong ‘to celebrate destructive processes as sacred (e.g. to celebrate violence, crime, war, famine, plague and disaster’ (279). He recommends, instead, the view that something should be regarded as sacred ‘if and only if (iff) it is creative or constructive’ (279). Thus ‘God the World’ captures the notion that everything which exists or could exist is ‘in’ God, while acknowledging that, given the existence of evil, not everything which exists or could exist is ‘of’ God—i.e. partakes of God’s intrinsic goodness. One might think of a cake which contains both currants and nails, perhaps; the nails may be baked into the cake, but they do not ‘belong’ to the cake.

‘God the Good’ encompasses the idea that God is also the universal concept of Goodness, akin to Plato’s Form of the Good as expounded by Iris Murdoch (1919–1999) (1992). God the Good is conjoined with God the World because the

nature of goodness is determined by the nature of the world; it is the actual or probable consequences of our actions which ultimately determine the degree to which our actions may be regarded as good. As David Ray Griffin suggests, our moral norms are ‘grounded in the nature of things’ (2014, 127). Therefore, God the Good cannot exist independently of God the World; God the Good and God the World are conjoined. It is also God the Good which prompts and enables the perfecting of God the World.

Steinhart claims that ‘it is irrational to ground reality in mystery’ (2016, 276) and proposes a form of cosmological argument which we might usefully employ to support belief in God the World. A version of Steinhart’s argument may be set out as follows:

- i. Complex things are contingent things.
- ii. The universe is a complex and therefore contingent thing.
- iii. Every complex contingent thing is derived from a thing of lesser complexity.
- iv. Therefore there are chains of decreasingly complex things, each of which is caused by its predecessor in the chain.
- v. Each chain of decreasingly complex things originates in a single thing which is not complex.
- vi. A thing which is not complex is not contingent.
- vii. Therefore the universe originates in something which is neither complex nor contingent, ‘the first cause of all physicality’ (277).

A modal version of this argument might run as follows:

- i*. Complex things are contingent things.
- ii*. The set which includes every actual and possible universe is a complex and therefore contingent thing. (It would not be true to say that every possible universe is a complex and therefore contingent thing because there is a possible universe which contains only one thing. Since such a universe would not be the only universe, however, there is still complexity which requires an explanation.)
- iii*. Every complex contingent thing is derived from a thing of lesser complexity.
- iv*. Therefore there are chains of decreasingly complex things, each of which is caused by its predecessor in the chain.
- v*. Each chain of decreasingly complex things originates in a single thing which is not complex. (This assumes that there cannot be irreducible complexity of any kind—or that if the universe does contain instances of irreducible complexity, there is a single cause of it, as proponents of recent versions of the argument for design have suggested (see, for example, Behe 2000, 2003)—and that irreducible complexity does not apply to the originating cause of the set of actual and possible universes.)
- vi*. The thing which is not complex is not contingent.
- vii*. Therefore every actual and possible universe originates in a single thing which is neither complex nor contingent, ‘the first cause of all physicality’ (Steinhart 2016, 277).

Steinhart suggests that, since the first cause ‘is the ground of all complex concrete things’ (277), it should be called the *urgrund* [original ground]. It is not supernatural because the cause of all natural things is, itself, a natural thing, but since it resembles some ultimate causes, including Plato’s Form of the Good and Plotinus’ Unity, it may be classified as ‘divine’ (277). For Steinhart, ‘[t]he *urgrund* is the naturally divine alpha, the ultimate source of all natural power and energy’ which includes ‘the power of self-surpassing, which is the capacity to produce greater versions of itself’ (277), but ‘the *urgrund* is not any kind of god’ (277). By this, Steinhart appears to mean that the *urgrund* is not any kind of personal god, but I shall argue that a version of his argument may be used to support belief in that which is God, the originator and sustainer of the universe, and is, at least in a metaphorical sense, personal.

For Steinhart, the *urgrund* is divine because it resembles an ultimate cause, but I would suggest that divinity is also that which requires ethical living and, to assist humankind in this endeavour, provides inspiration and a source of power. Steinhart does, indeed, describe various rituals which cultivate and express gratitude, but surely divinity also requires positive action. For this, I suggest, we need God in the form of God the Good, the inspiration and the magnetic force which draws us towards goodness and the action which increases goodness in our world. Without God the Good, the *urgrund* would be simply a natural fact about our world which has no implications for the way we live and which therefore gives us no prospect of overcoming the evil which our world contains.

Belief in the existence of God the Good may be supported by a development of the ontological arguments of Alvin Plantinga (1932–) (Plantinga 1974a, b) and Murdoch (1992, 391–430). In outline, the argument is that we encounter many examples of imperfect goodness in our world, and that we are able to rank them in order of goodness only because there is a standard of perfect goodness against which we can measure them. In an earlier paper, I set out this argument in more detail, as follows:

- ‘a. It is possible that there is Unsurpassable Greatness—that is, Maximal Excellence in every possible world.
- b. Necessarily, Maximal Excellence exists in any world that contains degrees of goodness.
- c. Goodness of varying degrees is ubiquitous in our world.
- d. If c., necessarily, Maximal Excellence exists in our world.
- e. If c., it is reasonable to presume that every possible world contains degrees of goodness.
- f. If e., necessarily Maximal Excellence exists in every possible world.
- g. If f., Unsurpassable Greatness actually exists.’ (Burns 2018, 130)

I considered four possible objections to this argument which I briefly summarise (and, to some extent, modify) here. First, the argument is not sound because premise b., and therefore also premise a., may be rejected—i.e. there is no reason to believe that Maximal Excellence must exist in any world which contains

degrees of goodness, and therefore there is no reason to believe that there is Unsurpassable Greatness—i.e. Maximal Excellence in all possible worlds. Second, there is no reason to believe that every world contains degrees of goodness. Third, if the argument for Unsurpassable Greatness is sound, can we not construct a similar argument for Unsurpassable Evil? Fourth, the argument is not an ontological argument because its reasoning depends upon human moral experience, supported by a form of cosmological argument in which God is the source both of the sequence of goodness and of every causal sequence in every possible world; God is the Ultimate Explanation of everything in every possible world, the nature of which determines what is, and is not, good for sentient beings.

In response to the first objection, I argued that we would be unable to identify degrees of goodness without a standard of Maximal Excellence. With regard to the third objection, I referred to Kant's argument from *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1996 [1793]) that there may, indeed, be an 'evil principle', but that humankind should follow 'the leadership of the good principle' to seek 'freedom from the *dominion* of evil' (Kant 1996 [1793], 129). In the "Objections and responses" section, I will have more to say about the implications of the existence of evil for the argument which I advance in this article.

With regard to the second objection, I suggested that there are no conceivable circumstances in which some things are not regarded as better than others, even if the nature of goodness varies from one world to the next because the nature of the environment provided by those worlds differs in certain important respects. It could be objected further, however, that there can be no hierarchy of goodness in a world containing only one thing—a stone elephant, perhaps. In parallel with my response to a similar objection to the version of the cosmological argument considered above, it could be argued that there is not a different scale of degrees of goodness in each actual or possible world but a single scale of degrees of goodness which encompasses the goodness of all actual and possible worlds. This might need to encompass the apparently incompatible goods of different worlds—for example, both the goodness of providing a meal consisting entirely of stones in a world whose inhabitants thrive on such a diet, and the goodness of providing an optimal diet for human beings in the world which we inhabit—but the degree of goodness of each kind of goodness could, at least in theory, be placed on the same scale. Since there clearly is a hierarchy of goodness in our actual world it is reasonable to argue that this forms part of an over-arching hierarchy of goodness, even if some of its elements are single elements in their own worlds. Thus, since there is a single hierarchy of goodness which includes the instances of goodness from all actual and possible worlds, there is only one Maximal Excellence, which must therefore be equivalent to Unsurpassable Greatness. The argument therefore requires modification, and might now look something like this:

- a* Necessarily, if there are degrees of goodness, there is Unsurpassable Goodness.
- b* Degrees of goodness are ubiquitous in our actual world.
- c* There are no conceivable circumstances in which some things are not regarded as being good to a greater degree than others.

- d* If b* and c*, there is a single hierarchy of goodness which includes all the goodness in the set of all actual and possible worlds.
- e* If a* and d*, Unsurpassable Goodness exists.

The fourth objection to the version of the argument in my earlier article focused on the need to incorporate into an allegedly ‘ontological’ argument an argument from moral experience, and even to bolster it with a type of cosmological argument, the nature of which was given only in outline. Here, however, I offer an argument for the existence of the two-natured God of panentheism (God the World and Good the Good) which draws more clearly on a fusion of cosmological and ontological/moral arguments. God the World, as ‘the first cause of all physicality’, is necessarily conjoined with God the Good because it is the nature of physicality which determines the nature of goodness, and thus both the two natures of God and the two arguments—cosmological and ontological/moral—are perpetually inter-dependent.

A conjoined argument for a conjoined deity might therefore look something like this:

- I. Every complex thing is contingent.
- II. If I., the set of all actual and possible universes is a complex contingent thing.
- III. Every complex contingent thing is derived from a thing of lesser complexity.
- IV. If III., the set of all actual and possible universes is a product of the set of multiple chains of decreasingly complex things, originating in a single, non-complex and non-contingent first cause of all actual and possible physicality (God the World—the existential aspect of divinity).
- V. The nature of actual and possible physicality determines the nature of goodness.
- VI. Necessarily, if there are degrees of goodness, there is Unsurpassable Goodness.
- VII. The set of all actual and possible worlds contains degrees of goodness.
- VIII. If VI. and VII., Unsurpassable Goodness exists (God the Good—the moral aspect of divinity).
- IX. If IV. and VIII., a conjunction of God the World and God the Good (the existential and moral aspects of divinity) exists.

Thus, God the World is responsible for our existence, whereas God the Good is the aspect of divinity which promotes flourishing. This constitutes a form of panentheism because the world is contained ‘in’ God, but there are some aspects of the world which are not ‘of’ God. Humankind therefore need to draw on the inspiration and power of the moral aspect of divinity in order gradually to destroy or perfect that which is not ‘of’ God and enable the flourishing of all sentient creatures.

Conjoined panentheism and personhood

The God of conjoined panentheism is, arguably, personal in at least two key respects—i.e. God is an agent who acts in our world, and there is a relationship between God and humankind.

As Thomas F. Tracy notes, the Abrahamic faiths ‘all include in their sacred scriptures a rich collection of stories about divine action’ (2006, 597), but the question of how we are to understand divine action has proved to be a very difficult one to answer. Tracy suggests that possible ways of explaining it might be grouped into five categories:

- i. God, as creator, ‘grounds and sustains the existence of all finite things’ (609).
- ii. God acts indirectly by means of divinely-created natural laws.
- iii. God acts indirectly through humankind whose free choices have been influenced by divine activity.
- iv. God acts directly by influencing that which is indeterminate at the quantum level.
- v. God acts directly within history to bring about effects which could not be brought about by human agents (609–610).

As Tracy points out, although classical theists cannot deny that God could choose to act in the manner described by iv. and/or v., each explanation is sufficiently problematic that he or she might choose to omit these from an account of divine action. This leaves explanations of the kind described by i. through iii., and these, I would suggest, are wholly compatible with the concept of God we find in conjoined panentheism. Thus, God the Good provides human persons with a standard of Goodness against which to measure their actions and thereby improve upon them (iii. above), while God the World provides the physical embodiment through which God acts (i. and ii. above). Echoes of this may be heard in the sixteenth century prayer allegedly written by St Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), according to which

Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless his people. (1996–2018 [date of first publication unknown]; accessed 10 August 2018).

Divine personhood is also commonly taken to imply the possibility of relationship between God and humankind. Since, on almost every conception of divinity, God lacks features which are normally important in personal relationships, such as the capacity to respond in a (relatively) unambiguous manner to verbal or written communication (or some adequate substitute, such as sign language), I would argue that relationship with God must, instead, be characterised as human engagement with the divine. It is therefore the activity of the believer which leads to a metaphorical ‘response’ from the divine, and which informs the subsequent behaviour of the believer. The believer may engage with the divine by reading the scriptures of his/her religious tradition and/or by attending a temple, church or mosque in order to listen to the teaching of religious professionals and to participate in religious rituals. The believer may also pray, either individually or in the context of his/her community, and such prayer may be understood as a form of meditation, perhaps focusing on situations of difficulty in his/her own life, the lives of those with whom

he/she comes into contact, or the lives of people of the world more generally, and may be informed by the reading of scripture, the teaching of religious professionals and discussion with other members of his/her religious community (see further Burns 2014). Alternatively, perhaps, if the unconscious is equated with God, an idea which Roderick Main suggests may be found in the work of Carl Jung (1875–1961) (Main 2017, 1108), who unequivocally does say that God is ‘Reality itself’ and that humankind is part of this Reality (Jung 1969 [1952], paragraph 631, quoted in Main 2017, 1109), then prayer may be understood as an attempt to connect with the mind of God. The focus of such engagement is likely to be God the Good but, as part of God the World, the believer is then responsible for participating in divine action by attempting to change the world for the better. Just as the human body sends white cells to fight an infection, so human persons, guided by God the Good, can become the metaphorical white cells which work to heal the ills of the world.

God the World and God the Good may be mapped—although perhaps not exclusively so—onto the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. God the World as the creative and sustaining aspect of divinity may be regarded as the parent-like aspect of God, while God the Good may be thought of as originating within God the World and therefore as the child-like aspect of God, exemplified, for some, in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The pervasive influence of God the Good may be understood as the spirit-like aspect of the divine. Each of these aspects of the divine is distinct from but cannot exist without the others.²

Objections and responses

In this section I endeavour to show how a version of pantheism in which God the World and God the Good are conjoined addresses two key—and related—objections to pantheism.

The meaning of ‘en’

Perhaps the most significant difficulty for pantheism of any kind is that of providing an explanation of the sense in which everything is said to be ‘in’ God. I noted in the section “[Conjoined pantheism](#)” above that this question has been much debated, and that, given the prevalence of evil, the version of pantheism which I argue for here does not claim that the totality of actual and possible universes is ontologically identical with divinity. I have, however, argued that there is a sense

² See also Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) who describes the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of God the first Principle, the Father in whom all things remain eternally, God the second Principle, the Son who is the Father’s love, and God the third Principle, the Spirit which is living power and virtue carried forth from the Father and the Son (1989 [1654], 103–104). Harald Atmanspacher and Hartmut von Sass (2017) also note the relationship between pantheism and Trinitarian theology, particularly in the work of Jürgen Moltmann, since both are concerned to maintain the close relationship between God and the world. Trinitarian theology also includes the idea of *perichoresis*, the interpenetration of the three modes of divine existence (Atmanspacher and Hartmut 2017, 1037).

in which the world is ‘in’ God, although some aspects of the world—i.e. its evil aspects—are not ‘of’ God. But what does this mean? Does it mean that parts of the world are ontologically identical with God the World while others are not?

Hartshorne attempts to address this problem by distinguishing between God’s ‘essence’ and God’s ‘accidents’, so that what is ‘in’ God may not be part of God’s essence. For Hartshorne, the nature of God’s essence entails that God has accidents because God contains both poles of every pair of opposites. ‘Essence’ is defined as ‘the individual in abstraction from all in him that is accidental, or without which he would still be “himself”’ (Hartshorne 2000 [1953], 4). This means that ‘mediocre’ beings are contained in the supreme being by means of these accidents, although even the accidents are described by mediocre predicates only in part, just as ‘a building need not be small merely because it has parts that are so, or as one who has the mediocre and more or less erroneous ideas of others as his own objects of contemplation, without believing in them, need not fall into error himself’ (4); the building and the contemplator transcend, respectively, smallness and mediocrity. This means, Hartshorne claims, that everything, including the greatest extent of each pole of contrary predicates and every point in between, can be thought of as being ‘in God, without there being mediocracy, “defects” in any usual sense, in his essential character’ (5). Even if we regard the evil aspects of the world as merely accidental parts of God, however, we must still say that God permits these accidents to be part of Godself.

Peterson examines the meaning of ‘en’ by distinguishing between strong panentheism, which claims that the world and God are in some sense identical, although one (the world) is part of the whole (God), and weak panentheism, in which the world and God are ‘copresent’ (2001, 399)—i.e. the world and God are present together so that God is present in and acts in the world. On this classification, Hartshorne advances a form of strong panentheism because, on his view, every aspect of the world is part of God, even if some aspects of the world are accidental rather than essential parts of God.

Peterson suggests that panentheists try to explain the sense in which everything is ‘in’ God by appealing to metaphor or analogy but that, consequently, their claims are not precise and may therefore be interpreted in different ways. He considers the locative metaphor, the mind–body analogy, and the substance metaphor, as follows:

The locative metaphor

If ‘everything is in God’ is understood as a locative metaphor, the world and God are in different locations—i.e. the world is located inside God. This may be regarded as a whole-part relationship, in which God is the whole and the world is a part. The nature of this relationship is not clear, however—although Peterson does note that some panentheists say that God does not arise from and is not dependent upon the part. The whole-part relationship is sometimes thought of as a series of descending levels of complexity and the action of God as ‘top-down’—i.e. ‘the action of the organizational whole on the more localized part’ (400). Peterson suggests that this metaphor does help us to understand the nature of the ‘en’, but reminds us that God and the world do not occupy distinct locations. It should therefore be thought of as

an attempt to explain the logical relationship between God and the world. But Peterson points out that, if the way in which the world is ‘in’ God is analogous to the way in which two things are spatially related, this does seem to imply that the world is divine and that when I sin, God sins (400).

The mind–body analogy

Peterson notes, however, that it is the mind–body analogy which has been more influential. Keith Ward suggests that it originated with Ramanuja (c 1017–1137) (Ward 2004, 62). According to this analogy, ‘God is to world as mind is to body’ (Peterson 2001, 401). Peterson suggests that the analogy depends upon an account of the relationship of human mind to human body in which the two are understood to be closely related and the mind is both a cause of bodily processes and a product of bodily processes. Applied to God, God is the mind of the world which is the body of God. The relationship between God and the world is not, however, clearly analogous to that between the human mind and the human body (including the brain). Furthermore, Peterson argues, although Christianity, in particular, thinks of God as an intentional, personal being, the analogy of God as the mind of the world portrays God in terms which are too anthropomorphic because God does not have a human-like brain and therefore cannot have thoughts which are constrained, as ours are, by the limitations of the body of which the brain is a part (402).

Others note that the mind–body literary device is not an analogy but a metaphor, however (see, e.g. Thomas 2006, 657). Although Owen C. Thomas points out various apparently unpalatable implications of the metaphor (657–658), I would suggest that its status as a metaphor means that we do not need to understand and apply to the God–world relationship the most recent conclusions of biologists, anthropologists and philosophers regarding the human mind–body relationship. But the question of whether my sins are also God’s sins remains difficult to answer, unless there are some parts of God’s body which are not controlled by God’s mind. It might be possible to argue that the mind–body metaphor does suggest a relevant analogy here, since not all bodily mechanisms are controlled directly or even indirectly by the mind. For example, if I cut my finger, I do not decide whether or not the cut will heal; whether or not it does so happens independently of my thoughts about it.

The substance metaphor

Thirdly, Peterson considers the substance metaphor. He suggests that both the locative metaphor and the mind–body analogy imply that God and the world are two separate but related things, and that this implies that they are, in some sense, two separate but related substances. He therefore claims that the arguments of panentheists and their critics parallel Trinitarian and Christological debates of the fourth century. Although in the latter case the discussion was concerned with the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, since God the Son was said to be embodied in Jesus the discussion is relevant to the question of how we are to understand the relationship between God and the world (2001, 403). The fourth century debate concluded that God the Father and God the Son are of the same substance

(*homoousios*), which gave rise to questions of how Jesus can be both divine and human. The meaning of the Chalcedonian Definition, the Early Church's attempt to resolve the dispute which says that Christ is two natures in one person, has been debated to the present day. Peterson suggests that panentheists are continuing this debate, and that although our understanding of God and the world has changed significantly, the basic question remains similar (403).

Peterson concludes that, since the central difficulty for panentheism is that of explaining the nature of God's presence in the world, and the metaphors which are commonly employed, although 'powerful and suggestive' (404), lack precision, we need to reconsider these metaphors and develop new ones. I would suggest, however, that the conjoined pantheist is able to explain the nature of God's presence in the world with the assistance of the three metaphors which Peterson examines. On conjoined panentheism, God the World is that which brought the world into existence and the physical substance of the world which persists through time. The nature of this determines the nature of goodness, all examples of which can be placed in a hierarchy, at the head of which is the perfect standard of goodness, God the Good. Conjoined panentheism therefore has in common with varieties of 'strong' panentheism identity between God and the world, at least insofar as the world is good or enables goodness; aspects of the world which cause suffering are like parasites in the body of God which, under the influence of God the Good, humankind must work to eradicate. Thus, conjoined panentheism also has in common with 'weak' forms of panentheism an emphasis on God's presence and God's action in both God the World and God the Good.

Conjoined panentheism and the problem of evil

As we saw above, if everything is 'in' God, this means that every existing evil is 'in' God. In order to avoid saying that God must be, in some way, identical with evil, I suggested that evil is 'in' but not 'of' God, like parasites which exist within a body but, if the wellbeing of the body is to be restored, must be expelled from the body. It is questionable whether this enables us to escape the magnified problem of evil which troubles modal panentheism, however. Nagasawa sets out the problem, according to which everything, both good and evil in both actual and possible worlds, is, in some sense 'in' God, including the worst possible examples of evil we can imagine, such as the eternal torture of children for no reason. Such a God, Nagasawa asserts, is not worthy of worship (2016, 101–103). The conjoined pantheist must surely acknowledge that, insofar as God the World is that which makes possible all actual and possible states of affairs, everything, including possible horrendous evils, is 'in' God. But if actual evils are said to be 'in' but not 'of' God, the conjoined pantheist can say that possible horrendous evils, too, are 'in' (in the very limited sense just described) God, but not 'of' God. It is the existence of God the Good which inspires and empowers the actualisation of possible goods and helps to prevent the actualisation of possible horrendous evils. This might be regarded as a modified form of modal panentheism, then, according to which all actual and possible goods and evils are 'in' God, but no actual or possible evils are 'of' God.

All actual and possible states of affairs are ‘in’ God, because God the World supplies the physical substance which provides the context for natural and moral goods and evils, but only that which is good may be regarded as ‘of’ God, since a God which is in any way identical with actual or possible evil is not something which we should value, or from which we should seek inspiration and power to enable human actions.³

If evils are actual or potential parasites in the body of God, however, this still raises the question of why God would allow God’s body to be infiltrated in this way. As F. W. J. von Schelling (1775–1854) suggests, ‘permitting an entirely dependent being to do evil is surely not much better than to cause it to do so’ (2006 [1809], 23). A response to this depends, perhaps, on how we define our concept of divinity. If the God of the conjoined panentheist is personal in a metaphorical sense, on the grounds that it has some of the characteristics of a human person (although it does not have all of them and has some characteristics which human persons do not have), and may therefore be regarded as acting in a sense which is analogous to the sense in which human persons act, then we could say that God acts insofar as God provides the physical means for us to perform evil actions but is not, in Godself, directly or indirectly responsible for human evil actions. We might think of a gun manufacturer who is not responsible for the actions of the man who uses the gun to murder his wife. The situation might be rather less clear if the gun manufacturer gives a gun to a man with known murderous intentions, but here, perhaps, the analogy breaks down because, on conjoined panentheism, it may be argued that God is not a conscious being who decides to provide humankind with the means to kill each other.

The conjoined panentheist must also address the objection that, if only some aspects of the world are regarded as being ‘of’ God, how can these be differentiated when some—perhaps many—aspects of the world can contribute to both flourishing and suffering? For example, rainfall after a drought may enable crops to grow and communities to be fed, but rainfall may also cause flooding and landslides, leading to the loss of many lives. Similarly, fire can provide warmth which is necessary for survival, but uncontrolled fire can main and kill. In response, the panentheist might say that the physical substance of God the World is morally neutral; although its nature determines and enables that which brings joy and that which causes suffering, it is not, in itself, either good or bad. Thus, although it is conjoined with God the World, it is only God the Good which is worthy of worship since it is only God the Good which serves as what Hartshorne, following A. N. Whitehead, refers to as a positive ‘universal agent of persuasion’ (Hartshorne 1964 [1948], xvii. See also Griffin 2014, 122–124). Thus, under the influence of God the Good, humankind must work together to prevent climate change and the consequences of excessive rainfall and unconstrained fire, and grow crops which will survive to provide food for all who need it. Indeed, Philip Clayton suggests that although the scientific data regarding climate change are well known, these are not enough to motivate radical

³ There is a precedent for this in the work of Aquinas (1224/5–1274), who argued that only perfections may be attributed to God (2017 [1920] [1265–1274], first part, question 13, article 3).

changes in human behaviour and argues that ‘the language of pantheism offers exactly the rich range of metaphors and values that science lacks’ (Clayton 2014, 211). We must work to prevent or cure diseases, some of which may be the product of the way we live, and we must oppose ideologies which bring advantage for the few and suffering for the many. Clearly, there remains much to be done and, arguably, we need the help of a rational system of beliefs to inspire and support us in this work.

Conclusion

I have argued that divinity provides humankind with meaning and purpose, and that this consists largely in working to promote the wellbeing of sentient creatures, including humankind. Divinity may be understood as a conjunction of God the World, which is the ultimate explanation and sustaining force of the physical substance of actual and possible worlds, the nature of which determines the nature of actual and possible goodness. There is a hierarchy of goodness, at the pinnacle of which is the standard of perfect goodness, God the Good, which inspires and empowers human goodness. Only God the Good is directly worthy of worship as only God the Good is uncontaminated by the evils which we must work to eradicate.

Finally we must, however, ask how we can know that divine reality corresponds with the conclusions of a philosophical debate. Love and Schmidt suggest that this claim is implied by theodicy and assumes both that ‘thought and being are one’ and ‘that God becomes the tool of the philosophers’ who, by ‘mastering nature and thereby overcoming the meanness of our mortal estate’ aim to ascend from that mortal estate ‘to that of a god’ (Love and Schmidt, xxvi–xxvii). This, they suggest, is ‘a most terrible form of evil’ (xxvii). On pantheism, philosophical thought cannot be motivated by a desire to become god-like, however, because, for the pantheist, humankind are already part of God the World. Unless one is an anti-realist (according to which nothing exists independently of the human mind) or a non-realist (according to which we cannot possess knowledge of anything which exists independently of the human mind) however, the world, and divinity, if it exists, are as they are regardless of our thoughts about them. Nevertheless, although there are some truths which we may reasonably accept on the basis of authority—such as the claim that the earth is a sphere, for example, unless we have the scientific knowledge to prove this for ourselves—there are some truths which we would be ill-advised to take on trust. Even if divinity is as it is regardless of what we think about it, beliefs often inform action and correct beliefs are more likely to lead to beneficial action. For example, if there is a malignant tumour in my body, it will exist whether I know about it or not, but if I can marshal my thoughts sufficiently to enable me to grasp the truth of the matter, I may be able to obtain life-saving treatment. So although there may be many who are unaware of divinity, or who misunderstand the nature of divinity, individuals and societies who have an understanding of divinity which is in close accord with the nature of reality and which informs beneficial life-choices may be those who can work most effectively to diminish evil and maximise the goodness, or Godness, of our world.

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