God and the world

Pragmatic and epistemic arguments
for panentheistic and pantheistic conceptions
of the God–world relationship

Lina Langby
Abstract

This study critically reconstructs, analyzes, and assesses reasons for embracing panentheism or pantheism instead of classical theism. It argues that, when analyzing the adequacy of a conception of God, pragmatic reasons related to harms or benefits are equally important as epistemic reasons that relate to truth and correspondence. To assess and weigh the reasons for and against panentheism and pantheism, worship-worthiness is used as a methodological tool. The reasons to prefer or reject panentheism or pantheism as adequate conceptions of the divine reality are thus related to worship-worthiness. Pragmatic and epistemic arguments for and against panentheism and pantheism are examined because both play a part when assessing whether a conception describes a God who is worthy of worship.

The investigation of the reasons to embrace or reject panentheism and pantheism is structured into five chapters, focusing on gender equality, environmental well-being, science and religion, the problem of evil, and worship-worthiness. A novel view of worship-worthiness is presented – a view that makes fruitful discussions of the adequacy of alternative conceptions of God possible.

There are benefits and problems with all conceptions of God. However, several reasons related to gender equality, environmental well-being, science, the problem of evil, and worship-worthiness suggest that a strict form of panentheism has explanatory and moral advantages over other conceptions of the God–world relationship. Pantheism has benefits that are equal to strict panentheism regarding environmental well-being and gender equality; but reasons pertaining to science, the problem of evil, and worship-worthiness suggest that pantheism should be rejected.

Although not without its problems, the study presents reasons to think that strict panentheism, such as process-panentheism, conceptualizes an essentially loving God that is worthy of worship.

*Keywords:* panentheism, pantheism, classical theism, process theism, conceptions of God, models of God, religious language, constructivism

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URN urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-514769 (http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva:514769)
Jag tror på en Gud som är helig och varm,
som ger kampglöd och identitet,
en helande Gud som gör trasigt till helt,
som stärker till medvetenhet
Jag tror på en Gud som gråter med mig
när jag gråter så allting är gråt.
    En tröstande Gud,
som kan trösta likt den,
som väntar tills gråten gått åt
Jag tror på en Gud som bor inom mig,
och som bor i allt utanför.
    En skrattande Gud
som vill skratta med mig,
som lever med mig när jag dör.

– Psalm 766
Lyrics: Christina Lövestam 1980
Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................... xi

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 13
   1.1. A brief introduction to panentheism, pantheism, and classical theism ......................... 14
   1.2. Perspectives on God-talk ....................................................................................... 15
   1.3. Relevance and previous research ........................................................................... 19
   1.4. Material and demarcations .................................................................................... 23
   1.5. Purpose and research question ............................................................................. 24

2. Language and reality .................................................................................................... 27
   2.1. Constructivism ...................................................................................................... 28
       2.1.1. Why pragmatic arguments are not second best .............................................. 30
       2.1.2. Linguistic constructivism ............................................................................. 36
       2.1.3. Essentialism and constructivism ................................................................... 42
   2.2. Concluding words .................................................................................................. 43

3. Good reasons .................................................................................................................. 45
   3.1. Analytical philosophical analysis ........................................................................... 45
   3.2. Epistemic and pragmatic reasons ........................................................................... 46
   3.3. Truth and pragmatic justification .......................................................................... 48
   3.4. A worship-worthy God ........................................................................................ 50
       3.4.1. Goodness and power .................................................................................... 54
   3.5. Axiological consequence analysis ......................................................................... 55

4. Demarcations: Classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism ....................................... 57
   4.1. Understanding classical theism ............................................................................. 57
       4.1.1. Traditional divine attributes .......................................................................... 58
       4.1.2. Challenges for classical theism ..................................................................... 63
   4.2. Understanding panentheism ................................................................................. 65
       4.2.1. Generic, strict, and qualified panentheism ..................................................... 67
   4.3. Understanding pantheism ..................................................................................... 72
       4.3.1. Naturalism and pantheism .......................................................................... 76
       4.3.2. Value and teleology ..................................................................................... 79
       4.3.3. The God–world identity .............................................................................. 81
       4.3.4. Religious pantheism ..................................................................................... 87
   4.4. Dualism .................................................................................................................. 89
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Subsections</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1.</td>
<td>Ontological God–world dualism</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2.</td>
<td>In-worldly dualism</td>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.</td>
<td>Panentheism and gender equality</td>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.1.</td>
<td>Evaluating the panentheistic argument from gender equality</td>
<td></td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.</td>
<td>Pantheism and gender equality</td>
<td></td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1.</td>
<td>Evaluating the pantheistic argument from gender equality</td>
<td></td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td></td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Environmental concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.</td>
<td>Panentheism and environmental concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.1.</td>
<td>Evaluating the panentheistic argument from environmental concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.</td>
<td>Pantheism and environmental concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1.</td>
<td>Evaluating the pantheistic argument from environmental concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td></td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>God and science</td>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.</td>
<td>Panentheism and natural science</td>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.1.</td>
<td>The emergence argument for panentheism</td>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.2.</td>
<td>Evaluating the emergence argument for panentheism</td>
<td></td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.3.</td>
<td>The process-panentheistic argument from science</td>
<td></td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.4.</td>
<td>Evaluating the process-panentheistic argument from science</td>
<td></td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.</td>
<td>Pantheism and natural science</td>
<td></td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.1.</td>
<td>Fine-tuning and expansion of the universe</td>
<td></td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2.</td>
<td>Evaluating pantheism and natural science</td>
<td></td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The problem of evil</td>
<td></td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.</td>
<td>Panentheism and the problem of evil</td>
<td></td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.1.</td>
<td>Purely persuasive power</td>
<td></td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.2.</td>
<td>The essential love argument for an un-coercive God</td>
<td></td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.3.</td>
<td>The empathetic-God argument</td>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.4.</td>
<td>Evaluating panentheism and the problem of evil</td>
<td></td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.</td>
<td>Pantheism and the problem of evil</td>
<td></td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1.</td>
<td>Personal pantheism</td>
<td></td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.2.</td>
<td>Non-personal pantheism</td>
<td></td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.3.</td>
<td>Evaluating pantheism and the problem of evil</td>
<td></td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td></td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Worship-worthiness</td>
<td></td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1.</td>
<td>The traditional and radical models of worship</td>
<td></td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1.1.</td>
<td>Condition one: worship as personal address</td>
<td></td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.1.2. Condition two: worshiping something “out there” .................. 204
9.1.3. Condition three: worshiping the purely transcendent .......... 205
9.1.4. Condition four: worshiping the supremely valuable ............ 207
9.2. Worship as desire to be united with the divine ..................... 208
  9.2.1. Goodness and power as reasons for worship .................. 210
9.3. Panentheism, pantheism, and worship-worthiness ............... 213
  9.3.1. Worship and divine goodness ....................................... 213
  9.3.2. Worship and divine power ......................................... 215
9.4. Conclusions ......................................................................... 219

10. Concluding remarks .............................................................. 221

Bibliography ............................................................................... 225
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1. Introduction

Deep forests, vast mountains, dark lakes, and sunlight glades. All full of life. Valleys and streams provide a variety of animals and plants with life-giving water. The world sometimes certainly seems truly divine. Perhaps everything, nature itself, is somehow divine? However, nature is not always so gentle. Nature can be extremely violent, full of death and suffering.

To regard nature as sacred, divine, and infused with more than meets the eye is common, even in these allegedly “secular times.” David Thurfjell’s book *Granskogsfolk* (2020) depicts the contemporary Swede’s religious attitude toward nature, the forest, and the spiritual wilderness. There is a widespread assumption that the generic Swede is non-religious; but this assumption is too hasty, as is the widespread assumption that religiosity has decreased generally.

Within contemporary academic theology and philosophy of religion, the interest in nature worship and similar types of religiosity is increasing and has done so for quite some time. The works on pantheism and panentheism are multiplying in number, and the idea that the God of traditional Western theologies is an anthropomorphic, patriarchal, male God, made in the image of a white man, is spreading. If God or the divine is not an ontologically independent patriarchal, male God – if God or the divine is immanent and intimately present in our world – how could and indeed should we conceptualize this God or divine reality?

It is within this field of philosophy of religion, with a focus on conceptions of God, that the present study is located. The present work outlines, clarifies, criticizes, and evaluates different reasons for conceptualizing the God–world relationship as panentheism, pantheism, or classical theism. What are the arguments for being a pantheist? Why should or should not a theist become a panentheist? If I am a feminist, are there specific reasons I should also consider? If I am mainly engaged in environmental well-being and strive for ecological flourishing, what reasons do I have, if any, to prefer pantheism or panentheism over classical theism? The present study examines the reasons and arguments of adherents and critics of panentheism and pantheism, and

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outlines the strengths and weaknesses of both panentheism and pantheism in contrast to classical theism.

1.1. A brief introduction to panentheism, pantheism, and classical theism

A noteworthy contribution to the study of conceptions of God brought forward here is the conceptual analysis in chapter 4, “Demarcations,” and the systematization and reconstruction of arguments in the chapters that follow it on panentheism and pantheism. I expand at length on how best to understand what these conceptions of God entail. In this section, I explain only briefly, and without problematizing, what I mean by panentheism, pantheism, classical theism, and theism in general.

Pantheism is a conception of God/the divine that states that God is identical to the world. Panentheism is a conception of God/the divine that states that the world is part of, or in, God, while God exceeds the world.

Etymologically, both pantheism and panentheism stem from Greek. *Pan* (πάν) means “all” or “everything,” *theos* (θεος) means “God,” and *en* (ἐν) means “in.” We can thus put together *pan-theism* and *pan-en-theism*: everything-God (pantheism) and everything-in-God (panentheism).

Classical theism was developed in and near Europe by theologians who were greatly inspired by ancient Greek philosophy. Where panentheism and pantheism identify the world to be part of or identical to God, classical theists hold God to be ontologically distinct and independent of the world.

Using capital “G” when discussing the God of classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism is deliberate. This may seem unorthodox, especially for pantheists. The reason for using capital G for all these conceptions of God/the divine is not to imply, for example, a Christian understanding, nor to suggest that God must be a person or person-like. The use of capital G signifies the ultimacy or supremacy of God. In classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism, God/the divine is regarded as the ultimate One – as the ultimate reality. In other words, using the capital G signifies that it is not Thor, Odin, or Zeus we are talking about. Thor, Odin, and Zeus would all be described with the lowercase “g”: they are gods – not God.

I have already mentioned “theists” without any prefixes such as “pan-”, “panen-”, or “classical”. Broadly speaking, a theist is someone who believes in God. When I investigate which reasons a theist has for embracing classical theism, panentheism, or pantheism, I am engaging those who believe in a divine reality that makes a difference in our lives. More specifically, the theists I turn to are those with an active engagement in one or more of the following areas: gender equality (chapter 5), environmental well-being (chapter 6), science (chapter 7), the problem of evil (chapter 8), and worship (chapter 9).
1.2. Perspectives on God-talk

The purpose of this study is thus to examine panentheism and pantheism, how they differ from each other and from classical theism, and what reasons there are to prefer or reject these conceptions of God. The project is thus of a metatheological nature. I look at the different reasons for being a panentheist or a pantheist, and I put these reasons to the test. Are they good reasons? What sorts of reasons are they? Are the arguments based on those reasons convincing? Are underlying assumptions being made upon which the arguments depend? Furthermore, as is explained more thoroughly in part 3.4, “A worship-worthy God,” the reasons to favor or reject panentheism and pantheism are related to the belief that “God” is worthy of worship.

When analyzing and answering these questions, I adopt a feminist philosophical perspective. I have, in other words, feminist glasses on when relevant. This perspective is functional when trying to question “false and unjust biased premises and starting points.” For this reason, I now devote a few words to what a feminist philosophy of religion might be.

There is no such thing as a single feminist philosophy of religion. Feminists who are theologians or philosophers of religion have different perspectives, scopes, and objectives that are too wide to capture in a single definition. However, the one thing that feminist philosophers of religion share is a dedication to the value of women’s experiences, knowledge, and lives. Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo describe the heart of feminist philosophy as the search for a culture, society, and politics that takes women’s experiences and knowledge into account, and respects and aims to promote a gender-equal society. Feminist philosophy investigates structures, writings, politics, ethics, epistemology, and other phenomena that are biased against women and marginalized groups. Marxist feminist philosophers in particular also consider the perspective of class and economy.

Feminism as a political category and feminist philosophy are much devoted to questions of power. Feminist philosophy asks questions about what power is, who can have power, who has it, how power should be distributed in a just and equal society, and how language and power are connected. Feminist philosophy of religion typically analyzes religious texts from a critical feminist

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4 Bailey and Cuomo, 1.
perspective. It constructively analyzes the philosophical assumptions and conceptualizations in different religious texts, institutions, and groups. It sometimes tries to reshape the whole endeavor of philosophy of religion – from a feminist perspective. Beverly Clack describes feminist philosophy in these terms:

If analytic philosophy of religion concerns itself with possible justifications for religious belief, the feminist approach to philosophy of religion directs attention to the constraints patriarchal religion places on women’s lives. Like philosophy, the discussion of religion cannot proceed without understanding the way it has developed out of a history that enshrined male power through institutions and ideas, and where women’s opportunities to shape political and intellectual life were as a result severely curtailed.7

Feminist philosophers in general, and perhaps feminist philosophers of religion in particular, are sometimes criticized for being relativists (an “anything goes” approach). The reason for such accusations is a feminist critique of “objectivity” and “rationality.” Sandra Harding explains that,

Because there are clear commitments within feminism to tell less partial and distorted stories about women, men, nature, and social relations, some critics have assumed that feminism must be committed to value-neutral objectivity.8

Feminist philosophers of religion, such as Pamela Sue Anderson and Grace Jantzen, criticize the notion of rationality used in Western analytical philosophy. The notion of rationality can be described as the very foundation of Western analytic philosophy. The notion of rationality rejects or downplays bodily experiences and the significance of situatedness.9 Anderson and Jantzen argue that the “view from nowhere” (from philosopher Thomas Nagel) is neither

9 “The dependence of meaning (and/or identity) on the specifics of particular sociohistorical, geographical, and cultural contexts, social and power relations, and philosophical and ideological frameworks, within which the multiple perspectives of social actors are dynamically constructed, negotiated, and contested. Such approaches are often perceived by realists as radical relativism.” “Situatedness,” accessed October 2, 2023, https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780198841838.001.0001/acref-9780198841838-e-2501?rskey=73Byme&result=1.
desirable nor possible. Some feminist philosophers, although they differ in their constructive suggestions and aims, share a conviction that it is impossible to be a neutral observer who empirically can describe and “capture” reality objectively. Harding writes that it is a male illusion that they can capture and understand reality empirically in itself as if it was “ready-made for their reporting.” However, Harding still argues that we need a notion of objectivity, but not the notion of value-neutrality.

A feminist critique of “reason” as it has been understood in Western philosophy and culture can couple with a feminist analysis of traditional language conceptions, metaphors, and models. Greek philosophy and Aristotle’s famous table of dualisms in his *Metaphysics* have influenced the entire Western conceptualization of reality. These dualisms or contraries put men, reason, light, spirit, good, and order on one side and women, chaos, body, darkness, and evil on the other side. Feminist philosophy can challenge such patriarchal categorizations. However, a feminist philosophical objective is not merely to show that Aristotle and others were patriarchal misogynists. The aim is also to show that the cultures and philosophies, at least in the West, are fundamentally founded on masculinist thinking, which often distorts the understanding of what, for example, reality, knowledge, gender, and God could be, or even is.

*The conception of God* is, therefore, a natural subject for criticism in feminist philosophy of religion. Jantzen and Anderson both criticize conceptions of God that hold God to be a perfectly objective “ideal observer” because such conceptions are used to ensure the very reality of a “view from nowhere.” This criticism does not indicate that realist stances are non-feminist, because there are (of course) feminist philosophers who are realists. The God of Western classical theism is often conceptualized as an “all-powerful, all-knowing Lord of the universe.” Many feminist philosophers have traced and written

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12 Harding, “‘Strong Objectivity’ and Socially Situated Knowledge,” 141.

13 Harding. 159ff.

14 See Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1999).


about the patriarchal and misogynist history of this conception. Daphne Hampson wholly rejects male models of God that claim God to be an omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing) King, Ruler, and Father. She especially rejects the Christian God because, in her reading, the Christian tradition tells us that we should obey this all-knowing and powerful God without question. Such a conception of God does not cohere with her feminist sense of reality. Therefore, the complex but central question that this dissertation seeks to answer is: How, then, should we speak of and conceptualize God if we adopt a feminist philosophical perspective? Naturally, we always speak about God and reality from our perspective. The question is how we can do this with as much ethical and epistemic sensitivity and credibility as possible. Catherine Keller writes that, since we will use anthropomorphic God-talk, we should at least use the best possible images. Would this not require of us metaphors arising from nonhierarchical, democratizing visions of sociality, not metaphors of totalizing economic and political order?

A feminist call to re-conceptualize what it means to be human, nature, and God in a non-patriarchal and often non-dualist way has given rise to a criticism of relativism. There is a debate about metaphysical realism and non-realism or anti-realism within feminist philosophy as well. (I do not distinguish between non-realism and anti-realism here, but understand them to be synonymous). Some feminists think that feminist philosophy must go hand in hand with realism to make truth claims about the objective wrongness of oppression, racism, and discrimination. For example, Anderson fears that metaphysical non-realism is bad for feminist philosophy, since she thinks that it then becomes impossible to make truth claims about oppression’s wrongness. Also, Hampson bases her post-Christian stance on a realist conviction when she argues that the fundamental core of Christianity is diametrically opposed to her feminist senses. Erica Appelros writes that many feminist philosophers of religion adhere to a realist understanding of reality because they fear that their arguments about a shared, actual reality in which women are oppressed

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19 Hampson and Ruether, “Is There a Place for Feminists in a Christian Church?,” 12.
and silenced would otherwise lose their weight and credibility. However, Appelros argues that realism and non-realism are not the only alternatives, and we can make truth claims about a shared reality without adhering to metaphysical realism. At the same time, we can keep some of the benefits of non-realism, such as its critique of the notions of “reality in itself” or a “view from nowhere.” I sympathize with Appelros’ third path. The details of this path are outlined in chapter 2, “Language and reality.” Appelros argues that, if we want to change reality and create a more equal one, we cannot merely start ascribing power to women’s endeavors. Instead, we must change the conception of God because it is belief in a certain “God” – or adherence to a particular worldview – that legitimizes the power structures that uphold unequal gender differences.

1.3. Relevance and previous research

Belief in God or some higher spiritual power is widespread across the world. In 2018, Pew Research Center concluded that 80% of American adults believe in God, but that only 56% believe that this God is as described in the Bible. Of those who answered that they do not believe in God, 9% answered that they believe in some higher power or spiritual force. In Western Europe, most people believe in God, but only 27% of those believe in God as described in the Bible. Research on religious beliefs is highly relevant, especially since secular people also hold worldview beliefs. The philosophical study of religion also involves research on atheistic, agnostic, and naturalistic worldviews.

For centuries, the dominating subject of investigation in the West was Christian beliefs and practices. From Plato to Augustine, Aquinas, and other scholastic thinkers, the dominating theme in the philosophy of religion and philosophical theology was focused on the nature of God as the supreme and perfect Creator of the world. The focus on monotheism, and especially on Western Christian theism, was prevalent from the scholastic era throughout the age of the Enlightenment and into the modern era, with influential thinkers such as Charles Darwin and William Paley. People generally believed in a

personal Creator-God, and when Darwin’s theory of natural selection could be used to criticize belief in such a God, the focus shifted only slightly to that of atheism versus theism. Contemporary philosophers of religion still engage with this tradition, focusing primarily on the rationality of holding religious theistic beliefs. Such work is significant, since the entire Western culture, to a great extent, is based on the values and worldview of classical theism.

In 1994, Clark H. Pinnock, William Hasker, John Sanders, Richard Rice, and David Basinger wrote a Biblical defense of what they called the “open view of God.” The open view of God – also called open theism or free will theism – argues against the classical theistic conception of God, claiming among other things that God is affected by time, that God does not have foreknowledge, and that the future is open. Not even God can know the future, according to open theists. Their work caused great debate, and they were accused of heresy, especially by North American evangelicals and Calvinists. Open theism agrees with process theism on several crucial points regarding the God–world relationship; and since process theism is a version of panentheism, these issues are discussed in succeeding chapters. I mention open theism when it is relevant, although I do not focus on it, since the debate between open theism and classical theists is already well documented. Furthermore, open theism and classical theism share the same ontological view on the God–world relationship: God is ontologically independent of any world. According to both classical theism and open theism, God chose to create the world but did not essentially need it. The world is ontologically other than God, according to both these versions of theism. For this reason, I do not analyze open theism as an alternative conception of God alongside panentheism and pantheonism.

In recent decades, more and more philosophers of religion have widened their field of research to include other sorts of traditions and conceptions of God than classical Western theism. There is an increasing interest in the so-called global philosophy of religion, with the aim of widening the themes and topics of philosophical investigation to focus not only on Western theism. The research program “Global Philosophy of Religion Project” at Birmingham University expands the philosophy of religion beyond Western theism.

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28 Excellent examples of this include Elenore Stump, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Katherine Rogers, Alvin Plantinga, and Richard Swinburne.
two research projects on panentheism and pantheism – the project “Exploring Alternative Concepts of God” (2011-2013) and “The Panentheism and Panente- 
ism Project” (2017-2019) resulted in several academic papers, special issues in journals, and anthologies on alternative conceptions of God. A project called “Panpsychism and Pan(En)Theism: Philosophy of Mind Meets Philosophy of Religion” (December 2022-2025) also widens the traditional perspective when investigating the nature of reality.

Books that widen the scope of inquiry to involve so-called alternative conceptions of God are Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine, In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World, Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities, and Panentheism and Panpsychism. These anthologies focus on panentheism, pantheism, open theism, process theism, panpsychism, traditional and classical theism, naturalistic worldviews, Eastern worldviews such as forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, and negative theology.

From these significant contributions and the vast number of articles in academic journals in recent years, it is clear that panentheism in particular is gaining more interest among philosophers of religion. Pantheism has also gained attention, although pantheism – more so than panentheism – is often rejected more or less immediately as flawed or uninteresting so that more focus can be given to panentheism. The present study does no such thing. I analyze and critically examine panentheism and pantheism equally thor-

40 For a good overview of why pantheism is regarded as heretical and monstrous, see Mary-Jane Rubenstein, Pantheologies: Gods, Worlds, Monsters (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).
oughly, and show that pantheism should not be rejected so quickly. Furthermore, this study has a focus on pragmatic reasons and on how conceptions of God affect our conception of reality – to the best of my knowledge, a very rare perspective.

The present study provides a thorough systematization of the many widespread arguments and reasons to favor panentheism or pantheism. First, I provide a detailed conceptual analysis and discuss how to understand what panentheism and pantheism entail, and how they relate to each other and to classical theism. By surveying the field and the arguments offered in favor of panentheism and pantheism, I systemize the reasons behind the arguments and critically analyze and assess those arguments.

Many academic articles, monographs, and anthologies on alternative conceptions of God today focus on epistemic and metaphysical aspects when analyzing the coherence and adequacy of God conceptions. Although this is part of my work as well, I emphasize the relevance of investigating alternative conceptions of God, but also with a focus on pragmatic consequences and lived experience. How does the way we speak about God affect us? How does how we speak about God shape our actual lived reality?

I argue that language affects reality, making it important to analyze the consequences of different conceptions. I argue for linguistic constructivism, and claim that pragmatic value judgments are as interesting as epistemic truth claims when examining rational reasons to favor or reject a specific conception of God. In previous and contemporary research on alternative conceptions of God, this theoretical stance is seldom found. Within feminist philosophy of religion, with prominent thinkers such as Grace Jantzen and Pamela Sue Anderson, a focus on language and consequences is found. Sallie McFague and Beverly Clack also emphasize the role of pragmatic reasoning. However, in the rare cases that pragmatic reasons are offered, they tend not to be combined with epistemic ones. My project is of a meta-theological nature, seeking to outline reasons to embrace panentheism or pantheism and to analyze whether they adequately depict a God worthy of worship. The pragmatic focus on how language affects reality plays a significant part in this.

The focus on pragmatic arguments is primarily found in feminist theology and the feminist philosophy of religion. Pragmatic arguments are relevant for us all, not only for feminist theologians and feminist philosophers of religion. In my work, I make it clear that both pragmatic and epistemic reasons can be rational reasons to favor or reject conceptions of God. I show this by using worship-worthiness as a methodological tool in the search for adequate conceptions of God.

1.4. Material and demarcations

That the present study is philosophical means that it approaches the material in a critical and normative way. I analyze, reconstruct, and evaluate arguments. I suggest how panentheists and pantheists should think or argue and normatively evaluate arguments and conclusions. The present study is limited to engaging analytically and philosophically with a select material to provide answers to the research questions. The questions that are posed must also be limited. For example, I do not exhaust all possible questions and answers related to the problem of evil, but limit the study to a few relevant and philosophically interesting inquiries.

Since the way we speak and conceptualize the world and its relation to God has a real implication for people’s lives and worldviews, it is crucial to highlight the problematic features of different conceptions of the God–world relationship. Some ways to conceptualize reality and God may be better or worse than others.

Conceptions such as pantheism and panentheism are not new, but they are of interest in the contemporary philosophy of religion. For this reason alone, it is of great importance to examine critically whether and how our talk about God/the divine in those conceptions of God, as a consequence, can discriminate against, oppress, or otherwise prevent the flourishing of life, or whether there are epistemological reasons to reject the conception of God in question.

I have carefully engaged the field of panentheism and pantheism and prominent researchers of particular interest for my work and topics relevant to this study. I systematize and thematize the material into different and distinct themes, and reconstruct objections to panentheism and pantheism in relation to these themes. I have found that a focus on environmental concerns, gender equality, coherence with natural science, and the possibility of handling the problem of evil are prominent themes of interest relating to reasons in favor of both panentheism and pantheism. For this reason, I look to philosophers and theologians who relate to one or more of these themes when arguing for their conception of God.

Last, this study does not examine alternative views on what a good and flourishing life is. The Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia – the good or flourishing life (εὐδαιμονία) is a vast and complicated subject with which I do not engage; I leave such research to the ethicists and take a negative stance, focusing on a linguistic axiological negative consequence analysis. Axiology

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42 For a good historical overview of panentheism see John W. Cooper, *Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006).

43 εὐδαιμονία is Greek and transliterated into Latin as eudaimonia. The common, but also disputed, translation is “good or flourishing life.” Eu means “good” and daimon means “spirit.” Etymologically, εὐδαιμονία/eudaimonia means something like “to have a good guardian spirit,” but it is usually understood and used as “the good life” or “the flourishing life.”
concerns values: it classifies which things are good and how they are good. Instead of examining the consequences of God-talk with different axiological value theories and ideas of eudaimonia in mind, I examine the potentially negative consequences of God-talk. I am interested in the consequences of how we speak about God/the divine. I apply a linguistic axiological negative consequence analysis to panentheism and pantheism. The result is possible pragmatic and epistemic reasons to prefer or reject one or more conceptions of God/the divine. I develop this method further in chapter 3, “Good reasons.”

1.5. Purpose and research question

The main research question of this study is:

What reasons does a theist have for embracing a panentheistic or pantheistic conception of God rather than a classical theistic conception of God?

This research question is divided into five sub-questions:

- How can panentheism and pantheism be demarcated from each other and from classical theism?
- What are the most significant reasons in favor of panentheism and pantheism?
- What are the most significant reasons to reject panentheism and pantheism?
- Which pragmatic consequences follow from conceptualizing God/the divine in a panentheistic and pantheistic way?
- When evaluating whether panentheism or pantheism are adequate alternative conceptions of God, how should pragmatic arguments be weighed against epistemic arguments?

The first question is the focus of chapter 4. There I analyze how to understand the differences between classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism. I also discuss how pantheism is distinguished from naturalism, and outline the ontological status of the God–world relationship in panentheism and pantheism.

The material in chapters 5-8 answers the second and third questions, analyzing and assessing reasons for and against panentheism and pantheism. In chapters 5 and 6 I analyze and evaluate reasons to think that panentheism or pantheism have the best pragmatic consequences regarding gender equality and environmental well-being. Chapter 7 focuses instead on epistemic reasons.

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to prefer panentheism or pantheism. There the focus is on whether theists have reason to believe that either panentheism or pantheism is more coherent with natural science than the other or than classical theism. Chapter 8 takes on the question of the problem of evil, and evaluates how God’s power can or cannot be understood to be coherent with divine goodness.

The fourth question, concerning pragmatic consequences, is answered in the chapters that are especially focused on pragmatic reasons, such as chapters 5-6 and chapter 9 on worship-worthiness. The discussion on divine power and love in chapter 8 also pragmatically affects how theists ought to think rationally about God and whether God is worthy of worship.

The final questions about weighing pragmatic and epistemic reasons come into focus in chapter 9, on worship-worthiness. There it becomes clear that pragmatic reasons play a big part in whether God, as described in panentheism and pantheism, is reasonably worthy of worship or not.

In the next chapter I expand on my theoretical approach to how language and reality are interconnected with each other – an approach on which the entire research is built.
In this chapter, the theoretical core assumptions that constitute the base of this study are presented. The theoretical framework consists of a theory I have named *linguistic constructivism*. This theory contributes to the research on conceptions of God because it argues for the importance of both epistemic and pragmatic reasons. In short, what I argue is this. When people argue for or against a conception of God, they ground their arguments on different sorts of reasons. Sometimes the reasons are epistemic – making truth claims about the nature of God and reality. At other times the reasons are pragmatic – making claims about the value or harm connected with the conception in question. Much feminist philosophy of religion, and feminist philosophy in general, testifies that harm can come from the way we speak, making an awareness of how we speak of and conceptualize God an important objective. Therefore, we need to consider both epistemic and pragmatic reasons to be rational reasons to favor or reject conceptions of God.

Moreover, as a theoretical starting point, I work from the assumption that God is worship-worthy. Theists, in other words, have reason not only to believe in God but also to hope that God exists. If a conception of God entails undesirable consequences or incoherent assertions about God that suggest that God is not worship-worthy, then the conception is flawed, false, or inadequate.

The first part of this chapter develops and argues for the reasonableness of linguistic constructivism. The second part highlights a feminist philosophical critique of traditional male-centered philosophy and theology. This feminist perspective follows naturally from the linguistic constructivist approach and the premise of God’s worship-worthiness. The focus in that part is on how God has traditionally been described and how this affects women and their role in theology and life.

When analyzing the different conceptions of God, these two parts form the basis for the upcoming negative consequence analysis. Without the theoretical view on language and reality outlined in this chapter, the importance of prag-
matic arguments could not be sufficiently established. Without linguistic constructivism, it could be argued (and many often do) that epistemic arguments – those focusing on truth and reality – have priority over pragmatic arguments, which focus on benefit or harm rather than on correspondence with reality. When the reasonableness of constructivism is established, pragmatic arguments cannot be regarded as second-best arguments.

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki puts into words what can be said to be the core of this work’s theoretical and methodological stance:

Given the pervasiveness of the issues, to change only metaphors or only myths or only metaphysics is insufficient; all three must be part of the feminist reconstructive agenda. Feminist reconstruction of the concept of God, using methods such as those of [Mary] Daly and [Rebecca] Chopp, insists finally that all concepts of God be tested heuristically by their effect on human community. For Daly, the litmus test is not only the well-being of women who finally become themselves, but it is also the total destruction of patriarchy. For Chopp, the test is not so much the destruction of patriarchy as the transformation of patriarchy into communities of emancipation into inclusive well-being. The feminist reconstruction of the idea of God, then, uses the perspective from the margins of a male discipline to give a radical critique of traditional categories. […] From the margins, women reconfigure the center. In the process, they insist that the ultimate judge of any philosophical thinking is not simply coherence and consistency, but the pragmatic criterion of the philosophy’s impact on communities of inclusive well-being. Their various modes of reconstructing the notion of God await the judgment of this test.47

When searching for a God worthy of worship, theists need to take both epistemic and pragmatic reasons into account.

2.1. Constructivism

In what follows, I outline what I call linguistic constructivism or simply constructivism. This constructivism delineates my understanding of metaphysics and how we can speak of and make truth claims about reality. This theoretical clarification not only explains my theoretical stance concerning the realism/anti-realism debate, but also serves to explain why this theoretical perspective enriches the research on conceptions of God. This theory motivates the importance of pragmatic arguments, and with it I argue that the traditional stance that epistemic truth claims have priority over pragmatic benefit-arguments needs to be reconsidered.

It must be stressed that I do not provide knock-down arguments in favor of constructivism. I would likely not succeed in persuading metaphysical realists

that they are wrong. What I do is to provide good reasons for why this theoretical position is reasonable and useful for the purpose of this study.

How we speak and the concepts we use are essential because they form how we experience and perceive reality. We can use language to make aspects of reality visible or invisible. The way we conceptualize different phenomena affects how we interact with and understand reality itself. This is exemplified below with three short illustrations displaying how the way we speak makes a difference.

It is very common to conceptualize “argumentation” in terms of war. We shoot down the opponent’s arguments, we are defensive or offensive, we win or lose, and we attack and are attacked.48 This way to conceptualize what we do when we argue affects how we perceive the argumentation. If we had another way of conceptualizing argumentation, such as in terms of dance, we would perceive the nature of argumentation differently. If we conceptualized argumentation in terms of aplomb (the stability of a position), battement fondu (a “melting” movement up and down), and dégagé (changing of weight from one side to the other), we would also experience the reality of argumentation in a quite different way than we do now.

The second example concerns names. Knowing the names of plants in a meadow or the trees and plants in a forest affects how we experience and perceive the meadow or the forest. Different species will stand out. They become individuals rather than a whole. We experience the forest differently if we perceive it as a unity or as a plurality. Research even suggests that we perceive color differently, depending on the concepts available to us.49

The third example concerns how to conceptualize “human being.” This is, of course, highly important when, for example, we think of human rights. Human rights will be applied differently, depending on how we conceptualize and thus perceive what or who is a human being. Must a human being be born, conscious, white, a man, rich, organic, or physical? What about a cyborg? When is a person more a machine than a human being? When, for example, should human rights apply? In school, we learn that ancient Greece formed the first democracy, but – unlike today – only free men were allowed to vote. Women and slaves were not regarded as the same sort of being as free men. Similar situations are still live realities. All humans are not treated as equals.


49 Research on the Himba tribe in Namibia suggests that “[…] even when two languages have the same number of terms and those terms cluster around similar points in perceptual space, speakers of those languages show significant differences in their cognitive organization of color space.” Debi Roberson et al., “Color Categories: Evidence for the Cultural Relativity Hypothesis,” *Cognitive Psychology* 50, no. 4 (June 2005): 406, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogpsych.2004.10.001.
with human dignity. Inequalities in salary owing to sex or skin color, for example, are widespread. And not all things and situations are so easily measured.

Articles 1 and 2 in the United Nation’s Declaration of Human Dignity states:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. [Article 2.] Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.\(^{50}\)

Even if we think that these declarations are good, it is evident that the notion of *who* or *what* is a person or a human being is fragile. Not too long ago, it was perfectly customary and acceptable to keep slaves, since they were not regarded as human beings in the same way as the masters. Nevertheless, things can change. Reality can change if the way we speak and conceptualize reality changes. A reality in which all human beings are conceptualized as human beings with inherent value and dignity is better than a reality in which only a few of us are.

Thus far, everyone could agree on the fact that language matters, and that a specific conceptualization can affect us and the reality we perceive differently than another conceptualization would do. Furthermore, this is true not only of social realities such as governments and school systems. As seen in the examples, it is true also of the natural world, such as plants, trees, and human beings.

### 2.1.1. Why pragmatic arguments are not second best

Why should theists think that it matters whether they perceive a particular conception of God as good? Why should they not focus only on epistemic truth claims relating to whether a deity such as the one described in their conception of God is actually real?

In this section, I expand on the non-metaphysical theories of Hilary Putnam, Eberhard Herrmann, and Karin Johannesson because they provide helpful tools when analyzing conceptions of God.

Herrmann often emphasizes that reality offers us resistance.\(^{51}\) We cannot do whatever we want or treat reality however we want. It will fight back. I


cannot fly merely because I say I can, and I cannot stop violence simply by not talking about it. Our words do not create reality in that sense. We conceptualize that which we experience, and some conceptions are better than others. Some conceptions will meet a reality that vigorously fights back, and others are quieter about the relationship between the concept and reality. The same applies to conceptions of God. If we conceptualize God as all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, we encounter a reality that fights back. Such a conception of God does not seem to be coherent with the world we actually experience – hence the need for theodicies to explain how such a God can exist at the same time as evil and suffering does.

We can only speak and think of reality and God from within our conceptual and linguistic schemes. According to Putnam, Herrmann, and Johannesson, what we refer to when we talk, for example, about ‘the sky’ does not depend on us; but all our propositions and claims about the sky do depend on our conceptions. Truth claims are always language-dependent. The idea that reality offers us resistance makes it possible to analyze our conceptions because some conceptions may cause reality to resist more violently than others. Some conceptions may be better than others. Some conceptions of God may be better than others. But (and this is the most important thing to realize) no conception of reality or God is ever language-independent.

Johannesson is a semantic realist; she argues that truth is a semantic idea. I agree. She follows Putnam, and thinks that, even though we do not create the sky by speaking of it, our conceptions make propositions about the sky true or false. Only propositions are true or false, and propositions are always either true or false. This stance is known as the principle of bivalence. Our conceptions do not make the sky have the color it has. Still, the proposition “the sky is blue” does depend on our conceptions, and the truth value of the proposition “the sky is blue” depends on those conceptions and the possibility of verifying the statement. According to Johannesson, an utterance is a proposition (which means that it is either true or false) only if we can imagine how, in principle but not necessarily in reality, we could go about justifying it. Truth, according to Johannesson, is related to a collective understanding of the correct language use.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-008-9163-z; Linda Fromm Wikström, Gud och vardagspråket: En religionsfilosofisk förutsättningssanalys (Uppsala: Faculty of Theology, 2010), 173.
53 Johannesson, 148.
55 Johannesson, Gud för oss, 200.
56 Johannesson, 201.
A similar understanding is found in Putnam’s theory of truth. Truth, according to him, is idealized rational acceptability. That means that we need not justify the truth claim here and now; but it is not independent of justification.\(^{57}\) Similarly, Johannesson argues that truth is connected to what we can justify. If we cannot justify the proposition in practice, we must be able to justify it at least in theory.\(^{58}\) According to this understanding, truth is,

\[\ldots\text{some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability} - \text{some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system} - \text{and not correspondence with mind-independent or discourse-independent 'states of affairs'.}\] \(^{59}\)

Our criteria for rational acceptability are used to form a theoretical understanding of the world. We all develop an understanding of the world based on what we deem to be rationally acceptable claims about the world. A community that preaches “sick”\(^{60}\) notions that are irrational or immoral, or that make false claims about the world, is valued by us as incoherent, incomprehensive, and non-functional. Notions or concepts that violently resist a peaceful correlation to reality are “sick.” They offer much resistance. Such representations and conceptualizations of the world are not “part of our idea of human cognitive flourishing, and thus [not] part of our idea of total human flourishing, of Eudaimonia,” as Putnam puts it.\(^{61}\)

Putnam argues that scientific virtues such as rationality, coherence, simplicity, and relevance are value-laden. A coherent worldview that is rational to accept is better than a sick and twisted one. Why? Because we need to make sense of the world, our actions, and our experiences, to live (good) lives. Putnam stresses that the empirical world and our conceptualization of it depend on our criteria for rational acceptability and that our criteria for rational acceptability change as our picture of the theoretical, empirical world evolves. The “real” world, according to Putnam, depends on our values, and our values depend on the “real” world.\(^{62}\)


\(^{58}\) Compare with Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1996), e.g., 69-71, who distinguishes between decidable and undecidable statements. The principle of bivalence only applies to decidable statements, according to Dummett, while Johannesson argues that it is enough that in principle we can verify the proposition. She calls truths that we cannot verify in practice, but only in theory, evidence transcendent truths.\(^{59}\) Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 49–50.

\(^{60}\) See Putnam’s example of ”The Australians” (Putnam, 131–34.) In the example, the Australians hold coherent scientific beliefs regarding most things except for the claim that we are brains in a vat. Regarding this claim, they all believe – without justification – the words of a Guru, who cannot know whether we are brains in a vat. Despite this, he claims that we are, and the Australians all believe him. This is an example of an incoherent belief, based on a “sick” notion of justification.

\(^{61}\) Putnam, 134.

\(^{62}\) Putnam, 135–37.
Since God is supposed to be worship-worthy, a conception of God that contributes to human and ecological flourishing can thus be regarded as more adequate or true than a conception of God that does not.

Furthermore, Putnam’s famous thought experiment of the “Twin Earth” and the “dots and objects” give us reason to think that the world is divided into categories and objects by us and not by the world itself. Johannesson points out that what we categorize as an “object” can differ, making it possible to answer the question, “How many objects do I have on my desk?” in different but true ways. “Twelve” may be an accurate answer, but it may also be the case that “1458” is a true answer, depending on how we conceptualize “object”. If we count the book as one object or all the papers in the book as individual objects, we will get different answers to the question, “How many objects do I have on my desk?” This is an illustration of conceptual relativism. Conceptual relativism entails that we can use different words and different concepts to refer to the same referent. Regardless of whether one is a metaphysical realist, a non-realist, or a constructivist, conceptual relativism is highly reasonable. Conceptualization – which is language – is thus intimately associated with both reality and truth.

However, although conceptual relativism is true, it is not the case that any possible conceptualization – of “object”, for example – is equally rational or coherent. If the letters on the pages or the words that are read aloud are said to be objects, we could reasonably call that an irrational and incoherent conception of what an “object” is. It does not even come close to any definition of what an object is, and it does not match lived experience. (How would one separate the words from the page they are written on? What criteria would make us think that the word is an object separate from the page? And how could one count verbal sounds, and where would one draw the line between one “verbal object” and another?)

If we are trying to refer to something worship-worthy but fail to do so because our words entail and describe something non-worship-worthy, then we have clearly failed to refer to what we wanted to refer to. As will become clear in chapter 9, ‘Worship-worthiness’, something cannot be thought to be worship-worthy simply because it exists. I argue there that someone or something is worship-worthy if the worshiper has rational reasons to feel sincere love for and desires (somehow) to be united with them/it. A worship-worthy deity

64 Johannesson, Gud för oss, 135.
67 John Searle would not agree with the claim that truth is a semantic idea, because he thinks that there are language-independent facts that can be expressed within different conceptual schemes. In other words, conceptual relativism can be accepted even if, like Searle, we think that there is a difference between the fact and the concepts we use to express that fact. (See Searle, 15.)
makes the worshiper feel sincere love, deep awe, reverence, and/or gratitude. *If a conception of God depicts a God for which theists have no reason to feel sincere love, deep awe, reverence, and/or gratitude, then it is not an adequate conception of God from the perspective of worship-worthiness.*

As we have seen, acceptance of conceptual relativism does not provide us with good reason to assume that reality is as it is independently. To claim that the referent behind a concept “is as it is independently of conceptualization” is to claim that there are true propositions about the referent of a concept that are true independently of conceptualization. This cannot be. Truth relates to concepts, and concepts are never independent.

Some suggest that it is reality that makes our claims true or false.\(^{68}\) I say that this is true only if we realize that there are no language-independent truths about reality. No facts are floating around space independently of our conceptions. In this sense, a proposition is true if it corresponds to reality; but it is not reality that determines the truth or falsehood of a proposition. Truth claims cannot correspond to an un-conceptualized reality. That is a nonsense claim, because language and truth claims are social and collective phenomena. Truth relates to a collective understanding of the correct language use.\(^{69}\)

And again, given conceptual relativism, truth claims about reality can be expressed in more than one way, but this does not make all conceptions equally good.

This theory does not deny external inputs to knowledge, because our experience is the most basic ground for beliefs and knowledge. What this theory does deny, however, is that these inputs are not to some extent shaped by our concepts. “The very inputs upon which our knowledge is based are conceptually contaminated; but contaminated inputs are better than none.”\(^{70}\) Erica Appelros explains the relationship between our conceptions and a reality that offers resistance:

> What I ate for breakfast today was not words; nor was it created by words. On the other hand, what makes me consider the müsli and milk that I had for breakfast to be proper breakfast food rather than something to feed the hamster, does have to do with conceptual construction.\(^{71}\)

When examining different conceptions of God, we need not consider them to be unreal or false. We need not think that our words create God any more that that they create the breakfast. Different conceptions of God can be understood as better or worse ways to refer to something real. Even if we accept conceptual relativism, we need not accept all conceptions as equally apt. After all,

\(^{68}\) Fromm Wikström, *Gud och vardagsspråket*, 244.
\(^{69}\) Johannesson, *Gud för oss*, 201.
\(^{70}\) Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 54.
hamster food is not proper human breakfast food, and not all conceptions of God describe a God worthy of worship.

To consider pragmatic reasons related to harms and benefits for human and non-human flourishing when contemplating the nature of God is not to engage in wishful thinking. It relates intimately to whether the conception of God depicts a God for which theists have reason to feel sincere love, deep awe, reverence, and/or gratitude. If not, as stated above, then it is not an adequate conception of God from the perspective of worship-worthiness.

According to Herrmann, values are expressions of feelings, but values are not merely feelings. Values say something about the reality in which we live. Putnam makes this point as well; our conception of the world depends on our values, and vice versa. Values are derived from our experiences of living in the world, and we have needs and desires as humans. We value that which can satisfy these needs and desires.

Analogously, we might say that values considered as intentional objects with respect to our existential experiences of what it means to be a human being, are the logical presupposition for being able to speak about values as real entities.72

Values as conceptualized emotions are why we can identify and describe certain situations as good or bad, joyful or frightening. If we cannot describe and come into contact with reality “in itself”, but only reality for us, our truth claims are also for us. However, if there are no independent truths, the distinction between truth claims for us and truth claims about the world or God becomes confused. In a situation in which there is no such thing as truth independently of us (since truth claims are semantically dependent), why would we devalue pragmatic arguments and only focus on epistemic arguments? We should not.

In conclusion, to evaluate a conception of God as good because of its good pragmatic consequences (or negatively, as bad because of its negative consequences) is not necessarily wishful thinking. As pragmatist Ulf Zackariasson puts it, a pragmatic approach and evaluation of religion is not a “second-best” approach, because neither pragmatic claims nor epistemic truth claims about God are independent of us.73

Even if we do not accept the claim that values and facts are equally constructed and dependent on language schemes, we should at least accept the following weaker stance formulated by Philip Kitcher: “we shouldn’t engage in ventures that can be expected to decrease the well-being of those who are

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already worse off than other members of society […]”.

He suggests that, in cases in which we can expect an underprivileged group – for example, women – to be worse off if we pursue S, the evidence in favor of S must be a lot stronger than otherwise. The more negative the consequences of S, the higher the standard of evidence in favor of S. We can expand this and say that, if the harms are severe enough, the possible truth may not always matter at all. This is a concrete example of how the values, for example, of human rights and the dignity of all human beings in some cases could weigh more heavily than epistemic truth claims. Even if there is epistemic evidence that suggests that S, we should not do S if S hinders the well-being of group B. This is also true for beliefs and theories, not only for practices. Say that we found evidence indicating that right-handed people are more intelligent than left-handed people. The likelihood of this leading to severe harm for left-handed would have to be weighed against the value of presenting this theory, even if evidence suggested that it were true. If a theory S has a high likelihood of being very harmful to a particular group of people B, we should be very restrictive in expressing S even if there are epistemic reasons to believe that S is true. In some cases, the harms would outweigh the truth claim of a theory.

Relating this stance to conceptions of God entails that the epistemic evidence in favor of a conception of God must be significantly stronger if the conception in question entails harmful consequences.

2.1.2. Linguistic constructivism

A constructivist approach to a linguistic analysis of how God or the divine reality is conceptualized, and a philosophical analysis of the arguments for and against different conceptions of God, can illuminate the consequences for and effects on us in our shared social reality. Implicit or explicit totalization of worldviews that become hegemonic, hidden, or visible power structures and discrimination are aspects that could be made visible with a linguistic constructivist approach when analyzing conceptions of God. What is made visible and what – or who – is made invisible as an effect of our language use?

The theory of linguistic constructivism (or simply constructivism) means that nothing in the inquiry should be taken for granted. One always asks how something is constructed and how this construction functions. It can be called constructivism because the theory regards reality as changing and, to some

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75 Kitcher, 97.
76 Kitcher, 97–98.
77 Obviously, this is not the case, and there is, of course, no reason to think it is.
extent, dependent on how we speak of and perceive reality. The emphasis is on a perception of reality – not on reality as independent from perception. All truth claims about an unexperienced reality are dependent on our conceptual schemes (even claims such as “this theory does not reject the possibility of an unexperienced or un-conceptualized reality”).

The constructivist approach advocated here does not claim that language and conceptions wholly create reality, but neither does it claim that reality is as it is independently of us. Our concepts and conceptions are not disconnected from reality – they refer to things, ideas, and persons in reality. Language does not (always) cause reality, but reality never “comes to us” as un-conceptualized. Without language and conceptions, we cannot refer to reality or to God, think about reality or God, or make truth claims. Without conceptions, there are no truths at all.

An advantage of linguistic constructivism is that it makes better analyses of power relations and ideologies possible. Post-structuralist constructivism separates itself from structuralism because it is suspicious of the divide between langue and parole. Post-structuralism claims that meaning is not found in the separate linguistic signs (langue), but that meaning is constructed by the use. Here one cannot disregard aspects of power, context, ideology, and authority. Language is language use, and meaning comes from that use. From a post-structuralist constructivist view, language is not merely reality-depicting, but a collective means of communicating and creating collective reality conceptions. In other words, language is our method to form conceptualizations of reality, and a post-structuralist constructivist is always suspicious when something is claimed to be objective, neutral, or “reality as it really is.”

Many similar language theories are inspired by structuralism, especially critical discourse analysis (CDA), emphasizing different aspects of language and communication. My theory could be called post-structuralist, but I call it simply linguistic constructivism.

In summary, by linguistic constructivism I mean the theory that language is our method to create conceptualizations of reality and that we do not depict a language-independent reality “in itself” because our concepts and conceptions are always linguistic attempts to describe reality as we perceive it, but we never describe it as it is “in itself.” This also relates to truth, since it is not reality “in itself” that makes a proposition true or false, but the relationship between the concepts of that proposition and the reality for us.

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79 Wojahn, 16–17.
80 E.g., social semiotic communication theory. According to it, language is a means to create social reality, and it focuses on how linguistic and visual means create social reality. Social semiotic communication theory claims that the choice of communication constitutes – not merely represents – reality. See David Machin and Andrea Mayr, How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012), 19.
2.1.2.1. Power and language

An interest in language, construction, reality, and truth claims goes hand in hand with an interest in power structures. Power research can be broadly divided into two main research traditions. Referring to John Scott, Andrea Mayr writes that the mainstream tradition, with its origin in Max Weber, focuses on power as corrective in state and institutions. In contrast, with Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault as central thinkers, the second-stream tradition focuses on power as persuasive and action-guiding. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony highlights mechanisms through which language is used by dominant groups to exercise power over subordinate groups by producing moral, political, and cultural values that become accepted by everyone, including the subordinate group. As a means to power, hegemony is closely related to language. Discourse that becomes “natural”, and is so normatively accepted that a group begins to think of it as absolute or natural reality, has shaped the people in the group, not with coercive power but with persuasive power. Mayr writes that the more legitimacy a dominant group has, the less coercion they must impose on subordinate groups.

In Language and Gender, linguist and anthropologist Penelope Eckert and linguist Sally McConnel-Ginet outline the significant connections between language, gender, sexuality, and power. They make an indisputable case for language’s role in shaping reality. Through repeated use of language we shape society and ourselves. Eckert and McConnel-Ginet write about the gendering of little children already from before birth by asking and answering whether the child is a “girl” or a “boy,” to the historical male-norm in which the man (and male) is regarded as the norm and the woman (and female) as some kind of defective man, or even as less human. Prominent figures in the history of philosophy and theology – from Tertullian and other Church fathers to Aristotle, Aquinas, and popes – have, by our modern standards, made quite baffling and outrageously sexist and dehumanizing analyses of the woman and her role in creation. Such a patriarchal way to conceptualize reality has obvious harmful consequences.

In the late 1960s, feminists in the United States introduced the social title Ms as an equivalent to the title Mr. Before the introduction of Ms, the only two available alternatives for women were related to marital status: Miss (unmarried) or Mrs (married). This was not the case for men. Mr indicates no marital status at all. The purpose of the new social title was to increase gender equality and to allow women not to be defined by their relationship to a man.

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82 Mayr, Language and Power, 11.
84 Mayr, Language and Power, 14.
85 Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, Language and Gender, 7, 12.
86 See Daly, The Church and the Second Sex.
but to be a subject on their own terms.\textsuperscript{87} There are, of course, many feminists and theorists who have raised critical voices and argued against totalizing worldviews about the supposed “essentialist nature” of women and men.\textsuperscript{88} The point here, articulated by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, de Beauvoir, Butler, Daly, Anderson, Foucault, and others, is that language and social categories affect the world significantly. More important, too, is the point that seemingly “natural” concepts and (perceived) purely descriptive language – perhaps even hegemonic moral values, politics, or categories – are not necessarily so natural and unchangeable. There is nothing “natural” about dividing women into the categories of \textit{married} or \textit{unmarried} unless, at the very least, a similar distinction were also applied to men. It may be a slow and extended process, but concepts can change, and conceptions can change; and if they do, then reality will also change.

\textbf{2.1.2.2. Feminism and reality conceptions}

Much feminist critique revolves around oppressive and sexist language and, consequently, around the question of realism and anti-realism. Many regard language to be dominated by male conceptions that ultimately and concretely affect everyone’s worldviews. The next two sections expand on the question of reality conceptions and feminist critique.

A challenge for much feminist philosophy and theology is to avoid letting the idea of language constructions become a trap that leads to relativism or anti-realism. Many feminist philosophers are realists because they are careful not to diminish the actuality of women’s lived bodily experiences as oppressed and dominated by men. I think that feminist philosophy today could, and should, have room for realist, anti-realist, and constructivist theories. Different perspectives can help us to make visible the questions and problems that only one perspective might miss.

Some feminist philosophers fear that allowing anti-realism into one’s feminist critique risks blurring or completely erasing the differences between “female,” “male,” “woman,” and “man,” which would also make it hard to argue that it is objectively wrong to oppress and abuse women. Pamela Sue Anderson rejects religious anti-realism precisely for this reason. The threat of relativism that she thinks is linked to anti-realism poses a problem for feminist truth claims, and she argues from a religious realist point of view.\textsuperscript{89} Some feminists point to the problem of not being able to speak about a common and shared reality with lived experiences, which is a problem for both realists and anti-realists. A risk with anti-realism is that powerful forces other than those working for gender equality and inclusivity could influence our shared reality and thus hinder the striving for a better and more equal world.

\textsuperscript{87} Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, \textit{Language and Gender}, 43.
\textsuperscript{88} E.g., Daly, \textit{The Church and the Second Sex}.
\textsuperscript{89} Anderson, \textit{A Feminist Philosophy of Religion}, x.
As I see it, the fear of anti-realism comes from the assumption that constructed reality cannot be real enough – that oppression somehow would be \textit{less} real than… than what? Stones? However, the constructed reality is real, of course. Alzheimer’s, oppression, gender, money, sexism – surely these are all real phenomena? We must not think of socially constructed categories as being less real than other categories.\footnote{If it makes any sense to separate socially constructed categories from anything else; and I am not convinced that it makes sense. What would the other things be? Natural? Unconstructed? For more on this discussion see, e.g., Jan Hacking, \textit{The Social Construction of What?} (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999); Searle, \textit{Konstruktionen Av Den Sociala Verklighetern}; \AA sta Sveinsdóttir, “Social Construction,” \textit{Philosophy Compass} 10, no. 12 (2015): 884–92, \url{https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12265}; Rebecca Mason, “The Metaphysics of Social Kinds,” \textit{Philosophy Compass} 11, no. 12 (2016): 841–50, \url{https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12381}.}

Appelros offer us a third distinction of reality in the realism/anti-realism debate in the hope of providing a platform for feminist philosophers to speak of shared reality without swearing allegiance to either religious realism or anti-realism. Even though I welcome both realist and anti-realist feminist philosophies, I consider Appelros’ third distinction to be very fruitful for everyone – feminist or not.

The problem with the debate, she argues, is the traditional dichotomy between \textit{real} and \textit{unreal}. She therefore introduces the three distinctions of reality as \textit{conceptualized}, \textit{constructed}, and \textit{constituted}.\footnote{Appelros, “Finns Gud?,” 75–76.}

Reality as “conceptualized” is to say that every proposition and utterance we make is spoken by us and with a language. Because of this, what we say about reality is restricted to the available concepts. This everyone can agree on, regardless of whether one is a realist, anti-realist, or constructivist.

Reality as “constructed” is to say that there are aspects in our lives that we have made up, but that are nevertheless real. Money, marriage, priests, and gender roles are examples of this. We have set up rules and orders, and within those orders, money, husbands, wives, bishops, boys, and girls are all real.

The critique of forms of anti-realism is often based on the misunderstanding that the notion of reality as constructed by language is the only alternative to reality as not being constructed by language.\footnote{Appelros, “Finns Gud?,” 75–76.} However, someone’s husband is more than just a human man; he is a particular man who has said certain vows and has obligations and lawful rights (in case of death or divorce, for example). This is not to say that the constructions of marriage, money, priests, and gender cannot be changed, but it is not as easy as simply \textit{saying} that we want to change them. Reality is not only what we say it is, but also how we live it. Reality is communal; so change cannot come about only because a single person starts acting as if, for example, gender roles were not real. What we perceive as real is thus not static and unchangeable, but we are talking about very viscous and slow processes.
Finally, reality as “constituted” by us is what determines what we regard as real and unreal. Unicorns are usually considered fictional. They are not real in the sense that they only exist within the fiction. Why? Because unicorns do not fit into our criteria for what constitutes “uncreated” reality for us. Physical, social, and linguistic functions play a part in what constitutes reality. Appelros writes that, for something to be constituted as real, it must matter to us. It has nothing to do with physical appearance since, as we have seen, rocks and mountains are as real to us as marriage and money. Reality as constituted only means that we regard it as real.

One might have thought that questions about what is real and what is not would be easy to answer. After thousands of years of philosophizing on the matter, it turns out to be the exact opposite. An exciting aspect of this is not only the fundamental question of “What is real?”, but also our constant resistance to answering that question consistently. Take the theatre or opera as an example. Within the world on stage, everything is real, and we as an audience accept it as real. It is part of the rules to withhold protest when Horatio sees the ghost. It is also part of the rules not to take it too seriously. No one gets upset and yells “Murderer! Call the police!” to the Egyptian priests when Radamés is left to die inside the vault. Within the story we accept many things, but we are always aware that it is just a story, a fiction. I want to draw attention to the inconsistency of when we draw these lines and decide that $x$ is real but that $y$ is unreal. When, the day after the opera, we go to the bank and apply for a loan, we perceive it as real, and whatever the bank man/woman says is taken to be true and has a real effect on our life. It can even affect our getting a loan and, suddenly, we find ourselves on a boat that we have just purchased. What makes “the bank” and what takes place within it more real than what takes place within “the theatre”? Both institutions are assumed to be real, but what takes place within them is not perceived as equally real. Why? Both are cultural expressions. Neither banks nor theaters exist necessarily, and neither of them would exist if not our human cultural institutions and settings would have made them real. Why, then, are the happenings in the bank taken to be more real than the happenings in the theatre? The answer I offer is a simple one: because we make them real. We have many sorts of institutions (banks, schools, theaters, governments, restaurants, art galleries), and we have somehow agreed that some of them are to have a much greater impact on our lives. That makes the difference between when a police officer tells you to do something and when an actor dressed as a policeman tells you to do that same thing. The difference is not that the actor is part of what we call a social culture while the police department is not – both are expressions of our shared human and socially constructed culture. The difference is that we have decided to listen and act as if certain cultural expressions matter more and are more real than others; and when we do that, we also make them more real than others.

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93 Appelros, 78.
One obvious problem here is that not all conceptualizations of reality are equally good. Not every conceptualization contributes to equality between men and women or satisfies humanity’s physical, psychological, and existential needs. Feminist philosophers of religion thus need to be able to speak about the wrongs and oppressions that exist. In other words, we need to make claims about reality without degrading certain areas in life as unreal or as “mere” constructions. Here, constructivism can offer a path on which it is made clear that what constitutes x and y as real is intimately connected to language conceptualizations and social constructions. This fact does not make x and y any less real or, as Appelros concludes, any less appropriate when making truth claims or moral statements.94

If God or the divine reality is worship-worthy and is taken to cause feelings of sincere love, awe, and gratitude in worshipers, any conception of God that prevents or hinders the flourishing of life must rationally be considered inadequate. Pragmatic reasons for the harms or benefits of a conception are thus of immense importance, and potential harm can come from a conception of God if it is said to depict a God who loves all while the same concept also entails the oppression of some.

2.1.3. Essentialism and constructivism

To express this point clearly about the different levels of reality, it is important to note that philosophical essentialism need not be the opposite of constructivism. Instead, in this study the opposite of constructivism is a realist position that states that reality is as it is in itself. By emphasizing this difference, my purpose is to argue that constructed conceptions of God are not necessarily unreal – the fact that they are constructed does not mean that they cannot refer to something real. Neither does it mean that the conception of God does not refer to or describe something essential about God.

Social kinds are as real and essential as natural kinds.95 Even if we socially construct money, there is an essence there that makes money money and not just any piece of paper. The essence of money is that it can be used as currency, and it can be exchanged into other forms of money or things of equal value. This is what it is for something to be money.96 The fact that socially constructed phenomena such as bishops, marriage, money, pain, and oppression are mind-dependent does not make them less real.

For instance, pain is such that it is essential to pain that pain exists only if some mental states exist. Similarly, Alzheimer’s disease and schizophrenia are such that it is essential to them that they exist only if some mental states exist, but it is not the case that pain, Alzheimer’s disease, and schizophrenia are unreal.

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94 Appelros, 84.
96 Mason, 843.
Thus, the fact that social kinds are mind-dependent in this sense [does] not establish that they are unreal either.97

Mind-dependent constructions are real, and the constructions are not necessarily arbitrary. We cannot simply decide that the concept “mother” refers to a childless man. It is another question whether we ought to have the concepts we have, or if we want to change their meaning. Philosophical analysis can help us to make the content and meaning of conceptions visible, and we must do so without reducing the reality of socially constructed phenomena. To deny the reality of social categories, even if we think that they are wrong, would be, as Sally Haslanger writes, to “ignore facts about our social arrangements that those who seek justice cannot ignore.”98

The point is that the reality of ships, government, theaters, banks, mountains, rivers, and God should not necessarily be perceived as anti-essential from a constructivist perspective. A constructivist view of money can maintain that money is real and that there is something essential that makes money money. It could be that we value it as currency or that we can trade and buy things with it because of its value. If we stop regarding paper money as valuable, it will cease to be money. Likewise, there is something that makes us conceptualize a mountain as a mountain and a quark as a quark. The essence does not lie within the physical attribute but in its use and in our perception of it.

To claim that a conception of “God” is humanly constructed does not mean that God is not real or that there is nothing essential to God that makes our conception of God adequate. As mentioned several times already, I conduct my analysis from the assumption that God is worship-worthy.

2.2. Concluding words

It should now be apparent that the constructivism outlined in this chapter takes pragmatic arguments to be equally crucial to epistemic arguments. I have given several reasons why this approach is useful when conducting an analysis of different reasons to prefer one conception of God to another. First, rationality is not limited to epistemic truth claims. Pragmatic reasons for believing a particular conception of God to be the most adequate can be rational reasons. Second, linguistic constructivism takes pragmatic reasons regarding inequality and power structures, for example, to be as important as epistemic reasons. Third, many people witness that their belief in a good, supremely valuable and worship-worthy God cannot be joined with a conception of God that contributes, for example, to sexism or to environmental neglect. Fourth, conceptual

97 Mason, 845.
constructions are not unreal – they refer to something real, and they affect us. Regardless of whether one is a realist, we can all agree on the claim that con-
structions and conceptions are real in their effects and that reasons based on
the value or harm of certain conceptions can be rational. Pragmatic arguments
are not second-best arguments, and they are equally important when searching
for an adequate conception of God.

One should not make the mistake of believing that interests in the construc-
tion of language and its consequences are disconnected from metaphysics or
epistemology. Reality can fight our conceptions in different ways. In this
study, I use worship-worthiness as the litmus test. Furthermore, theological
and conceptual coherence are very much part of the philosophical discussion
of why we should prefer, or not prefer, a conception of God.

This chapter has presented the theoretical ground on which the investiga-
tion and analyses are based. Arguments for and against panentheism and pan-
theism are examined, focusing on both epistemic and pragmatic arguments,
because both play a part when assessing whether a conception describes a God
that is worthy of worship or not.
3. Good reasons

This chapter provides an outline of the philosophical methodology of this study. As a philosopher of religion, I approach the material using philosophical methods, seeking to clarify and critically analyze different arguments for and against panentheism and pantheism as conceptions of God. A philosophical conceptual analysis evaluates how panentheism and pantheism can, or ought, to be understood. Philosophical critical analysis is then used to analyze arguments for and against panentheism and pantheism. This analysis clarifies the reasons that are offered to support the conclusion, and evaluates whether the conclusion follows from the premises. I analyze whether the conclusions to favor panentheism or pantheism are reasonable or likely.

My interest is not only in analyzing how to conceptualize God. It is also to analyze how different conceptions of the God–world relationship affect us and how that, in turn, affects God’s worship-worthiness. In other words, I analyze the actual and possible consequences of different sorts of God-talk. The final analysis is conducted by use of linguistic axiological consequence analysis. This chapter clarifies what, more specifically, I intend by this.

3.1. Analytical philosophical analysis

First, when examining conceptions of God, I engage in conceptual analysis. Using rational reconstruction, I analyze how to understand and define panentheism and pantheism, and suggest and motivate ways to do this. Second, I analyze and evaluate the arguments for preferring conception \( A \) to \( B \), and whether the reasons support the conclusion; and I make visible the hidden assumptions that support the validity or soundness of the arguments.99

If conception \( A \) of God is internally inconsistent or based on contradictory claims, then conception \( A \) is rejected as flawed. The premises of the different conceptions must be tenable, valid, sound, non-contradictory, and based on reasonable assumptions.

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However, *internal consistency or internal coherence is not sufficient* to constitute an adequate conception of God. There are also pragmatic and epistemic reasons not to settle for only an internally coherent conception of God. Furthermore, the rationality of beliefs cannot be reduced to epistemic rationality alone. Pragmatic reasons also constitute grounds for rationality.100

### 3.2. Epistemic and pragmatic reasons

A reason is something we use to support the conclusion of an argument. An argument necessarily has a conclusion, and the reasons or premises support that conclusion. If the conclusion follows from the premises, the argument is valid, even if the premises are false; and if they merely make the conclusion probable, then the argument is cogent.101 This study extracts the different reasons that panentheists and pantheists give to conclude that panentheism or pantheism is preferable to classical theism. One such reason might be that adherents of a particular conception of God think that their conception coheres better with gender equality and environmental well-being, or that it fits better with natural science. The assumption behind such a reason is that it is good that the conception of God coheres well with gender equality, environmental well-being, or natural science. If one disagrees with the claim that conceptions of God ought to cohere well with, for example, natural science, one is unlikely to be persuaded by an argument built on the assumption that this is a good thing.

In this study, I reconstruct arguments in favor of panentheism and pantheism that are related to specific themes, such as environmental concerns, gender equality, the problem of evil, divine power, and love. Related to the theme in question, I critically assess whether theists have reason to favor classical theism, panentheism, or pantheism.

Different sorts of reasons are used in different ways. A reason can be used to support a conclusion in an argument; it can be used to persuade someone; and we give reasons to explain or motivate actions we take. I distinguish between two primary forms of reasons, and call them “epistemic” and “pragmatic.”102 Epistemic reasons have to do with truth, correspondence with real-

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100 The previous chapter argues at length for this conclusion.
102 In the philosophical study of reasons and arguments we find many different terms. Epistemic reasons are sometimes called evidential reasons, and sometimes they are called theoretical reasons. Pragmatic reasons are sometimes called practical reasons, normative reasons, or action-guiding reasons.
ity, and what we can know or rationally believe to be true. Epistemology attempts to understand what knowledge is, what truth is, and how we can know things. Epistemic reasons are *truth-oriented*.

Not all reasons relate to the truth of our beliefs. We can have reason to believe a proposition or to act in a certain way because that belief or act would be good. For example, belief in an afterlife sometimes reduces fear of death. Even if there is no afterlife, this belief leads to something good or useful. In this example, the reason for believing in an afterlife is not an epistemic reason. Instead, it could be called goodness-oriented, or benefit-oriented. Reasons of this kind are sometimes called pragmatic or practical reasons. I use the term “pragmatic reason.”

Pragmatic reasons can be used to argue that specific actions are *better* or more useful than others, even if the suggested action is not the only one that is logically available. Pragmatic reasons are not based on epistemic truth claims but, for example, on axiological grounds, stating that $x$ or $y$ is good – which is why pragmatic reasons are *benefit-oriented*.

Pragmatism is thus directed toward benefit, non-epistemic value, and usefulness. A claim is true in a strong pragmatic sense if it is useful for a specific purpose. Such strong pragmatism reduces epistemic truth claims to pragmatic claims. This study does not hold such a reductive view of epistemic claims or reasons, but neither does it hold epistemic reasons to be the sole rational ground for belief.

Coherence is important when evaluating the adequacy of conceptions of God. A conception of God is internally coherent if the attributes and claims that are made are non-contradictory. A conception of God can also be coherent in the wider sense so that it coheres with some other claim, such as a particular understanding of love. Advocates of panentheism or pantheism can claim that their conception of God entails a more coherent view of divine love or natural science (for example) than any other conception, or that their particular conception of God coheres better with the striving for gender equality or environmental well-being. Coherence thus relates to both epistemic and pragmatic arguments.

Both epistemic and pragmatic reasons can be used to form *rational* beliefs. An epistemic argument in favor of pantheism, for example, claims that pantheism offers a true or at least the most accurate or coherent description of the God–world relationship. A pragmatic argument in favor of pantheism states

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that we *ought* to conceptualize the God–world relationship in terms of pantheism because it is *better* than the alternatives for different benefit-oriented reasons.\(^{105}\)

### 3.3. Truth and pragmatic justification

Two kinds of pragmatic argument have to do with beliefs. One is truth-dependent, and the other is belief-dependent. Blaise Pascal’s wager is a famous example of the former argument; *if* it is true that God exists, then the benefits of the religious belief will be great; but if God does not exist, you have not lost much because of your belief. The benefits of believing obtain only if the belief is true – that is, it is truth-dependent.

The second kind of argument is not truth-dependent but belief-dependent; the benefits of believing something obtain even if the belief is not true. “This is an argument that recommends belief cultivation because of the psychological, or moral, or religious, or social, or even the prudential benefits gained by virtue of believing it.”\(^{106}\) It is with the belief-dependent arguments that I am concerned.

People usually do not believe things simply because they have good consequences. To believe something is to believe that it is true; but, as Behan McCullagh says, “the fact that a belief has good consequences implies nothing about its truth.”\(^{107}\) What a pragmatic justification does – as an epistemic justification does not – is to take the non-epistemic value of holding a particular belief into account. McCullagh adopts a Jamesian stance and concludes that religious beliefs based on pragmatic justification can be rational – but only if they meet two conditions: “there must be some evidence of their [the religious beliefs’] truth, which is not outweighed by evidence that they are false, and believing them must have generally good moral consequences, not bad ones.”\(^{108}\) He means that, if a pragmatic justification is to be rational, it must at least be *epistemically balanced* – the evidence for the belief’s/proposition’s truth cannot be weaker than the evidence for its falseness. If this first condition is met, the pragmatic justification must also be *pragmatically/ethically merited* – the value that comes from holding the belief/proposition must be believed to be good, or at least harmless. William James did not speak merely

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\(^{105}\) For another defense of the rationality of pragmatic reasons, see Bastian, “Minimal Disturbance.”


\(^{108}\) McCullagh, 28.
about epistemic evidence and good consequences, but also about liveness, forcedness, and momentousness.\textsuperscript{109}

Not everyone who uses pragmatic arguments agrees that the epistemic evidence must be balanced. One could also argue that pragmatically good consequences outweigh epistemic reasons. Pragmatic reasons are used to show the benefits or the disadvantages of a belief. Sallie McFague motivates her pragmatic stance regarding her conception of God by arguing that we cannot know how/what God is and what might characterize God. Grace Jantzen motivates her pragmatic stance with a refutation of realism. She proposes a constructivist conception of God such that we always and only should understand propositions about God as human constructions.\textsuperscript{110} Moreover, if we follow the suggestions of Philip Kitcher, there are cases in which the pragmatic arguments weigh more than the epistemic ones.\textsuperscript{111}

\textit{I take epistemic balance to be essential for whether a conception of the God–world relationship is a live option, or not. However, if God is supposed to be worthy of worship, it is not enough that a particular worldview is a live option. In relation to worship-worthiness – and given that the conception of God is a live option in the first place – pragmatic reasons can weigh more than epistemic reasons.}

Suppose that one argues pragmatically in favor of a conception of God that one believes contributes to good, flourishing lives. In that case, this God–world view must (if we follow James) be \textit{probable} – a live and forced and momentous option – and not be based on mere wishful thinking. The pragmatic arguments in this study are about the harmful consequences of specific uses of language relating to God/the divine and ourselves – consequences that hinder the flourishing of life and that cannot be reconciled with a God worthy of worship.

A crucial ingredient of the subsequent negative consequence analysis is God’s worship-worthiness. If God is supposed to be worthy of worship, theists cannot accept just any consequence. Moral and pragmatic questions play a significant part in our lives and religious beliefs.

The emphasis on pragmatic consequences is essential because there is a distinction between a conception of the divine and the divine itself. However, we are confined to our conceptions when we refer to something and can only describe the phenomenon as it appears \textit{to us}. In that sense, all conceptions of God explored in this study make use of analogical and metaphorical language. No conception describes God in “Godself.” However, some analogies and metaphors may suit one conception of the divine better than others. Suppose that God is believed to be good while theists, after careful analysis, conclude


\textsuperscript{110} Jantzen, \textit{Becoming Divine}; McFague, \textit{Models of God}.

\textsuperscript{111} Kitcher, \textit{Science, Truth and Democracy}, 93–99.
that their conception of God cannot be described coherently as good, or that it leads to unacceptable, harmful, immoral consequences. In that case, the reason for describing God as good would be very vague indeed. Theists would have to change their conception of God, stop believing that God is good, or accept full-scale equivocal religious language. What would the statement “God is good” or “God is worthy of worship” mean if this God is thought, for example, to contribute to the Holocaust, sexism, or environmental destruction? Either theists would need to use “good” and “worthy of worship” in highly equivocal ways, or they would have to come up with a very good theodicy for why God is still good and worthy of worship. I suggest a third way. To paraphrase John Stuart Mill, I call no being good and no conception good if it implies sexism, abuse of power, or ecological destruction.\textsuperscript{112} If a conception of God implies such negative consequences, I suggest that there must be something wrong with the conception. In other words, I would change the conception of God rather than the belief that God is good and worship-worthy.

If the concept of God contained worship-worthiness, one could pragmatically justify the refutation of any conception of God that, because of its negative consequences, was not worthy of worship.

In conclusion, conceptions of God are analyzed with a focus on (1.) how God is described and perceived, (2.) why this is so, and (3.) what conclusions we can draw from this in terms of worship-worthiness. We should not promote or encourage a conception of God that prevents the pursuit of flourishing lives, and neither do we want to promote or encourage a conception of God that is internally incoherent or incompatible with what we believe to be epistemically rational and justified beliefs about ourselves and the world. There are both epistemic and pragmatic reasons to prefer one conception of God and to reject others.

3.4. A worship-worthy God

That which we call God is traditionally understood to be worthy of worship. In this study, worship-worthiness is used as a methodological tool when analyzing the adequacy of panentheism and pantheism in relation to classical theism. There are many different reasons to regard something as worship-worthy, and epistemic and pragmatic reasons must play a part in that evaluation. I argue below that a conception of the God–world relationship that prevents the flourishing of life is a conception of God that is not worthy of worship.

According to Anselm of Canterbury, God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. This God is supremely great and worthy of worship. Wor-

ship is appropriate not because God will reward us with eternal life or heavenly bliss. Charles Hartshorne writes that worship is appropriate “simply because God is worshipful because worship is the appropriate response to the supreme Creative and Receptive Spirit of the cosmos.”

One of the Ten Commandments in the Hebrew Bible is to worship no other gods than the true God. In recent years there has been debate about whether we are obligated to worship God. Richard Swinburne argues, for example, that human beings are obliged to respect great accomplishments, and that we owe even more respect and gratitude to those who are our benefactors. God must be worthy of utmost respect because God is the ultimate cause of our existence. God is simply most worthy of worship. Nicholas Wolterstorff also argues that we have an obligation to worship God. He attributes God’s worship-worthiness to God’s glory, holiness, wisdom, faithfulness, and loving nature. Many accounts, including Swinburne’s and Wolterstorff’s, presuppose that an entity worthy of worship must be a personal entity. One reason is that one can only respect persons, and one cannot treat an object with respect. Another reason is that a non-personal being cannot be morally superior and thus cannot be morally worthy of worship. In chapter 9, “Worship-worthiness,” I analyze and question these claims.

Grace Jantzen asks the relevant question of whose account of greatness we are talking about when we claim that God is supremely great and worthy of worship.

Whose conceptualizarion are we talking about? The valorization of such attributes as power, mastery, immortality, omniscience, and incorporeity could be seen as highly congenial to masculinist attitudes and preoccupations, as we have already had occasion to note.

118 Wolterstorff, 34–39.
If there is something to this feminist critique – which I take as a theoretical assumption – it is reasonable to claim that the traditional account of divine worship-worthiness is based on human desires – mostly human masculine desires. I claim, therefore, that when constructing a conception of God whose God is supposed to be worthy of worship, epistemic and pragmatic reasons must be part of the criteria for worship-worthiness.

Conceptions are always constructed – they are linguistic, and attempt to describe some phenomenon or entity adequately. If a conception of God (in this case, classical theism, panentheism, or pantheism) attempts to describe a God worthy of worship, the same conception cannot result in harmful consequences such as sexism, oppression, or environmental destruction. Later I argue for an understanding of worship as expressing a desire to be united (somehow) with the divine reality, a reality that makes the worshiper feel deep love, awe, reverence, and/or gratitude.

A God that makes innocents suffer or that is considered “morally inferior” to us for some reason cannot be worthy of worship. My thesis is that theists should not accept just anything that a conception of God tells us and then be expected to worship that God. The question is: What consequences can we not accept, and what consequences can we not do without? Mill states that,

> Whatever power such a being may have over me, there is one thing which he shall not do: he shall not compel me to worship him. I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures, and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go.\(^{121}\)

Since I understand worship as a desire for unity with the divine, I take goodness to be a reasonable criterion for worship-worthiness. God must be good, although not necessarily morally good. Whether God must be all-good is evaluated in chapter 9, “Worship-worthiness.”

Divine power is also frequently regarded as a necessary condition of God’s worship-worthiness. Even if divine power, possibly in the form of omnipotence, is not regarded as the only reason to worship God, it is regarded as crucial for worship-worthiness, among other things, because it relates to the creation of the world and the possibility of ending suffering and evil.

It is rational to assume that what constitutes a good or worthwhile life differs from person to person. Therefore, I approach the question of values and what constitutes a good life in an apophatic way. By “apophatic” I mean in this context that we cannot fully speak of what a good life is or what the good

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is because the good for one person might not be the good for another. Even though experiences are subjective, I agree with Eberhard Herrmann that it is reasonable to assume that certain phenomena prevent the fulfillment of a flourishing life. Herrmann believes that a good and fulfilling life should be without oppression, violence, marginalization, and misery. Situations or phenomena that cause such bad things include sexism, abuse of power, racism, and ecological destruction. Jantzen argues similarly that injustice in the form, for example, of dominance, oppression, sexism, racism, or class hierarchies hinders human becoming and flourishing. In other words, situations and actions that prevent humans from living good lives include inequality, sexism, domination, and oppression.

Underlying the analysis of worship-worthiness is also an ideal of equality. Within the scope of this study I am not able to work out a special theory of justice or to specify exactly what a good life is. Instead, an ideal of equality, holding all humans as of equal dignity and having essential rights, figures as an underlying assumption throughout the analysis.

Few people will accept or adopt a belief in a conception of God/the divine based merely on what seems preferable to us. Something more is needed. Most people also need some other reason to prefer a conception of God; perhaps that it is theologically and conceptually coherent (internal coherence), based on sound and reasonable arguments, is consistent with science, or fits with one’s overall worldview. In order not to construct a conception of God based entirely on wishful thinking, we need both pragmatic and epistemic reasons.

If theists want to worship God rationally, the God-conception should not hinder the flourishing of life, because theists would have little reason to desire unity with something that prevents the flourishing of life. I regard negative consequences as complementary pragmatic reasons to prefer or reject a specific conception of God. Good consequences could be a necessary but not sufficient reason to favor a specific conception of God.

The expected consequences in question may not necessarily follow. Inductive reasoning – based on reasonableness and probability rather than on necessity – is also a ground for rationality. Another way to phrase this is in relation to pragmatic implications as opposed to logical implications. Göran Hermerén defines a pragmatic implication in the following way: If $X$ pragmatically implies $Y$, then the subject $S$ ought to accept $Y$ if $S$ accepts $X$. In other words, a convincing explanation would be required if $S$ were to accept only $X$ and reject $Y$. A logical implication is defined as: If $X$ logically implies $Y$, then $Y$ is derived from $X$; $Y$ follows, in other words, logically from $X$.

But if the pragmatic consequences following from a classical theistic, panentheistic, or pantheistic outlook on life do not follow by necessity, how

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123 Jantzen, Becoming Divine, 169.
can they be compared? Religious traditions and faith are much more than only epistemic truth claims. They involve responses, actions, and reactions to the world and the happenings that we encounter. Adherents of religious and non-religious worldviews learn from and are expected to act in accordance with what Ulf Zackariasson describes as paradigmatic responses.\(^{125}\) If they did not act in line with such paradigmatic responses, we would require a convincing explanation for why that is. Paradigmatic responses are normative, and follow pragmatically from certain worldviews. In other words, beliefs are action-guiding. Adherents of classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism are guided by these normative paradigmatic responses, which help to guide their concrete actions in the world. Owing to the relative similarity of these conceptions of the God–world relationship, normative pragmatic paradigmatic responses can be analyzed and compared.

In conclusion, we need criteria for worship-worthiness that consider more than epistemic truth claims. We need a moral criterion for worship-worthiness as well – God must also be good. Existence, or coherence with natural science, is not enough for worship.

I take negative pragmatic or axiological consequences as reasons to reject a conception of God as worship-worthy. However, good pragmatic consequences are not the only criteria for worship-worthiness; we also need epistemic reasons. Useful and good consequences, such as whether the conception of God coheres with engagement in environmental well-being, are not enough for worship – the conception of God must also be epistemically probable.

### 3.4.1. Goodness and power

To summarize, there are many possible reasons to worship God, such as the belief that God is the Creator and sustainer of the world or that God is transcendent and non-physical. However, as I argue more extensively in chapter 9, there are reasons to question such grounds for worship-worthiness. Instead, in chapter 9 I analyze how the notions of goodness and power relate to panentheism and pantheism to see whether the God of panentheism or pantheism is worthy of worship on those accounts. I limit the analysis to these areas because these are the most relevant, rational, and frequently occurring reasons to worship God that also can be applied to panentheism and pantheism. To evaluate philosophically the potential worship-worthiness of a panentheistic and pantheistic God in a fruitful way, I cannot model the discussion around criteria that reject panentheism and pantheism from the start.

3.5. Axiological consequence analysis

Consequence analysis is a philosophical method to analyze the consequences of a specific phenomenon. Precisely how this is done or what to focus on is not specified, which is why the philosopher doing a consequence analysis must be clear and precise when explaining what they are searching for. For example, the present study is a philosophical one. The consequences suggested here may not necessarily follow but, given the philosophical and metaphysical assumptions of the different God–world conceptions, it is philosophically and pragmatically reasonable to assume that certain outcomes would follow.

The present study is about God-talk, and the consequences it examines are consequences for us and non-living nature that hinder our pursuit of flourishing lives. These consequences result from the way God/the divine is described and conceptualized. For this reason, I call the method a linguistic analysis.

Axiology is the philosophical study of value. Some ways to speak of and conceptualize God/the divine are morally better than others. The analysis weighs the negative and positive ethical outcomes of the pragmatic and epistemic arguments for each alternative conception of God. For this reason, I call the method an axiological analysis.

It should now be clear what the method I call (linguistic) axiological consequence analysis is. This axiological consequence analysis is combined with traditional philosophical analysis, as described in section 3.1, “Analytic philosophical analysis.”
4. Demarcations: Classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism

Using conceptual philosophical analysis, this chapter defines and demarcates classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism. In line with the aim of this study, panentheism and pantheism are defined to make it clear how they relate to and differ from classical theism and from each other. If we cannot distinguish between panentheism, pantheism, and classical theism, we cannot evaluate whether the reasons in favor or against them are rational.

In the contemporary philosophy of religion, conceptions of God other than classical theism are called “alternative” for a reason. It is impossible to discuss so-called alternative conceptions of God without knowing what classical theism is and some of the critiques it has faced. My objective is to survey the most prominent reasons for and against the alternative conceptions of God and to examine whether they offer coherent, pragmatic, and epistemically adequate alternatives to classical theism. Therefore, I start by outlining a rational reconstruction of classical theism.

4.1. Understanding classical theism

What is known as classical theism is often attributed to historical Church fathers and theologians such as Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395), Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-390), Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Avicenna/Ibn-Sina (c. 980-1037), Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109), Moses Maimonides (c. 1135/8-1204), Averroës/Ibn-Rushd (1126-1198), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308), John Calvin (1509-1564), and Stephen Charnock (1628-1680). Contemporary theologians described or self-identified as classical theists include Millard Erickson, Elenore Stump, Edward Feser, Katherin Rogers, Brian Davies, Jordan Steffanik, and Christopher Tomaszewski. Often greatly inspired by ancient Greek philosophy, classical theists have been thinking and philosophizing about God for about two thousand years, and no definition would do justice to all of their positions and beliefs. However, it is possible to discern some core beliefs that makes it adequate to call it a classical theistic tradition of ideas. By looking at a handful of
so-called classical theists, I rationally reconstruct what reasonably could be thought of as core beliefs in contemporary classical theism.\textsuperscript{126}

4.1.1. Traditional divine attributes

The God of classical theism is traditionally thought to be a God of absolute unity, simplicity, immutability (unchangeability), impassability (lack of passion), transcendence, omniscience (perfect knowledge), omnipotence (perfect power), omnipresence (complete or perfect presence), and omnibenevolence (perfect goodness).\textsuperscript{127} God is also thought to be eternal, self-sufficient, ontologically independent, necessary, and the free Creator and sustainer of everything that exists.\textsuperscript{128} From these beliefs about God it follows that the God of classical theism is thought to have existed eternally and unchangingly before God created the world, and that God will continue to exist eternally even if the world ceases to exist. The God of classical theism is conceptualized as a purely transcendent spirit – ontologically distinct from the physical world, although at the same time immanent in it because of God’s omnipresence.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{126} It is a rational reconstruction. However, it is still possible to argue that individual thinkers, such as Thomas Aquinas, might be better labeled something else. See, e.g., Hans Gustafson, “Collapsing the Sacred and the Profane: Pan-Sacramental & Panentheistic Possibilities in Aquinas and Their Implications for Spirituality,” \textit{The Heythrop Journal} 63, no. 4 (2022): 652–65, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2011.00684.x. In the case of Aquinas, his thoughts have still heavily influenced other classical theists.


Classical theists distinguish between God as Creator and the world as the creation. They are two distinct categories; the world only exists because of the Creator’s voluntary sustaining activity. “There is the one, uncreated, simple God, and there is everything that is not that one, simple essence, which is created.” God does not essentially need the world, but the world essentially needs God to exist. The existence of God is independent of the existence or non-existence of a physical world, which entails that reality is constituted by both physical reality (the world) and the non-physical divine (God). I refer to this distinction when I claim that classical theism entails ontological God–world dualism.

Furthermore, the God of classical theism is thought of as maximally perfect, which is why it also has been given the name perfect-being theology. Anselm of Canterbury is the father of the idea that God is “something than which nothing greater can be thought.” What the perfections amount to has been debated at least since the time of Plato, and the traditional answers have been heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. Stephen Charnock writes about God’s perfection, that “Again, if God were not omnipotent, we might imagine something more perfect than God. […] a being able to do more than God is able to do, and consequently a being more perfect than God.” Since Charnock holds God to be the most perfect imaginable, he concludes that God must be omnipotent (among other attributes).

According to classical theists, God does not depend on anything because God is perfect in Godself. A perfect being cannot change either for the better or for the worse. Katherin Rogers defends perfect-being theology, and writes that “He [God] must exist absolutely a se, from Himself.” Since God’s being is wholly unaffected by anything but Godself, God is not changed or affected by the happenings in the created world. God is eternal but not timeful in the sense that God is changed by the passing of time or the contingency of the world, according to classical theism. Furthermore, classical theists believe that God is Creator, and the world is the creation. Classical theism and the perfect-

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133 For a good introduction to perfect-being theology, see Rogers, Perfect Being Theology.
135 Charnock, Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 38.
137 Rogers, Perfect Being Theology, 25.
being tradition hold that God freely chose to create the world; creation is contingent because God does not depend on anything but Godself.\textsuperscript{138}

The God of classical theism is also person-like.\textsuperscript{139} God is not a person like humans are persons, but it is a more accurate description to call God a person that to deny it. In classical theism, God is always beyond what words can capture, but, in line with Aquinas, classical theists still believe that we can attribute goodness, personhood, power, and so on to God in an analogous way. God has knowledge, creativity, and will, things usually attributed to persons. God also acts intentionally, and can be thought of as a personal subject in an analogous way. However, God is not material or physically located in space, also something usually attributed to persons. In one sense, classical theists maintain that it is true that God is the personal Creator; in another sense, God is not a person if God’s personhood is thought to be like ours.\textsuperscript{140}

The doctrine that God is immutable results from the claims that God is simple, eternal, perfect, and unaffected by time. Immutability is connected to the classical theistic belief that everything exists because of God, but that Godself cannot come in and out of existence. God’s being is traditionally not thought of as time-bound. God is timeless and eternal. God can be said to experience the totality of infinity all at once. Because the eternal God is simple, perfect, omniscient, omnipotent, and unaffected by time, God does not change; hence the doctrine of immutability.\textsuperscript{141} God does not change God’s mind, and God is not moved or surprised by the actions of created beings. It “is his [God’s] perfection to be immutable.”\textsuperscript{142} A perfect and timeless God cannot change because perfection is already complete and in no need of change.\textsuperscript{143}

Classical theists sometimes use the distinction, originally made by Peter Geach, between a “Cambridge change” and a real change. A Cambridge change is “change that can be ascribed to something without it being implied that the thing in question has undergone any real change.” When Mary loves Joseph, we can ascribe a Cambridge change to Joseph: he is now loved by

\textsuperscript{138} For example, the will of God (such as the will to create) never depends on the will of man. Jean Calvin, “Institutes of the Christian Religion (Vol. 1 of 2),” trans. John Allen, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45001/45001-h/45001-h.htm, 2022, Chapter VII, I, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45001/pg45001-images.html.utf8.


\textsuperscript{141} Charnock, \textit{Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God}, 102.

\textsuperscript{142} Charnock, 29.

\textsuperscript{143} Franks, “The Simplicity of the Living God,” 280.
Mary, although nothing real has changed within Joseph. According to classical theists, only Cambridge changes, but never real changes, can be attributed to God.\footnote{Davies, \textit{The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil}, 68.} 


God, according to classical theists, is thus immutable and impassible, but few classical theists take this to entail indifference. However, no classical theist believes that we somehow affect God’s decisions or “emotions,” as if God is affected by the passing of time.\footnote{Erickson, \textit{Christian Theology}, 323. See also how Thomas Aquinas discusses God’s immutability in relation to petitionary prayer. Aquinas, \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles}, Part II: Chapter 95.} God is thought to be eternal and timeless, and knows therefore everything from eternity. A perfect and simple God is not moved by the contingency of the world. The perfect God experiences only perfect love and happiness, according to classical theism (at least, in an analogical understanding). A perfect God has no potentiality, only actuality. Thus God is immutable.\footnote{Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, Q.9, article 1, and I, Q.20.} Negative emotions are imperfect and, since God is perfect and unchangeable goodness, God does not feel sorrow. God is goodness itself.\footnote{Aquinas, I, Q.6, article 2; St. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles}, trans. Vernon J. Bourke, University of Notre Dame edition 1975, vol. Part I, Book 3 (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), Chapter 20.} 

Now, for classical theists, the doctrines of immutability and impassibility do not mean that God is not actively present and involved in the world. Classical theism is not the same as deism, in which God is thought to have created but then left the world to its own devices. The point stressed by Christopher Franks is not that the world lacks God’s active presence, but that “God would be no different had God not created. God’s activity is fully realized as it is,
and is unchangeable.” Classical theists such as Franks reject any real change in God because God is perfectly simple and pure actuality. They claim that what changes is God’s Cambridge properties, not that there is any real change in the eternal and perfect nature of God. Also, Brian Davies explains how God can be immutable and impassible while still active in the world: the world changes, but God does not change or learn from the world. However, God – as the sustaining active cause – is constantly active and thus involved in the world. “[...] God is more involved with things than any created thing can be with another.”

Eric J. Silverman also emphasizes the distinction between divine impassibility and divine indifference to human suffering. The doctrine of impassibility merely states that God does not have embodied passions, not that God does not have something analogous to our emotions or that God does not care about us. God cares from eternity, but not in a timeful way, as if God were a being in time like created creatures. For example, Linda Zagzebski’s notion of “omni-subjectivity” states that God knows every first-person perspective. God knows everyone, even from a first-person perspective, because God is eternally omniscient and the Creator and cause of there being first-person perspectives in the first place. God knows, but is not identical to that which God knows.

From this rational reconstruction of classical theism, we see that classical theists hold God to be the omnibenevolent, free, personal Creator of the world and that human free will is not a necessary component of it. Human free will is an extension claim of classical theism, whereas divine free will is a core claim. God was free not to create, had God so chosen. Occasionalists, for example, believe that the only active and free agent in the world is God. Only God has causal efficiency, according to them.

Following the core claims outlined so far, we also see that classical theists should accept the possibility of God creating the world from nothing – that is, the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. In the words of Charnock, “so long as there is nothing, God can produce out of that nothing, whatsoever he pleases.” Aquinas writes that God alone has creative power, meaning that only God can

154 Rogers, Perfect Being Theology, 21; Charnock, Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 15, 24.
155 This belief leads to the conclusion that God is the efficient cause of all evil and suffering, as well as all goodness.
156 Charnock, Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 24.
create something out of nothing. This doctrine results from the claims that God is wholly transcendent, independent, and impassible. God does not need or depend on anything other than Godself, and so the world must be contingent and a result of God’s free choice to create. According to classical theists, if God is the Creator ex nihilo of everything that is not God, God cannot be material or physical, because then God would be part of the material and created world. But God is not part of the material and created world in the sense that objects in the world are; God is “part of” the world in being the omnipresent, sustaining, spiritual cause of it. Even if there are classical theists who reject creatio ex nihilo, they must accept it as possible, given the classical theistic belief in a wholly transcendent, ontologically independent, omnipotent Creator-God.

4.1.2. Challenges for classical theism

Several philosophers have critiqued perfect-being theology as being incoherent or inconsistent. According to the critique, it is logically inconsistent for a being to have all the great-making attributes that perfect-being theology ascribes to God. Can an immutable God be a Creator? Can a timeless God create a contingent world? Can an impassible God be loving? Can an eternal God know truths about the present and the future? Can the doctrine of divine simplicity – the claim that God is the divine properties – be coherent with the claim that God is personal? Can God be both omnipotent and omniscient? As Rogers phrases this last conundrum, “an omnipotent being could make a creature who had a secret unknown to anyone but itself, while an omniscient being must know every secret.”

Perhaps the most frequently asked question is how a wholly good, omnipotent, and omniscient being can allow the world to be so full of evil and suffering. This is the problem of theodicy or the problem of evil. Critics charge that classical theism has no adequate or morally acceptable theodicy available. If God is perfect in goodness and power, and knows every evil and suffering in the world, why does God not intervene? Why is the world so full of evil and suffering if God is a perfect being?

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157 Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, Q.45, article 5-6; Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, Part II: Ch. 102.
158 Davies, “A Modern Defence of Divine Simplicity,” 556–57; Erickson, Christian Theology, 238; Charnock, Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 39.
159 Rogers, Perfect Being Theology, 22.
160 Some philosophers and theologians, such as Elenore Stump, prefer to call it “the problem of suffering.” The problem of theodicy, the problem of evil, and the problem of suffering are basically the same problem, and I treat them as such. Sometimes you see the distinction between theodicy and defense. Exactly how this distinction is made varies from scholar to scholar. I do not find this distinction useful – at least, not for the way I interact with the problem of evil and theodicy in this dissertation. I regard a theodicy to be an attempt to answer why/how a perfectly good, omnipotent, and omniscient God allows evil and suffering. A defense answers the same question.
Skeptical theists think that we have no reason to assume that we could ever know or understand God’s ways. Instead, skeptical theists trust that God is good and that everything happens for a good reason. In the words of John Calvin,

Wherefore let us not hesitate to say with Augustine, “God could convert to good the will of the wicked, because he is omnipotent. It is evident that he could. Why, then, does he not? Because he would not. Why he would not, remains with himself.” For we ought not to aim at more wisdom than becomes us.

Another traditional answer to the problem of evil states that evil and suffering are necessary for some greater good. Free-will theists claim that human free will is such a greater good. God has the power to prevent evil, according to classical free-will theists. However, the development of free moral beings with the possibility of moral choices is part of God’s overall purpose for creation, and divine interference would hinder the realization and spiritual development of genuinely free (meaning free to act contrary to God’s will) moral beings. John Hick famously argues that human free will is a necessary part of soul-making and the realization of virtue. With free will comes the possibility of evil, and with that, responsibility.

If God ultimately is the omnipotent, independent Creator of the world, God is ultimately responsible; God chose to create a world in which evils such as cancer, tsunamis, oppression, torture, and starvation are possible. Are these evils essential for the development of spiritually and morally free beings? And does the good of developed spiritually and morally free beings outweigh the evil and the suffering? Perhaps – although critics of classical theism strongly disagree.

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165 In a previous article I argue that only process-panentheists can coherently claim that God really had no other way than to create the world as God did. See Lina Langby, “Process-Panentheism and the ‘Only Way’ Argument,” *Open Theology* 8, no. 1 (2022): 261–75, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0203.
We can now see that the following core claims reasonably apply to classical theism.

Classical theism is a family of conceptions of God that holds at least the following claims to be true: (1.) God is metaphysically independent of the any world; (2.) God is a transcendent and non-physical spirit; (3.) God is person-like; and (4.) God is absolutely simple, omnipresent, omnipotent, eternal, self-sufficient, necessary, unaffected by time and contingent events, perfect in goodness, and the free Creator and sustainer of everything that exists.

As we have already seen, more attributes could be added to these core claims. However, this minimal understanding will suffice to outline the differences between classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism.

I have now presented a rational reconstruction of classical theism and some questions raised against it. Some objections are philosophical, arguing for incoherence within the classical conception of God. Others are theological, arguing for religious inadequacy or scriptural misrepresentation. Another sort of critique of the classical theistic conception of God is pragmatic or axiological, stating that this conception of God leads to harmful consequences such as gender oppression or environmental neglect. I do not claim that all objections are successful, and many theologians and philosophers defend classical theism. This dissertation, however, is not primarily about classical theism. I now turn to panentheism.

4.2. Understanding panentheism

As the name indicates, panentheism is a form of theism that differs from classical theism. Several thinkers have defined panentheism, and so several definitions of panentheism are possible and available. Niels Henrik Gregersen says that there are probably as many definitions of panentheism as there are ways of understanding what the en in panentheism means.167 Here, I navigate between a few definitions of panentheism to explicate some of the consequences of the selected definitions and to explain how I understand panentheism. I also say something about the history of panentheism.

Panentheism as a philosophical answer to the God–world relationship is not limited to one specific religion. Forms of Hinduism contain panentheistic doctrines and beliefs; so do forms of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. Panentheism has its roots in Neo-Platonism, and later in Pseudo-Dionysius and theologians such as Nicholas of Cusa and Schleiermacher.168 The history of panentheism is in many ways the history of Neo-Platonism. Neo-

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168 Cooper, Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers.
Platonism’s distinctive panentheistic aspect is the notion of the world as a divine emanation; and the dialectical theology originating from Nicholas of Cusa, Jacob Böhme, and later Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel displays panentheism. Dialectical theology locates dialectical relations in God’s being: God is both immanent and transcendent, both finite and infinite, contingent and necessary.\textsuperscript{169}

Etymologically, \textit{panentheism} stems from Greek: “\textit{pan},” from πάντα, means “everything”; “\textit{en}/\epsilon\nu” means “in”; and “\textit{theism},” from θεος, means “God.” \textit{Everything in God}. The question is what “everything in God” means.

Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, the German idealist philosopher (1781-1832), is often presented as the one who first named the doctrine that everything is in God \textit{panentheism}.\textsuperscript{170} As mentioned, the history of panentheism can be traced back at least to Neo-Platonism, and panentheistic thoughts are found in many religions; but Krause was the first to label it. However, in modern theology it has been regarded as the middle ground between classical theism and pantheism, and it is sometimes also accompanied by process theology.

Panentheism is often contrasted with pantheism (discussed later in this chapter). Pantheism is sometimes described as the doctrine that \textit{all is God, and God is all}, rather than that all is \textit{in} God.\textsuperscript{171} The significant difference between pantheism and panentheism is the notion of identity. Panentheism maintains an ontological distinction between God and creation – a distinction that pantheists do not stand by.

Panentheism holds God to be both immanent and transcendent in/to the universe. This is also the case with classical theism. However, where the classical theistic God is immanent and omnipresent, God is still an ontologically independent and separate category or entity: God is pure spirit. In panentheism, the world is a part of God. The world emanates from God’s being in some sense.

I use the term “world” as synonymous with “universe” or “cosmos” unless I say otherwise. Panentheism, then, is at least the doctrine that the world is \textit{in} God, that God is immanent and transcendent in relation to the world, but that God is not exhausted by the world. In addition, I suggest another claim to demarcate panentheism from classical theism, namely that there is a necessary feedback effect between God and the world. I come back to this later.

\textsuperscript{169} Cooper, 63.
\textsuperscript{171} A thorough and critical discussion of this definition is presented later in the chapter.
When describing the panentheistic God–world relationship, the analogy of the world as God’s body is very common. Philip Clayton calls this the panentheistic analogy. Michael Brierley recommends that the panentheistic analogy of the world as God’s body be thought of as the body and *person* rather than body and *mind*. In panentheism, the world is said to be *in* God, or part of God; but the body cannot be considered part of the mind, but rather part of the whole *person*.

### 4.2.1. Generic, strict, and qualified panentheism

To distinguish panentheism from classical theism and pantheism further, we must develop our understanding of the core claims of panentheism. I turn to three fruitful versions of panentheism, defined by Niels Henrik Gregersen as *generic, strict, and qualified* panentheism. In the chapters that follow, I mostly talk about the strict version since, as I explain later, it is the most promising and useful definition of panentheism.

*Generic* panentheism is defined as follows.

i. God contains the world, yet is also more than the world. Accordingly the world is (in some sense) “in God.”

ii. As contained “in God,” the world not only derives its existence from God, but also returns to God, while preserving the characteristics of being a creature. Accordingly, the relations between God and the world are (in some sense) bilateral.

What differentiates panentheism from classical theism is not the stance that God is immanent in the world. Classical theists also stress God’s immanence. What is different here is not that classical theism rejects the first tenet of generic panentheism, but that classical theism rejects the second one: that the world and God affect each other in a bilateral sense. More precisely, most classical theists reject the claim that God is indifferent, but maintain that God is eternally unchanged. Classical theists can argue that God is involved in and affected by the happenings in the world if such statements do not suggest a change from potentiality to actuality or timefullness within God. God is involved by being the eternally active force by which nothing could exist; but

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175 Tabaczeck, *Divine Action and Emergence: An Alternative to Panentheism*, 165; Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, I, Q.8, article 3. Here, Aquinas writes that God is in all things by virtue of God’s power, presence, and essence, and as the cause of being.


177 E.g., Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 38.
God is not involved or affected in the sense that the world actually changes and affects the nature or will of God.

Classical Christian theists can coherently argue that the world is in some sense “in” God owing to the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit and the divine omniscience. Therefore, generic panentheism does not aid us in the search for a fruitful definition of panentheism that separates it from classical versions of theism.

*Strict* panentheism claims that God metaphysically *needs* a world. Gregersen defines it as follows.

i. God cannot exist without generating a world, analogous to the way a soul cannot exist without a body; however, God can exist by embodying other worlds than our physical cosmos.

ii. It is by a metaphysical necessity that God and world coexist and co-determine one another, so that God influences the world and temporal experiences flow into the actual nature of God; all that exists necessarily participates in divine life.\(^{178}\)

This definition comes to terms with the problem of the definition of generic panentheism. Here we find an actual difference between classical theism and panentheism, namely the metaphysical necessity of a world. Classical theism holds the creation to be a result of free divine choice, while, according to this definition, panentheism (and especially process-panentheism) holds creation to be metaphysically necessary. This definition also highlights the mutual or dipolar feedback effect between God and the world. As will become apparent later, this definition suits process versions of panentheism very well.

Qualified panentheism is a borderline case, because classical theists could hold the first of the tenets below to be true as well. However, since classical theism rejects divine mutability and passibility, I consider qualified panentheism as a possible way to understand panentheism.

*Qualified* panentheism is defined as follows.

i. While the world cannot exist without God, God could exist without a world; accordingly, the soul–body is at the most a useful metaphor for the intimacy of the God–world relationship once the world is created out of divine love.

ii. It is by divine grace that the world is codetermining God, so that temporal events may influence God and creatures share the life of God; all that is redeemed participates in divine life.\(^{179}\)

\(^{178}\) Gregersen, “Three Varieties of Panentheism,” 23.

\(^{179}\) Gregersen, 23.
This definition is not as strong as strict panentheism. However, it could still be a fruitful definition that explicates some modal and pragmatic differences between panentheism and classical theism. Both classical theism and panentheism, in this definition, agree that God could exist without a world and that the world exists by divine grace. However, this qualified version of panentheism highlights the temporal aspect of God – something that classical theism rejects. Arguably, the difference between qualified panentheism and classical theism is slight. However, qualified panentheism could be used to signify the mutual relatedness and love between God and the world to a higher degree than classical theism does. However, I would not use qualified panentheism as a definition of panentheism if I wanted to argue for an alternative conception of God other than classical theism. Nevertheless, it could be used when arguing for a more relational view of God.

Gregersen’s suggestion is that panentheism must be defined so that the world not only exists in God but that the world also has a feedback effect on God. This, I believe, is true. To define panentheism in respect of a feedback effect between God and the world, and that the world is in God, is helpful, because this clearly states two doctrines to which classical theism does not adhere. This does not in itself settle the question of whether the feedback effect is metaphysically necessary. I think that is good because, at this point, I do not wish to define away more conceptions of God than is necessary.

In addition to the definitions offered by Gregersen, it useful to look at the core claims of panentheism according to Mikael Stenmark. Even though Stenmark defines panentheism as necessarily of the strict kind – which I do not – he presents valuable and useful distinctions when clarifying what panentheism entails. First, he assumes that the “theism” in panentheism (and pantheism) indicates a minimal personal perspective that he calls minimal personal theism. Minimal person theism holds that “God is conscious or mind-like, or personal or person-like, or has properties at least similar to those of a person.”

He then proposes that panentheism includes 1.) minimal personal theism, but also seven other core claims:

2.) The doctrine of creation: “God is the creator of the world, so the world depends on God for its origin.”

3.) The doctrine of (immense) divine power: “God is at least as powerful as one must be to create the world and sustain its continued existence.”

4.) The doctrine of conservation: “The continuing existence of the world depends on God’s ongoing creative activity.”

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181 Stenmark, 25. (See p. 26 for context.)
182 Stenmark, 31.
183 Stenmark, 25.
5.) *The doctrine of ontological inclusion:* “God ontologically includes the world, that is, the world is a part of God.”

6.) *The doctrine of symmetrical ontological dependence:* “God depends on the world (or the creation of another world) for God’s own existence [and the world depends on God for the world’s own existence].”

7.) *The doctrine of (divine) sensibility:* “God is capable of emotions, in particular is capable of feeling sorrow or suffering as a result of [the] afflictions of God’s creatures.”

8.) *The doctrine of divine goodness:* “God is perfectly good, compassionate and loving.”

These are the core claims of panentheism according to Stenmark; but there are possible extension claims that could be added. Some of these core claims are shared with other forms of theism, such as classical theism. Doctrines 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8 are also shared with classical theism. As far as I can see, Stenmark’s version of minimal panentheism (the core claims) is best called strict panentheism, to use Gregersen’s terminology. Stenmark even rejects the idea that qualified panentheism is panentheism at all, since it rejects the doctrine of symmetrical ontological dependence. Furthermore, generic panentheism is too vague and open for it to be distinguished from classical theism. I accept qualified panentheism into my analysis, since it actually emphasizes something different than classical theism, namely a temporal and relational aspect of God – something that classical theism rejects.

According to Louis Jacobs, panentheism need not entail the strict understanding. He writes that, “while it is inconceivable for there to be a universe without God, it is not inconceivable for God to exist without the universe.” This is precisely what classical theists claim. In order to understand this claim as panentheism and not simply as classical theism, we must understand it in terms of emanation. A panentheistic God of this qualified kind can exist without a world; but any world that does exist comes from God’s very being as an emanation. The creative act would have to be in terms of *creatio ex Deo* – a creation from the being of God – not *creatio ex nihilo*. If we understand qualified panentheism like this, it differs from classical theism not only in a modal but also in a more substantial sense.

However, some theologians and philosophers, such as Paul Göcke, argue that the only difference between panentheism and classical theism must be that panentheism holds the world to be an intrinsic – necessary – property of God.

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184 Stenmark, 26.
185 Stenmark, 26.
186 Stenmark, 31.
187 Stenmark, 31.
God, while classical theism holds the world to be an extrinsic – contingent – property of God.\textsuperscript{189} He rejects spatial understandings of the \textit{en} in panentheism. Instead, he argues that it is only because of the doctrine that the world is a necessarily existing and ontologically intrinsic part of God that separates panentheism from classical theism.\textsuperscript{190} I agree with Göcke that the difference between classical theism and panentheism sometimes (depending on which exact version we speak of) is minimal. However, if we accepted that the only distinct aspect of panentheism is the doctrine that the world is an ontologically necessary and intrinsic part of God, then we would have no way of distinguishing it from pantheism (see later in this chapter). Instead, panentheism claims, among others, both that the world is an ontologically and intrinsic part of God and that God is more than the world. According to pantheism, God is not more than the world; and so in this second tenet we have a distinguishing feature between panentheism and pantheism.

We have seen some different definitions and qualifications of panentheism. From now on, I regard panentheism as a spectrum of doctrines that share a close family resemblance. I regard the \textit{doctrine of symmetrical ontological dependence} as the defining feature of strict panentheism. However, I shall not be so strict as to reject versions of panentheism that do not hold this doctrine to be true. Different philosophers/theologians regard different questions as more significant than others and, therefore, they give more weight to some claims and care less about others.

The panentheism of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich von Shelling, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Alfred North Whitehead, and Charles Hartshorne holds God to be metaphysically dependent on a world (although not necessarily this actual world). Sallie McFague is a panentheist, but her reasons for being a panentheist have little to do with whether God metaphysically needs a world. She argues in favor of panentheism on feminist and environmentally pragmatic grounds. Jürgen Moltmann holds a compatibilist position in which God is both a necessary and a free Creator.\textsuperscript{191} One of the significant reasons that Moltmann rejects classical theism is because it cannot adequately explain the existence of evil, while (he argues) his version of panentheism can. If the problem of evil is one’s core concern – if the problem of evil is the primary reason why one is a panentheist rather than a classical theist – then panentheism ought to be more successful in explaining the nature and existence of evil than classical theism.

I end this section by concluding that \textit{I understand panentheism to be a family of conceptions of God that holds at least the following claims to be true:}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{191} Cooper, \textit{Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers}, 245.
\end{itemize}
(1.) God is the primary cause and ground for the world’s existence; (2.) the world is an ontological part of God; (3.) the world is part of God, but God is more than the world; (4.) God and the world affect each other so that there is a feedback effect between God and the world; (5.) God is person-like; and (6.) God is perfect in goodness and knowledge and at least as powerful as one needs to be in order to cause and sustain the world.

There are other extension claims that could be added, but I regard these six doctrines as essential to panentheism. Doctrines 1 and 6 are shared with classical theism, but – as will become apparent in the chapters that follow – the notion of goodness, and especially divine power, differs from how it is conceptualized in classical theism.

4.3. Understanding pantheism

This part of the chapter aims to identify the core beliefs that could be defined as properly pantheistic as opposed to panentheistic or classical theistic. This is crucial, since my purpose is to analyze how arguments for pantheism differ from arguments for panentheism in relation to classical theism. Below I also discuss different versions of naturalism, because some thinkers have thought naturalism and pantheism to be the same thing. I argue that naturalism and pantheism are ontologically different theories. I also say something about the history of pantheism.

Pantheism shares the same etymology as panentheism. The difference is the missing *en*. As a result, we have only “pan”/ πᾶν and “God”/ θεός: *everything is God*, or possibly *God is everything*. In section 4.3.3, “The God–world identity,” two main versions of pantheism are presented. There we shall see a slight difference between claiming that *nothing is that is not God* (I call this type “monistic all-is-one pantheism”) and *God is everything that is* (I call this type “pluralistic one-is-all pantheism”).

As is the case for panentheism, pantheistic ideas are ancient. They can be found in Christian mysticism, Indian philosophy, Sufi mysticism, Buddhism, Kabbalistic Judaism, and (I imagine) also in many ancient nature religions.

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192 I have coined these terms by combining the ideas of William Urquhart, Timothy Sprigge, and William James. I believe that my terminology (monistic all-is-one, and pluralistic one-is-all) is clearer, it suits the positions better, and it avoids possible confusion with panentheism. It is easier to separate pantheism from panentheism if we speak of identity (is), rather than location (in).

However, the English term pantheism was coined by the Irishman John Tol-land in 1705, although Joseph Ralphson used the Latin term *pantheismus* in 1697, in *De Spatio Reali seu Ente Infinito*. Modern culture is often inspired by pantheist thoughts such as those found in the films *Star Wars* and *Avatar*.

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) is perhaps the most famous historical pantheist, but there is debate about whether he actually was a pantheist. Peter Forrest thinks that Spinoza was either an atheist or a panentheist, and recently, Luca Valera and Gabriel Vidal have argued that Spinoza was in fact a panentheist. Indeed, some parts of Spinoza’s *Ethics* appear to indicate panentheism – for example, when he writes that the human mind is in God, and that God is without passions owing to God’s perfection, so that pleasure and pain are not part of God. Spinoza believed that only one substance exists, and that this substance is God/Nature. Nothing can be conceived and nothing can exist without this one substance. He denies that God has a body, and he does in a sense distinguish between God and the world so that they are not identical, because God is the *cause* of everything else that exists, and all things are modes of the one substance – God. He does emphasize that finite things are in God, which also sounds like panentheism. However, he argues that no things exist that are not modes of God, which appears to be a pantheistic claim. Whether Spinoza is to be considered a pantheist depends on how one defines it, and could be the theme of an entire study on its own. Spinoza argues that the world and everything that exists does so in God. “Whatever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived.” I suggest that this should not be understood in the same way as the panentheistic “in,” but as a humble and linguistic way of stating that individual parts, such as you and I, are not God-the-totality but parts of God-the-totality. There exists only one substance, according to Spinoza – only one thing that is independent of anything, necessarily infinite, and conceived in itself – and

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194 Peter Forrest and Roman Majeran, “Pantheism,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne / Annales de Philosophie / Annals of Philosophy* 64, no. 4 (2016): 82. (Footnote 8).
197 Spinoza, 184. (Part V, proof of prop. XVII.)
198 Spinoza, 3, 10. (Part I, prop. V and XV.)
199 Spinoza, 10, 16, 39. (Part I, prop XV, XVIII and proof, and Part II, corollary and note to prop. X.)
200 Compare with Levine, *Pantheism*, 137. (Note 21).
201 Spinoza, *The Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata)*, 10. (Part I, Prop. XV.)
everything else is dependent on this one substance. Finite things are modes of God; and God, according to Spinoza, is the cause and creator of these finite things.  

Nothing is external to God, and God is the “indwelling and not the transient cause of all things.” A pantheism of this sort highlights the difference between unity and ontological identity. There is a unity and a substance monism because God is the one substance, and everything finite exists because of God as modes of God.

There is only one substance: the God–world. However, this does not mean that I am ontologically identical to you or even to God. Spinoza states that we are in God to emphasize that God is infinite and not finite. According to him, God is the infinite “creator”; the world is not, even though the world is a mode and a necessary expression of God. The more we understand the world, Spinoza says, the more we understand God.

In conclusion, all pantheists agree that God and the world are identical somehow and that the God–world is an ontologically monistic unity. How this monistic unity is to be understood is not agreed upon, and critics of pantheism often claim that pantheism cannot make sense of how a diversified universe is a unity. This is called the problem of unity. However, all pantheists reject God–world dualism. Thus in pantheism we have ontological monism. Our choice is not only between ontological God–world dualism and ontological God–world identity. Substance monism, or some panpsychist mental quality, might be used to explain the God–world unity. However, God–world monism does not equal ontological identity. Unity and ontological identity are not the same things.

According to Michael Levine, the pantheist does not believe that the theistic God is immanent because the pantheist rejects the existence of the theistic God altogether. According to Levine, pantheism is non-theistic and non-personal. Stenmark assumes instead that pantheism can take the theism part seriously and that pantheism, therefore, shares a belief in a personal or person-like God. I analyze two paradigmatic forms of pantheism: one in which the divine is taken to have person-like qualities, and one that rejects person-like qualities in the pantheistic God–world.

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202 This is something with which pantheist Timothy Sprigge would not agree, since he argues that pantheism by necessity rejects the notion of God as creator.

203 Spinoza, The Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata), 16. (Part I, Prop. XVIII.)

204 Spinoza, 188. (Part V, Prop. XXIV.)

205 Levine, Pantheism, 2; Timothy Sprigge, “Pantheism,” The Monist 80, no. 2 (1997): 197.


207 Levine, Pantheism, 94.

208 Stenmark, “Panentheism and Its Neighbors,” 28. Neither Levine nor Stenmark are pantheists themselves, but they base their judgment on a philosophical investigation of pantheism.
By looking at the sample below of definitions of pantheism, it becomes clear that further distinctions are needed to analyze pantheism fruitfully as an alternative to panentheism and classical theism. Some definitions of pantheism to be found are these:

1.) “The view that God is in everything, or that God and the universe are one.”

2.) “Religious system [...] based on the belief that God (or gods) and the universe are identical. According to pantheism, all life is infused with divinity. It sees no distinction between the creator and creatures.”

3.) “The belief that God is present in all natural things.”

4.) “In pantheistic views, God and the world are essentially identical; the divine is totally immanent.”

5.) “[T]he view that God is identical with the cosmos, the view that there exists nothing which is outside of God, or else negatively as the rejection of any view that considers God as distinct from the universe.”

6.) “The doctrine that God is not a personality or transcendent supernatural being but that all laws, forces, manifestations, and so forth of the self-existing natural universe constitute an all-inclusive divine Unity.”

It is evident that the first part of the definition (1.) is inadequate in this study, since using it would entail no real difference between pantheism and panentheism. The third definition (3.) also appears inadequate, since classical theists and panentheists believe God to be omnipresent in all natural things. Definitions (2.), (4.), and (5.) all focus on the identity between God and the universe. They all capture what was said in the previous part of the chapter: the significant difference between pantheism and panentheism is the notion of identity. Panentheists keep an ontological distinction between God and creation, while

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pantheists do not. Definition (6.) is also useful because it distinguishes between pantheism and panentheism (and classical theism). It also emphasizes versions of pantheism that reject a personal conception of the divine.

When analyzing what I initially call religious pantheism, the focus will be on the identity of God and the world. This identity can be either personal or non-personal. Joanna Leidenhag, Michael Levin, and Eric Steinhart have emphasized that pantheism asserts two things: (1.) that all things that exist are unified; and (2.) that this unity is divine.\(^{215}\) Arthur Schopenhauer’s critique that pantheism equals atheism appears true if God/the divine is only a synonym for the physical universe.\(^{216}\) However, if pantheism is to be a conception of the divine, it must state something more than a semantic identity between “God” and “the physical universe.”

4.3.1. Naturalism and pantheism

As the epithet \emph{religious} in the previous section indicates, some worldviews are non-religious and are often called \emph{naturalistic} instead. One such worldview is sometimes called naturalistic pantheism. I argue that pantheism and naturalism are separate outlooks on life. They are substantially different; the difference is not constituted by using different words – “God” or “world” – to denote the world. To fulfill the purpose of this dissertation, it is especially relevant to outline this difference, since the purpose is to analyze different conceptions of the \emph{God–world} relationship. Versions of “pantheism” that may equally well be called “atheism,” therefore, are not investigated.\(^{217}\)

Brian Leftow argues against naturalistic pantheism, and describes it as the view that “the universe at its basic level consists entirely of the basic entities of physics, and its laws are those of physics.”\(^{218}\) He also argues that, if one wants to be a naturalist, one cannot be a pantheist, and vice versa. I will show that Leftow is right in this assessment.

As with most philosophical categories, \emph{naturalism} is a slippery concept that is used differently by different philosophers. It is often philosophically confusing when a philosophical stance such as naturalism, realism, or anti-realism is not specified. \emph{Naturalism about what? A realist about what?} Naturalism is


\(^{217}\) That is to say, if such a theory could be called pantheism at all, which I reject.

also often contrasted with *supernaturalism*; but if we do not know what the first stance means, we will not know what contrasts with it.

A re-occurring distinction is that between *metaphysical* naturalism and *methodological* naturalism. A metaphysical naturalist is someone who thinks that only natural things and phenomena exist. A methodological naturalist is someone who only accepts natural and empirical explanations and investigations when doing science. The question here is what is intended by the term “natural.” What is intended by claims stating that only natural things exist? What is a natural explanation? If the natural sciences found scientific evidence for the existence of God, would that indicate that God is a natural phenomenon? Would that indicate that explanations relating to God’s actions are natural explanations?

*Metaphysical* naturalism is a theory about what exists. It states that only natural phenomena and entities exist. God, perceived as a supernatural being or agent, does not exist according to a metaphysical naturalist. Philip Clayton writes that metaphysical naturalism\(^ {219} \) “is the view that all that exists are natural objects within the universe […].”\(^ {220} \) The question then is what “natural” is supposed to mean. Metaphysical naturalism is usually connected to *physicalism*. Physicalism states that everything is reducible to physical laws, particles, or energy.\(^ {221} \) However, as some have pointed out, if it turns out that science can prove the existence of spirits, ghosts, angels, or God, what would it mean to say that those entities are non-natural?\(^ {222} \) My impression is that most metaphysical naturalists have no good answer to this question, since they rely on the belief that such supernatural entities simply do not exist. Therefore, this hypothetical scenario would never be realized.

A *religious naturalist* believes that only the natural world exists, but that it is appropriate to hold a religious attitude toward nature.\(^ {223} \) According to Jerome Stone, a religious naturalist denies that a personal God exists, that there is some cosmic teleology, and that the world/reality involves comprehensive

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\(^ {219} \) He only writes “naturalism”, but what he describes under the term “naturalism” is a metaphysical position, and therefore I take his definition of “naturalism” to be really a definition of *metaphysical* naturalism.


\(^ {221} \) Clayton, 2.


conservation of value. According to this understanding of religious naturalism, process theology is not naturalistic (as David Griffin wants to argue) but supernaturalistic. Stone writes the following about process theology:

As I understand it, the God of process theology, while deeply immersed within this world, is so ontologically distinct and superior as to fall outside the realm of naturalism as I understand it. An entity that is surpassable by none except itself is not naturalist – immanentist, yes; naturalist, no.

As Mikael Leidenhag describes the religious naturalist, she wants to combine a metaphysical naturalist claim with a methodological one. However, the religious naturalist also claims that the natural world can provide us with a sense of religious meaning, value, and purpose. According to the religious and metaphysical naturalist, the natural world – which is all there is – may even be regarded as sacred and an appropriate object of awe. All religious naturalists are monists because they believe that there is only one reality – not, for example, God and the world. However, they can be emergentists and believe that the natural physical world gives rise to a plurality of phenomena of value such as consciousness or mentality.

So, are religious naturalists pantheists? Sometimes, yes. If a religious naturalist rejects the existence of a personal God, then she cannot be a personal pantheist, although she can be a non-personal pantheist. On the other hand, if, as Stone defines it, a religious naturalist is someone who rejects the notion that the world contains a cosmic teleology and denies belief in a comprehensive conservation of value in the universe, then she cannot be a pantheist at all.

For a pantheist such as Timothy Sprigge – who is a panpsychist pantheist – it is obvious that naturalism is different from pantheism. According to Sprigge, everything has consciousness, and everything shares in the one united divine consciousness. He describes so-called pantheist positions that claim that “God” is simply another word for nature/the universe as described by science (such as the views of Richard Jeffries and Robinson Jeffers) as “materialism gone sentimental.” “God” is not merely a word we can use to describe the world according to natural science.

Joanna Leidenhag agrees that what is sometimes called naturalistic pantheism is dangerously close to being what Richard Dawkins describes as “sexed

228 Leidenhag, 3.
229 See Sprigge, The Vindication of Absolute Idealism, Ch. 3; Sprigge, “Pantheism,” 202–4.
up atheism.”231 William Bauer also suggests that a pantheist need not identify God with a purely materialistic universe. The involvement of mind would make pantheism more feasible because, “if God has any features, it seems they must include some kind of mental or experimental features.”232 Pantheism can thus have a naturalistic component, in that pantheism need not go beyond the “natural.” However, the broader metaphysical picture needs to include something that makes the unity divine, such as mentality or intentionality. In other words, a pantheist and a metaphysical naturalist are not in agreement on what reality is like.

A naturalist and strict biologist position cannot claim that nature has a purpose. A naturalist can only claim that things happen. Cells mutate and evolve, but a naturalist cannot claim that certain mutations, species, or extinctions are better or worse than others, because nature has no intentions in a strictly non-intentional and non-teleological universe. Mutations do not happen for a reason, according to a naturalist. They happen because they can. It is incorrect to claim that genes mutate because they will survive better. It is the other way around: some genes survive better because they mutate. However, intention – a telos – does not exist in a naturalist world, at least not until animals with consciousness arise; but then there are only subjective intentions, not an overarching telos for the whole of the cosmos. We ascribe intention to nature because we cannot but see intention everywhere we look; but a naturalistic universe has no purpose or intention.

Martin Yaclin also supports the idea that naturalism and pantheism are different positions. He argues that the divine unity in pantheism is axiologically superior and that the divine unity makes nature inherently valuable.233 A naturalist cannot coherently think that the universe as a whole is inherently valuable or that the universe/unity is aware, conscious, or experiencing, or that it has a telos and an aim.

4.3.2. Value and teleology

A pantheist claims that something unites all nature/the universe, namely the inherently and supremely valuable telos: the divine unity. The divine is somehow (perhaps in the form of consciousness) present in all the parts.234 As stated above, a naturalist cannot claim that nature as a whole is a divine unity.235

231 Leidenhag, “Unity Between God and Mind?,” 546.
God/the divine is generally thought to be good and metaphysically perfect. The same is true of the pantheist God.\textsuperscript{236} The value of the natural order, according to the naturalist, is relative to that of other natural orders, and there cannot be a unity of superior value. According to a naturalist, value is something we ascribe. It is we who postulate intention in nature. A naturalist cannot think that \textit{nature} is intentional in itself or that it has a telos.

Furthermore, a naturalist does not attribute perfection or goodness to the world itself. A religious naturalist can argue that only living things are valuable and that non-living nature is not because value is something \textit{we} attribute to things. A pantheist, on the other hand, whether personal or non-personal, believes that everything is valuable independently of what we think, because everything is an aspect of the divine teleological reality.\textsuperscript{237}

Most pantheists would claim that the divine unity is valuable or even metaphysically perfect.\textsuperscript{238} Spinoza used “reality” and “perfection” as synonymous words.\textsuperscript{239} The world is perfect since God is perfect, and, according to Spinoza, this has nothing to do with whether we like the world.\textsuperscript{240} A naturalist cannot coherently claim at all that the world is self-conscious or that it experiences unity — especially not that this unity is good, perfect, intentional, or immensely valuable.

Whether religious or not, a naturalist thus denies that the universe/world as a unity has intention, purpose, self-consciousness, or self-awareness. This is the primary difference between the pantheist and the naturalist. However, while the pantheist God/unity need not be personal (as described below), the \textit{pantheist God/unity must be an experiencing, intentional, conscious, or teleological whole}.

To limit the material analyzed in this dissertation, I do not engage with purely naturalistic worldviews or with what could be called “religious naturalism” because they are not relevant in a discussion on the worship-worthiness of God. Atheistic or naturalistic worldviews do not depict any God–world \textit{relationship} at all. The unity must be regarded as divine for pantheism to be a conception of the divine, and I take divinity to be logically inconsistent with

\textsuperscript{236} Mander, “Pantheism.”
\textsuperscript{237} Loyal Rue, “Religious Naturalism—Where Does It Lead?,” Zygon 42, no. 2 (2007): 420, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2007.00409.x. Unless William Urquhart is right in his accusation that Hindu versions of pantheism are inherently pessimistic, in that they are metaphysically and axiologically empty. There is more on this in chapter 5, “Gender equality.” It may also be the case that a religious pantheist still can claim that different aspects of reality are \textit{more} valuable than others. See Mander, “Pantheism.”
\textsuperscript{239} Spinoza, \textit{The Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata)}, 34. (Part II, Definition VI.) Also p. 32, (Part I, Appendix.)
\textsuperscript{240} Spinoza, 34. (Part II, Definition VI.)
naturalism. For this reason, from now on I understand all forms of pantheism to be what I previously labelled religious pantheism. I also accept that personal pantheist positions – that God is personal – are something that religious naturalists reject. A pantheist does not believe that we can simply discard the words “God” or “the divine” and speak merely of “nature.” According to the pantheist, something makes the world a divine unity, and this is what separates her from the naturalist. The non-personal pantheist, even if she does not believe that God is personal, believes that the divine unity has a telos and inherent value.

4.3.3. The God–world identity

Peter Forrest mentions at least three ways in which the pantheistic God–world could be considered a unity.

The first would be if it had a mental life and if that mental life had sufficient psychological unity to count as a person. In that case we would have a pantheistic personal God. The second would be if the parts of the Universe are causally integrated so that it formed a self-organising system analogous to a living organism. Finally we might take the Universe to be a unity because of the ubiquitous and pervasive natural order. […] We could take the whole Universe to have a unity due to the ubiquitous and pervasive natural order or we could instead take the natural order itself to be God.241

Even if we agree on a definition of pantheism as the view that God and the world/universe are identical, it is not obvious what the identity claim amounts to. In this section, I identify two main versions of pantheism: a monistic all-is-one version, and a pluralistic one-is-all version. Even if there are more sophisticated versions of pantheism that lie somewhere in between these two versions, I use them as paradigmatic examples to reconstruct arguments for how a pantheist can argue coherently in favor of value distinction (in chapter 5, “Gender equality”).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, William S. Urquhart strongly criticized pantheism. He focused on two primary forms of Hindu pantheism: the pantheism of Advaita Vedanta with Adi Shankara (c. 700-750) as the central figure, and the pantheism of Vishishtadvaita, or qualified Vedanta, with Ramanuja (c. 1017-1137) as the central figure.242

Shankara held the Brahman – the unchanging and eternal reality – to be all there is. According to Shankara’s philosophy and the tradition of Advaita Vedanta, the world is illusory and phenomenal, māyā, and only the Brahman is

242 Urquhart, Pantheism and the Value of Life, 29.
The tradition of Advaita Vedanta “affirm[s] the reality of Brahman alone and view[s] the created world as an illusion […].” The belief that only the Brahman is real may be understood as denying plurality and separation, because the tradition of Advaita Vedanta regards matter and individuals as illusions. Only the Brahman is real.

In addition, Ramanuja was critical of Shankara’s philosophy and, instead of denying the reality of the phenomenal world, Ramanuja accepted it as real. Vedānta perspectives of the world as an illusion or that it is an imperfect manifestation of Brahman ran contrary to Rāmānuja’s religious proclivities. For Ramanuja, God is exemplified in different forms, such as matter and soul. In Ramanuja’s model, the self is different than but still identical to the Brahman. There is an “identity in difference” or a dialectical difference in Ramanuja’s pantheism. Individual souls experience the cycle of rebirth (samsāra), but they are still modes of Brahman. I argue that this sort of pantheism allows for real, not merely apparent, pluralism and distinction. There is room for manyness in God in this sort of pantheism.

The philosophies of Shankara and Ramanuja are both ontologically monistic. They embrace God–world monism. However, according to Urquhart, the Advaita Vedanta (Shankara) is idealistic because it states that divine consciousness is the only real thing. In contrast, the Vishishtadvaita or qualified Vedanta (Ramanuja) does not. Urquhart describes the differences between Shankara’s and Ramanuja’s philosophies.

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244 Adluri, “The World as the Body of God: Ramanuja on What Is Ultimately Real,” 626.


251 Urquhart, Pantheism and the Value of Life, 25.
the two Hindu schools as follows: 1.) *nothing is that is not God* – I call this “monistic all-is-one pantheism” – (Advaita Vedanta and Shankara), and 2.) *God is everything that is* – I call this “pluralistic one-is-all pantheism” – (Vishishtadvaita, or qualified Vedanta and Ramanuja).\(^ {252}\)

William James emphasizes a similar distinction between these primary forms of pantheism.\(^ {253}\) He distinguishes between *monistic* pantheism and *pluralistic* pantheism. James, and recently also Mary-Jane Rubenstein, favors the pluralistic version of pantheism because it allows for a plurality of realities and entities.\(^ {254}\) Instead of the monistic *all*-form, James and Rubenstein want the pluralistic *each*-form.\(^ {255}\) They argue that an absolute monistic unity creates hierarchies and inequality because hierarchy and domination can arise within a system with only quantitative and no qualitative difference.\(^ {256}\) Instead, pluralistic pantheism builds on pluralities and differences. The multiform is divine, and the world is full of divinities. James agrees that this plurality forms a unity because everything is connected to *something*, although not to *everything* as the monistic version would have it.\(^ {257}\) “Well, let things be one in that sense!”,\(^ {258}\) he proclaims. Being a pragmatist, he points out that the world can be a unity or a plurality, depending on our perspective.

I take James’ monistic pantheism to be sufficiently equivalent with the all-is-one type of monistic pantheism, and I take his pluralistic pantheism to be sufficiently equivalent with the second, pluralistic one-is-all type of pantheism. I write “sufficiently equivalent” because monistic pantheism need not be of the idealistic form, denying the reality of the phenomenal world. Also, James’ and Rubenstein’s pluralistic pantheism, especially Rubenstein’s version, is so pluralistic as almost to be polytheism. God/world are many, according to their pluralistic pantheism. God is not one, and the world’s entities are not modes of one unified God. Instead, everything has its own perspective and point of view. There is no “God’s eye point of view,” only a plurality of perspectives.\(^ {259}\) According to this sort of pantheism, there is no absolute unity; so Rubenstein prefers the term *pantheologies* (in plural) instead of pantheism.

However, James and Rubenstein agree that all versions of pantheism are monistic in one way, and that is by denying ontological God–world dualism. Instead of ontological God–world dualism, as found in classical theism and panentheism, pantheism entails ontological God–world monism. This is essential to pantheism.

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\(^ {252}\) Urquhart, 25.
\(^ {257}\) Rubenstein, 149; James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 169.
\(^ {258}\) James, *Pragmatism*, 93.
\(^ {259}\) James, 103; Rubenstein, *Pantheologies*, 173–74.
According to Urquhart, the monistic all-is-one version sacrifices the reality of anything but God, and describes the reality of things in the phenomenal world as mere illusions, māyā. According to him, the second form of pantheism, the pluralistic one-is-all version, does not sacrifice the reality of the phenomenal world, but sacrifices the individuality and particularity of the things in the phenomenal world. Ramanuja would probably disagree with Urquhart’s pessimistic analysis, and, of course, James and Rubenstein would argue that the pluralistic one-is-all pantheism indeed does keep the reality of the multiform. That is the whole point of pluralistic pantheism. In chapter 5 I develop the argument that the pluralistic one-is-all version of pantheism does not sacrifice individuality and particularity.

These two paradigmatic versions of pantheism are often intermingled, and a single pantheistic thinker often (consciously or unconsciously) combines these two versions. Urquhart concludes that “[t]he above considerations have shown that the two phases of Pantheism are so inseparably linked together that in our treatment of it we must keep both of them in view.”

The pantheism of Timothy Sprigge, for example, states that God is in everything and that everything is in God.

Even Shankara made distinctions in the phenomenal world, even if he thought that ultimately only the Brahman is real. It is obvious that some versions of pantheism, such as the Hindu versions, claim that God is not merely the totality of things but that each thing is God. If each individual thing is God, then so is the totality. This means that the concepts “world” and “God” refer to the same “entity/phenomena” (although they cannot refer to a value-less and naturalistic reality). However, the two concepts are not necessarily synonymous because they highlight different aspects of the same thing. They do, nevertheless, refer to the same thing. Claims about identical things need not be synonymous. For example, claims about the evening star and the morning star cannot necessarily be regarded as synonymous claims. The referent is a single star/planet, but the two concepts are used to denote different aspects of the same entity.

According to William Mander, a “majority of pantheists have regarded the universe as Infinite, metaphysically perfect, necessarily existent, and eternal (or some subset thereof).” These characteristics are traditionally identified with God. Mander lists six possible ways to understand the pantheistic identity claim. I accept only three of them as viable, because if the other three were

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260 Urquhart, Pantheism and the Value of Life, 26.
261 Urquhart, 37.
263 Sprigge, “Pantheism,” 196.
264 Mander, “Pantheism.”
accepted it would be impossible to separate pantheism from panentheism or classical theism. The notions of identity I accept are:

**Dialectical identity:** Ramanuja, Eriugena, Nicholas of Cusa, Spinoza, and Charles Hartshorne are some thinkers who emphasize dialectical identity, or “identity in difference” (even if not all of them are pantheists). Mander writes that many pantheists reject the traditional distinction between identity and difference. God and the world are both identical and different. This idea is found in Ramanuja’s philosophical theology of identity in difference. Karl Pfeifer proposes an analogy in order to make sense of this. In the analogy, God is understood as gold: no matter how many parts or shapes a piece of gold is divided into, it will always remain 100% gold. We could identify a gold clock and see that it is different from a gold necklace; but both are pure gold. I regard dialectical identity with ontological monism or non-dualism as a viable and fruitful way to understand pantheism. This is distinguished from classical theism and panentheism because a panentheist would claim that God is gold plus something else, and the classical theist would only claim that God is something other than the gold (the world). It is also distinguished from metaphysical naturalism because a naturalist would never assume that everything is inherently divine.

**Substance identity:** The world consists of only one type of substance according to Spinoza. This substance is necessary (by definition) and eternal. It

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265 I reject (1.) identity through being, (2.) identity of origin, and (3.) eschatological identity as fruitful ways to understand pantheism.

(1.) In Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, we find the thought that God is Being itself, with Augustine, Paul Tillich, and Ibn Arabi as influential thinkers. The idea is supposedly pantheistic because the identity of God and the world is in terms of being. Any being in the world is identical to God as Being itself. It is possible, of course, for a pantheist to adhere to the “identity through being” thesis by combining it with some pantheistic core beliefs. However, I do not consider this a viable or fruitful way to understand pantheism because, from this definition alone, we would not know what separates pantheism from classical theism or panentheism.

(2.) Plotinus and Eriugena have inspired ideas of the world as an emanation or an expression of God. The idea is that the cosmos comes from God or has emanated from God. I do not take the “identity of origin” thesis to indicate pantheism, because classical theists and panentheists also usually believe that the world has its origin in God. If “creation” here indicates that first there was only God and then there was God and the world, then it cannot be pantheism.

(3.) Friedrich von Schelling and Samuel Alexander argue that the world is not yet divine, but will become so in the eschaton. I do not consider eschatological identity a fruitful way to understand pantheism, because I am interested in how pantheists could regard the God–world relationship now – not only in the eschaton.

is God, and it is the world/nature/universe. The things we ordinarily think of as separate or individual are, according to this theory, modes or properties of one and the same divine substance. This is a substance monism. This could, however, be combined with an in-worldly pantheistic pluralism such as the one William James and Mary-Jane Rubenstein defend, and describes as the each-form. In other words, the God–world is full of a plurality of beings. Nevertheless, it is an ontological God–world monism. I regard this as a fruitful way to understand pantheism. This is distinct from classical theism and also from panentheism because here God is not more, or other, than the world. This is also distinct from metaphysical naturalism because it does not accept the claim that everything shares a divine eternal substance.

Partial identity: Not every pantheist takes the identity claim to be binary. The world may be a proper part of God, and God may be a proper part of the world, but the proportions may not be equal. Mander (himself a pantheist) argues that we should not be too quick to discard pantheism of this sort because “‘strict identity’ is virtually impossible to define due to the extreme difficulty of stipulation what would count as acceptable and what as an unacceptable sense, part, aspect, or element of difference.” However, here we risk ending up with a concept of God that might be less than the world, and that could not be accepted as pantheism. Moreover, if the proportions are not equal so that parts of the world are not equally God, it seems possible that parts of the world are filled with something that is not God – and that cannot be defined as pantheism either. Can reality itself be more, or less, reality in different places? If God is regarded as more present in the physical matter than in empty space, then I suppose that a pantheistic God can be more, or less, in different places. In the chapters that follow, it becomes apparent that some pantheists regard God as more significantly present in some places and circumstances than in others. We thus have a God–world monism but with different degrees of divine significance present. I regard the notion of partial identity to be a viable way to understand pantheism, even though it is a claim that can also be shared by panentheists.

It is time to conclude how I intend to understand pantheism in this study. There are many versions of pantheism and different understandings of the identity claim. I accept both personal and non-personal pantheism. These nuances are examined in the sections that follow. I end this section by concluding how I understand pantheism.

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267 Spinoza, *The Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata)*, 1, 3. (Definition III, and Part I, prop. V.)
269 Mander, “Pantheism.”
I understand pantheism as a family of conceptions of God that hold at least the following claims to be true: (1.) The Universe/Nature is an all-encompassing teleological divine monistic unity (God); (2.) this divine Unity (God) is all there is, and God is nothing more than this; (3.) the all-encompassing Universe/Nature/God (Unity) is supremely good, valuable, or sacred.

This definition is meant to be as open as possible so that different versions of pantheism could accept it (the personal and the non-personal versions). It makes a distinction between pantheism and panentheism, and also between pantheism and naturalism. Classical theists and panentheists reject the notion that the universe is a monistic God–world unity, and they reject the claim that God is nothing more or other than the universe. Naturalists reject the claim that intentionality or teleology is embedded in the universe. They also reject the claim that the universe is good, valuable, or sacred in itself. They can only accept the claim that we ascribe value to some aspects – not that the universe is a valuable, sacred unity in itself. Furthermore, pantheism is not atheistic, since no atheist would describe the world as a divine telos. Any accusation (such as Schopenhauer’s) that pantheism can be reduced to atheism is misplaced.

4.3.4. Religious pantheism

As argued above, I do not engage in different naturalistic positions that, by “God,” mean nothing other than a naturalistic physical universe, since I do not take metaphysical naturalism to be compatible with pantheism. The pantheists presented in the chapters that follow, therefore, adhere to religious pantheism of different sorts. Religious pantheism can be divided into at least two different versions: personal pantheism and non-personal pantheism. The personal pantheist believes that God is person-like. The non-personal pantheist rejects this. Both personal and non-personal pantheists believe that it is relevant to speak of and understand the pantheistic unity as divine.

4.3.4.1. Personal pantheism

The purpose of the present section is to exemplify how personal pantheism can be outlined because, if it is to be a coherent and reasonable conception of God that is worth considering, it must offer a reasonable explanation of personhood that is compatible with the core beliefs of pantheism. The analysis of the coherence of personal pantheism follows in chapter 8, “The problem of evil.” What follows here are merely examples of this position.

Personal pantheism holds God to be personal or person-like. In line with minimal personal theism, presented previously, personal pantheism holds that “God is conscious or mind-like, or personal or person-like, or has properties at least similar to those of a person.”270 Peter Forrest suggests that personal

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pantheists should think of the universe as God’s body. To use this analogy to describe pantheism might sound inconsistent, but, according to Forrest, consciousness – and thus personhood – does not imply a spiritual self. Personhood does not presuppose body–soul dualism, and so personal pantheists can conceptualize the God–world as person-like, even if there is no spiritual self in God that transcends the divine body.\textsuperscript{271}

Forrest proposes that there need not be a spiritual self for there to be unity of consciousness, and he claims that the personal pantheist God need not be a spirit of any kind. The self, he says, is not constituted by a spirit but by a unity of body-awareness (proprioception).\textsuperscript{272}

Grace Jantzen and Richard Franks defend a more straightforward understanding of the personhood of God. According to them, the pantheist God is perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Jantzen argues in favor of what I call the “embodied God thesis.”\textsuperscript{273} It entails that a personal, or person-like God, must be embodied. In this view, the body is not a sufficient but a necessary component of personhood. Even if we adhere to a non-reductionist view in which we are both body and spirit combined, we are nevertheless inescapably bodies. This is critically examined further in chapter 8, “The problem of evil.”

Michael Levine, in contrast, rejects the notion that any conception of a personal God should be called pantheism. According to him, for pantheism to be a real alternative to classical theism, pantheism needs to reject the personal-God conception.\textsuperscript{274} I do not think this is the case, which is why I distinguish between non-personal pantheism and personal pantheism.

4.3.4.2. Non-personal pantheism

In contrast to personal pantheism, non-personal pantheism rejects that God is personal or person-like. Pantheism, in Levine’s understanding, is wholly non-Jewish, non-Christian, and non-Muslim, since he thinks that pantheism rejects any notion of a personal or person-like God. For example, Shankara’s notion of the all-encompassing Brahman is non-personal.

Given that most classical theistic (and panentheistic) problems arise because of the belief in divine personhood (such as the problem of evil), non-personal pantheism might have an advantage. Only for those who think that

\textsuperscript{272} Forrest, 28–29.
\textsuperscript{273} Jantzen, \textit{God’s World, God’s Body}.
\textsuperscript{274} Levine, \textit{Pantheism}, 8, 49.
personhood is essential for the divine to be coherently the divine is this a problem. The non-personal pantheist denies that personhood and consciousness are required for the divine. Because of this, the model of the world as the divine body is inappropriate for non-personal pantheists, because that model usually presupposes that someone has the body.

Forrest asserts that the pantheist God must be personal because he thinks that only a personal or person-like God can be a suitable object of worship. Conceptually, if by “God” we mean something worship-worthy, or possibly even the only worship-worthy thing or being, and only a personal God can be worship-worthy, then essentially God must be personal. However, according to non-personal pantheism, the universe does not need to be worthy of worship. Thus the pantheistic God does not have to be personal. If the pantheist is engaged in worship, she does not necessarily think that the thing worthy of worship is a personal deity.

The theist claims that “It is necessarily true that God (if He exists) is worthy of worship.” The pantheist may accept this as true of the theistic God, but will reject its applicability to the pantheistic Unity. It is not necessarily true that the Unity, if it exists, is worthy of worship. Indeed, for the pantheist, it is most likely necessarily false.

We have here an entirely different understanding of worship-worthiness than Forrest’s. Suppose it were the case that only a personal deity could be worthy of worship. In that case, worship would be an inappropriate activity for a non-personal pantheist. However, as I argue in chapter 9, “Worship-worthiness,” there is no reason why personhood should be necessary for worship-worthiness. I argue there that, conceptually, a non-personal pantheistic unity could also be worthy of worship. To claim that non-personal pantheism is an inadequate conception of the divine only because of its rejection of a personal God is to beg the question against pantheism as an adequate religious conception of God.

### 4.4. Dualism

Before ending this chapter, I clarify the different notions of dualism at play when discussing classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism. It is important

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275 Peter Forrest claims that God must be personal in order to be worthy of worship. If being worthy of worship is necessary for being divine, and if only a personal being can be worthy of worship, then God – conceptually – must be personal. I critically examine, and criticize, this understanding in chapter 9, “Worship-worthiness.”


277 Forrest and Majeran, “Pantheism,” 68. This will be problematized because there are pantheists who think that worship is inappropriate for a pantheist to engage in.

to distinguish between what I call ontological God–world dualism and in-worldly dualism. Only if this is clearly communicated can the differences between classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism be sufficiently and finally established.

4.4.1. Ontological God–world dualism

Ontological God–world dualism is the view that reality consists of two ontological categories, physical reality and the divine. Implicit in this is the belief that the divine is non-physical. Ontological God–world dualism contrasts with ontological God–world monism, which is the view that reality consists of one ontological category: the essentially divine and non-reductive physical reality.

Ontological God–world dualism is a global ontological thesis concerning the God–world relationship. It concerns the nature of reality as a whole, both God and the world. In classical theism, God is purely transcendent spirit, while the panentheistic God is both matter and spirit. The pantheistic God is pure matter – although the nature of this matter need not be considered in respect of reductive physicalism. Classical theism is thus based on the metaphysical doctrine of ontological God–world dualism. As we have seen, the God of classical theism essentially does not need the physical world. God chooses to create and uphold the world, but could exist without it.

With this understanding of ontological God–world dualism, versions of panentheism also assume it. Mikael Leidenhag comments that, “With respect to a global ontology of reality, panentheists seem unable to avoid dualism; indeed, one should actually expect them to adopt a global dualism, otherwise God becomes identical with physical reality.” Of course, if God is identical to the physical universe, it is not panentheism but pantheism we are talking about. Panentheism must therefore adhere to a global ontological God–world dualism.

Although strict panentheism rejects the claim that God could exist without a world (as classical theism claims), strict panentheism also entails the claim that reality as such is constituted by at least two ontological categories: physical reality and that which is not a physical reality but purely divine and non-physical. Reality as a global whole is thus constituted by the world and by the part of reality that is God but not the world. The difference between classical

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theism and panentheism, in this regard, is that panentheism holds God to be both physical reality and transcendent spirit, while classical theism holds God to be only transcendent and wholly non-physical.

Process-panentheism of the Whiteheadian tradition is a version of strict panentheism; it holds the world to be necessarily co-eternal with God; God metaphysically needs a world to which to relate and with which to be in mutual relationship. In process-panentheism, God is dipolar. In the words of Whitehead,

Thus, analogously to all actual entities, the nature of God is dipolar. He has a primordial nature and a consequent nature. The consequent nature of God is conscious; and it is the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom. The primordial nature is conceptual, the consequent nature is the weaving of God’s physical feelings upon his primordial concepts.

In process thought, all things have self-determination and something like free will, even if not all things are conscious or self-conscious. This means that God never is nor can be the unilateral steering cause for anything. God always needs the free cooperation of the entities themselves. In a way, this is certainly a kind of dualism, although God metaphysically always needs to relate to a world. This is clearly not a monism, because the world is contingent, and only God has eternal aspects. They are not identical. However, given the metaphysical necessity of the relationality between God and world, we could say that process-panentheism entails an ontological God–world dualism with necessary dipolar inclusion. In the chapters that follow, the meaning of this is more carefully examined.

Pantheism is committed to ontological God–world monism. In contrast to ontological God–world dualism, this monism holds the world as such to be constituted by only one type of ontological category: the God–world. The ontologically monistic God–world cannot be separated into matter and spirit or into physical and non-physical reality, as if these are different categories. As will become apparent in the next section and in the chapters that follow on pantheism, matter and spirit are a holistic unity according to pantheism. I reject the notion that physically reductive theories are to be called pantheism, which is why I take pantheism to entail a holistic and monistic ontology.

\[284\] Whitehead, 345.
\[285\] Whitehead, 27.
4.4.2. In-worldly dualism

Ontological God–world dualism is a global ontological thesis concerning reality as a whole. A local ontology concerns in-worldly states of being. “A local ontology [...] focuses on a specific phenomenon within the world and what the best ontological interpretation of it may be.”\(^{286}\) In the chapters on panentheism and pantheism, the notion of in-worldly dualisms occurs frequently. The traditional dualisms of nature/God, transcendent/immanent, man/woman, and human/animal are mentioned. In these cases, the word “dualism” can often be understood as synonymous with contrasts or opposites. In some cases – for example, in the arguments for pantheism regarding environmental well-being and gender equality – the ontological monism of pantheism can entail in-worldly monism as well. If the only real category is the monistic God–world, then the traditional dualism of matter and spirit is false. However, this does not mean that contraries cannot exist. Pantheists do not necessarily reject the reality, for example, of men and women, animals and human beings – although some versions of pantheism, such as Advaita Vedanta, reject altogether these categories as real. The problem that some pantheists seek to address is when we conceptualize and categorize reality into distinct spheres as if they could exist independently of their surroundings, and as if relationality and interconnectedness were not fundamental. The problem with conceptualizing the world in dualisms and contraries is not the fact that a plurality of entities and beings constitutes the world, but the fact that human beings and societies tend to regard certain aspects of reality, such as the male and masculine, as inherently more valuable than the female and feminine.\(^{287}\) The male and the human have traditionally been associated with reason, divinity, and spirit – thus contributing to theologies that value the male and masculine more than the female and feminine. The same applies to the conceptualization of human beings. “Human being” ought to be an inclusive category, seeing that everyone is different and unique. Despite this, the notion of a human being has historically been thought of as a white, economically stable middle-aged man. This is seen in the details of daily life, such as how health care is constructed, how cars are built, and what room temperature is regarded as adequate.\(^{288}\) A theology with a worldview in which, for example, men are considered more rational, righteous, and spiritually evolved than women can contribute to a


\(^{287}\) See, e.g., Jantzen, “Feminism and Pantheism.”

\(^{288}\) Clack, Feminism, Religion and Practical Reason, 19. In Invisible Women, Caroline Criado Perez (2019) provides data that shows how to a large extent society is constructed for men. For example, women have a naturally lower body temperature than men, thus making a system based on the temperature of a middle-aged man of 70 kg significantly colder for the majority of women who, naturally, are not themselves middle-aged men of 70 kg. In the case of health care, it is a known fact among those working with cardiac arrests that women rate their experience of chest pain lower than men do, even if in fact they have a more serious cardiac condition. This makes it difficult to assess which patient to prioritize.
society structured after Man as the norm. A theology that highlights the superior value of human beings over nature will also affect how society is structured.

In-worldly dualisms or contraries are not always harmful. The problem is not the dualisms or contraries in themselves, or the fact that a theological worldview holds reality to be constituted by a plurality of beings and entities. The problem is how these dualisms or contraries are conceptualized and valued, and how this affects our shared reality and the possibility of promoting human flourishing. If reality is not constituted by matter and spirit but by a non-reductive spirit–matter, then to treat human beings as essentially only matter (a reductive physicalist position) or as essentially only spirit (a Cartesian dualistic position) would hinder the striving after flourishing. It would be to neglect something essential about what it is to be a human being. The same reasoning applies to nature as a whole.

Now let us turn to the different reasons in favor of panentheism and pantheism.

\[289\] This problem arises in both ontological God–world dualism and versions of ontological God–world monism.
5. Gender equality

In this chapter, arguments for and against panentheism and pantheism, with an exclusive focus on gender equality, are explored. It focuses on pragmatic reasons in favor of panentheism and pantheism. The arguments for or against a particular conception of God, and how that relates to gender equality, are primarily pragmatic, focusing on benefits or harms rather than on epistemic truth claims about the correspondence to reality. The way we conceptualize the God–world relationship affects our worldview and conceptions of reality – and some ways have better consequences than others. Furthermore, if we believe in a worship-worthy God, we find that some conceptions of God fit more coherently with that belief than others. For these reasons, the present chapter primarily engages in pragmatic arguments about the benefits or harms resulting from conceptualizing God in terms of panentheism and pantheism, because a conception of a worship-worthy God ought not to result in harmful consequences such as sexism and oppression. Suppose that theists have reason to believe that one conception of God causes fewer harmful consequences regarding gender inequality than another. In that case, it would be a reason to prefer it to other conceptions of God.

It should be emphasized that there need not be something intrinsically harmful about classical theism, panentheism, or pantheism regarding gender equality. Regardless of which conception of God theists adhere to, they can be deeply engaged in the dignity of women and strive for the equality of men and women. However, because it is limited to gender equality, this chapter seeks to answer whether a theist who is deeply invested in feminist concerns for gender equality has reason to prefer panentheism, pantheism, or classical theism. Even if theists have such a reason, it does not entail that the other conceptions of God are necessarily anti-feminist.

5.1. Panentheism and gender equality

Ought a feminist theist to be a panentheist rather than a classical theist? Are there pragmatic reasons to believe that a panentheistic conception of God contributes to a more gender-equal society than classical theism? With the help of Sallie McFague, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, I recon-
Struct what I call the panentheistic argument for gender equality, which concludes precisely that theists do have such a reason. The first part of this chapter analyzes and critically evaluates this claim.

So how might a panentheistic argument for gender equality be understood? I start by analyzing McFague’s reasons for preferring panentheism to classical theism.

McFague offers pragmatic feminist reasons as to why panentheism – in our time – is a better option than classical theism. As a Christian, McFague wants to find ways of conceptualizing God that fruitfully cohere with her belief that environmental concerns and gender equality are essential. She does not wish to reject God-talk altogether, but seeks to find a religiously and pragmatically satisfactory way to talk about God. She argues that panentheism offers a more pragmatically adequate model of God than classical theism.

McFague suggests the metaphors of God as Mother, Lover, and Friend. These metaphors recommend a panentheistic conception of the God–world relationship rather than a classical theistic one. To conceptualize God metaphorically as Mother suggests that God and the world are intimately connected. There is an intimate spiritual and bodily connection between the Mother-God and the child-world. To clarify further how this is a metaphor for panentheism, we ought to think primarily of the mother–child relationship before the moment of birth. The mother and child are the same and are only gradually becoming separate. But the child comes from the mother, both spiritually and physically. Panentheism makes sense of this relational metaphor.

Classical theism does not. The classically theistic God is transcendent, nonphysical, independent, and un-relational. Classical Christian theism – entailing several extension claims not necessary to classical theism in general – naturally holds the second person – Christ – to be physical and relational. Nevertheless, even such Christian classical theism maintains the eternal God’s absolute simplicity and immutability. Such a conception of God highlights the purely spiritual while neglecting the physical and bodily. Such a conception of God contributes to an unhealthy ideal of hierarchy, in which the earth, the body, and the female are seen as un-divine while heaven, the spirit, and the masculine are seen as divine.

The metaphor of God as Lover also suggests the intimately bodily and relational nature of God. A lover necessarily needs a relationship. God as Lover needs the world, and the nature of this relationship is of the ultimate physical and intimate character. God as Lover speaks of the inherent value of the natural world. God wants to be united with us. God’s love includes the whole of creation. God’s love is inclusive love. Panentheism makes sense of the

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290 McFague, Models of God, 20.
291 McFague, 65.
292 McFague, 130.
293 McFague, 108.
metaphor of God as Lover; classical theism less so. Classical theism rejects any notion of God as dependent, physical, relational, and emotionally vulnerable. A loving relationship entails vulnerability owing to the spiritual and physical investment of both parties. A classically theistic God is not vulnerable or affected, but is independent and metaphysically unaffected by the world. The classically theistic God could exist without a world, but a lover cannot exist without the beloved, making this a suitable metaphor for panentheism but less so for classical theism.

The metaphor of God as Friend also suggests the relational and caring aspect of the God–world relationship. Unlike the model of God presented in classical theism, the Friend model entails a mutual and equal relationship. It entails mutuality, dependence, and voluntary love. Panentheism makes more sense of this metaphor than classical theism.

Another feminist theologian arguing for panentheism is Keller, a process theologian who does not share McFague’s strong pragmatic focus. Process theism (henceforth process-panentheism) has its origin in the thoughts of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000). Process theism is a version of panentheism; more specifically, it is a form of strict panentheism because it holds the world as a necessary part of God. In the chapters that follow, I describe process theology in more detail. For the present purposes, it is enough to say that process-panentheism, as a strict form of panentheism, claims that body/world has always existed. Nature (in some form) has always existed. This is a metaphysical and hence epistemological reason to prefer panentheism to classical theism, because this view entails that God is necessarily embodied – God is essentially related to a world. This view entails that body has always existed and that body as such is primordial. In line with the metaphysics of process-panentheism, Keller rejects creation ex nihilo, and emphasizes that the watery depths were already there in the beginning (Gen. 1:1-2). She argues against creatio ex nihilo, and instead argues for creatio ex profundis – creation from the depths. The primordial watery depth described in Genesis 1:1-2 is female and uncreated. The female, in this theory, is primordial, not a secondary and lesser aspect than the male.

Keller digs deep into the history of Western theology, and finds the abhorrence for matter and bodies – and worst of all, for female bodies – in the Hellenistic and gnostic traditions, which spread and evolved into the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo during the second century, drawing on other scriptural references such as Mark 13:19, Rev. 3:14, and 2 Macc. 7:28. Traces of the Babylonian myth of Tiamat – a primordial sea-dragon goddess – are found in Genesis 1:2 as the feminine primordial depths of the sea (theom). The female

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294 McFague, 19, 168.
296 Keller, 45.
Tiamat is primordial chaos. The myth of Tiamat, and the second verse of Genesis, thus speak of an eternal female aspect, equal to God, and part of God.

Keller traces the history of the idea that God must be wholly transcendent to the early Christian gnostic Basilides (second century) and primarily to Irenaeus (c. 130-202), who contributed to the ideas of creatio ex nihilo. The early Church wanted to establish God’s complete sovereignty and independence, thereby downplaying the second verse of Genesis—a verse containing references to a primordial female chaotic aspect. Any idea of creation from chaos was discarded in order to protect God’s sovereignty. Instead of creation from a primordial deep/chaos, the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo became universal for Christians. “Thus Christian orthodoxy originates in a symbolic misogyny [...].”

The panentheistic model of the world as God’s body is thus part of a feminist argument for equality. We not only have bodies, but we also are bodies. Western culture’s historical abhorrence of bodies results from dualist thinking, in which the spirit is regarded as higher and nobler than the body. Grace Jantzen traces a misogynist in-worldly dualism back to at least the times of Aristotle and Plato. “Women, who were seen in terms of their reproductive function, were thus conceptually linked with matter and with the chaotic and evil, while men were linked with reason, spirit, and form.”

Thus we have here a case in which an ontological God–world dualism spills over into the world in a harmful way. If God is pure spirit, and God is perfect in every aspect, then the world is imperfect, often sinful, and flawed. Classical theists believe that God created the earth “and saw that it was good.” Classical theists do not share the gnostic disdain for the material world. Nevertheless, feminist theists such as McFague, Keller, Jantzen, and Radford Ruether help to point to the link between ontological God–world dualism and a distorted and harmful in-worldly dualism.

If God is a transcendent spirit, independent of any physical world, then divinity relates to the transcendent, immaterial, and independent. These phenomena and attributes become holy. In contrast, everything that we conceptualize as physical, material, bodily, and relational has historically been associated with the non-divine: the sinful and possibly evil. In Western culture and throughout the history of theology, Woman has been regarded as a lesser kind of being than Man. She has been regarded as a defective, more sinful creature. The inevitably physical and bodily nature of childbirth has bound Woman to Nature while connecting Man more closely to the divine attributes. Reason, power, transcendence, and disembodiment have been associated with Man, while the bodily and sinful have been associated with Woman.

297 Keller, 28.
298 Keller, 46–54.
299 Keller, 54.
300 McFague, The Body of God, 16.
301 Jantzen, “Feminism and Pantheism,” 271.
The religious allusion is intentional, since the masculinist symbolic of the west is undergirded by a concept of God as Divine Father, a God who is also Word, and who in his disembodiment, omnipotence and omniscience is the epitome of value. Even in a relatively secular society, these traditional attributes of divinity still stand for that which is most highly valued: in other words, it is held even by atheists, that if there were a God, ‘he’ would have to be like this. Thus whether it is held that the divine is instantiated or not, the concept of the divine serves to valorize disembodied power and rationality.\(^{302}\)

A refusal to conceptualize God as physically embodied is interconnected with a refusal to conceptualize God as female. This is because refusing the panentheistic world-body metaphor implies the idea that “body” is inferior to God, a lesser aspect. If “body” is inferior, and “body” in most cultures is identified with women, it is an implicit claim that women are inferior and that men are closer to God.\(^{303}\)

Radford Ruether is also interested in myths that speak of the bodily as eternal aspects of the divine. She examines three traditional creation stories: the Babylonian, the Hebraic, and the Platonic. They all depict creation out of primordial chaos. The idea that God must create out of pre-existing nothing is a later Christian idea to save God’s sovereignty and independence.\(^{304}\) The fact that the primordial chaos of these three old traditions is conceived as female made/makes it even worse.

The point is that a panentheistic model of God can be harmonized with the thought of an equal and primordial female aspect of reality. In panentheism, the bodily and physical are not regarded as evil or lesser aspects. The bodily and female are part of God, and according to strict panentheism, they are even necessary and eternal parts of God.

Just as we not only have, but are, bodies, a panentheistic conception of God holds that God’s transcendence is embodied. God is available to us physically and mentally, and God’s transcendence “is not available to us except as embodied.”\(^{305}\)\(^{306}\) This also connotes Ruether’s talk of the transcendent God and the immanent Gaia as two interconnected aspects.\(^{306}\) This claim can be seen as analogous to the human component of body and spirit (let us assume that we are both spirit and body). If we accept this, we are, at least in this world, spirited bodies. We are necessarily bodies and necessarily spirits. The spirit is embodied in this world, and the panentheistic analogy holds God to be a transcendent spirit and physical body.

Despite the talk of female and male aspects or principles, God is neither a man nor a woman. Even classical theists agree with this. Therefore, to speak

\(^{302}\) Jantzen, 268.  
\(^{303}\) McFague, The Body of God, 21.  
\(^{305}\) McFague, The Body of God, 133.  
\(^{306}\) Ruether, Gaia & God, 249.
of God as only male or to speak of God as only female is idolatry, according to McFague. “God is she and he and neither.” Keller, as previously mentioned, examines the divine potentiality of the deep – theom – and the feminized Shekhinah. Panentheism describes the God–world relationship in terms that appreciate the female and God’s embodiedness in a way that classical theism does not. To conceptualize God as both body and mind, as both physical and transcendent, as panentheism does, is the most important implication of the metaphor of God as Mother, according to McFague. The mother is a physical body, but also something else. In relation to the child, the mother transcends her physical body; she is the nourishing and sustaining everything. For long periods of time, there is no difference between mother and child, and yet there is a difference. The smudged line between mother and child is a perfect analogy for the smudged line between God and the world.

In summary, according to what I call the panentheistic argument for gender equality, a cosmos that is (or is taken to be) inseparable from the divine plausibly contributes to a worldview and theology in which body and relationality are (or are regarded as) divine. The inclusive and relational theology implied in panentheism, emphasizing the bodily and female aspects of the divine, plausibly contributes to a more gender-inclusive and gender-equal worldview. Therefore, theists should embrace a panentheistic conception of God rather than a classical theistic conception of God, since the latter rejects the bodily nature of God. When they realize this, theists ought to prefer a panentheistic model of God that emphasizes the bodily and female aspects of the God–world relationship. Panentheism makes visible that God is relational and bodily and physically interconnected with the world, thereby making relationality and embodiedness – traditionally female attributes – divine traits.

If God is conceptualized as both spirit and body without hierarchy, the historical association of women (body) as hierarchically lower than men (spirit) can be dealt with. Women have historically been treated as lesser than men, and continue to be treated as inferior to men in many regards. The God of classical theism carries many patriarchal metaphors. He is primarily conceptualized in masculine terms, and the fact that classical theism traditionally comes with patriarchal language has been negative for women historically, and it still is today. Body and embodiedness are traditionally associated with women, and they still are. However, panentheism emphasizes God as embodied. If the divine is conceptualized as physically embodied, the dualist value-hierarchy between spirit and body dissolves. Moreover, the process-panentheistic argument exemplified by Keller (strict panentheism) states that reality has primordial female and physical aspects. That suggests that God includes

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308 Keller, The Face of the Deep, 234–38. The Shekhinah, שֵׁכֶינָה, is Hebrew from the rabbinic literature, meaning something like “the dwelling presence of God.”
309 McFague, Models of God, 112.
both female and male aspects. A panentheistic conception of God thus has resources for a more gender-equal theology and mentality than classical theism.

In the next section this claim is evaluated.

5.1.1. Evaluating the panentheistic argument from gender equality

What must a feminist theist accept to gain the good gender-inclusive pragmatic consequences wanted by those arguing in favor of gender equality? Must she accept the core claims of panentheism, or could she coherently be a classical theist?

Contrary to Sallie McFague and others, Nancy Frankenberry questions whether panentheism manages to steer away from the patriarchal value-dualisms of the “spirit-male” and “nature-female.” She thinks not. She claims that the dualism in panentheism – with God as the world’s soul – could easily relapse into the conceptualization of Man as inherently closer to the soul/God and Woman as closer to the body/earth. To avoid this, the panentheism ought to be of the strictest kind possible if the old value hierarchies and dualisms are to be avoided.

McFague and other feminist thinkers such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Paula Gunn Allen, Carolyn Merchant, and Delores S. Williams (although they are not necessarily arguing for panentheism) are ecofeminists. Ecofeminism comes in many forms, but shares the conviction that patriarchal systems are responsible for a lot of destruction and misery in the “human” and “natural” world (even though, of course, the human is part of the natural).

Radford Ruether argues that male domination of nature is interconnected with male dominance of women: both are seen as property owned by the man. The core presumptions of ecofeminism outlined by Nancy Howell are similar to the thoughts of McFague. According to ecofeminism, Woman and Nature are interconnected in that both are objectified and made into the “other” while Man is the norm. For this reason, ecofeminism calls for social transformation through the transformation of values, non-dualism, and non-hierarchical perceptions. Ecofeminism fundamentally questions hierarchal dualisms such as cul-

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311 The term *ecofeminisme* comes from the French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne, who in 1974 in *Le féminisme ou la mort* argued for feminist revolution in order to save nature from ecological destruction.


313 Howell, “Ecofeminism.”
ture/nature, human/animal, male/female, reason/emotion, mind/body, objectivity/subjectivity, and individuality/interconnection. The ecofeminist conviction is that these dualisms justify a patriarchal and environmentally hostile value system. Ecofeminism also argues that humans (both men and women) are part of nature, and that nature should be treated and conceptualized as inherently valuable.\(^{314}\)

Must ecofeminism come in the form of panentheism? No. A classical theist can hold all these convictions, and so can a pantheist. Ecofeminism is not necessarily panentheistic. Classical theists have argued for equality and our responsibility for the well-being of Earth.\(^{315}\) Classical theism emphasizes the ontological dualism between God and the world and often also between body and soul, the material and the spiritual.\(^{316}\) Such soul-body dualism, however, is only an extension claim for classical theists and is also a possible extension claim for panentheists. However, the core convictions of ecofeminism, such as the interconnectedness of nature and humans and of the bodily and the spiritual, do not cohere as well with classical theism as with the core beliefs of panentheism. Nevertheless, a feminist emphasis on equality and non-hierarchy is not incompatible with classical theism, and substance dualism (soul-body dualism) is a coherent extension claim for both classical theists and panentheists.

The process-panentheistic claim, represented by Catherine Keller, that the physical and female are primordial and eternal aspects of God, is a strong reason for the feminist theist to prefer process-panentheism, especially if she has epistemic reasons to think that process-panentheism is true. A feminist theist ought to find the notion of a primordial female aspect very compelling and interesting indeed. This, however, is not the place to explore the epistemic reasonability of process metaphysics.

Naturally, classical theists could also conceptualize God as Mother, Lover, and Friend. The argument is not that these metaphors are logically or conceptually impossible ways to talk about the God of classical theism. The argument is that panentheism makes more sense if God is indeed thought of as a relational Mother, Lover, and Friend.\(^{317}\)

\(^{314}\) Howell, 233–35.


\(^{316}\) E.g., Jean Calvin clearly saw the divine essence as purely spiritual. “A solid proof of this point may also be gathered from man being said to be created in the image of God. For though the glory of God is displayed in his external form, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul. […] Only let it be decided that the image of God, which appears or sparkles in these external characters, is spiritual.” Calvin, “Institutes of the Christian Religion (Vol. 1 of 2),” Chapter XV, III.

\(^{317}\) Classical theists generally take God to respond to prayer in a way not unlike a friend who wants to help and care for her friends. E.g., Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Part II:Ch. 95.
Classical theism stresses a more profound transcendence and divine independence than panentheism. But panentheism, similarly to classical theism, is based on a dualist God–world ontology, since God is more than the world according to panentheism: God is both physical and spiritual. Why, then, should a theist believe that panentheism is better than classical theism regarding gender equality?

Ontological God–world dualism contributes to the harmful in-worldly hierarchal dualisms that McFague and others seek to avoid. If God is a transcendent spirit and ontologically other than the physical world, the gendered hierarchal dualisms such as nature/female and spirit/male can continue even within panentheism. The dualisms of body/soul, nature/human, human/God, and man/woman are less hierarchal in a panentheistic framework than in the classical theistic framework. Granted, this is not a very strong reason to reject classical theism in favor of panentheism. Nevertheless, the focus on the female and bodily aspects of the God–world relationship entailed by process-panentheism makes a pragmatic case in favor of strict panentheism. In the previous chapter, I said that process-panentheism entails an ontological God–world dualism with necessary dipolar inclusion; and it is this necessary relationality that plausibly makes the difference. One may, therefore, think that strict panentheism, especially in the form of process-panentheism, coheres somewhat better with feminist convictions than classical theism, and that this is a pragmatic reason to prefer strict panentheism to classical theism.

I suggest that a feminist theist has a reason to prefer panentheism to classical theism if she can accept the metaphysics of process philosophy/theology. (The details of this metaphysics are presented further in chapter 8, “The problem of evil.”) If she cannot, she should at least adhere to strict panentheism – the claim that God metaphysically always needs a world. If the theist cannot accept the core assumptions of strict panentheism, there are only very weak pragmatic reasons to prefer panentheism to classical theism. Such reasons would be based on the more inclusive aspects of panentheism, in which the attributes traditionally linked to the female (such as body) are as much part of the divine as the attributes traditionally linked to the male (such as reason and transcendent spirit). The pragmatic aspect lies in the belief that a theology and a worldview based on panentheism would contribute to a reality in which the female and the male are valued equally, even if we have no epistemic reasons to think that panentheism is true.

In other words, even if we are not strict panentheists, it is plausible to believe that the benefits of conceptualizing the female and the male as inherently divine and natural would be greater than the drawbacks of not doing so, even

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if we cannot determine the accuracy of panentheism. Classically theistic religions hold humankind to be created *imago Dei*. Genesis 1:26 reads, “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness […]’.” Classical theism does not, of course, necessarily entail a patriarchal reading of Genesis, which also reads “[…]in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). Classical theism is not anti-feminist. However, the inclusive language embedded in panentheism, with its inherently female and physical aspects of God, has the resources to contribute to an inclusive theology with regard to gender equality. Should it be the case that classical theism is a more accurate description of the God–world relationship, we would lose nothing (focusing on gender equality) by valuing men and women equally. Therefore, even if classical theism does not necessarily lead to a gender-unequal mentality, theists still have a pragmatic reason to prefer panentheism to classical theism.

The question asked previously was whether a feminist theist must accept the core claims of panentheism, or whether she could coherently be a classical theist. We can now see that the answer is that she need not accept the core claims of panentheism. She could coherently be a classical theist. The reasons surveyed in this chapter give theists no epistemic reason to prefer panentheism. However, I have shown that a feminist theist has pragmatic reasons to think that panentheism, and especially strict panentheism, coheres better with her feminist worldview than classical theism does.

The remaining part of the chapter focuses on pantheism and gender equality.

5.2. Pantheism and gender equality

If the previous reasoning is cogent and there are pragmatic reasons to think that panentheism could contribute better to a gender-equal world, are there further reasons to think that pantheism is even better? Do theists have pragmatic reasons to believe that a pantheistic conception of God contributes to a more gender-equal society than panentheism (and classical theism)? Many pantheists think so; and one reason is that pantheists focus on global inclusion, as expressed in the following quote, which indicates that the pantheistic aim for equality stretches further than equality only between men and women.

Thus, Pantheists oppose the world view of anthropocentrism - that is, a belief that the world was created exclusively for the benefit of human beings. Pantheists consider that anthropocentric attitude to be equivalent to specism; perhaps worse than racism in its capacity for undermining the very existence of our species as a part of the community of living things. The Pantheist religion
is seen as a system of reverent behavior toward Nature rather than anthropomorphic deities.\textsuperscript{319}

The quote indicates that, if the world in its totality is divine, then so are flowers and snails. Furthermore, it indicates that we should not be species-racist; we should not think that only humans are valuable. Pantheism holds God to be identical to the world; so everything in the world is inherently valuable by virtue of being divine.

If in panentheism we find resources to promote gender equality and the value of the female and the body, those resources are found in pantheism as well, since in pantheism we have removed all notions of divine transcendence. Nancy Frankenberry and Grace Jantzen, therefore, argue in favor of pantheism on feminist grounds. According to Frankenberry, both male and female metaphors of God, such as the Father model and the Mother model, are seriously flawed. They are both anthropomorphic, and they both “frequently reinforce patterns of permanent infantilism and cuts off moral maturity and responsibility.”\textsuperscript{320} She questions whether panentheism really manages to steer away from the patriarchal dualisms of the “spirit-male” and “nature-female.” She argues that it does not, and that pantheism is the better alternative.

Jantzen, in line with many panentheists, uses the analogy of the world as God’s body. With a pantheistic and non-reductionist interpretation of the analogy, Jantzen uses the analogy to argue that pantheism, not panentheism, best safeguards the feminist aim for autonomy and individuation.\textsuperscript{321} The reason is the monism of pantheism. She argues that the old Western dichotomies, which can be traced back at least to ancient Greece’s Plato and Aristotle (as was presented in the introduction of this dissertation), are greatly threatened by the monism inherent in pantheism. However, a feminist critique of pantheism claims that the autonomy and freedom that women fight and have fought for are risked if everything is said to be a single unity. If everything is a unity, why fight for women’s rights?

Jantzen disagrees with this objection. Instead, she argues that it is precisely pantheism and monism, not the dualism inherent in classical theism and panentheism, that guarantees individuality and distinction. With pantheism, the classical dualism of body and soul vanishes because, according to pantheism, reality is not constituted by body (the world) and soul/spirit (God). According to pantheism, we only have the God–world, and this God is not a transcendent spirit that is disconnected from the world. Instead of ontological God–world dualism, pantheism entails ontological God–world monism. However, this need not be understood as physically reductive. We need not understand this as implying that everything can be broken down into physical matter.

\textsuperscript{320} Frankenberry, “Classical Theism, Panentheism, and Pantheism,” 33.
\textsuperscript{321} Jantzen, “Feminism and Pantheism,” 269.
as understood by the natural sciences. In pantheism, physical matter – the
God–world – should be understood non-reductively: spirit and nature are two
aspects of the same thing. Nature is divine, and the divine (God) is Nature.

More precisely, how would pantheism help the struggle for gender equality? Jantzen and others think that, with a pantheistic worldview, we would
recognize that other genders, classes, and ethnicities are the divine. We would
not strive for mastery and dominion of the earth, other genders, classes, or
ethnicities. With a pantheistic framework, these could not be thought of as
contrary to God or as non-divine, because the divine cannot be separate from
the material world. If women are to become divine, if women are to be flour-
ishing subjects with voices of their own, the traditional models of God and the
traditional understanding of rationality and what it is to be a human need to
change.

Like Frankenberry, Jantzen argues that a pure shift from male to female
metaphors of God is insufficient. (Indeed, Rosemary Radford Ruether and
Sallie McFague agree that female metaphors are no less anthropomorphic than
male ones.) We should not merely change one oppressive system for another.
Instead, we ought to break the entire system. The problem with the Father-
God model, according to Jantzen, is the inherent disembodiment of the God
concept. As seen in the previous quote from Jantzen, the God model in which
traditional classically theistic theology is grounded conceptualizes the male as
spiritual, while the female is conceptualized as physical and often sinful. God
is made in the image of man; and a feminist agenda wants to break such patri-
archal thinking. However, it is not enough merely to change ‘Father’ to
‘Mother’ while still having the same concept of God in mind. “[T]inkering
with inclusive language does not challenge that disembodiment […]” Jantzen
wants a wholly embodied God.

For Jantzen, the analogy of the world as God’s body is not a dualistic anal-
ogy because, within her pantheistic framework, there cannot be transcendence
without immanence. In her view, spirits do not transcend their bodily and ma-
terial aspects as if spirits could exist apart from them. Body and spirit are to
be understood non-reductively as two aspects of the same entity, just as the
Morning Star is the same as but also different than the Evening Star. This line
of thought is also found in Taoism, with yin and yan.

If theists seek a truly embodied God, where do they find this? Jantzen and
Frankenberry both answer: in pantheism. To understand Jantzen’s argument
against the dualism in classical theism and panentheism properly, we must
realize that we cannot conceptualize inside without outside, because there is
no difference ontologically. The difference is constructed: it is perspective,

322 Jantzen, 274.
323 Jantzen, Becoming Divine.
324 Jantzen, 88.
325 Jantzen, “Feminism and Pantheism,” 275.
326 Jantzen, God’s World, God’s Body, 125; Jantzen, Becoming Divine, 271.
relative, and it is semantic – something upon which we have agreed. I suggest that this is how pantheism should be understood. The material and the spiritual are inseparable in pantheism, and there is no God–world dualism, only different expressions of the same ontologically non-reductive monism. Frankenberry asks whether this pantheistic unity really can “coexist with self-affirming feminist politics of autonomy?” If the very idea of individuality and separation is part of the problem that feminists should seek to avoid, then the answer is “yes”. But if all that exists is the same monistic unity, why would it be important to fight for individualization? Can pantheism coherently safeguard the feminist concern about individuality and distinction? Jantzen thinks so. Moreover, she claims that pantheism, and only pantheism, can safeguard the feminist concern about individuality and distinction.

How can we make sense of this claim? Jantzen argues that panentheism – which is ontologically dualistic – cannot give rise in any obvious way to the distinction and individuality so praised by feminism. The dualism inherent in panentheism, she argues, cannot coherently answer how individuality and distinction arise. Individuality and distinction are things that feminists tend to value, since autonomy and freedom presuppose individuality and distinction.

On a dualist account, after all, there is no obvious basis upon which particularity–especially difference–can arise. How is one person different from another, and each one unique? If personhood is essentially a question of mental substance, then the basis of individuation must either be the material body, to which this mind is however only contingently conjoined, or, failing that, appeal would have to be made to a specific and unique creation of each ‘soul’, a creation which however emerged only gradually through infancy and childhood even though the developing body really had nothing to do with the soul.

In this quote, we see that the dualism of which Jantzen speaks is in-worldly dualism regarding body and soul/spirit. However, such in-worldly dualism is the result of ontological God–world dualism, which views spirits as transcendent, immortal, and independent of the physical world. God is such a transcendent divine spirit according to both classical theism and panentheism (even though panentheism claims that God is also the world). This sort of dualism affects the world and how we conceptualize our own nature. In classical theism and panentheism, we are physical bodies with spirits/souls; but, according to Jantzen, such a view causes a problem with individuality.

In pantheism, the material and the spiritual are inseparable aspects of the same thing: God. The transcendent and the immanent are two sides of the same thing. Transcendence and immanence are not opposites because immanence is a necessary condition of transcendence. According to Jantzen, the opposite

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328 Jantzen, “Feminism and Pantheism,” 281–82.
of transcendence is not immanence but *reductionism*. There cannot be a spirit without body, and there is no body without a spirit.

According to traditional substance dualism, spirits are ontologically independent and do not need the physical body. However, in Jantzen’s pantheism, the physical gives rise to the spiritual or mental via *emergence*. Different sorts of consciousness and spirits/mentality emerge, depending on the different physical conditions. A stone is plausibly less spiritually/mentally evolved than a cat, and human beings are plausibly more spiritually/mentally evolved than both stones and cats. Therefore, Jantzen asserts that the emergence of different individual souls/spirits is more probable in pantheism than the dualist interactionism of classical theism and panentheism. On the dualist account, either each soul is created individually and put in a body it does not essentially need, or it emerges gradually in a body it does not essentially need. According to Jantzen, individuals with both body and soul in a non-reductive entanglement with different experiences and consciousness are much more plausible in pantheism than in dualistic classical theism or panentheism, because consciousness can emerge from physically complex aggregates.

Here we see that Jantzen appeals to *emergence* theory. In chapter 7, “God and science,” we see that emergence is often used to argue that panentheism is more compatible with modern science than is classical theism. It is interesting, therefore, that Jantzen turns emergence theory against panentheism (and classical theism).

Before critiquing and evaluating this pantheist argument for equality, it is time to summarize the argument. The pantheist argument for equality states that the inherent monism of pantheism safeguards the unity of all beings, genders, and species. If everything was equally divine, we would not have coherent grounds for maintaining gender hierarchies or hierarchies among species. A pantheistic monism safeguards the feminist need for personal individuation and separation because only in a monist framework can personal distinction really emerge. Only if spirit and body are seen as a *non-reductive unity* – as two aspects of the same thing – can individual personhood emerge.

### 5.2.1. Evaluating the pantheistic argument from gender equality

It is now time to evaluate the soundness of the claim that a feminist theist ought to be a pantheist rather than a classical theist or panentheist. Is it reasonable to think that pantheism, and possibly only pantheism, coheres with a feminist need to emphasize individuality and autonomy?

Classical theism and panentheism both assert an ontological God–world dualism, although of different kinds. This dualism seems to be the very thing

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331 Jantzen, 282.
that feminist theists arguing for gender equality want to get away from because ontological God–world dualism often contributes to theologies and worldviews with patriarchal in-worldly dualisms. God is more embodied in panentheism than in classical theism; but if it is non-dualism feminists want, pantheism is the natural choice.

But is it non-dualism that feminist theists should want? Must a feminist theist reject ontological God–world dualism to have a worldview that is coherent with the feminist belief in the equal worth of all genders? Must the theist be an ontological God–world monist to have a coherent feminist worldview? If not, are there still pragmatic reasons to prefer pantheism to panentheism and classical theism?

The pantheist belief that everything shares divinity, and that God is identical to the physical (and hence identical to the female as much as to the male), must surely be a pragmatic reason for the ethical advantages of pantheism. If all humans and all of nature are divine – or are at least thought to be divine – then the incentive to treat everything and everyone with love and reverence is great. Such a belief would plausibly limit gender inequality. Any theist arguing for the equal rights and dignity of all human beings wants to maintain coherently that there are values – otherwise, the struggle for gender equality becomes incoherent. Unfortunately, as I will show, no version of pantheism can guarantee the absence of patriarchal hierarchies because, as soon as we allow value differences, they can be used to argue in favor of male superiority.

A step toward answering the questions above is to evaluate the potential harm or benefit of using the analogy of the world as God’s body. Is it appropriate for a feminist theist to conceptualize the world as God’s body? As noted earlier, panentheism – like classical theism – is ontologically dualistic, although their dualisms differ. The panentheistic God is seen as the world’s soul – as something that includes but nevertheless exceeds the physical world. According to Frankenberry, this idea could easily relapse into the conceptualization of Man as inherently closer to the soul/God and Woman as closer to the body/nature.\(^{332}\) If that is so, panentheism is no better than classical theism. Furthermore, if that is so, feminist pantheists should avoid the analogy of the world as God’s body. However, as seen, Jantzen does not believe that the analogy must be avoided because she argues in favor of a pantheistic and non-reductive interpretation of the analogy. According to this understanding, body and soul are inseparable – transcendence and immanence are non-reductive sides of the same coin.

There is a risk, however small, that the analogy with God as the soul and the world as the body risks ending up in the patriarchal dichotomy that feminists usually want to avoid. If this dualism is kept, then the anticipated benefits for gender equality also risk being merely anticipated and not actually realized. Granted that this risk may be very small, we might still think that feminist

theists have a reason not to use the analogy at all. If God is not at all conceptualized as the transcendent soul, it is plausible that the risk of harmfully devaluing the female and glorifying the male owing to a perceived link between the male-female and the transcendence-immanence divide diminishes.

Could this be a pragmatic feminist reason to favor pantheism over panentheism and classical theism? Yes, because it is a reason to reject completely the body–soul analogy in favour of the God–world relationship. Pantheism may be regarded as having better pragmatic consequences than both classical theism and panentheism in this regard, although it is a very weak pragmatic advantage, especially when compared with strict panentheism.

The possible risk entailed by the analogy is not a good reason to reject strict panentheism and instead favor pantheism, since both positions emphasize the necessity of the bodily and female aspects of the divine – thus lessening the risk of harmful dualisms. These pragmatic benefits would result even if pantheism or strict panentheism were false, because the benefits are belief-dependent and not truth-dependent.

That said, epistemic reasons are still relevant. One of the most severe objections to pantheism is that it is internally incoherent. This critique claims that pantheism is logically inconsistent with value differentiation and distinction. If as a result of this internal incoherence pantheism is not a live option (to speak like William James), theists would hardly act in accordance with it, which means that we would not gain the pragmatic good consequences of it.

So, is pantheism a live option for the theist? Can pantheists coherently claim that different values and individual distinctions are relevant to a feminist aim for autonomy and equality?

5.2.1.1. Pantheism and value differentiation

In the chapter on how to demarcate pantheism from panentheism and classical theism, I distinguish between monistic all-is-one pantheism and pluralistic one-is-all pantheism. William James and Mary-Jane Rubenstein both argue in favor of the pluralistic version because the first, the monistic variant, cannot allow for distinction and individuality. It absorbs the multiform into a single monistic unity, making the many an inseparable one. Here James and Rubenstein agree with William Urquhart’s critique of monistic pantheism because it rejects the reality of anything but Brahman/God.

I now use the paradigmatic distinctions of monistic all-is-one pantheism and pluralistic one-is-all pantheism to reconstruct a coherent pantheist position and to show how pantheism of the pluralistic one-is-all type can be open to individuality and value distinction. That kind of pantheism sanctifies everything while maintaining its individual reality. Both Ramanuja and Spinoza emphasize individual souls as modes of the one God/Brahman. If God, as the

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one necessary substance or entity, makes up the entire reality, theists can un-
derstand God as everything without sacrificing the reality of the different
modes.

An analogy may help to illustrate this. Water consists of two hydrogen at-
oms and one oxygen atom (H\textsubscript{2}O). It can take different forms. It can freeze, be
liquid, or be in the form of gas. The ice cube and the gas are H\textsubscript{2}O, but ice
cannot be reduced to gas. We cannot speak of ice as if it denotes gas or liquid
water. Instead, we have water/H\textsubscript{2}O in different modes, but nonetheless non-
reducible modes. If we reduce ice or gas to only H\textsubscript{2}O – that is, if we call eve-
rything simply H\textsubscript{2}O – we would not be able to make adequate distinctions to
explain reality and our experiences of it. Both gas and ice are indeed H\textsubscript{2}O, but
it is an inadequate description of reality to reject the existence of the different
modes that H\textsubscript{2}O can take. The same applies to God and the world. God is
everything and (continuing the analogy) God is H\textsubscript{2}O. This does not make the
modes of God (the liquid, the gas, the frozen) less real. They have different
properties, and they interact with the rest of the world differently.

Pantheists could claim that the pantheistic God–world self-expresses its di-
vinity differently, and some modes may be more revealing than others. Some
expressions promote the goal, aim, or intention of the divine, while others do
not significantly express the inherent divine value. The modes that do can be
coherently considered more valuable than the others.

A pluralistic one-is-all type of pantheism can allow distinction because this
version of pantheism claims that God-is-all. It does not claim that all-is-one.
Pluralistic one-is-all pantheism claims that we are parts of or aspects of God,
but it does not deny individuality or value distinction.

James writes that monistic all-is-one pantheism absorbs distinction and in-
dividuality into a unified One. In contrast, the pluralistic one-is-all version
keeps the many “in all their manyness.”\textsuperscript{334} We have here a pantheistic unity of
a different sort, but it is still a unity. We still have a monistic God–world on-
tology.\textsuperscript{335}

A pantheism of this sort marks the difference between unity and ontological
identity. Everything forms an ontological monistic unity because there is only
the monistic God–world. We have an ontological God–world monism. Every-
thing finite exists as modes of the God–world, but Sarah cannot be reduced to
Peter. They are different divine expressions. Sarah and Peter are not the entire
God–world; they cannot be reduced to God-the-totality. They are aspects of
the God–world. This leaves open the possibility for individuality and free ac-
tion in the world. Even if everything is an aspect of the ontologically monistic
God–world, this form of pantheism can allow individuality and difference,

\textsuperscript{334} James, \textit{A Pluralistic Universe}, 161.
\textsuperscript{335} James’ version of pluralistic pantheism claims that everything is connected to something,
but not necessarily to a unified Whole, which is connected to \textit{everything}. See James, 169;
James, \textit{Pragmatism}, 93.
since there is a difference between a monistic ontological unity and a monistic ontological identity. The world in its entirety is identical to God, but individual parts of the world are not identical with God-the-totality, just as my heart is a part of me but not identical to all of me. Ice is not identical to steam. Ice cannot be reduced to gas, even if both are modes of H₂O, and Sarah cannot be reduced to Peter, even if both are aspects of the divine. If pantheists reduced everything to God and referred to everything as “God,” they would not be able to make relevant and adequate distinctions to explain reality. Different aspects of the one divine reality can still be distinguished, and they have different causal efficiency.

Jantzen believes that God’s presence in Jesus was a lot more significant and revealing than God’s presence in The New York Times. Not everything a person does is revelatory of who that person is and of the things most important to her. The same is true of God.\textsuperscript{336} With this newspaper analogy, we see how pantheists can claim that God’s self-expression is not equally and significantly present everywhere, thus making some aspects of the world more valuable or more significantly divine than others. As in the analogy of H₂O, God is equally present in all modes of being, but all modes do not promote the inherent aim, goal, or teleology of the divine God–world. Some modes, therefore, are more valuable than others.

I have now reconstructed a possible way for pantheists to maintain coherently the reality of value differences despite believing that everything is divine. I cannot see how a monistic unity in which everything is a single inseparable reality is open to difference and value differentiation, especially if the empirical world is a mere illusion.\textsuperscript{337} I conclude that a pantheist argument for gender equality must presuppose a pluralistic one-is-all type of pantheism. Only within such a pantheistic framework does it make sense to speak of men, women, plants, humans, animals, good, bad, prosperous, disastrous, etc. A monistic all-is-one type of pantheism rejects these categories altogether as real. From the perspective of a monistic all-is-one type of pantheism, pantheists would have no reason to value gender equality any more than inequality and patriarchy.

5.2.1.2. Pantheism and emergence

I have argued that pantheism is a live option for the theist, at least regarding value differentiation. We can answer in the affirmative the initial question of

\textsuperscript{336} Jantzen, God’s World, God’s Body, 98–99.

\textsuperscript{337} Mikael Leidenhag argues that the monist view of Advaita Vedanta does not entail a strict denial of the reality of individuality. There is a difference between ontological non-existence (\textit{asat}), the empirically real (\textit{mithyā}), and the absolutely real (\textit{sat}). We experience happiness and suffering empirically (\textit{mithyā}), although the happiness and suffering have no real existence (\textit{asat}). If he is right, then all the better for pantheism! See Mikael Leidenhag, “Grounding Individuality in Illusion: A Philosophical Exploration of Advaita Vedānta in Light of Contemporary Panpsychism,” European Journal for Philosophy of Religion 13, no. 3 (2021): 7–8, https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.2021.3163.
whether pantheism coheres with a feminist need to emphasize individuality and autonomy coherently. But what about the claim that only pantheism can coherently do so? That must be false, and I show why below. We do not have to be pantheists to argue coherently that autonomy and individuality exist.

If spiritual personhood and souls only emerge from pre-existing physical matter, then, given a pantheistic worldview, this must also apply to God. In other words, the monist emergence theory promoted by Jantzen implies that God’s mental/spiritual aspects are also emergent. If this does not also apply to God, then it seems as if there is a difference between God and the world, which means that it is no longer pantheism we are talking about. If that is the case, we cannot use Jantzen’s arguments as arguments for pantheism. An emergent God supervenes on the physical world, which indicates emergentist panentheism, not pantheism. If first there was only matter, and then there was matter and spirit (God), then it is not pantheism we are talking about. This dualism is devastating for a pantheist theory of emergence.

To clarify this, I briefly anticipate and summarize what is said about emergence theory in chapter 7 on “God and science.” According to strong emergence theory, the mental exists because of the physical. In other words, the mental is ontologically dependent on the physical for coming into existence. Therefore, if God emerges from the physical world, analogous to how the mind emerges from physical matter, then God supervenes on the physical world. Strong emergence theory, described in more detail in chapter 7, states that newly emergent phenomena are irreducible and that we, therefore, have two irreducible forms of reality: mind/spirit and body/matter. When applied to God, we get God and the world. But according to pantheism, we do not have God and the world – we only have the God–world. The ontological monism necessary for pantheism cannot be kept if we accept the theory of strong emergence.\(^338\) In other words, if we accept a theory of strong emergence and the ontological distinction between transcendent spirit and non-divine physical reality, we are not arguing in favor of pantheism but possibly panentheism. That is all very well, but since we are searching here for arguments in favor of pantheism, we must reject the emergence theory.

If theists anyway accept somehow that the pantheist God has emerged from pre-existing matter, such as in the theory of Samuel Alexander, perhaps the actual world could still be identical to God. However, the problem with this theory is that such a God would not be eternal, and we could not say that God and the world were always a monistic unity. For this reason, I reject that such a theory should be called pantheism at all. One can perhaps argue that the mental/spiritual aspect of God has emerged from the physical part of God and

\(^{338}\) It goes without saying that weak emergence theory is equally unacceptable from a pantheistic perspective, since weak emergence claims that the emergent property (e.g., mind or God) is reducible to the physical base cause. If that were the case, we would have no need for a pantheistic theory of emergence at all.
call that pantheism, although I strongly advise against it, because then it would seem as if the world and God were not always the same.

Furthermore, I see no reason why individually created souls could not be properly individual. Apart from the crucial fact that panentheists need not adhere to dualism regarding body and soul, since they need only adhere to an ontological God–world dualism, why does a dualist framework of body and soul imply that there cannot be individual personhood? The body–soul dualist encounters the problem of interaction, for how can a soul interact with the body? But this problem says nothing about the personal individuality of the soul. Why could not a panentheist or a classical theist think that we are distinct individuals? A body–soul dualist (whether a panentheist or a classical theist) may end up with the problem of interaction. However, the argument for pantheism presented earlier only claimed that individual souls would have to emerge from the physical, which it essentially does not need. I see no reason to accept this conclusion, for why could it not be the case that God creates individual souls and “places” them in each individual body? The pantheistic monism advocated by Jantzen possibly has the potential of solving the problem of interactionism between the body and soul, but I do not see why it should convince a feminist theist to become a pantheist rather than a classical theist or a panentheist.

It is one thing to argue that human souls and minds emerge from the physical; pantheists, panentheists, and classical theists can all think that. In-worldly substance dualism is an extension claim for classical theists, panentheists, and pantheists alike. It is quite another to think that God emerged from the physical world. An emergent God of that sort does not cohere with the core claims of pantheism outlined earlier because, if that were the case, it would seem as if the world first was non-divine, just like naturalists claim, and only divine after the emergence took place. Emergence *within* the world does not necessitate ontological God–world monism. The claim that only pantheism can safeguard the feminist concern about individuality is false.

I started this evaluation by asking whether it is reasonable to think that pantheism, and possibly only pantheism, coheres with a feminist need to emphasize individuality and autonomy coherently. I have argued against it. The theist need not be an ontological God–world monist to have a coherent feminist worldview. I also argued that pantheism is a coherent worldview regarding value differences. This is an epistemic reason that strengthens the possible pragmatic good consequences of conceptualizing everything as divine. Theists have coherent reasons to think that a theology and a worldview based on pantheism plausibly contribute to good consequences for gender equality, even if pantheism is false. Even if false, it is at least a coherent live option.

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339 Such as the panentheism of Arthur Peacocke and Philip Clayton.
Limiting the focus to the question of gender equality, does this constitute reason enough to think that pantheism is pragmatically better than panentheism? I cannot draw that conclusion because, unfortunately, even if we argue coherently for value differences within pantheism, we end up with the same problem as classical theism and panentheism: the value difference can be used to argue in favor of patriarchy and female subordination. Neither classical theism nor panentheism necessarily entails that the male/masculine is more valuable than the female/feminine; but history shows that patriarchal tendencies tend to be prevalent. Even if pantheism entails a non-reductive monism, with everything as divine, we could still end up with the same patriarchal tendencies – especially if we maintain a pluralistic one-is-all kind of pantheism. But pluralistic one-is-all pantheism is still preferable to monistic all-is-one pantheism.

5.3. Conclusions

This chapter has reconstructed, critically analyzed, and evaluated pragmatic arguments for panentheism and pantheism regarding gender equality.

A feminist theist need not accept the core claims of either panentheism or pantheism to have a conception of God that is coherent with the struggle for gender equality. She can be coherently a classical theist, a panentheist, or a pantheist. The reasons surveyed in this chapter give theists no epistemic reasons to prefer either panentheism or pantheism, but they are both live options. However, I have shown that a feminist theist has pragmatic reasons to think that panentheism – especially strict panentheism – coheres better with a feminist worldview than classical theism does. Moreover, she has no or only very weak reasons to prefer panentheism to strict panentheism, since both strict panentheism and pantheism emphasize the necessity of the world-component in God.

I argued that the theist, if she accepts the core assumptions of strict panentheism, has strong pragmatic feminist reasons to prefer strict panentheism to classical theism. If the theist does not accept the strict claim that the physical world is a necessary part of God, but only the core claims of panentheism, theists have only weak pragmatic reasons to favor panentheism over classical theism. The pragmatic aspect lies in the belief that a theology and a worldview based on panentheism would contribute to a reality in which the female and the male are valued and treated more equally, even if there are no epistemic reasons to think that panentheism is true.

I concluded that the ontological God–world dualism of panentheism – with God as the ‘soul’ of the world – could contribute to the in-worldly conceptualization of Man as inherently closer to the soul/God and Woman as closer to the body/earth. This risk may be very small, but no matter how small a risk it
may be, it could be argued that feminist theists have reason to reject the appropriateness of the analogy. That said, the rejection of the analogy is not a reason to reject panentheism and to favor pantheism, since no conception of God needs to involve the analogy. Both strict panentheism and pantheism come with the risk of in-worldly dualism, even if both emphasize that the physical and bodily aspects are significant to God’s being.

When limited to the question of gender equality, it is hard to assess the pragmatic benefits of pantheism over strict panentheism because, even within a pantheistic framework, value differences can result in the same problems as in classical theism and panentheism: the value difference can be used to argue in favor of patriarchy and female subordination.

Despite this problem for pantheism, I concluded that the pantheist argument for gender equality must presuppose a pluralistic one-is-all type of pantheism. Only within such a pantheistic framework does it make sense to speak of men, women, plants, humans, animals, good, and evil. A monistic all-is-one type of pantheism rejects these categories altogether as real. From the perspective of a monistic all-is-one type of pantheism, we would have no reason to value gender any more than inequality.
6. Environmental concerns

This chapter explores arguments for and against panentheism and pantheism, with a focus exclusively on environmental concerns and environmental well-being. Even if the academic philosophical debate about conceptions of God and environmental concerns may involve some truth-oriented epistemic arguments related to correspondence, it is the pragmatic arguments that are the focus of this chapter. The first reason for this has to do with the general debate about conceptions of God and the environment. In this philosophical debate, the significant arguments at play are pragmatic, highlighting the benefits or harms that a particular theological language brings. The second reason for focusing on pragmatic arguments is epistemic. Despite the plausible ineffability of God, it is nevertheless fruitful to philosophize about different conceptions of God, divine attributes, and so on. We can argue that certain conceptions of God are more coherent than others – coherent with particular understandings of what it is to be good and loving, personal, powerful, worship-worthy, etc. Certain ways to describe God and the God–world relationship affect how we conceptualize the world outside of the theological discussion. This means that a particular form of conceptualizing the God–world relationship affects how we interact with one another and nature. For these reasons, the present chapter engages in pragmatic arguments about the benefits or harms of conceptualizing God in terms of panentheism and pantheism.

First, as in the previous chapter, it is essential to acknowledge that classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism do not necessarily have harmful environmental consequences. Even if there are reasons to prefer one conception of God over the others, this does not entail that one cannot be deeply engaged in environmental concerns, regardless of which conception of God one adopts. The objective of this chapter is not to argue that, for example, classical theism has inherently negative implications for the environment. The aim is to examine whether a theist has reason to believe that panentheism or pantheism would entail a more environmentally flourishing world than classical theism.

6.1. Panentheism and environmental concerns

Does a theist have pragmatic reason to believe that a panentheistic conception of God contributes to a more environmentally flourishing world than classical theism? Again, I reconstruct the panentheistic argument for environmental
concerns with the help of Sallie McFague, Catherine Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether. The first part of this chapter analyzes and critically evaluates the claim that panentheism is a better worldview, limiting the focus to environmental well-being.

So why do thinkers such as McFague think this? In McFague’s case, the reason is panentheism’s inclusive metaphors and conceptions. McFague suggests that panentheism and panentheistic metaphors are more adequate than traditional Western theology. After the Second World War and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world is significantly different. We now have the possibility to end life as we know it. We have the power to destroy the entire planet. For these reasons, we need inclusive language, metaphors, and theology. We need to conceptualize the God–world relationship in ways that appreciate our role in it while ensuring that we do not treat the rest of creation as if it belonged to us.\(^{340}\)

The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* entails a dualism in which first there was only God, and then there was God and the world. Classical theism claims that God is metaphysically independent. God does not need any world, but freely chooses to create. McFague points to this model’s hierarchical conception of the God–world relationship. In classical theism, God is wholly transcendent, spiritual, non-physical, and independent. The divine is spirit, and the physical and bodily are the opposite of the divine. The spirit is above the body, higher in the cosmic hierarchy. Likewise, humans are higher than nature, and men – who in traditional theology are considered more spiritual than women – are higher than women.\(^{341}\)

The metaphors made possible by a panentheistic conception of the God–world relationship point toward a God who is both spiritual and physical, both bodily and spiritually invested in the world, both mother and father, both friend and Creator, both female and male. McFague argues that the God portrayed in traditional classically theistic theology is a distant God, related only to human beings – not to the whole of creation – and that this God controls creation by dominant power.\(^{342}\) A classically theistic understanding of God as completely transcendent and omnipotent suggests a divine power of dominant control that makes impossible a theology in which mutual love and relationship are put first.\(^{343}\) God as Mother, Lover, and Friend, as presented in the previous chapter, suggests a very different understanding of divine power and love than that portrayed in classical theism. These panentheistic metaphors suggest a God that cares for the whole of creation in a bodily, intimate, and vulnerable way.

\(^{342}\) McFague, 65, 183.
\(^{343}\) McFague, 19.
The panentheistic metaphor of the world as God’s body points toward a theology emphasizing the role and importance of both body and spirit, nature and human, human and God.344 “We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature.”345

The traditional conception of God as an omnipotent and essentially independent spirit has contributed to a worldview in which humans believe they can use and treat nature only as a means to their ends.346 Ecofeminists such as McFague argue that domination of the earth and patriarchal domination of women are interconnected. In classical theistic theology, the glorification of the independent spirit leads to the female, bodily, and physical aspects of nature becoming equivalent to the sinful and the non-divine. The ontological God–world dualism of classical theism spills over into in-worldly dualism, and makes the in-worldly distinctions into valued ones – in which some aspects of the world become regarded as divine (particularly the human, masculine, power, knowledge, reason, individuality) while other aspects become regarded as non-divine (nature, the female, weakness, feeling, embodiedness, relationships).

McFague asks us to appreciate the interconnectedness of all things. Body and spirit are inseparable, and humans and nature are inseparable. Theists need a theology that speaks of relationality rather than independence and domination. Theists need a theology that promotes the flourishing of all life, not only humans. Theists need a theology that clearly shows that the physical body and nature are basic.347

If we want a world of environmental well-being and flourishing, we should not regard nature as something dead, as only a disposable means to achieve our own desires. This means that theists should change the way they conceptualize their relationship to nature and to God. We need more inclusive metaphors that speak of relationality instead of independence and hierarchal ruling.

[T]he king as benevolent patriarch encourages attitudes of passivity and escape from responsibility. In the triumphalist, royal model the victory has already been won on the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and nothing is required of us.348

Another ecofeminist is Rosemary Radford Ruether. She argues that the transcendent God of classical Judeo-Christian theism is a patriarchal male God who legitimizes the human dominance of nature.349

344 McFague, The Body of God, 141, 149.
347 McFague, 85.
348 McFague, Models of God, 69.
349 Ruether, Gaia & God, 2–4.
Ecofeminism seeks to dismantle the whole paradigm of male over female, mind over body, heaven over earth, transcendent over immanent, the male God outside of and ruling over the created world—and to imagine an alternative to it.350

As mentioned, ecofeminism points toward the interconnectedness of the patriarchal domination of women and the human domination of the rest of nature. Ecofeminist theology takes these insights and promotes inclusive theology without hierarchal dualistic divisions that are harmful to the environment and all creatures in it. McFague and Radford Ruether both seek a theology that leads away from destructive value-dualisms.

Like McFague, Radford Ruether implores us to see the inclusive aspects of God and creation. The Greek goddess Gaia is the personified immanent feminine divinity—a goddess of nature and body. Radford Ruether argues that both God and Gaia are part of us. Theists need a theology that makes humans part of creation, not dominant rulers of it.351 Like McFague, Radford Ruether argues that panentheism offers such a theological understanding of the God–world relationship, while classical theism hinders that understanding.

Catherine Keller emphasizes the human responsibility as caretakers for the earth. “When we mistake dominion for dominance, we fail in our responsibility as caretakers for the earth—ipso facto we abdicate ‘dominion’,”352 As noted in the previous chapter, Keller is also critical of the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. Her critique is grounded in biblical exegesis and the process theology to which she adheres.353 Western ecotheology is much inspired by the relationality and holistic philosophy of Whiteheadian process theology; and although ecotheology is not necessarily based on Whiteheadian process theology, Jay McDaniel describes its tight connection with this tradition.354 Being a process theologian, Keller highlights the inherent value of all of nature. God and the world affect each other in a mutual relationship. Living and non-living nature alike is valuable, and has an inherent aim that is set by God. This kind of theology contributes to ethical and ecological thinking, evoking respect for the diverse as inherently valuable.355

The previous chapter speaks of Keller’s rejection of creatio ex nihilo. As noted there, she argues instead for an eternal and primordial female aspect of

354 McDaniel, 26,39-40.
reality that exists uncreated and eternally alongside God. In other words, some world was already there from eternity. This points toward panentheism. From the start, the line between God and the world was already smudged. This, she argues, furthers the need for a theology that accepts and makes visible the interconnectedness of God and the world, humanity, and nature.

The “en” [in panentheism] asserts the difference of divine and cosmic, but at the same time makes it impossible to draw the line. For is not the line always already smudged? The smudge, the flux, “is” the en, the overlap, of divinity with world, of world with divinity. [...] the “in” channels the resonance between “deeps.”

According to what I call the panentheistic argument from environmental concerns, a cosmos that is (or is taken to be) inseparable from the divine will invoke more responsibility, more care, and a more profound feeling of holiness toward our environment than a cosmos that is not (or is taken not to be) a part of God. The inclusive and relational theology implied in panentheism contributes to a more relational and environmentally prosperous worldview. Therefore, theists should embrace a panentheistic conception of God rather than a traditional/classical theistic conception of God. Theists ought to prefer a panentheistic model of God that emphasizes the intimate relationship between God and world. Panentheism shows that, just as we cannot draw a line between us and nature, neither can we draw a line between God and the world.

In the next section, this is critically evaluated.

6.1.1. Evaluating the panentheistic argument from environmental concerns

Panentheism conceptualizes humans as part of creation and in a mutually necessary relationship with it, just as God and the world are in a mutually necessary relationship. Is this panentheistic core belief reason to think that a panentheistic conception of God contributes to a more environmentally flourishing world than classical theism does?

Panentheism, unlike classical theism, emphasizes unity and a mutual relationship between God and the world. With a theology based on panentheism, we see that we cannot treat the Earth as a means to our own ends. Of course, classical theists value the Earth as God’s creation. Nevertheless, given that the classical theistic God would be perfect and unchanged actuality, even without the world, these are pragmatic or benefit-oriented reasons to prefer panentheism to classical theism. The panentheistic argument from environmental concerns, and that from gender equality, state that it would be better if we con-

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ceptualized the divine in panentheistic terms. It would be better both for ourselves and for the whole of nature and all its animals – because we would not treat and conceptualize nature and animals as lacking intrinsic value. The question is whether this is a good reason for a theist who is deeply engaged in environmental well-being to be a panentheist rather than a classical theist or a pantheist.

Again, a classical theist can be involved and interested in the environment. There is nothing in classical theism that logically entails a hierarchical and dominant treatment of the environment, and classical theists believe that God created the world and “saw that it was good.” The doctrine of immanence entails ecological value, as the world is God’s beloved creation. That being said, I claim that theists have pragmatic reasons to think that panentheism has pragmatic environmentally oriented benefits owing to its inherent focus on the mutual relationship between God and the world that classical theism lacks. The ontological God–world dualism of panentheism is necessarily less hierarchical than classical theism, which holds God to be metaphysically independent and unaffected by any world. Of course, ecotheology and a deep concern for the environment are also possible from a classical theistic perspective. Nevertheless, everything else being equal, and remaining limited to the question of environmental well-being, theists have pragmatic reasons to prefer panentheism to classical theism.

In the chapter on how to define panentheism and pantheism, I developed an understanding of ontological God–world dualism and the notion of in-worldly dualism. In-worldly dualisms or contraries are not necessarily harmful. The problem is how in-worldly dualisms or contraries are conceptualized and valued, and how this affects our shared reality and the possibility of promoting human and non-human flourishing.

Of course, theists need not be panentheists to argue that human beings should not treat other beings and nature as merely disposable objects. Classical theists believe that God is perfectly good and that humans have a special responsibility to care for the rest of God’s creation. That theology has been used to justify immoral human behavior does not mean that it is entailed by classical theism. If theists believe that God is just and perfect, they also believe that domination, unjust actions, and environmental destruction are

357 Erickson, Christian Theology, 281.
against the will of God. From a classical theistic perspective, a model of God that implies domination must be a false notion of God’s perfection. “[…] understanding God as perfect does not
*ipso facto*
make the concept of God patriarchal […].”

God’s dominion and omnipotence is not tyrannical, but governed by God’s wisdom and righteousness. However, this defense of classical theism still only points toward the pragmatic benefits of panentheism because, when we speak of and conceptualize reality, this has a real effect on that very reality. We affect reality by conceptualizing it in certain ways, and some are better than others. Some ways help to promote human and environmental flourishing. Others hinder that struggle. Even if classical theism does not logically entail human environmental neglect and exploitation, it has had such pragmatically harmful consequences because of the stark divide between the divine and the world. Such a division has contributed to actions that fail to take the intrinsic value of the earth sufficiently into consideration. When people act in the world with “too much heaven on their minds,” it tends not to be good for the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, we must not forget that there are also in-worldly dualisms and contraries within panentheism (and pantheism). However, many – especially feminist – philosophers and theologians have shown us that the traditional classical theistic theology, which is ontologically dualistic, has contributed to harmful in-worldly value hierarchies.

Ontological God–world dualism says that reality is constituted by physical reality and non-physical, spiritual reality – both God and the world. Classical theism holds the purely spiritual God to be supreme in all aspects. In-worldly phenomena associated with the spiritual, such as Man, reason, and individuality, have therefore been regarded as more divine – more valuable. And since the ontological God–world dualism of classical theism entails that the world is that which is *not* God, everything associated with the material, such as nature, animals, and other things linked to the bodily, such as women, feelings, and relationality, has been regarded as non-divine – and hence less valuable than God. This, I claim, is the problem with the classically theistic ontological God–world dualism. Classical theism is not problematic in itself, but it has affected the worldview and conceptualization of reality in ways that are harmful to the human–nature relationship. A theology and a worldview based on classical theism and its ontological God–world dualism have negative prag-

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360 Taliaferro and Meister, *Contemporary Philosophical Theology*, 117.
361 Charnock, *Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, 442.
362 To paraphrase the song from the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyrics by Tim Rice.
matic consequences because they have affected how the entire Western culture conceptualizes the world and its relationship to God. The result is seen in the harmful ways in which theology has been used to legitimize human domination and exploitation of nature.

Depending on which version of panentheism we speak of, it also holds a more or less strong ontological God–world dualism to be true. Process-panentheists, such as Keller, maintain the necessity of the God–world relationship and argue for the eternity of a world. God and the world are co-eternal. In one sense, this is still a kind of ontological God–world dualism, in that also process-panentheists claim that reality is constituted by the physical reality and by that part of God that transcends the physical reality. That said, this strict form of panentheism still maintains that the world is a necessary part of God – something that classical theism denies. It emphasizes the necessary relationality between God and the world. Process-panentheism entails ontological God–world dualism, but with the necessary dipolar inclusion.

If panentheism is true, the benefits of conceptualizing God in panentheistic terms are great. Assuming the belief that God created the world and “saw that it was good,” a belief shared by many panentheists and classical theists, the benefits of this far outweigh the drawbacks if it turns out that classical theism is correct. Even if classical dualistic theism is more accurate, no harm would come from our treating one another and the environment as inherently valuable. The reverse cannot be said to be true. If it turns out that panentheism is a more accurate description of the God–world relationship, the harm arising from not conceptualizing other beings and nature as part of God is significant. We need only look at the failed attempts to stop climate change and environmental exploitation, such as in the Paris Agreement 2015 and the United Nations climate change meeting in Glasgow 2021. Furthermore, even if we leave truth out of it, we have pragmatic environmental reasons to prefer panentheism to classical theism.

Owing to the value hierarchy between heaven and earth, the spiritual and bodily material – a hierarchy fueled by ontological God–world dualism – it is plausible to assume that a conception that highlights the inherent and equal value of both heaven and earth, the spiritual and bodily material, would result in more care and love for the natural world than a conception that highlights the superior value of spirit/soul would. Thus we have a pragmatic argument in favor of panentheism over classical theism. Again, this is not to say that a classical theist cannot be highly engaged in environmental questions. McFague argues in favor of panentheism, which could be labeled as qualified pantheism because it is not evident whether God necessarily needs a body. Such panentheism does not give theists any convincing reason to prefer panen-

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364 Not necessarily this actual world, but some world.
theism to classical theism, because God cares for God’s creation even in clas-
sical theism, and neither classical theism nor qualified panentheism maintains
the necessity of the created world.

I claim that the argument would be stronger if the version of panentheism
being defended were that of strict panentheism. Keller’s stance, therefore,
strengthens the argument: process theology clearly states that some kind of
world has always existed because of the rejection of creatio ex nihilo. Body/nature has always existed. In strict panentheism, God necessarily needs
a body/world for God’s continued existence. If God can exist without the
world (or any other world), then God need not be both physical and transcend-
ent. If this is the case, then the most important implication of the model of
God as embodied, physical Mother loses its vigor. God can indeed still be both
immanent and transcendent in McFague’s panentheism. However, the empha-
sis on the embodied God – a model supposed to help us to rid ourselves of the
hierarchal dualism of mind/body, nature/heaven, and God/world – loses its
force if God is not necessarily embodied. God is immanent also according to
classical theism, which is why a strict pantheism offers a better alternative to
classical theism than qualified panentheism, because only in strict panenthe-
ism is the God–world relationship necessary.

I started out by asking whether the panentheistic core belief that God and
the world are in a mutual relationship gives a theist reason to think that a
panentheistic conception of God contributes to a more environmentally flour-
ishing world than classical theism does. I have argued that only the stricter
claim that God and the world are in a necessary mutual relationship gives a
theist reason to think that panentheism could contribute to a more environ-
mentally flourishing world than classical theism, because only strict panen-
theism values both parts in the relationship as intrinsically and equally valua-
ble for the relationship.

Now it is time to examine the pantheistic argument for environmental well-
being.

6.2. Pantheism and environmental concerns

The focus of the rest of this chapter is to reconstruct and evaluate the cogency
of a pantheistic argument for environmental concerns. If only environmental
well-being is taken into account, does a theist have pragmatic reasons to prefer
pantheism and to believe that a pantheistic conception of God contributes to a
more environmentally flourishing world than panentheism and classical the-
ism do?

Environmental well-being is of the highest priority for many people be-
cause of climate change and its consequences in floods, forest fires, extreme
drought, extreme rain, etc. It is now clear, without a doubt, that human beings
are responsible for the climate change we currently experience around the world.  

According to what I call the pantheist argument for environmental concerns, the world, nature, animals, and plants would flourish and prosper to a higher degree if the pantheistic worldview were prevalent. The pantheist argument for environmental concerns states that the pantheist conviction that all of nature is divine is needed if we truly want to turn away from the destructive environmental path we currently follow. According to the argument, a pantheistic worldview is better for the environment than classical theism and panentheism because of the pantheist rejection of God–world dualism and divine transcendence. It is my objective to analyze this pragmatic claim critically.

What environmentally pragmatic consequences can be expected to follow from a worldview based on ontological God–world monism? According to the core claims of pantheism, the God–world is intrinsically and supremely good, valuable, or sacred. A pantheist cannot think that nature is only instrumentally valuable. A pantheist cannot think that human beings have the right to over-consume and exploit nature in destructive ways. However, since humans are part of nature, and we have needs in order to survive, pantheists must claim our right to live by the earth, eat, and so on; but this must be done in a respectful and worshipful way, since everything is part of the sacred, intrinsically valuable God–world.

If everything is equally valuable – since everything is God – why care for the *environment* or for the preservation of jungles rather than their deforestation? If we should care for environmental well-being, the pantheists must be able to make value judgments and value distinctions, and we cannot do that if everything divine is equally valuable and sacred. All pantheists must explain how and why specific actions and situations can be good while others are bad when everything is one monistic divine unity. Provided – as I argued in the previous chapter – that pantheists coherently can solve the problem of value differentiation, there are reasons to take the pantheist argument for environmental concerns seriously.

Now, consider the following quotes about pantheism.

> Because Pantheists identify God with Nature rather than an anthropomorphic being, Pantheists oppose the arrogant world-view of anthropocentrism.

> Nothing in the Universe exists alone; all matter and energy is united, interdependent, and inter-related. […] Man’s arrogance in considering himself apart

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from and superior to other organisms is resulting not only in environmental abuse, but in deterioration of his own spirit.  

Pantheism provides an inclusive, nonhierarchical, nonanthropocentric worldview that can help us recognize our limits and our kinship with the rest of the cosmos, especially the other living things with whom we share the planet.

These quotes indicate that environmental concerns and human caretaking of humans, animals, and plants are of utmost importance for pantheists. A desire to preserve the biosphere and to care for all creatures and plants on earth is a natural response for a pantheist who believes nature and the universe to be divine. A pantheistic worldview highlights a non-anthropomorphic ethical concern for all things and the shared responsibility for the well-being of all things.

Harold W. Wood argues that pantheism is inherently linked to environmental concerns in a way that neither classical theism (in particular) nor panentheism is. He writes that traditional religions, usually classical theistic ones, attribute sacredness and holiness to a transcendent realm beyond our physical planet. In pantheism, however, the entire universe, including the Earth and our solar system, is sacred. The ecosystem is a divine revelation for the pantheist. This is the correct way to understand Acts 17:28, for it is literally in the divine that we “live and move and have our being” according to pantheism.

Wood emphasizes that environmental ethics is specially woven into the heart of the pantheist because “pantheism teaches that respect and reverence for the Earth demands continuing attempts to understand ecosystems.” We need only look at the world today to see that we do not have a world of flourishing life or ecological well-being. Wood believes that pantheism is the remedy.

John W. Grula is also a pantheist who argues that the classical theism of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Enlightenment, and postmodernist paradigms are failing to eliminate environmental destruction and war, and that we ought to change the overall worldview to view our physical world as sacred instead. The Sixth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations’ organ for assessing the science

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related to climate change, clearly declares humans to be responsible for the rapidly changing climate on Earth.\textsuperscript{374}

So, what is it in pantheism that makes pantheists such as Wood and Grula believe that a prevailing pantheist worldview would lead to more ecological well-being and flourishing? Grula thinks that panentheism encourages more robust environmental ethics than classical theism does because of its emphasis on God’s necessary immanence in the world. The natural follow-up argument is that pantheism, for its part, encourages even stronger environmental ethics than panentheism because pantheism rejects divine transcendence altogether. If divine immanence is good for environmental well-being, pantheism appears to be a better worldview than panentheism or classical theism. Scientific research into global warming, acid seas, the effects of deforestation, and the interconnections of organisms, plants, and animal life in an ecosystem has been critical because, according to the pantheist, it is crucial for us to understand and care for Nature/God.

Pantheists thus reject divine transcendence and the notion of a creator-God. Are there reasons to think that such rejections can have good environmental consequences?

According to Grula, when we postulate a first cause and a creator of the universe, we also tend to attribute personality and holiness to this creator. We tend to anthropomorphize God and think of God as having human abilities, and humans tend to look to and imitate this person-like super-God.\textsuperscript{375} According to the pantheist, only by recognizing that we are as dependent on ecosystems and environmental well-being as any other entity can we promote a fully inclusive and loving worldview that is beneficial for all.\textsuperscript{376} Pantheism provides environmental ethics and a sense of the sacredness of all natural things.

Sallie McFague and others have emphasized the negative consequences of traditional dualistic theology with a divine Creator and a profane creation.\textsuperscript{377} Grula agrees, and thinks that a worldview such as the one embedded in classical theism, has provided humans with a theological justification to not only take from the creation as needed for survival but also to engage in rank exploitation of it without any concern or even the perception that something sacred is being desecrated. In marked contrast, native North Americans and other cultures with pantheistic aspects do assign notions of divinity and sacredness to the creation.

\textsuperscript{374} Eyring et al., “Human Influence on the Climate System.”
\textsuperscript{375} For more on these sorts of argument, see Jantzen, \textit{Becoming Divine}; McFague, \textit{Models of God}.
\textsuperscript{376} Grula, “Pantheism Reconstructed: Ecotheology as a Successor to the Judeo-Christian, Enlightenment, and Postmodernist Paradigms,” 175.
As a result it is generally thought that the aboriginal peoples of these cultures were much more careful and sparing in their use of it [...].

Like the panentheistic argument for environmental concerns, the pantheistic argument is focused on the negative effects of in-worldly dualisms—more specifically, those that cause or contribute to destructive and harmful actions. In this case, the destructive and harmful actions are related to environmental concerns.

In summary, the pantheist argument for environmental concerns states that the pantheist conviction that all of nature is divine is needed if we truly want to turn away from the destructive environmental path we currently follow. If all of nature is fully divine and regarded as divine, we will treat all of it as divine, contributing to environmental well-being. Classical theism and panentheism attribute transcendence and ontological dualism to the God–world relationship. According to the pantheist argument for environmental concern, such a conceptualization contributes to a worldview in which the spiritual God—not the world—is the inherently and supremely valuable entity. A pantheistic worldview rejects God–world dualism and divine transcendence. If we truly live, move, and have our being in God, and if everything is divine, even nonliving nature is divine and inherently valuable.

I now evaluate whether a theist really has good reasons to think that pantheism contributes more to environmental well-being than do panentheism and classical theism.

### 6.2.1. Evaluating the pantheistic argument from environmental concerns

If strict panentheism has pragmatic advantages over classical theism because of its emphasis on the necessary embodiment of God, is pantheism even better? That is the question to which I now turn.

The pantheist argument for the pragmatic environmentally good consequences presupposes the coherency of making value distinctions. All pantheists think that all of nature/the world is divine and, therefore, sacred. However, depending on what sort of pantheist one is, the pantheist can regard God as more present in different places and that nature, therefore, is more significantly divine in certain places. But how can pantheists know which aspects of the divine God–world are more valuable and divinely revelatory? How can pantheists know what aspects of the world we should preserve and which, with a good ethical conscience, we can treat as being of lesser divine significance?

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379 Jantzen, God's World, God's Body, 98–99. She claims that God is more present in Jesus than in a newspaper.
Pantheism is non-anthropocentric by nature, meaning that not only human beings are intrinsically valuable. Pantheistic ethics is non-anthropocentric since everything is divine. To care only for humanity is to care only for a small aspect of what God is. For pantheists, humans and all of nature are part of the divine moral community.

Personal pantheism is coherent with value differentiation because the personal God–world could self-express its divinity more significantly and concretely, for example, through ecological flourishing and beauty and be less significantly expressed in suffering and devastation. Pantheists can say that, in ecological flourishing and beauty, we see the intention or aim of the pantheistic God–world more clearly. Suffering and devastation are also part of the pantheistic God, but we could understand them as non-revelatory of the inherent aim or teleology of the personal God–world. Ecological well-being and flourishing can therefore be understood as good and beautiful – in line with the divine purpose or goal – while environmental exploitation and destruction prevent it.

Is this reasoning also applicable to non-personal pantheism? The divine God–world would not intentionally self-express its teleology, but non-personal pantheists could still think that ecological well-being and flourishing express the divine non-personal telos better than environmental exploitation does.

Actions are moral in so far as they promote the significantly divine expressions of the world. Non-personal pantheism has no intentional aim or goal, but morality and value could be regarded as something like a metaphysical constant, such as gravity. Love, beauty, and environmental well-being could then be considered more significantly divine than hate, destruction, and environmental exploitation.

Suppose that strict panentheism – given God’s necessary immanence and mutual feedback – inspires more care, love, and respect for the whole of creation than classical theism does. Are there reasons to think that pantheism would inspire even more than strict panentheism? Pantheism and strict panentheism both emphasize the necessity of the world-aspect of God, and both come with the risk of environmentally harmful in-worldly hierarchies. In pantheism, we have no ontological God–world dualism at all. The risk of it spilling over into the world, becoming in-worldly dualisms, thus vanishes. However, as concluded in the previous chapter, as soon as we accept that we can make value differences, these can be used to argue for the superior value of human beings at the expense of the rest of the natural world. In-worldly value hierarchies can be used to cause harm to the Earth.

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Furthermore, Wood and others have emphasized that pantheism is essentially non-anthropocentric, which entails the view that the rest of nature is also intrinsically valuable. This may be true, but it does not necessarily entail believing that non-human nature is just as valuable as humans. Moreover, classical theists and panentheists also value non-human nature, since it is created by God (classical theism) or a (necessary) part of God (strict or qualified panentheism). Classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism do not entail the view that only humans are intrinsically valuable.

Despite this, do theists have other reasons to believe that a pantheistic worldview gives us stronger moral reasons to care for the environment and non-human nature than strict panentheism? To reconstruct such a reason, I draw resources from panpsychism to formulate a panpsychist pantheism. However, I show that this fails to be a reason to favor pantheism over panentheism.

Panpsychist pantheism, more than non-panpsychist pantheism, has especially good environmental and pragmatic consequences. I now define the kind of panpsychism that is relevant to this argument.

The statement entailed by panpsychism is that everything is mental. This can be understood differently, and there are different forms of panpsychism. One version found in process theism is called panexperientialism. Other versions are subject-panpsychism, micropsychism, and cosmopsychism. Joanna Leidenhag outlines four core theses within all forms of panpsychism. The first is mental realism, in which at least some organisms are conscious. The second is a non-emergent, irreducible level, in which phenomenal consciousness cannot be reduced or perceived as an emergent feature. The third is fundamental monism, in which the fundamental psychist level of reality applies to both the mental and the material. The fourth and last core thesis in panpsychism is that the foundational mental level of reality is necessary to explain mentality and consciousness in organisms such as humans. The panpsychism that is relevant in the following argument entails that everything, on a fundamental level, has mentality/psyche, subjectivity, consciousness, or at least experience. Nothing is “only” material. Everything is also mental in some fundamental sense, and neither can be reduced to the other. This notion of panpsychism is sometimes called dual-aspect monism or material-mental monism. To my mind, material-mental monism is the better label, since it makes it clear that everything material is irreducibly mental.

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382 Leidenhag, 65–90.
Whether a pantheist treats all of nature as inherently valuable must depend on what sort of pantheist she is. Only the panpsychist pantheist necessarily believes that mountains, trees, and rivers are experiencing, mental, or possibly sentient entities in themselves.\footnote{A contemporary example of a panpsychist pantheist is Timothy Sprigge. See Sprigge, \textit{The God of Metaphysics}.} A non-panpsychist pantheist need not think that rivers, mountains, frogs, and deserts are especially precious in themselves, even if they are also aspects of God.\footnote{Mander, “Pantheism.”} My thumbs are parts of me, but not nearly as significant as my heart. But the panpsychist pantheist ought to believe that all aspects of nature are valuable, since everything is an experiencing, conscious, mental, or experiencing thing. A non-panpsychist pantheist need not claim that.

But why should pantheists think that life, experience, or mentality are more valuable than non-living and non-experiencing or non-mental matter? A non-panpsychist pantheist could argue that everything, regardless of whether it is alive, conscious, or experiencing, is equally divine and equally valuable because everything is an aspect of the one sacred whole. However, that stance indicates that pantheists cannot make value distinctions at all, and that we would have no reason to care for the environment rather than nuclear destruction. In that case, we have no ‘pantheistic argument for environmental well-being’ left.

According to the panpsychist, everything is mental, subjective, conscious, or at least experiencing, which makes the panpsychist position more interesting than a non-panpsychist one, since the panpsychist attributes more intrinsic value to the world than the non-panpsychist. Suppose, therefore, that we accept the claim that life and conscious, mental, or experiencing beings/subjects are inherently valuable. In that case, we have a moral reason to struggle for the well-being of living, conscious, and experiencing entities.

Since I have argued that pantheists can make coherent value differentiations, theists have environmentally pragmatic reasons to prefer panpsychist pantheism to non-panpsychist pantheism. In other words, the pantheist argument for environmental concerns is pragmatically more convincing if the pantheism in question is a panpsychist pantheism.

But is it reasonable to think that non-human nature would flourish more if pantheism were the prevailing worldview rather than panentheism or classical theism? It is plausible that humans would treat non-human nature with more care, love, and respect than currently if non-human nature were regarded as divine, \textit{even if} pantheists regard humans as \textit{more} valuable. It is plausible that pantheists have more profound environmental ethics than classical theists and qualified panentheists owing to their belief that everything is the God–world, \textit{even if} classical theists and qualified panentheists also value non-human nature as intrinsically valuable. The reason is this. A classical theist who believes
that God creates something also plausibly believes that it is inherently valuable by being God’s creation.

Furthermore, a panentheist who thinks that something is part of, or in, God also plausibly believes that it has intrinsic value because of this. But classical theists and qualified panentheists would surely value God in Godself more than God’s creation or relational parts. They would value the eternal and unchanging part of God that is not the world more than the contingent part of God that is the world. If so, it is also the case that pantheists value the world more than classical theists and qualified panentheists, since they think that the world is Godself. If pantheists love and value the world more than classical theists and qualified panentheists, this is an environmentally pragmatic reason to favor pantheism. However, strict panentheism, like pantheism, holds the world as a necessary aspect of God. Contrasting pantheism and strict panentheism does not suggest any pragmatic benefits of pantheism. Thus theists have pragmatic environmental reasons to prefer pantheism to classical theism and qualified panentheism, but have no pragmatic reason to prefer panentheism to strict panentheism. Pragmatically, we would gain much by treating nature as inherently divine and valuable, even if pantheism or strict panentheism were not true.

Panpsychist pantheism is environmentally pragmatically better than non-panpsychism; but does a theist have pragmatic reasons to prefer panpsychist pantheism to panpsychist panentheism? No. Panpsychism is an extension claim in pantheism, panentheism, and classical theism alike. If the moral grounds to treat non-human nature well result from panpsychism, theists have no reason to prefer pantheism to panentheism or classical theism, since panpsychism can combine with all these types of theism. Instead, it appears that theists have environmental and moral reasons to be panpsychists. Since, as we have seen, the theist has pragmatic environmental reasons to prefer strict panentheism to classical theism, we now see that theists have further pragmatic reasons to prefer strict panpsychist panentheism – for example, process-panentheism. However, theists do not have grounds to prefer panpsychist pantheism to panpsychist panentheism. They appear to have equally good environmental pragmatic benefits from the reasons presented here.

In conclusion, theists have pragmatic environmental reasons to prefer panpsychist pantheism to non-panpsychist pantheism because a panpsychist pantheist also values animals and non-sentient nature as inherently valuable and significantly divine. This is because everything, even so-called non-sentient nature, is experiencing, conscious, mental, subjects, or living entities, according to the panpsychist. If life, consciousness, mentality, subjectivity, or experience are inherently valuable, then a panpsychist universe is more valuable than a non-panpsychist universe. However, panpsychism combines with panentheism and classical theism as well. Since strict panentheism, limiting the focus to environmental well-being, is pragmatically preferable to classical theism, and since pantheism contrasted with strict panentheism suggests no
pragmatic environmental benefits, panpsychist panentheism is at least equally preferable to panpsychist pantheism.

Even if we cannot determine the truth of panpsychism, theists have a pragmatic reason to act as if it were true. Whether the theist believes that the world is God’s creation (as classical theists), that it is part of or in God and in a mutual (necessary) relationship with God (panentheism), or that the entire world is divine (pantheism), the panpsychist extension claim that everything is mental, conscious, or experiencing, and valuable in itself, or at least acting as if it is, would plausibly contribute to the non-anthropocentric ethical behavior we need to change the destructive treatment of the environment.

6.3. Conclusions
This chapter has critically analyzed and evaluated environmental pragmatic arguments for panentheism and pantheism.

Limiting the focus to environmental well-being, I concluded that only strict panentheism, in which God and the world are in a necessary mutual relationship, gives a theist pragmatic reasons to think that panentheism could contribute to a more environmentally flourishing world than classical theism does. Only strict panentheism, contrasted with qualified panentheism and classical theism, values both parts of the relationship as necessary and equally intrinsically valuable for the relationship. In qualified panentheism, theists can keep the same ontological God–world dualism as in classical theism. If that is kept, theists no longer have a pragmatic reason to prefer panentheism to classical theism, because qualified panentheism does not imply a changed worldview, compared with classical theism on that account. Strict panentheism offers a better alternative to classical theism than qualified panentheism because it forces the theist to conceptualize the God–world relationship in different terms, with more inclusive metaphors that speak of the necessary value of the world, since it is an essential part of God.

Last, with only environmental well-being under consideration, I concluded that theists have no reason pragmatically to prefer pantheism to strict panentheism. Both positions conceptualize the world to be necessary to God, and both positions come with the risk of contributing to environmentally harmful in-worldly hierarchies. I argued that theists have pragmatic environmental reasons to be panpsychist, since a panpsychist attributes more intrinsic value to the non-human world than non-panpsychists have reason to do. However, panpsychism combines with many kinds of theisms – not only with pantheism. For this reason, I concluded that theists have pragmatic environmental reasons to prefer either panpsychist strict panentheism (e.g., process-panentheism) or panpsychist pantheism. From the arguments and reasons surveyed in this chapter, they appear equally good from a pragmatic environmental perspective.
This chapter explores arguments for and against panentheism and pantheism, with a specific focus on natural science. The focus is on pragmatic rather than epistemic arguments, since the philosophical debate about science and religion in general, especially concerning conceptions of God, concerns consistency and coherence with the worldview presented by the natural sciences. This chapter analyzes how well panentheism and pantheism cohere with modern natural science, starting with the emergence argument for panentheism. Then I proceed to the process-panentheistic argument, and conclude by analyzing the coherence of pantheism and natural science.

Occasionally, claims are made that particular arguments cannot be used in favor of panentheism or pantheism, since they are incoherent with how panentheism and pantheism have previously been defined. The overarching purpose of this study is to answer the question of what reasons there are to embrace panentheism or pantheism rather than classical theism. If the reasons presented in favor of panentheism really are reasons in favor of pantheism, this needs to be clarified.

7.1. Panentheism and natural science

The biochemist and theologian Arthur Peacocke and the theologian and philosopher Philip Clayton defend panentheism as the better option when relating science and religion. Peacocke and Clayton argue that panentheism offers an understanding of how God acts causally in the natural world (special divine action) in ways that do not contradict the natural sciences. It is this question with which I engage. I reconstruct Peacocke’s and Clayton’s positions into what I call the emergence argument for panentheism. I distinguish the emergence argument from another argument that comes from process theology and is argued for by David Ray Griffin, for example. I call that argument the process argument from science.

7.1.1. The emergence argument for panentheism

The emergence argument for panentheism states that special divine action (see below), as understood in panentheism, is more coherent with natural science
than classical theism is.\textsuperscript{386} What reasons are there to think this? To answer that, we must first know what the potential problem with special divine action is.

Natural science, such as physics, neuroscience, chemistry, and so on, conducts all observations and formulates all theories based on the causal closure principle. This principle says that the universe is a closed system. All effects have their cause within the closed system that is the universe. A \textit{physicalist} perspective on the causal closure principle claims that all physical effects have necessary and sufficient physical causes, and that those causes can be found within the physical universe.\textsuperscript{387} As will become apparent below, a \textit{non-reductive} physicalist perspective on the causal closure principle claims that all effects have their cause within the universe, but leaves open the possibility of mental causes.

Natural scientists should never invoke supernatural explanations to describe natural processes; this is the principle of \textit{methodological naturalism},\textsuperscript{388} which says nothing about ontology. Only \textit{metaphysical naturalism} makes ontological claims.\textsuperscript{389} However, methodological naturalism works as if no gods, spirits, or other supernatural entities have causal effects in the natural world. In other words, \textit{methodologically}, natural science assumes that no supernatural entities (such as gods and spirits) have any causal influence whatsoever, and that physical effects have purely physical causes.\textsuperscript{390}

In the debate about divine action as compatible or incompatible with science, the relevant action is “special” or “particular” divine action or, as Thomas Tracy calls it, “objectively special” divine action.\textsuperscript{391} When theists affirm God as Creator and sustainer of the world, God’s act as the constant sustaining cause is called general divine action. God’s general action, in this sense, never ceases. Both classical theists and panentheists agree that God constantly sustains the world in its existence in this sense. The question related to science is whether God can be thought to act or intervene in the world by

\textsuperscript{386} Clayton, \textit{God and Contemporary Science}, 102.
means of special or particular divine action. Such divine action would, for example, temporarily change or interfere with the otherwise law-governed and causally closed universe as described by the sciences. If the world is a unified network of cause and effect, a spiritual and purely non-physical God cannot work in it other than by means of supernatural intervention.

Classical theism holds God to be ontologically independent and transcendent pure spirit. If such a God interacted with the world through special divine action, it would, from the perspective of the causal closure of the universe, be by means of supernatural intervention. On that account, classical theism is thought to be inconsistent with science.

Are there reasons to think that panentheism could be more consistent with science? Does not panentheism also violate the causal closure principle? Peacocke thinks that God acts in the world, for example, by affecting nature on a quantum level. God acts “in, with, and under” the natural processes.\(^3\) For this reason, he argues that panentheism is more compatible with the natural sciences than classical theism is because, if God acts by affecting the natural world on the quantum level, then we can explain divine action without resorting to supernatural explanations. Of course, the classical theistic God could also affect nature at the quantum level. However, that interference would be supernatural intervention because the classical theistic God is an ontologically independent, distinct, wholly spiritual, and transcendent being. Since, according to panentheism, the world is in God, or a part of God, there is no “qualitative or ontological difference”\(^3\) between “divine” action and “natural” action.

To make sense of this panentheistic claim, panentheists such as Peacocke and Clayton often use the analogy of how the mind affects the physical body to argue that, in panentheism, God can act directly in the physical world. In this panentheistic analogy, God is the mind that causally affects the physical body – the world.\(^4\) For this analogy to be scientifically acceptable, there must be scientific reasons to think that the mind actually can work causally on the physical body. In other words, the causal influence of the mind cannot be only an epiphenomenon that is reducible to the merely physical neurons. Only if there are reasons to think that non-physical entities, such as minds, can have causal efficiency in the physical world do we have reason to think that the panentheistic analogy works as a reason for the compatibility of panentheism and science.

So, are there scientific reasons to think that non-physical entities can have causal efficiency in the physical world? This brings us to emergence theory.


\(^4\) Clayton, God and Contemporary Science, 101.
Emergence theory, as described by Clayton, “[…] claims that the nature of the world is such that it produces, and perhaps must produce, continually more complex realities in a process of ongoing creativity […].” Furthermore, emergence theory states that physical objects and phenomena such as atoms and electrons can arrange themselves to produce new complex properties that are more than their constitutive parts. Consciousness, self-consciousness, the mind, and morals are emergent phenomena, according to this view.

Clayton’s description of emergence contains four parts: (1.) in-worldly monism (Oliver Li clarifies that emergence theory is “neutral with respect to whether or not matter is the basis of all phenomena”); (2.) property emergence; (3.) irreducibility of the emergence; and (4.) “downward” or “top-down” causation. First, both Clayton and Peacocke claim that reality is composed of one type of “stuff,” but that this “stuff” cannot be reduced to merely physical parts. In other words, they reject reductive physicalism. Mind or spirit can emerge from physical matter, but cannot be reduced to it. The second feature states that novel properties and phenomena emerge from lower-level physical aggregates. The lower-level phenomena (the third feature) cannot reduce or predict these new complex properties.

As will become apparent, the fourth feature separates weak emergence from strong emergence. Weak emergence theory states that new emergent properties or phenomena are unexpected and unpredictable. However, in principle, the emergent properties could be deduced from physical laws alone, even though they are unexpected. Strong emergence theory states that the emergent properties or phenomena are physically non-reductive and causally efficacious so that the whole causally affects its parts. This is called “top-down” or “downward causation.” The causal impact of the whole on its parts is not even deducible in principle in strong emergence. Strong emergence can be used (if such a thing exists) to...

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397 In Clayton, *Mind and Emergence*, 4., Clayton explains his understanding of ontological monism. In my terminology, his notion of ontological monism translates as “in-worldly monism.”
398 Li, *Panentheism, Panpsychism and Neuroscience*, 87.
401 Peacocke, 259.
refute reductive physicalism, since, if successful, it shows that new physically irreducible and causally efficacious properties and phenomena emerge from low-level parts. David Chalmers says that there is at least one instance of strong emergence, namely consciousness, and that,

Strong emergence has much more radical consequences than weak emergence. If there are phenomena that are strongly emergent with respect to the domain of physics, then our conception of nature needs to be expanded to accommodate them. That is, if there are phenomena whose existence is not deducible from the facts about the exact distribution of particles and fields throughout space and time (along with the laws of physics), then this suggests that new fundamental laws of nature are needed to explain these phenomena.  

Causality explained from low-level components to more complex systems is called “bottom-up” causality. Sometimes events occur that the natural sciences cannot explain by using reductive physicalist explanations. The emergence of the mind and how the mind causally affects the physical body are examples. Reductive physicalism assumes that all causes are physical; but some events within the natural sciences indicate the emergence of something non-reductive. According to non-reductionists, there are cases in which a theory of physicalist “bottom-up” causation is insufficient. Instead, a “top-down” explanation of causation is needed. This is what strong emergence states. A science based on reductive physicalism cannot explain the mind’s causal effect on the body without reducing this causality to an epiphenomenon. When there is “top-down” causation, something new has emerged from the low-level component that cannot be explained by mere knowledge of the physical components.

One example is complex physical systems. Clayton writes that “[o]ne would not, for example, know about conductivity from a study of individual electrons alone; conductivity is a property that emerges only in complex solid state systems with huge numbers of electrons.” Another example is what in physics is called dissipative systems. A dissipative system is a physical system in which there is “order out of chaos.” Dissipative systems such as tornados are examples of where science cannot explain the events of the whole by merely knowing about the low-level physical parts. The system as a whole works in ways that the separate parts would not.

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405 For examples of emergence in the natural sciences, see chapter 3 in Clayton, *Mind and Emergence*.
406 Clayton, 66.
408 Peacocke, 261.
Theoretical physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne supports the non-reductive description of the natural world by strong emergence theory. He writes,

The clockwork universe is dead. The future is not just the tautologous spelling-out of what was already present in the past. Physics shows an openness to new possibility at all levels, from the microscopic (where quantum theory is important) to the macroscopic (where it is not). In that sense, physics describes a world of which we can conceive ourselves as being inhabitants.\(^{409}\)

If Polkinghorne, Peacocke, and Clayton are correct, the universe is not a deterministic and physically reductive system. Complex physical systems, such as a seeing eye, indicate “bottom-up” causation. The physical is constituted to result in the eye being able to see. However, phenomena such as the mind’s influence on the body cannot be explained with bottom-up causation. If the mind actually can affect the physical body (e.g., a mental intention to lift the arm, which causes the physical brain to cause the arm muscles to move), it indicates an emergent “top-down” causation. This implies that explanations, both in natural science and in theology, can take the form of downward causation, or whole-part-influence as Peacocke prefers to call it. Peacocke proposes that theists conceptualize God and God’s special actions in the world in terms of whole-part-influence. Just as dissipative systems behave in ways that the parts cannot explain – the parts would not behave as they do if they were not part of the whole system – the world exists and behaves in ways that are only explainable by the whole system, which is God.\(^{410}\)

We can now see how emergence theory relates to panentheism. Presuming the reality of strongly emergent phenomena – that, for example, minds are as real as the neurons and physical structures from which they emerge – as the omnipresent yet immanent mind, God can be thought to act in the world by influencing it in a non-intervening or non-supernatural way. This model thus suggests a causally closed system but with emergent mental causes – for example, a non-reductive physicalism (mentality is causally real).

Since panentheism holds the world to be in God and vice versa, the divine actions would not come from the “outside,” as would supposedly be the case in classical theism. The panentheistic emergence argument thus states that special divine action, from the perspective of panentheism, would not violate the causal closure of the universe. Peacocke’s words serve to summarize the emergence analogy:

On this model of God’s relation to the world-as-a-whole, the total world system is seen as ‘in God’ who (uniquely) is present to it as a whole, as well as to its


\(^{410}\) Peacocke, *Paths from Science towards God*, 52–53.
individual component entities. If God interacts with the ‘world’ at this super-vinent level of totality, then he could be causatively effective in a ‘top-down’ manner without abrogating the laws and regularities (and the unpredictabilities we have noted) that operate at the myriad sub-levels of existence that constitute that ‘world’.\footnote{411}

According to Peacocke, God’s “intervention” in the world is naturalistic, since all events in the world are within the laws of physics. However, they also express God’s intention, just as the natural world contains systems that cannot be explained except in terms of top-down causation.\footnote{412} (This is perhaps to stretch the meaning of the word “naturalistic,” because many would argue that God is not natural but is indeed supernatural. Then again, that is the panentheistic point; there is no clear distinction between God and the world if the world is in God or part of God’s being.)

In summary, the panentheistic emergence argument states that panentheists can understand special divine actions in the world in a way that coheres with natural science. Rationally acceptable scientific explanations about causality must be in terms of natural explanations. In other words, supernatural causal explanations (such as the acts of gods, spirits, and angels) are not acceptable. According to the critiques, a classical theistic conception of God holds God’s action to be supernatural intervention. According to classical theism, God is a wholly different and transcendent kind, distinct from the world. God is not part of the world except in respect of God’s voluntary omnipresence. How can an ontologically transcendent, non-physical, and wholly different kind of being act causally in the world except through supernatural intervention? According to this argument, it cannot.

Panentheists use the analogy of how the non-physical mind causally affects the physical body to show how the panentheistic God – as the world’s omnipresent mind – can act causally from “within” the physical world, since the world is in God. According to this argument, such divine action would not be supernatural but a cause from within the otherwise causally closed universe (but the universe is not physically reductive if mental events are causally real). Using the emergence argument, panentheists can argue that divine action is more coherent with natural science than classical theism is.

The next section evaluates this claim.

7.1.2. Evaluating the emergence argument for panentheism

According to the emergence argument above, panentheism can coherently conceptualize special divine action as non-intervening in the causally closed physical universe. The argument also claims that classical theism, with its


stronger claim on divine transcendence and otherness-than-the-world, cannot
be so combined. Is this a sound conclusion?

Classical theists would most likely object to the entire reasoning above. The classical theistic approach to divine action relates intimately to the belief in God as the Creator and sustainer of the world (general divine action). Classical theists claim that God is necessarily involved in the world because the world cannot exist without God’s sustaining activity. \(^{413}\) In the words of Brian Davies,

> Talk about God as intervening has to presuppose that there is commonly a serious absence of God from created things. Yet if God is (in my sense) indeed the Creator of all things, then he is never absent from any of them […] \(^{414}\)

A miracle, according to classical theists, is not special divine interference with the natural laws, because God is always immanently present as the upholder of the world’s existence. \(^{415}\) A possible understanding of miracles from a classical theistic perspective is to say that a miracle happens when only God acts as the cause, as opposed to when worldly causes are also involved. \(^{416}\) Edward Feser explains this below.

> For, again, in the Thomistic view, God is not properly conceived of either on the model of one natural substance acting on others or as a “god of the gaps.” But only if he were conceived of in either of those ways could it make sense to blame him for failing to “intervene” to prevent harm, in the way that a human being governed by natural law might be blamed for failing to intervene to prevent harm from befalling another human being. \(^{417}\)

Classical theists can thus object to the claim that God intervenes in the creation in a supernatural way. God usually acts in the world by using secondary causes. God is always a causal power, but not always the sole causal power at

\(^{413}\) E.g., Calvin, “Institutes of the Christian Religion (Vol. 1 of 2),” Chapter XVI, III and chap. XVI, IV.
\(^{414}\) Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, 75.
\(^{415}\) Whether there really are natural laws is debated. Dispositionalists are inclined to think otherwise, and instead speak only of inherent power dispositions in objects. See Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
work. This is called double agency. Davies argues that the notion of intervening or not intervening suggests a deistic approach such that God can choose not to be involved in the world. But classical theists reject the idea that God can pop in and out of the world, or that we can ever conceive of the world as being without the constant sustaining divine activity. In normal cases, God and objects or subjects in the world are the cause for what happens in the world.

A few words must be said about this. First, panentheists also hold the world to be dependent and sustained by God’s general action. The world could not exist at all were it not for God’s creative and sustaining action. Classical theists and panentheists agree on that. The issue is rather whether special divine action should be understood to be a break with the natural order.

According to the classical theistic tradition, God is the first and ultimate cause for all other created causes, while God is not a created cause at all. God usually uses secondary (created) causes to act in the world, and those causes are empirically observable or measurable. The empirical causes are causally real (contrary to what occasionalists claim), although not on the same ontological level as God’s primary sustaining cause. Ulf Jonsson, working within the Thomistic classical theistic tradition, describes it as follows:

God is causally active only as the transcendent primary cause and never as a created secondary cause. […] God is thereby never an in-worldly natural explanation for anything, which entails that God is never the answer to any scientific question.

The claim or assumption that God constantly acts as the sustaining cause for why anything actually exists in the first place is not a scientifically acceptable claim because it goes beyond what we can say, given methodological naturalism. As seen in the quote above, God is never the answer to scientific questions. Only secondary causes are empirical causes and therefore scientifically available. Whether or not a divine primary cause lurks in the background is irrelevant from the perspective of methodological naturalism, since it says nothing about ontology – which is not to say that there cannot be a divine

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418 Jonsson, Gud och andra orsaker: Hur en ny teori om orsak och verkan kan förändra vår världsbild, 144; Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, Q. 105, article 1-2.
419 Thomas Aquinas explains his view on God as a cause in the world. There are different kinds of cause, working on different ontological levels of reality. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, Q. 105, article 5. The view of causes working on different ontological levels, and in which an effect can have several causes, fits the dispositionalist view of causation very well. See Nancy Cartwright, Nature’s Capacities and Their Measurement (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1989); Mumford and Anjum, Getting Causes from Powers; Tabaczek, Divine Action and Emergence: An Alternative to Panentheism.
420 Davies, The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil, 75; Charnock, Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 19, 57.
421 Jonsson, Gud och andra orsaker: Hur en ny teori om orsak och verkan kan förändra vår världsbild, 87, my translation.
primary cause in the background. Classical theism and its notion of secondary causality is thus consistent with natural science and methodological naturalism, if God as the primary cause is left out of the empirical explanation. Even if God in fact is a constant cause for all effects, it is not scientifically possible to say so – at least, not as long as methodological naturalism is the fundamental principle of natural science. Both God and an in-worldly event can be the cause of an effect, but science can only point to the in-worldly cause and, given Ockham’s razor, the non-scientific cause must be removed from the scientific explanation.

Even if classical theists say that God usually uses secondary causes when acting in the world, they also accept that God can act directly, without created secondary causes. Classical theists also take purely divine causal power to be possible; hence the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. Given that a miracle is an act caused by God alone without secondary empirical causes, explanations referring to such divine causation are obviously unacceptable from a methodological naturalist perspective. Special divine action without secondary causes is possible from a classical theistic perspective, since God is omnipotent and can do anything that is not “a contradiction in terms.”

Thus it still seems to be the case that God’s causal activity, at least when it is direct and without the use of created secondary causes, would have to be conceptualized as divine interventions, even if classical theists would argue that there cannot be any non-divine causes at all, since God always participates in creation and upholds its very being.

Assuming for the moment that this is a problem: is panentheism a better conception of God from the standpoint of modern science when explaining how God acts in the world?

First, weak emergence, at least in principle, collapses into reductive physicalism. Given that reductive physicalism is a position that theists want to avoid because of its inability to give a coherent solution to the problem of divine special interaction, weak emergence offers theists no help in coherently combining divine action with science. Reductive physicalism is incompatible with panentheism (and classical theism) because God is not reducible to physical stuff.

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Second, whether there really are strongly emergent non-physical phenomena that can have causal efficiency is debated.\textsuperscript{424} However, physicists and chemists such as Polkinghorne and Peacocke point out that no science can offer complete explanations of the natural world without also accepting the reality of causal efficiency above the fundamental physical level. Polkinghorne says,

Arthur Peacocke is right to say that: “There is no sense in which subatomic particles are to be graded as ‘more real’ than, say, a bacterial cell or a human person, or even social facts.” Every level of description is needed in our effort to do justice to the rich and varied process of the world, in its nature both flexible and reliable – including the category of divine providence.\textsuperscript{425}

There is no reason to think that strongly emergent phenomena, if real, would be “non-natural.” If non-physical minds emerged from physical base parts, they would still be part of the natural causally closed nexus. Mental causality would be top-down causality, but still within the law-governed natural world. For the sake of argument, I assume that strong emergence is real – and mental causality is a commonsense assumption by which we all act – and proceed to evaluate whether panentheism can be coherently thought to be more compatible with science than classical theism is.

Supervenience, irreducibility, and causal efficacy are necessary components of strong emergence theory. According to supervenience theory, the mental exists because of the physical. In other words, it is dependent on the physical for coming into being in the first place.\textsuperscript{426} Non-reductionist theories such as strong emergence theory hold not only the proposition that the mental supervenes on the physical to be accurate; they also hold the mental to be irreducible to the physical and that the mental has causal power to influence both mental and physical properties.\textsuperscript{427} Given that the mental is supervenient on the physical, it is impossible for there to be mental causation without a physical base cause.

What happens when the emergence of mind is taken as an analogy for how God interacts with the physical world? It appears that God would be emergent from the physical, just as in Samuel Alexander’s theory in \textit{Space, Time, and}


\textsuperscript{425} Polkinghorne, \textit{Science and Providence: God’s Interaction with the World}, 36.


\textsuperscript{427} Kim, 34–35.
Deity. But this is something that neither Clayton nor Peacocke accepts or argues for. However, we do not need God to be emergent to use emergence as an analogy for how God acts within the natural world in a non-interventionist way. The point of the analogy is to show how mental causes can have causal efficiency on physical entities within the natural world. If that is correct, God as a mental/spiritual entity would have no problem interacting with the physical world. Given panentheism, God is immanent in the world just as the world is immanent in God. There would be no break with the natural laws. But is this right? What about the causal closure of the world? Would not the panentheistic God also be said to interfere with the causal closure principle?

Tracy points out that the theory that the universe is a unified causally closed natural system is a metaphysical theory – not a scientifically verifiable and observable one. Others would even say that it is a metaphysical theory without any evidence at all to suggest its reasonableness. Science, therefore, “[does] not commit us to a view of the natural order that rules out objectively special divine action, even if that action constitutes an ‘intervention’.” The principle of causal closure is not a scientific fact. It is a philosophical hypothesis, originally springing from a reductive physicalist worldview. As such, it should be regarded as a methodological assumption in scientific enterprises but not as a scientific truth. Therefore, theistic theories of divine action that go against the ontological principle of causal closure are still compatible with science, since science is only committed to causal closure as a methodological tool.

Furthermore, the use of methodological naturalism when exploring and answering questions of cause and effect says nothing of whether such explanations are exhaustive. In fact, the openness of mental/spiritual causality beyond the scope of methodological naturalism suggests that any explanation that is based solely on methodological naturalism is likely partial and non-exhaustive.

If causal closure is not taken as an ontological truth, then any theory of divine mental/spiritual influence on the physical world is, in principle, compatible with science – and with classical theism. The reason is that a causally open system is also open to non-physical causal reasons, such as mental and spiritual influence. However, panentheists need not even reject the truth of ontological causal closure to offer an account of special divine action that is compatible with science. Why, more specifically, is that?

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429 For someone arguing this line, see Jonsson, Gud och andra orsaker: Hur en ny teori om orsak och verkan kan förändra vår världsbild.
Li argues that, even if causal closure is taken as an ontological fact, panentheism coheres with it. More specifically, panentheism is consistent with ontological causal closure as a non-reductive physicalist theory. This is because God’s causal acts, given panentheism, are from within the causally closed world, not from without. According to Li, panentheists need not, as Mikael Leidenhag argues, distinguish between divine non-natural causality and natural causality. Leidenhag argues that panentheism cannot avoid dualism without collapsing into pantheism because, according to him, even if God’s actions in the world are natural (meaning that God does not violate any “natural laws”), there must be a difference between divine non-natural causality and natural causality. If there is no such difference, the theory has collapsed into pantheism. He concludes that emergence theory cannot help panentheism to become a monist theory of the God–world relationship. But is a monist theory of the God–world relationship required for the theory to be consistent with the principle of causal closure? No.

If Li and the other panentheists are right, then panentheists have no reason to want to make panentheism into an ontologically monist theory. Panentheism, as Leidenhag correctly points out, entail an ontological dualism in that God transcends the world. But panentheism does not necessarily entail in-worldly dualism between mind and matter. Mind-body dualism or mind-body monism are extension claims. Panentheists do not claim that the “line” between the transcendent and the immanent aspects of God in the God–world relationship is a line above/beyond/ separate from (pick your favorite preposition) the world. The line, in the words of Catherine Keller, is “smudged.” The smudged line is within God rather than within or above the world. In line with how general divine action (God’s constant sustaining activity) can never be distinguished from the world and its natural causes, neither can special divine action be in panentheism. Divine non-natural causality and natural causality cannot be distinguished in panentheism because they both work from within a causally closed yet physically non-reductive system. There would be no way of discerning whether a cause is “natural” or “divine” because we would not be able to discover scientifically the divine aspect of a cause in the world as if it were an add-on to the otherwise natural causes. Nonetheless, in order not to collapse this theory into pantheism (as Leidenhag and others argue it does), there must be a difference between divine-natural and natural-natural causality. But given panentheistic God–world inclusion, this difference is still not grounds for calling the panentheistic divine action a break with natural laws.

432 Oliver Li, *Gud i allt och allt i Gud: En religionsfilosofisk undersökning av panenteism* (Göteborg, Stockholm: Makadam förlag och Oliver Li, 2023), 67–69.
434 Li, *Gud i allt och allt i Gud: En religionsfilosofisk undersökning av panenteism*, 68.
435 See also Tabaczek, *Divine Action and Emergence: An Alternative to Panentheism*, 7.
Can classical theists not also conceptualize God’s actions from “within” the world in some non-intervening way? Yes, they can. Tracy argues that there are at least four possible ways in which divine action can be conceived of: 1. as being the direct cause and source of existence \textit{ex nihilo}; 2. as indirectly acting through the causes of the created natural laws; 3. as intervening in the natural causal series of natural causes that otherwise would be deterministic; and 4. as directly determining the under-determined or in-deterministic aspects at the quantum level. The fourth suggestion is a form of direct divine action that nevertheless is non-intervening in the sense that it is not a breaking of natural laws from “the outside.”

Quantum theory, from a scientific perspective, has both deterministic and in-deterministic interpretations. Given quantum theory, we cannot determine in advance the outcome of events, but at best give a probabilistic answer. “If God’s creative will determines the outcome of a quantum transition, then this might provide a means by which God shapes the ongoing course of events in the world without disturbing the lawful structure of the natural order, i.e., without intervening.” If Tracy is right, then theists can coherently combine scientific explanations with special divine action in the world. Even classical theists can coherently claim that God acts in the world, for example, by influencing it on the in-deterministic quantum level. However, given that classical theism conceptualizes God as wholly different, independent, absolutely transcendent, and non-physical, such divine acts – even though they are within the world – must coherently be conceived of as coming from “without.” However, if the universe is not causally closed, this is not a problem.

If the principle of causal closure is only a methodological and not an ontological commitment in science, there also appear to be coherent ways for classical theism – despite its stronger focus on divine transcendence, and despite God being a wholly different kind or substance than the world – consistently to combine special divine action with science. Both classical theism and panentheism are thus consistent with science. Panentheism can be said to be more coherent with science than classical theism only if ontological causal closure is taken into account. But given that the ontological causal closure principle is a contested philosophical theory with no scientific evidence in its favor, the fact that classical theism is inconsistent with it is not a weakness.

Science – being a systematic endeavor of observation, hypothesis, and empirical tests – can make no ontological claims beyond what, in principle, is

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Tracy, “Scientific Vetoes and the Hands-Off God,” 64–65.}
\footnote{Tracy, 63.}
\footnote{Tracy, 63.}
\footnote{This coheres well with the dispositionalistic view of causation as non-deterministic. See Tabaczeck, \textit{Divine Action and Emergence: An Alternative to Panentheism}; Jonsson, \textit{Gud och andra orsaker: Hur en ny teori om orsak och verkan kan förändra vår världsbild}.}
\footnote{Tracy, “Scientific Vetoes and the Hands-Off God,” 64.}
\end{footnotes}
possible to falsify in the physical world. Whether something mental, and possibly even divine mental/spiritual activity, is causally involved is not scientifically observable, testable, or falsifiable. Such causes cannot be scientifically acceptable, given methodological naturalism, and no honest scientist can draw ontological conclusions about the possibility or non-possibility of divine special actions in the natural world.

In conclusion, both classical theism and panentheism are consistent with the methodological naturalism that is the foundation of any scientific theory. Panentheism appears to be consistent with both the ontological and the methodological principle of causal closure. Classical theism is consistent only with the methodological principle. However, the stronger ontological claim is not a scientific claim; it is a philosophical, metaphysical claim with no proper evidence in its favour, and has no proper role to play in scientific theories and explanations. Classical theists must accept that their conception of God is not consistent with the ontological causal closure principle; but that is a small price to pay, since that does not affect whether their conception of God is compatible with natural science. Limiting the focus to the question of special divine action and natural science, theists have little or no reason to prefer panentheism to classical theism.

Next, I turn to the process argument from science.

7.1.3. The process-panentheistic argument from science

In this section I focus on the claim that process-panentheism, with its denial of creatio ex nihilo but the affirmation of creation from pre-existing chaos, is more coherent with science than classical theism, which affirms creatio ex nihilo. What can modern science tell us about the possibility of the universe coming into existence from nothing?

The standard theory in modern cosmology explains the expansion of the universe. Before the explosion/expansion began, the universe was in an extremely hot and dense state without space and time. This state is called the singularity. At some point, the singularity exploded and gave way to a massive and expansive spread of energy and matter. This expansion is commonly known as the Big Bang. The question is whether the standard cosmological theory of the Big Bang and an expanding universe is more coherent with process-panentheism than with classical theism and creation ex nihilo.

The standard theory in contemporary cosmology is the result especially of Albert Einstein’s general theory of relativity, the ideas about the expansion of the universe by mathematician Alexander Friedman and astronomer George Lemaître, and the measurements of astronomer Edwin Hubble. According to the standard theory, the universe expands constantly at higher and higher speeds. However, the singularity – the hypothetical pre-state of the universe – is a philosophical hypothesis and not something that contemporary science
can confirm, although it is a scientifically reasonable hypothesis. Cosmologist Martin Sahlén writes that, given modern cosmology and physics, it is possible that the universe had a beginning in a singularity. However, Sahlén argues that it also is possible that something existed before the singularity.  

Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow describe the beginning of the universe in terms of quantum fluctuations in a state of vacuum and gravity. A big enough quantum fluctuation could have been caught by gravity and resulted in a Big Bang. What is described in this theory is not creation ex nihilo, because some things already existed: quantum fluctuations, gravity, and vacuum.

How does this relate to process-panentheism and classical theism? The claim that, for example, quantum fluctuations, gravity, and vacuum have always existed coheres with the process-panentheistic theory of creation out of chaos. According to Whiteheadian philosophy, on which process-panentheism is built, reality is fundamentally relations in processes. According to process-panentheism, God created the world out of chaos but not out of no pre-existing thing. A process-panentheistic account of reality “before” God ordered the world into actual entities and enduring individuals is to say that reality existed only in random happenings – random occasions occurring without intent and without relational effects. Another possibility is to say that some kind of world has always been and that God eternally creates from that which God has previously created.

The doctrine of creatio ex nihilo must be given up if everything – including God – is essentially relational. According to the core doctrines of process-panentheism, there cannot have been a time when there was only God but no world. That is an impossibility, given the necessary relationality of all actual entities and theprehension of actual/physical and possible/mental states of af-

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441 Sahlén, 81.
442 Sahlén, 82.
444 It is important to appreciate the difference between the philosophical meaning of “nothing” and a scientific one. For example, Stephen Hawking refers to a quantum mechanical vacuum when speaking about “nothing.” This is not the same thing as the philosophical meaning of an absolute nothingness.
445 Of course, time is relative to space. Any talk of God “before” the creation of space is therefore inevitably anachronistic and, in some sense, confused. However, on the process-panentheistic account, the reality of some kind of “space,” however low-grade and unordered, is eternal.
446 Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 65.
448 Griffin, Reenchantment without Supernaturalism, 137–38.
449 Hartshorne, Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes, 78.
fairs. Process-panentheists, therefore, claim that process-panentheism fits scientific cosmological theories that point toward a state, for example, of vacuum and quantum fluctuations before the expansion of our visible universe began.

In summary, the argument is that the process-panentheistic description of how the universe came to be is more compatible with science than is classical theism and its creatio ex nihilo. Classical theism invokes creation out of nothing – something that process-panentheists cannot accept. The process-panentheistic doctrine of creation out of chaos is more coherent with modern science and cosmology than the doctrine of creation from absolutely nothing, because pre-existing vacuum, quantum fluctuations, and so on are not nothing but clearly something.

I now turn to evaluate this argument.

7.1.4. Evaluating the process-panentheistic argument from science

Do theists have reason to believe that process-panentheism is more compatible with modern natural science than classical theism is?

The process-doctrine of creation out of chaos instead of creation out of nothing (ex nihilo) entails that reality before it was ordered as we know it was that of “low-grade actual occasions happening at random, i.e., without being ordered into enduring individuals.” The standard theory in contemporary cosmology states that, in the beginning, before the expansion of the universe began, the “universe” was microscopic, dense, and extremely hot. As far as science can tell, the Big Bang (the explosion/expansion) was the Beginning (with a capital B) only of the observable universe. Whether something pre-existed the expansion (a singularity) of the observable universe is beyond what contemporary science can say. It is possibly beyond what science ever can say, since there is no way of scientifically observing that which is non-observable. Whether vacuum, quantum fluctuations, gravity, and energy can be said to have pre-existed the Big Bang is a philosophical metaphysical question that cannot be proven or falsified scientifically. One possible theory, advocated by

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450 I am aware that process theist John B. Cobb defends the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. However, as I argue in chapter 8, “The problem of evil,” the rejection of ex nihilo is not grounded only in the fact that the process-God has only persuasive power. The rejection results from a cumulative case based on several of the other core doctrines of process theism. Taken together, I cannot see how a process theist of the Whiteheadian kind can coherently defend the claim that God could exist independently – without any kind of world. But that is exactly what creatio ex nihilo entails.

451 Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 65.

452 The singularity-state can hardly be called a “universe.”

453 Sahlén, “Universums Ursprung,” 82.
Hawking, suggests that a quantum fluctuation and a gravitational force resulted in the so called Big Bang. Given our scientific observations, it is impossible to say whether a singularity came to be from nowhere or from something pre-existing. Scientifically, we cannot confirm whether some kind of physical reality is finitely old or whether something existed, for example, before a quantum fluctuation blew up (the Big Bang). Theories about this, such as Hawking’s theory of quantum fluctuations appearing out of “nothing,” are not scientific but philosophical and metaphysical speculations about the universe’s origin. The problem is that we cannot look that far back into the past. We cannot conduct experiments and make observations to prove that creation ex nihilo is either a true or a false doctrine. However, there might be theories that are scientifically more probable than others.

Given the strong physicalist causal closure principle, physical effects necessarily have physical causes. From a scientific perspective, that seems to indicate the improbability or even impossibility of the singularity coming into being from a philosophical nothing (as opposed to a scientific nothing that involves vacuum and so on). Now, as we have already seen, causal closure is a philosophical hypothesis and not a scientific fact; it is used as a methodological assumption, but not necessarily in the strong physicalist sense. Natural scientists conduct their experiments and observations based on the methodological principle of causal closure, assuming that all effects have empirical causes. Furthermore, there are natural laws or regularities that make the doctrine of ex nihilo scientifically less probable. The law of the conservation of energy and the second law of thermodynamics are two examples. If there indeed was nothing, then where did the energy come from? According to the law of conservation, energy can never be created or destroyed, but only be transformed or transferred. This makes creation ex nihilo less probable from a scientific perspective than eternally existing energy, gravity, and so on. A classical theist can, of course, coherently reply that “God created the energy!” A classical theist thus has no problem combining the doctrine of ex nihilo with the law of the conservation of energy and the second law of thermodynamics. As Hans Halvorson and Helge Kragh note, “[W]hy should a [classical] theist expect to be able to derive creation ex nihilo from the laws of nature?” They should not. God is not a cause we can measure, according to classical theists.

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455 Sahlén, “Universums Ursprung,” 81.
456 This “nothing” is not nothing in the philosophical ex nihilo sense.
457 Within the natural sciences such as physics and astronomy, “natural laws” are considered to be practically/methodologically reliable in the sense that one can predict and rely on the probability of certain outcomes, given certain circumstances. That is not to say that they are deterministic or that scientists can determine outcomes by necessity.
Even if, hypothetically, science could prove that the universe is infinitely old – in other words, if science could disprove that the first particles and energy appeared from nothing and that instead they are eternal – this is not necessarily a problem for classical theism. God, being omnipotent, could have created an infinitely old universe.\(^{459}\) However, if theists want a theology that is supported, even if not proven, by scientific cosmology, then process-panentheism appears successful (at least regarding the “origin” of the universe).

The law of the conservation of energy and the second law of thermodynamics can thus be interpreted to support the eternal existence of energy, and consequently as a reason to reject the coherence of *creatio ex nihilo* with science on that account. But is this the only scientifically coherent reading of the natural laws? In contrast, William Lane Craig argues that the law of the conservation of energy, the second law of thermodynamics, and the standard model in cosmology *support* the belief in creation *ex nihilo*.\(^{460}\) The standard model and the second law of thermodynamics make it scientifically probable that the universe had a temporal beginning. The second law of thermodynamics states that processes in a closed system seek and end up in a state of equilibrium. However, the standard theory and all the empirical observations that scientists make point toward an accelerating expansion of the universe. Craig thinks that this is good evidence for the theory that the universe had a temporal beginning. If the universe were infinitely old, we would already be in a state of equilibrium.\(^{461}\)

The standard model states that the universe is expanding, and the longer back in time we look, the denser, hotter, and more pressurized it is. Eventually, if it were scientifically possible, we would see the singularity. Many cosmologists think of the sudden explosion/expansion of this singularity as the creation of the observable universe because even space-time was created at that point. “‘An initial cosmological singularity therefore forms a past temporal extremity to the universe’.”\(^{462}\) This model thus describes a universe that has a finite past.

However, this says nothing about the existence of the gravitational law or quantum fluctuations that possibly pre-existed the singularity. Gravitational law and quantum fluctuations are not *nothing*. Even if we accept that the universe had a temporal beginning in a Big Bang, we have not explained how *vacuum or fluctuations* came to be. It is crucial to appreciate that a scientific theory based on empirical research has limits. Einstein’s theory of relativity breaks down and becomes useless in the extreme state of a singularity. Our


\(^{461}\) Craig.

\(^{462}\) Craig. (Quote from P. C. Davies “Spacetime Singularities in Cosmology”, in *The Study of Time III*, ed. J. T. Fraser (New York: Springer Verlag, 1978), 78-79.)
known physics does not apply to the state of singularity. Therefore, scientists cannot calculate or make falsifiable predictions about a possible singularity or what might have preceded it.⁴⁶³

The philosophical and theological notion of *ex nihilo* is not the same as a scientific “nothing.” Science could never either prove or disprove the possibility of creation *ex nihilo*, not even in principle. Even quantum vacuum is not “nothing” in the relevant philosophical sense entailed in *ex nihilo*.

Given current scientific knowledge of the world, the process-panentheistic hypothesis about random low-grade and unstable “stuff” is reasonable and has some scientific backing. However, modern cosmology is not inconsistent with a theological model of God as the cause of the original state that eventually expanded into the known universe. That is, of course, not a scientific theory; but science cannot disprove it either. Given modern scientific cosmology, both process-panentheism with its creation out of chaos and classical theism with its creation *ex nihilo* offer possible answers to questions about the beginning/creation of the universe. Theists have reason to believe that the process-panentheistic doctrine of creation out of chaos is consistent with natural science, but they also have reason to believe that the classical theistic doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is consistent with natural science, making process-panentheism and classical theism equally compelling from a modern scientific cosmological perspective regarding the pre-origin of the universe.

Finally, it is time to move to arguments in favor of the coherence of pantheism and natural science and to evaluate whether pantheism is more compatible with modern science than panentheism is.

### 7.2. Pantheism and natural science

Does a theist have reason to think that pantheism is more coherent with science than panentheism or classical theism? If so, what are the reasons?

Pantheists hold the universe to be a holistic unity, and no part of it is causally isolated or ontologically independent. Pantheists have no reason to reject even the strong ontological principle of the causal closure principle, described in the first part of this chapter. Nothing about the pantheistic God–world contradicts the ontological principle of causal closure since, according to pantheism, there is nothing outside, beyond, or above the actual physical universe.

According to a pantheist argument from science, therefore, pantheism unites science and religion without conflict. Pantheists look to the natural sciences because they tell us about the world and thus about the divine. Harold W. Wood links the world’s physical and biological interconnectedness with the pantheistic unity. Modern biology and physics show the complexity of

ecosystems and how humans are physically and biologically connected to the rest of nature and the entire universe – just as pantheism claims.\textsuperscript{464} John Grula argues further that pantheism is preferable to classical theism and panentheism because it fits \textit{methodological naturalism} better than they do. Methodological naturalism is usually understood as the default stance within the natural sciences; and, as previously noted, it is supposed to be the principle that no supernatural entities such as gods, ghosts, and spirits are allowed explanatory room in scientific methods and explanations.\textsuperscript{465} Grula argues that pantheism offers a better explanation of the God–world relationship, according to Occam’s razor, in which the simplest coherent explanation is to be preferred. Unnecessary complexity, or premises that are unnecessary to explain a phenomenon, must go. Panentheism needs to explain how God is both transcendent and immanent, and it needs to answer questions about the ontological status of the world in relation to God. Pantheism, in turn, is a more stripped down conception of the divine that appeals to no supernatural phenomena at all.\textsuperscript{466} God is the world, and God is nothing more than, or above, the world. This model fits methodological naturalism better than panentheism or classical theism do. For this reason, pantheists think that pantheism coheres better with natural science than the other two conceptions of God.

Apart from the physical and biological connection between all entities, the universe also appears to be fine-tuned for life. Grula thinks that the fine-tuning of the universe and the holistic unity and interdependence of everything are good reasons to favor pantheism.\textsuperscript{467} In contrast to this, Peter Forrest argues that the fine-tuning of the universe poses the biggest problem for both personal and non-personal pantheists.\textsuperscript{468} I come back to this later.

Since pantheists are not naturalists, what reasons are there to think that the universe is divine? According to Grula, the fact that the universe is comprehensible, that everything appears to be governed by gravity, electromagnetic force, strong nuclear force, and weak nuclear force suggests that the universe is inherently mathematical.\textsuperscript{469} To Grula, this pervasive and mathematical order is the divine unity, and he thinks that this order can give rise to the \textit{mysterium}

\textsuperscript{464} Wood, “Modern Pantheism as an Approach to Environmental Ethics,” 159. Furthermore, when we die, our bodies are recycled and become part of the whole ecological and holistic system of nature. This pantheistic idea aligns with the natural scientific answer about what happens when we die. See Grula, “Pantheism Reconstructed: Ecotheology as a Successor to the Judeo-Christian, Enlightenment, and Postmodernist Paradigms,” 171. However, there are pantheists who are open to the idea of life after death; see, e.g., Sprigge, “Pantheism,” 210.

\textsuperscript{465} Smith, “Methodological Naturalism and Its Misconceptions,” 322.

\textsuperscript{466} Grula, “Pantheism Reconstructed: Ecotheology as a Successor to the Judeo-Christian, Enlightenment, and Postmodernist Paradigms,” 162.

\textsuperscript{467} Grula, 171–72.

\textsuperscript{468} Forrest, “Pantheism and Science,” 316–17.

tremendum et fascinans – the ineffable experience of encountering the holy.\textsuperscript{470} Thus, according to Grula, this natural order is the divine pantheistic unity, and this ordered mathematical universe evokes a feeling of fear and awe and a feeling of mystery and love (the \textit{mysterium tremendum}).\textsuperscript{471}

Furthermore, Grula describes the unity in the quote below, and compares the divine order with theistic intelligent design. He calls the divine order “intelligent design,” but emphasizes that it is not an intentional or personal designer.

Pantheism denies that there is such an intelligent designer and affirms that biological evolution is explained by Darwinian principles and their modern enhancements. Pantheism diverges, however, from most of the scientific establishment in maintaining that there is pervasive design in our universe as revealed most compellingly by the precisely calibrated constants of nature. This intelligent design is the primary basis for regarding our universe and God as one and therefore the creation as divine and sacred.\textsuperscript{472}

Grula’s pantheism is thus non-personal, and it could strike the reader as religious naturalism. However, if we understand Grula’s notion of design as something with a direction or aim, something like a teleology, we see that his worldview is pantheist. If the design is not taken to be something we merely ascribe to the universe, if there is an inherent purpose behind the design, if it has a telos, then it is pantheism and not naturalism. A religious naturalist cannot ascribe intention, purpose, or teleology to the universe, while this is precisely what a pantheist does.

The next section focuses more explicitly on the coherence of pantheism with the fine-tuning and expansion of the universe.

7.2.1. Fine-tuning and expansion of the universe

According to contemporary science, the universe is expanding, and rapidly so. Is pantheism coherent with this scientific fact? The expansion of the universe is a pressing issue for all pantheists. If it only meant that God also is expanding, the pantheist would not have a problem. However, as Peter Forrest notes, “It is expanding so rapidly that distant parts are at relative velocities greater than the speed of light and therefore causally isolated.”\textsuperscript{473} If distant parts of the universe are moving even faster than the speed of light, they are causally isolated from other parts of the universe, and the causal unity in the universe


\textsuperscript{472} Grula, 171–72.

\textsuperscript{473} Forrest, “Pantheism and Science,” 313.
breaks down. If some parts of God/the universe are *not* part of the causal whole, then it seems as if also God lacks unity, and pantheism is in trouble.

The pantheist can argue that causal physical connections are un-necessary for a divine unity in the universe. A *personal* pantheist can claim that a psychological unity, such as a divine consciousness that is present even in the outer expanding parts, would suffice as a divine unity. However, Forrest concludes that a personal divine consciousness would have to supervene on the physical parts of the universe; and the pantheist cannot accept that because pantheists are necessarily non-dualists. The expansion of the universe can, therefore, be used as a scientific reason to argue *against* the coherence of personal pantheism.

But is non-personal pantheism coherent with the expansion of the universe? According to Forrest, it is. A non-personal pantheist, such as John Grula, tends to think that the universe’s natural order is divine. This order applies to all parts of the universe – even the expanding and causally isolated parts – which is why Forrest concludes that a non-personal pantheist ought to identify God with the natural order (as Grula does) and not with the universe as a whole.474

Our universe has a remarkably law-like structure and order – something that endorses the non-personal pantheist thesis of a divine teleological order that unites the universe. For example, gravity pulls, and energy never ceases but only changes form. This order, understood as the divine unity, is coherent with non-personal (and personal) pantheism. However, Forrest notes that science only proves *our* universe’s ubiquitous and pervasive order. If many universes exist, they may not share the same structure or laws.475 Furthermore, the existence of many divine universes would indicate polytheism instead of pantheism, unless there were something that united all the universes. According to multiverse theories (which are necessarily speculative), the universes are causally isolated and thus do not share a unity. *If* the many universes shared a natural order or laws, that would perhaps suffice as a pantheistic unity. However, multiverse theories are metaphysical and not scientific theories. *If* there were many universes with no shared natural order, pantheism would be undermined. Alternatively, the pantheist God would be the God of only one of the many universes.

The universe not only expands, but also appears to be fine-tuned for life. So, if Forrest is correct in his assessment that the universe’s expansion makes non-personal pantheism more probable and coherent with science than personal pantheism, then, for it to be a scientifically coherent conception of the God–world relationship, non-personal pantheism must also be consistent with a fine-tuned universe.

The fine-tuning of the universe is needed for life to occur. Only minimal differences in the universe’s composition, heat, speed, or gravitational forces

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475 Forrest, 315–16.
would make life impossible. Even extremely small circumstantial differences in the universe’s physical and chemical processes and constitution would have rendered life impossible. So, what can non-personal pantheists say about the fine-tuning of the universe?

Now, according to Forrest, only life is inherently valuable.\textsuperscript{476} If this is the case, the value of the universe consists in the presence of living beings. This in turn entails that a pantheistic universe is only inherently valuable in so far as it contains life. However, the fine-tuning of the universe suggests that life is \textit{highly unlikely}. Life, according to one understanding of fine-tuning, is accidental, which in turn makes the pantheistic universe only accidentally valuable – at least, if only life is inherently valuable. No pantheist can accept this to be the case. If, as Forrest believes, only life is inherently valuable, then the fine-tuning of the universe is a problem for both personal and non-personal pantheists.\textsuperscript{477}

Fine-tuning can be used, of course, to argue that life, however unlikely, is not accidental but deliberately created by an intentional God. That suits classical theists, panentheists, and possibly even personal pantheists, but poses a problem for non-personal pantheists, because they reject the existence of a person-like and intentional God.

However, all pantheists claim that God/the universe is supremely valuable. Forrest points out that, if a non-personal God/universe is of supreme value, it is because it contains personal life with inherent value. If life really is accidental and the pantheist God is a non-agent without intentions, then value is accidental. The implication of this is that God, as supremely valuable, is only \textit{accidentally} valuable and therefore only accidentally divine.\textsuperscript{478} Whether belief in an accidentally divine God is religiously adequate depends on whether such a God is worthy of worship. Perhaps it is not; and many pantheists also agree that worship is inappropriate for pantheists. If life and value are \textit{not} accidental, then the non-personal pantheist must claim that it was very probable that life should emerge in the universe. However, modern science suggests the opposite. The claim that life in the universe is probable is, therefore, not supported by science (although it is \textit{possible}).

In summary, Forrest argues that the expansion of the universe threatens personal pantheism but poses no problem for non-personal pantheism. From a scientific perspective of focusing on the expansion of the universe, non-personal pantheism is more probable than personal pantheism because the impersonal ubiquitous natural order – regarded as divine – applies even to causally isolated parts. An eternally expanding universe is therefore not problematic for a non-personal pantheist such as Grula. Forrest argues that personal pan-

\textsuperscript{476} Forrest, 316.
\textsuperscript{477} Forrest, 316–17.
\textsuperscript{478} Forrest, 308, 316.
theism does not cohere with an expanding universe because the mental/spiritual aspect of a personal God would have to supervene on the expanding physical parts of the universe, which, because of the expansion, would eventually become causally isolated – something no personal pantheist can accept.

Furthermore, Forrest concludes that, since pantheists cannot refer to divine intentionality or intentional design to explain why life exists, they must claim that life is in fact quite probable. Only life, and especially personhood, are inherently valuable, according to Forrest. If that is the case, then a lifeless universe would be valueless. Pantheists must therefore claim that it was very probable that life should emerge in the universe. Science, however, gives us no reason to assume that this is true. In fact, it appears that life is a mere coincidence arising from the exact structure of the universe. If only life is valuable, and life is accidental, fine-tuning poses a problem for all kinds of pantheism.

The methodological naturalism of natural science coheres well with a pantheistic framework. Science confirms the pantheist idea that everything is interconnected and that natural laws and the natural order govern everything. Since pantheism postulates nothing beyond the physical universe, it coheres well with both the methodological and the ontological principles of causal closure. The forces of gravity, electromagnetic force, the strong nuclear force, and the weak nuclear force apply everywhere in the same way under the same conditions. This order can be understood as the non-personal divine pantheistic unity. According to this argument, pantheism, despite the potential problem with fine-tuning, is more compatible with natural science than classical theism and panentheism are.

It is now time to evaluate these arguments in favor of the coherence of natural science and pantheism.

7.2.2. Evaluating pantheism and natural science

Is pantheism more coherent with science than panentheism or classical theism? Let us start with the question of the origin of the universe. What can a pantheist coherently say about that? And is such a response coherent with modern scientific theories?

If the universe is finitely old, then so is the pantheist God. The religiously relevant question is whether such a divinity is worthy of worship. The scientifically relevant question is whether the universe is finitely old. We saw earlier that modern cosmology has no definite answer here. The explosion and expansion known as the Big Bang is the beginning of our ordered universe as we know it. However, Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow argue that it is scientifically possible that the Big Bang was not a first event because, scientifically, the “nothingness” of the universe prior to the Big Bang was still something, such as quantum fluctuations, vacuum, and gravity. Therefore,
it is scientifically possible (which says nothing about its probability) that the universe is not finitely old because some aspects of it might be eternal – something that would suit pantheism very well.

However, even if the theory of pre-existing vacuum and quantum fluctuations were scientifically possible, they would not be enough to constitute anything near the pantheistic God–world. The pantheistic God is not a Creator, because that would entail that God created Godself. The most reasonable pantheistic response to the question of the origin of the universe is to claim that the universe is eternal and self-existing. But an eternally existing world that would satisfy the pantheistic requirement that it be a supremely valuable unified divine whole with a telos is decidedly not supported by science.

According to what scientists can observe and empirically test, the observable universe is finitely old. The problem is that we have no scientific way of looking back and seeing what happened before the Big Bang. If the universe is finitely old, we have a strong argument against the probability of pantheism in both its personal and non-personal versions. To claim that God before the creation of the world was a possibility, and after the creation, an actuality, sounds like panentheism, not like pantheism. There is not supposed to be a God–world dualism in pantheism. Pantheists should claim that the God–world is eternal; it has always been and always will be. That some energy and physical circumstances have no beginning seems to be a scientific possibility, but I can see no way in which gravity and quantum fluctuations could be enough to constitute the divine teleological, all-encompassing, supremely good or valuable eternal God–world.

In other words, given scientific perspectives on the origin of the universe, theists wishing to have a conception of God that is compatible with science have a reason to reject pantheism.

7.2.2.1. Pantheism and fine-tuning

The world appears to be fine-tuned for life. The fact that there is life in the universe, according to physicists, is fundamentally dependent on the exact characteristics, constants, energy, and laws of nature that our universe had in its beginning. Even extremely small variations would make life an impossibility. The fine-tuning for life is a result of either chance or an intentional agent or structure. From a scientific perspective, we have no reason to assume that life was likely to emerge; and we cannot, of course, postulate an intentional designer. How does this affect the scientific coherence of pantheism?

Since Forrest ascribes value only to life, he concludes that fine-tuning poses a problem for pantheism. If he is right that only life is valuable, fine-tuning does indeed pose a problem for pantheism because, as he argues, the value of the God–world would be accidental – something to which I think that pantheists themselves would object. If Forrest is correct about only life being inherently valuable, pantheists can easily solve this problem by claiming that everything is alive, which would entail that everything is inherently valuable. We
can call such a position *animistic pantheism*, which could claim that everything fundamentally is alive. The fine-tuning of complex life in the form in which we usually encounter it would thus not be the only way for a pantheistic God to be inherently valuable. Of course, it is not necessary for a pantheist to claim that *only* life is inherently valuable. In fact, that is quite an odd claim from a pantheist perspective. Pantheists could very well ascribe inherent value *not only to life* but to everything, even to so-called non-sentient entities.

I suggest that pantheists appeal to panpsychism to safeguard the inherent value of the God–world. *Panpsychist* pantheists typically embrace fundamental monism—the claim that the fundamental level of reality is material-and-mental, and cannot be separated.\(^{480}\) If reality is inherently mental—not by means of supervenience but in a fundamentally holistic way—then consciousness or mentality is everywhere, including in expanding and causally isolated parts. I see no reason why panpsychist pantheism of this kind could not take the form of either personal or non-personal pantheism. If mentality is inherently valuable, then an exhaustively material-and-mental universe would be too. In other words, the existence of life may be accidental and the result of mere circumstantial happenings at the very beginning of the universe’s expansion. But this poses no problem for panpsychist pantheism, because panpsychist pantheism attributes inherent value not only to complex life forms but also to everything mental—which is to say, everything.

Thus the fine-tuning of the universe does not appear to be a problem for either personal or non-personal pantheism if the pantheism in question is a panpsychist pantheism.

### 7.2.2.2. The expansion of the universe

Given the expansion of the universe, do theists have reason to reject or prefer pantheism compared with panentheism and classical theism? Forrest mentions the possible end of the universe in respect of a “Final Crunch.”\(^{481}\) Granted the scientifically accepted truth of the expansion of the universe, it is a lot more likely that the universe will meet a “cold death” when all parts are so isolated and far apart that they eventually lose speed, grow cold, and die. That situation is only acceptable for pantheists who believe that more than only life is valuable. However, for pantheists who think that only life is valuable, a cold death would be the death also of God—a massive problem for them.

The cold death of the universe poses no problem for panentheists or classical theists, since they believe that God is not dependent on this precise world. God could create a new world—a new body.

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\(^{481}\) Forrest, “Pantheism and Science,” 312.
Furthermore, Forrest thinks that a non-personal pantheist can handle the expansion of the universe better than the personal pantheist, because the non-personal pantheist can claim that the natural order is the divine unity. This unity applies even to the expanding and isolated parts. However, if all life in the universe eventually dies the cold death of expansion, and if only life is valuable, then the non-personal God will also die and lose its value. In that case, expansion is also a problem for non-personal pantheism.

Is this the case for both personal and non-personal pantheism? I argue that there are scientific reasons to think otherwise. Both forms of pantheism can coherently maintain the divine unity despite the rapid expansion. Even if distant parts of the universe are moving faster than the speed of light so that they are causally isolated from other parts of the universe, and causal unity in the universe breaks down, pantheists could still maintain the pantheistic unity. The reason is quantum entanglement.

In 1935, Albert Einstein, Boris Podolski, and Nathan Rosen published an article on the quantum phenomena that became known as quantum entanglement, the EPR effect (for Einstein, Podolski, Rosen), or what Einstein called “spooky action at a distance.”482 This phenomenon shows that there is a necessary connection between two quantum entities, such as photons. If something changes in photon1, the same change necessarily occurs in photon2. The distance between the two quantum entities is irrelevant – they are necessarily connected, regardless of distance. The “spooky action at a distance” entails a unity of connectedness. John Polkinghorne calls this quantum entanglement “togetherness-in-separation.”483

The change does not occur in photon1 and then in photon2. Quantum entanglement is a necessary and instantaneous phenomenon. Therefore, even if some parts of God/the universe are not part of the causal whole because of the universe’s expansion, we could still maintain a pantheistic unity in respect of the spooky, necessary connectedness, at least at a quantum level. Whether this pantheistic God is personal or non-personal I cannot say; but the scientifically known phenomenon of quantum entanglement coheres well with a belief in a pantheistic divine unity.

The expansion of the universe is also coherent with the beliefs of panpsychist pantheism. Timothy Sprigge, for example, believes that consciousness is the pervasive divine unity. Everything constitutes God’s eternal consciousness.484 A panpsychist pantheist of this kind need not assign inherent value only to life or personhood. Consciousness or mentality is everywhere,

484 Sprigge, The Vindication of Absolute Idealism; Sprigge, The God of Metaphysics.
according to a panpsychist pantheist, even in causally isolated parts. I therefore conclude that panpsychist pantheism, even without quantum entanglement, can coherently handle the expansion of the universe. If this is correct, Forrest’s charge that personal pantheism cannot cohere with the universe’s expansion is wrong. The personal pantheist should, however, be a panpsychist pantheist.

Forrest suggests that pantheists take a similar route as process theists, who claim that God existed before the Big Bang as a possibility, and after an eventual Final Crunch as concrete actuality.\(^\text{485}\) However, this solution appears only to be available to panpsychists who think that the divine consists of a psychological, conscious unity that is not dependent on a physical world. But then it seems as if the psychological unity, or divine consciousness, supervenes on the physical and actual universe. This cannot be pantheism because, according to pantheism, there is nothing beyond, above, or under the universe. If the divine unity supervenes on the physical world, then God is something more than the world. Thus we would have panentheism and not pantheism. Therefore, the best route for a pantheist to take is to argue that the universe is eternal and that physical parts always have existed, and always will exist. If the physical matter is inherently mental or conscious, as panpsychist pantheism claims, and if this consciousness is the pervasive divine unity, then the divine does not supervene on the physical. Panpsychist pantheism does not collapse into panentheism.

A “natural-order” pantheist such as Grula thinks that the pervasive natural laws are the divine unity. It is not apparent why we should call this unity divine at all; why not call it simply a natural order? What makes it divine? However, I argued previously that Grula is a pantheist owing to his notion of design as something with a direction, an aim, or a teleology. In conclusion, both nonpersonal pantheism and personal pantheism in the form of panpsychism can coherently handle the universe’s expansion. They can both maintain the pantheistic unity.

To summarize, because of the inherent non-supernaturalism and methodological naturalism that is inherent in pantheism, pantheism coheres well with natural science on some accounts but less so on others. Regarding the fine-tuning and the expansion of the universe, I have argued that the most promising pantheist position is panpsychist pantheism. However, as concluded in chapter 6, “Environmental concerns,” panpsychism combines with many worldviews, not only with pantheism. If panpsychism must be added to pantheism to make it coherent with the fine-tuning and expansion of the universe, it is not really pantheism but panpsychism to which we should be attracted.

Regarding the origin of the universe, theists have no reason to prefer pantheism to panentheism or classical theism. In fact, pantheists of all kinds must think that scientific theories about the singularity and the possible pre-existing

\(^{485}\) Forrest, “Pantheism and Science,” 312.
quantum fluctuations and gravity are highly problematic, since science offers theists no coherent reason to think that the singularity or pre-existing states could count as the all-encompassing, teleological, and supremely valuable divine God-world. Even if gravity and quantum fluctuations existed before the expansion of the singularity, science offers no reason to think that the universe is eternal.

7.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that panentheism can be thought to cohere better with science than classical theism does only if the principle of causal closure is taken as an ontological scientific fact. However, since science can make no such ontological claims, but can only use the causal closure principle as a methodological tool, spiritual divine causality is also possible in principle. Classical theistic and panentheistic accounts of special divine action are, therefore, equally coherent with science.

I concluded that versions of panentheism that reject creatio ex nihilo (such as process-panentheism) cohere with some interpretations of scientifically accepted facts, such as the second law of thermodynamics and the law of conservation of energy. However, there are possible scientific interpretations of those same natural laws that speak in favor of a temporal universe. Limiting the focus to the question of the origin of the universe, science gives theists no reason either to prefer or to reject panentheism in contrast to classical theism.

Finally, I concluded that pantheism in the form of panpsychism can coherently handle the expansion and fine-tuning of the universe. Again, this is not really a strength of pantheism, but a reason to be attracted to panpsychism, whether it be combined with pantheism or with some other worldview. Furthermore, from the perspective of science, we have no reason to think that the universe is eternal – something that all kinds of pantheism ought to claim. Scientific perspectives on the origin of the universe give theists reason to reject pantheism and instead to favor panentheism or classical theism.
8. The problem of evil

This chapter explores arguments for and against panentheism and pantheism, with a focus on the problem of evil. Naturally, it will not cover all aspects and possible solutions related to this old and vast problem. The focus is on whether, and if so how, panentheism and pantheism can coherently deal with the problem of evil, and on how theists, despite evil and suffering, can understand God to be perfectly good and loving. The focus is primarily on epistemic arguments about how to conceptualize God’s goodness and power. Depending on how God’s goodness and power are conceptualized, the possible coherent answers to the problem of evil vary. The epistemic arguments for conceptualizing divine power and goodness in a certain way also pragmatically affect the reasons to favor one conception of God over others. Pragmatic reasons are also important, since epistemic reasons and internal coherence strengthen the case for a particular conception of God. If a theist has epistemic reasons to believe that both panentheism and pantheism are likely to be internally coherent, and both also have resources to answer the problem of evil coherently, there may still be pragmatic reasons to favor one conception of God over the other.

The questions of epistemic character that are investigated in this chapter are: What can or cannot a panentheist and a pantheist claim about the goodness of God and the problem of evil? and How do the coherent options that are available affect possible ways of engaging with theodicy from panentheistic and pantheistic perspectives? If God is not perfectly good, or if God is not omnipotent, we get different problems of evil than those that are traditionally identified, since the traditional problem of evil is a result of the beliefs that God is (1.) perfectly good, (2.) omnipotent, and (3.) omniscient. This chapter explores whether and how panentheism and pantheism can handle the problem of evil in different, and possibly even better, ways than classical theism.

Following the structure of the previous chapters, I start with panentheism.

8.1. Panentheism and the problem of evil

The question to examine in the first part of this chapter is whether, if at all, panentheism can offer a better answer to the problem of evil than classical theism. I examine three different but interrelated arguments that relate to panentheism and the problem of evil. The first is about the power of God from
a process-panentheistic perspective. Process-panentheists deny that God is omnipotent in the traditional sense. The second argument focuses on God’s love rather than God’s power, and does not presuppose process-panentheism. I call it the essential love argument. According to it, only strict panentheism can coherently conceptualize God as essentially loving, whereas the classical theistic God cannot be so conceptualized. If this argument is sound, theists may have both an epistemic and a pragmatic reason to favor strict panentheism over classical theism, because they may morally prefer an essentially loving God to a God that they cannot coherently understand to be that — even if classical theism also has theodical resources to answer why an omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient God allows evil and suffering.

Related to the essential love argument is what I call the empathetic-God argument. It is a moral and thus pragmatic argument about the nature of God as a co-sufferer with the world. If, as the argument claims, only the panentheistic God can coherently be understood as empathetic and relationally invested in our sufferings and predicaments, it may be a pragmatic moral reason to favor panentheism.

8.1.1. Purely persuasive power

Can a coherent account of divine power be developed within a panentheistic framework? It is often argued that panentheism entails the idea that God’s power is purely persuasive and never coercive. This, in turn, affects the problem of evil, since it is traditionally based on the premises that God is perfectly good, omnipotent, and omniscient. If the second premise is rejected, the problem vanishes or changes significantly.

As will become clear, there are different reasons why the notion of purely persuasive power is appealing. There is a pragmatic moral reason, and there is an epistemic metaphysical reason. The moral reason can be formulated as follows: If God is omnipotent in the traditional sense, God can stop horrendous evil and extreme suffering. A God who has the power to stop such evil but does not do so is morally blameworthy. If, on the other hand, God only has persuasive power, God cannot unilaterally stop evil and suffering. This latter God is morally superior to a God who (for different reasons) can but does not want to stop the evil and suffering. As Ruslan Elistratov puts it, “Any

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morally decent being with intervening powers would do something, period […] not to mention an agent possessing moral perfection.”

The metaphysical epistemic reason why God possesses only persuasive and not omnipotent power presupposes the metaphysics of process theism. It states that God metaphysically cannot be omnipotent and thus cannot stop evil or unilaterally intervene in the world. The notion of divine power thus has direct implications for the problem of evil.

So, why does a process-panentheist reject divine omnipotence? The reason is based on the notions of efficient and final causation (also called sufficient causation – see below) and on how those relate to coercive and persuasive power. Let us start with how to understand coercive and persuasive power.

Coercive power can be defined as follows. I use coercive power if I restrict and limit the possibilities of someone or something without the consent or cooperation of that person or thing. I use persuasive power if I affect the desired possibilities but not the actual possibilities of someone or something, and with the cooperation and consent of the other.

The process-panentheistic denial that God possesses coercive power is linked to a specific understanding of efficient and final causation. Efficient causation is a causal effect between actual individuals. Final causation takes place within an actual being as a result of its self-determination. This process argument states that God can never coerce or unilaterally force some actual being’s self-determination (its final causation). Without going into too many details, suffice it to say that the process-panentheistic denial that God possesses coercive power is a denial that God possesses unilateral power to coerce the self-determination of free actual beings. Furthermore (and this is essential to process-panentheism), everything, even protons and electrons, has such self-determination.

Contrary to David Ray Griffin, his former student Thomas Jay Oord does not use the term “final causation,” but prefers to write of God’s power as never being a sufficient cause. “A sufficient cause brings about results all alone. It determines outcomes unilaterally and therefore, in itself, explains an outcome fully.” Whatever term we use, the idea following from the process view is that God never acts as the sole cause in any situation.

But what reasons are there for believing that God can never be a sufficient cause? Here it is necessary to be more specific about the metaphysical core
assumptions of process-panentheism. What are they, and why do they make divine coercive power, and hence omnipotence, impossible? Griffin lists ten core doctrines of process theism. Of these, I claim that at least six together make the case against the possibility of divine coercive power.

First, everything is *serially ordered societies of experiences* (in contrast to Cartesian substance dualism and materialistic substance monism). To be actual is to be many – namely, a series of ordered societies of experiences. For example, an electron is a society of actual occasions of experience, which in turn makes it essentially relational. The electrons experience is simple – it is a low-level kind of experience compared with more aggregated and complex entities such as trees or even true individuals such as human beings – but even the electron relates to earlier and later occasions of experience and internalizes these in its being. This is true also of God. Second, the doctrine of *prehension* entails that every real being/actual entity feels other occasions of experience. Prehension is both mental and physical, since every actual being, such as an electron, is both mental and physical. Because of prehension, the experiences and reality of actual beings become objective parts of one another. Third, this entails that everything is *inherently relational*. Relationality is fundamental in process philosophy and theology. Nothing can exist in solitude. Everything affects and is affected by its surroundings – past, present, and future.

Fourth, according to the doctrine of *panexperientialism/panpsychism*, every actual being, such as sticks, stones, and electrons, has the creative power to affect others. Everything has at least some level of self-determination (even the electron). Fifth, process-panentheism denies divine supernatural intervention. This entails that God only acts within the natural world and its order, and never violates it. Sixth, the doctrine of *dipolar theism* entails that God also has two poles. Whitehead calls them the consequent and the primordial natures of God. God is eternal and contingent at the same time. Some aspects of God are eternal – such as God’s goodness – and some aspects are contingent owing to the changing nature of the world. God essentially bestows the world with possibilities and, in return, is affected by the world. God prehends all occasions of experience in the world, which in turn become part of God. The world is not only an aggregate of occasions of experiences, such as a stone, but a true individual – namely God. Griffin describes this: “The universe, in other words, is a compound individual [such as a human being is a

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499 Whitehead, 248, 351, 339.
500 Whitehead, 25, 27.
501 Whitehead, 343–45.
compound individual, while the stone is a mere aggregate] with God as its dominant member.  

Furthermore, in process-panentheism God is not one localized physical being. God is omnipresent and necessarily related to the world, owing to the core doctrines outlined above. God is not a metaphysical exception to these metaphysical laws, so God cannot exercise coercive efficient causation – God can only exercise persuasive efficient causation. For these reasons, the process-God cannot physically hinder a person from walking into a dangerously busy street because God is not one localized agent who can use other bodies as aggregates. God is an omnipresent spirit and so cannot be regarded as an anthropomorphic agent with the same abilities as we have. 

Classical theists also hold God to be a non-physical omnipresent spirit, and can therefore use the same argument to explain why there is evil in the world despite God being omnibenevolent and omniscient. The difference between the classical theist and the process-panentheist, on this account, is that classical theists hold God to be omnipotent. God could, at any moment, intervene or cease to keep the world in existence. Classical theists hold that God could act directly in the world. If the evil and suffering were not worth it, if the good did not outweigh the evil, God could simply intervene or create a new world. The process-God could not do that because the process-God has no omnipotent power. The process-God has only purely persuasive power. 

To summarize: in order to make sense of the claim that God possesses only persuasive power, theists should appeal to the arguments that (1.) God is not a physical being who can act as a physical efficient cause; (2.) everything, down to the molecular level, is inherently self-determining and has creative causal power of its own; and (3.) everything is essentially relational – including God. 

From the core doctrines of process-panentheism, I conclude that everything necessarily exists in relation to other entities and that everything has some level of self-determination because of panexperientialism and the two poles. Everything thus has the freedom to act contrary to God’s will, and God cannot override that. God cannot interfere with the self-determination of other beings. Therefore, God is not the only one with true creative power. God and creative power are two ultimates. In turn, given the inherent freedom to act contrary to God’s will, the possibilities of evil and suffering will always exist. This does not entail that evil and suffering will always be actual, but, according to process-panentheism, they must – metaphysically must – always be possibilities.

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502 Griffin, Reenchantment without Supernaturalism, 142.
503 Griffin, Evil Revisited, 103.
504 Griffin, 103–4; Oord, God Can’t, 33.
505 See Thomas Aquinas on miracles, in Aquinas, Summa Theologicae, I., Q, 105, article 7.
506 Jonsson, Gud och andra orsaker: Hur en ny teori om orsak och verkan kan förändra vår världsbild, 92, 153, 155.
From the metaphysical core doctrines of process-panentheism, it is impossible that there could be a world without even the possibilities of evil and suffering.

This inference leads some scholars to the conclusion that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* must be given up. Oliver Li concludes, “for if God had created the world out of nothing, then God could also have created the world such that preventing evil would have been possible.” Since it would have been impossible for the process-God to create a world without the possibility of evil and suffering, this is a reasonable conclusion to draw. Many process theists do indeed reject creation *ex nihilo*.508

Suppose that God’s power is only persuasive in this process way. In that case, God cannot have created the world *ex nihilo*. More precisely, theoretically, the very first divine creative act could be described as creation *ex nihilo*; but from the point when something existed, God’s actions had to be purely persuasive, since the inherent freedom and self-determination is a metaphysical law according to the metaphysics of process philosophy/theology. The process-panentheistic denial of creation *ex nihilo* does not follow from the doctrine of purely persuasive power alone. It follows from all the other metaphysical core doctrines mentioned above, such as the prehension and necessary relationality of everything – including God.509

Given the denial of creation *ex nihilo*, the evil in the world is a result of creaturely freedom – a world that God cannot unilaterally control because God’s lure is only a possibility, waiting for something/someone to actualize it freely.

The problem of evil does not arise merely from concerns about God’s power but from the combination of God’s supposed omniscience, perfect love, and omnipotence. Whitehead rejects the thought that God has coercive power, not because it is morally inferior to persuasive power, but because the possibility of God having coercive power leads to the unacceptable conclusion that God is morally responsible for the evil and sufferings in the world.510 If God is perfect in love and knowledge, this is unacceptable. However, according to the Whiteheadian tradition, God is not omnipotent in the traditional sense.

According to process-panentheism, God is not responsible for the evil done by humans. It is not *God* who creates, wills, or allows evil. The process-panentheistic stance that God created *order out of chaos* rather than out of nothing means that the metaphysical principles of the world are not contingent, as in classical theism, in which God created *ex nihilo*.511 God, therefore, could not have created a world without the risk of evil.

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507 Li, *Panentheism, Panpsychism and Neuroscience*, 219.
508 Although there are process theists, such as John Cobb, who defend creation *ex nihilo*. However, I cannot see how process-panentheists can coherently maintain creation *ex nihilo*.
510 See also the many personal stories of abuse and suffering, and how in many cases the problem of evil makes people lose faith in a loving God. Oord, *God Can’t*, e.g., 1-14.
511 Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, 224.
This doctrine means not only that God cannot occasionally interrupt the world’s causal nexus. It also means that the divine purpose to bring about a world rich in value cannot—metaphysically cannot—be carried out without the risk of great evils. In this way, process philosophy is able to reconcile the facts of our world, as horrible as they often are, with belief in the wisdom and perfect goodness of this world’s creator.\footnote{Griffin, 230.}

So far, I have outlined the process-panentheistic reasons to think that God has purely persuasive power. If that is so, God cannot coerce, since God cannot limit the possibilities of actual beings without their consent. God metaphysically cannot exercise anything other than efficient persuasive power because actual beings have self-determination, and God is not one localized physical agent.

The conclusion drawn by process-panentheists is that a process-panentheistic conception of God with purely persuasive power offers a better solution to the problem of evil than other conceptions of God—classical theism in particular—because evil and suffering are not something the process-God allows or wills; they are realities because God is not the only agent with creative power. God wants to prevent evil singlehandedly, but cannot.

The next section analyzes an interrelated argument, namely the essential love argument for an un-coercive God. It too relates to the problem of evil, but focuses on God’s love rather than God’s power.

8.1.2. The essential love argument for an un-coercive God

Both classical theists and panentheists hold God to be perfectly good. It is part of their core claims. However, some panentheists claim that only their conception of God is coherent with the belief that God is essentially loving. Why is that? Is that a coherent claim? It is important to answer these questions first before further investigating whether panentheism can better account for evil and suffering in a world governed by an all-loving God than classical theism can.

The essential love argument for an un-coercive God builds on all the above-mentioned claims about God as having purely persuasive power. What the essential love argument does, which the argument for purely persuasive power alone does not, is to change the focus from divine power to divine love. The essential love argument claims that the process-panentheistic God is essentially loving, while the classical theistic God cannot be so conceptualized. What are the premises and presuppositions behind such a claim?

Oord is a process-panentheist in the Whiteheadian tradition. He adheres to the core claims of process-panentheism outlined above, and he believes that God is affected by time and by the world’s contingent events, that God cannot
foreknow the future, that all things are fundamentally mental with self-determination, and that God necessarily creates and relates to the world. That God is necessarily related to a world is not something God could have chosen not to be. According to Oord, the necessity of the God–world relationship is a result of God’s essence as love, and (I would add) the core claims of process-panentheism. Love is the primary divine attribute, according to Oord. However, classical theists also believe that God is perfectly good. How and why does Oord argue that the process-panentheistic God is more loving than the classical theistic God?

The first premise of this argument is the primacy of love. God is, first and foremost, loving. Love is the primary divine attribute. This is something with which most classical theists also would agree. The second premise is the nature of love as essentially relational and others-empowering. Third, as a relational process, love is a process in time that affects all parties in the relationship. Fourth, because love is essentially relational and empowering of others, love is essentially uncoercive. “Love does not overrule or override. [...] It does not manipulate, dominate, or dictate in ways that allow no response. Love does not control.” From these premises, process-panentheists such as Oord draw the conclusion that God has only persuasive power. God cannot unilaterally control or intervene in the world, not even to stop evil and suffering. Moreover, process-panentheists such as Oord draw the conclusion that the process-panentheistic God is essentially loving. An essentially loving God necessarily loves the world, since it is in God’s nature to love. However, according to this argument, the classical theistic God does not necessarily love the world, because that God is ontologically independent, immutable, and impassible. Those attributes are logically incompatible with the nature of love as an intrinsically relational process in time that always works to empower the other.

If this argument is sound, theists may have both an epistemic and a pragmatic reason to think that process-panentheism has better resources than classical theism to reconcile evil and suffering with the belief in a perfectly loving God. The epistemic reason is that, if coherent, the process argument rejects divine omnipotence; this changes the entire problem of evil, since it is then not a question of whether and why God allows evil and suffering. The pragmatic reason is that, even if classical theism can provide theodicies that coherently explain the existence of evil and suffering despite the existence of a perfect God, the process-God can be conceptualized as essentially loving – something that the classical theistic God cannot possibly be. If that were the case,

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514 Oord, 199–200.
516 Oord, 93.
theists would have a pragmatic reason to prefer an essentially loving God to a non-essentially loving God.

Why can a classical theistic God not be conceptualized as essentially loving? According to the essential love argument, an essentially loving God whose primary divine attribute is love and whose power must be understood in light of the primacy of love cannot create *ex nihilo*. The classical theistic God is thought to have created *ex nihilo*, contrary to the process-God. If God created *ex nihilo*, God was not always in a loving relationship with the world. Classical theism holds God to be ontologically independent, timeless, immutable, and impassible. God chose to create and love the world, but God does not change in Godself. The world is affected, but God is not. According to the essential love argument, if God can choose to love the world, although God essentially does not need it, then God is not essentially loving.

According to the essential love argument, love is essentially a relational process, which entails that an essentially loving God cannot be immutable and impassible. Love changes both the self and the other, and change implies time. Relationships are essential to love, and relationships are processes that affect. An essentially loving God is thus affected by the passing of time and the creation to which God relates. According to the essential love argument, this description of love does not fit the classical theistic God.

We can now come back to how the essential love argument for an un-coercive God relates to the denial of divine coercive powers. According to Oord, since love is essentially relational and essentially others-empowering, it never controls. Furthermore, he writes that an essentially loving God never coerces in the sense of being a sufficient cause.

When I say, “God needs us,” I assume God always loves. Always. And I assume, as the Apostle Paul puts it, “love never forces its own way” (1 Cor. 13:5). Never. Love doesn’t control, in the sense of being a sufficient cause. Therefore, it’s impossible for a loving God to control others.

A sufficient cause (or final cause, to use Griffin’s term) is a sole, unilateral cause. According to Oord, owing to the very nature of love, an essentially loving God cannot control or prevent evil and suffering alone. God is never the sole sufficient cause. God always acts with the creation. For this reason, God cannot prevent evil and suffering, but only try to persuade creatures in the world to work together for a better and more loving world.

Earlier we saw how the core doctrines of process-panentheism entail the rejection of creatio *ex nihilo*. Oord adheres to all those claims, but adds the

519 Oord 2022, 176, 186–192.
notion of divine essential love. He argues that a God who is essential love cannot create *ex nihilo*, since an essentially loving God always needs someone—a creation—to love and with whom to be in a relationship.\textsuperscript{522}

Oord argues that the classical theistic God cannot be understood to be essentially loving because that God has no need for relationships. The classical theistic God is immutable, impassible, timeless, and ontologically independent. Such a God cannot be essentially loving—at least, not if the essence of love really is relationality, non-coercion, and others-empowering.\textsuperscript{523}

Griffin also argues that God is necessarily loving and, therefore, cannot coerce. It is God’s nature to love; and if one truly loves someone, one does not control them.\textsuperscript{524} The God of classical theism also loves the world. However, according to the critique of process-panentheists, the classical theistic God does not necessarily love the world. That God could withdraw God’s love, because the classical theistic God does not essentially need the world or any relationships at all. God is love in Godself, according to classical theism. If, as classical theism maintains, God were perfectly loving, powerful, and omniscient, then God could prevent or stop horrendous evil and suffering. Furthermore, the classical theistic God is omnipotent—something that is logically incompatible with an essentially loving God, according to the essential love argument. Classical theists have no reason to reject traditional divine omnipotence. Thus, according to process-panentheists, classical theists have more difficulty reconciling evil and suffering with the existence of God than process-panentheists do.

In summary, the essential love argument states that, if God is necessarily loving, then God necessarily loves the creation. Love is essentially relational, and an essentially loving being is essentially relational. In other words, God is necessarily related to a world—just as strict panentheism holds and classical theism denies.

Before evaluating this argument, a similar argument to the essential love argument is presented. I call it the empathetic-God argument. It is similar to the essential love argument, but does not involve process-panentheism. Instead, it presents a non-process-panentheistic response to the problem of evil.


\textsuperscript{523} Oord, *Pluriform Love*, 34.

\textsuperscript{524} David Ray Griffin, “Process Theology and the Christian Good News,” in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock (Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2000), 17–18. The debate between process theists and “free-will theists” (or open theists, as they are often called) revolves around this; the free-will/open theists argue that God loves by choice and not by necessity.
8.1.3. The empathetic-God argument

The problem of evil, or the problem of suffering as it also is called, is used as an argument both against and in favor of panentheism. Here I examine it as an argument in favor of panentheism. It is a “positive” argument of suffering. Broadly speaking, the claim is that a suffering God is more empathetic and loving than an impassible God, making the God of panentheism more loving and empathetic than the God of classical theism, because only the passible God can relate, be moved, and thus empathize with and love us. This can be used to formulate both a pragmatic and an epistemic argument in favor of panentheism. The pragmatic argument says that a passible and empathetic God is morally preferable to an impassible and immutable God. The epistemic argument claims that only the passible, panentheistic God can be empathetic and loving, and that panentheism, therefore, is preferable to classical theism.

Arthur Peacocke’s version of panentheism answers the question of how we are to understand the world’s suffering and how it relates to God by emphasizing God as personal and loving. Let us call it the empathetic-God argument. It says that a panentheistic God suffers with us in a way that an impassible and ontologically independent God cannot. The panentheistic conception of God holds the world’s suffering to be suffering in God. As personal, God relates to the world and feels its suffering as it happens in Godself. In classical theism, God witnesses and possibly emotes with the suffering world, but the suffering is not part of the Godself. This enhances the classical problem of evil, in which it seems either that God cannot be omnipotent or that God cannot be perfectly loving and morally good. According to Peacocke, the panentheistic “suffering God” who not only witnesses but also takes bodily part in the suffering is a better conception if we are searching for a God of love.525

The God of classical theism does not need us – the creation. According to classical theism, God chooses to create and sustain the world but, because of the doctrines of divine simplicity, immutability, and impassibility, God is timeless and unaffected by the contingent happening in the world.526 However, empathy and understanding presuppose relationship. Love and empathy are essentially relational phenomena. To love is to care. To love is to be engaged and affected. In the words of Oord, “Love assumes a change in the receiver from not having received the gift to receiving it. […] An immutable God cannot love, at least in the way we know love.”527 If theists want to understand God coherently as loving in a way that is at least fairly similar to the way we usually know love, they have reason to prefer panentheism to classical theism. Granted that all talk of God is somehow analogical or metaphorical: since God is not a being like us, there can still be better or worse ways to describe God analogically. Panentheists reject divine immutability and impassibility, and

525 Peacocke, Paths from Science towards God, 86ff.
527 Oord, Pluriform Love, 118.
hold their God to take a metaphysical part in the world’s suffering – which, according to the argument, makes God more empathetic toward our sufferings. In the words of Whitehead, God is the “fellow-sufferer who understands.”

In summary, the empathetic-God argument states that God is personal, loving, and relational. Panentheism states that the world is within God or a part of God. God suffers as the world suffers. Because there is so much suffering in the world, God would have to suffer as the world suffers to be perfectly empathetic and understanding. A panentheistic conception of God holds suffering as an ontological part of God, since the world is part of God; but the evil that causes the suffering is not necessarily part of God’s essence. It only takes part in the existence of God. While love is part of God’s eternal and unchanging nature, suffering is not. Suffering is only contingently part of the panentheistic God. A premise in this argument is the claim that a suffering God is more empathetic and loving than a God who does not suffer. A panentheistic God does suffer, whereas the God of classical theism does not. (Recall that classical Christian theism holds beliefs beyond what classical theism in general entails.) A panentheistic conception of God, according to this argument, is more empathetic and loving than the God of classical theism.

Now it is time to evaluate the arguments in favor of panentheism presented above.

8.1.4. Evaluating panentheism and the problem of evil

Limiting the focus to the problem of evil, does a theist have reason to prefer panentheism to classical theism? Are purely persuasive power, essential love, or God’s participation in suffering reasons to believe that panentheism has better resources coherently to reconcile the existence of evil with the belief in a perfectly loving God?

The panentheistic notions of the suffering God might be consoling, and might even induce hope amid suffering. The hope would be based on the belief that we are not alone in our suffering, and that God is immanent and takes part in the suffering with us. However, if it is an essentially loving God that theists seek, they do not need a God who only suffers with us. They need a God who essentially relates to and is affected by the creation – because love is essentially relational.

8.1.4.1. Purely persuasive power

The question to assess here is whether panentheism offers a better solution to the problem of evil than classical theism because of the doctrine of purely persuasive power. The main question to answer is whether panentheism does

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in fact entail conceptualizing God’s power as purely persuasive. If not, panenteleism does not offer an additional and better solution to the problem of evil than classical theism offers.

Must a panentheist reject traditional divine omnipotence? If not, can she anyway answer the problem of evil differently than classical theists?

If theists have no reason to reject traditional divine omnipotence, they also have no reason to reject creatio ex nihilo. If they affirm creatio ex nihilo, they must also accept that, in a sense, God is ultimately responsible for the possibility, and the continued existence, of evil and suffering.

The rejection of creatio ex nihilo is not in itself linked only to the belief in God’s purely persuasive power, but to all the core doctrines of process theism mentioned earlier. If nothing (in its philosophical meaning) exists, God has nothing on which to exercise either coercive or persuasive power. If God created ex nihilo, there would have been nothing to coerce in the first place. Thus the process-panentheistic denial of creatio ex nihilo is grounded in other metaphysical core doctrines of process-panentheism. The doctrine of prehension, in which every actual being/entity necessarily has a mental and a physical pole; the inherent relationality of everything, including God; the essential self-determination of all actual entities; and the denial of supernatural intervention – these are such core doctrines.

Panentheists who stand by the doctrine of divine purely persuasive power must accept panexperientialism/panpsychism. More precisely, to argue coherently that God only has purely persuasive power, panentheists must adhere to process-panentheism, which includes panexperientialism/panpsychism. Only if panentheism is joined with the process doctrine of panexperientialism/panpsychism, the doctrine of essential relationality, and the claim that God is not a metaphysical exception is the doctrine of purely persuasive power convincing. Why else would a panentheistic God not be able to have coercive power?

Panexperientialism/panpsychism holds every physical entity to have a physical and a mental pole so that everything has something analogous to free will. The natural world is part of the divine, and God can exercise only persuasive power, since even rocks and trees have mental and physical poles and

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529 That said, there are some process theists, such as John Cobb, who defend creatio ex nihilo. I agree that the doctrine of purely persuasive power alone does not suffice to reject the possibility of creatio ex nihilo, because neither “persuasion” nor “coercion” is applicable to a situation in which nothing exists on which to act persuasive or coercively. However, there are other core doctrines that suffice to reject creatio ex nihilo successfully.

530 For a list of the core doctrines of process theism, see Griffin, Reenchantment without Supernaturalism, 5–7.


532 Langby, “Process-Panentheism and the ‘Only Way’ Argument.”
self-determination. However, panpsychist metaphysics does not make coercive power impossible.\(^{533}\) Free will would be limited and diminished; but nothing in the panpsychist idea of physical and mental poles makes divine coercive power impossible. Therefore, I argue that a panentheistic acceptance of purely divine persuasive power **must be based on panpsychism/panexperientialism, fundamental relationality, and belief in the existence of true libertarian freedom.** This is what Griffin argues (he calls it theological freedom), because the way in which process-panentheism understands efficient and final causation implies that every actual being (even atoms and electrons) has some degree of self-determination, even **vis-à-vis** God.

Furthermore, Mikael Stenmark argues that the doctrine of divine persuasive power is not a core claim of panentheism, but only an extension claim.\(^{534}\) This is true. It is, however, a core claim of process-panentheism. A panentheist who **is not a process-panentheist has no coherent reason to reject the belief that God has both coercive and persuasive power.** In fact, a panentheist who is not a process-panentheist has no good reason to reject either *creatio ex nihilo* or the possibility (or actuality) of divine coercive power, and so cannot coherently claim that God can exercise **only** persuasive power.\(^{535}\)

Process-panentheism coherently entails that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* should be given up because, given the core claims of process metaphysics, God always relates to an actual world, and cannot override the self-determination and will of actual entities. For some, this may be too steep a price to pay – although I argue that this is a bullet that a panentheist who wishes to benefit from the argument from purely persuasive power must bite. A Whiteheadian process-panentheism, which states that every actual being has some level of self-determination that not even God can coerce, offers strong support for the doctrine of persuasive power. This further implies that a panentheist who wishes to benefit from the argument of purely persuasive power must be a process-panentheist. Only a process-panentheist can coherently argue that God has **only** persuasive power, while a non-process-panentheist can maintain belief in an omnipotent God.

I started by asking whether panentheists have reason to reject divine omnipotence. We have now seen that the answer is “no.” Only process-panentheists have reason to do so, because they adhere to several metaphysical core claims that non-process panentheists have no reason to accept. The conclusion drawn from this is that a panentheist who does not hold the claims of process theism, such as panpsychism/panexperientialism and the rejection of *creatio ex nihilo*, to be true cannot use the argument for purely persuasive power to answer the problem of evil.


\(^{534}\) Stenmark, 34.

\(^{535}\) I argue more extensively for this in Langby, “Process-Panentheism and the ‘Only Way’ Argument.”
8.1.4.2. An essentially loving God

Owing to the belief that God is essentially loving, Oord argues in favor of the primacy of love – that God first and foremost is love. However, classical theists could very well also hold the primacy of love doctrine to be true. Why, then, should a theist think that panentheism entails a more coherent view of divine love than classical theism does?

First, it must be clarified that the nature of love is not the reason why God possibly possesses only persuasive and never coercive power. If God has only persuasive power, it is because of the metaphysical circumstances described by the core doctrines of process-panentheism. I claim that the argument of divine purely persuasive power is an epistemic argument that results from the core doctrines of process-panentheism presented earlier. The reason for the process-God’s purely persuasive power is not because of the nature of love.

According to Oord’s essential love argument, God cannot unilaterally control beings, because God necessarily loves. However, he also admits that the essential love argument is not enough to reach the conclusion that God has only persuasive power. He must also conclude that God does not have omnipotent power in the traditional sense, because God is not a physical body that can move other bodies.536

Another reason to reject the essential love-argument in favor of purely persuasive power is that we can exercise truly loving acts both by coercive power and by persuasion. Likewise, it is not the case that persuasion is always loving. We can use persuasive power to cause great harm, evil, and suffering. An evil deity with perfect persuasive power would use persuasion to cause evil and suffering. A manipulative person can persuade others to commit suicide or murder. That is not loving. It is loving to rescue someone from drowning.537 I would be morally blameworthy if I did not try physically to prevent someone from drowning if I had the opportunity to do so.

Oord agrees with me on this. It is loving for us to prevent suffering and evil. It is loving for us to prevent someone from drowning or physically to prevent them from being run over by a car.538 For this reason, Oord (and Griffin) must add to the argument that God is a universal spirit with no physical body with which to act coercively. Oord does not intend the love argument to be a sufficient argument in favor of the doctrine of purely persuasive power. He combines it with the claim that God is a universal spirit with no localized body with which to work coercively.539 He writes: “Both because God is a

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537 Oord agrees with this. See Oord, God Can’t, 32.
538 Oord, 32.
539 Oord, Questions and Answers for God Can’t, 78; Oord, God Can’t, 33.
bodiless Spirit and divine love does not coerce, God cannot control." According to Oord, these claims together make the cumulative case against God having traditional omnipotent power.

That said, Oord also writes: "[...] God’s love is necessarily self-giving, others-empowering, and, therefore, uncontrolling." He also writes that "Love seeks overall well-being, which means acting for the common good. Love promotes flourishing." According to him, it is not loving to coerce in the sense of being the sufficient cause. In fact, owing to the doctrine of pan-experientialism/panpsychism – a core claim of process-panentheism – (which Oord calls material-mental monism), no one ever acts as a sufficient cause. Everything has self-determination, which is why nothing and no one, not even God, is ever the sole sufficient cause for anything.

But what has love got to do with it? The claim that nothing and no one ever acts as the sole, determinative cause for anything is not because of the essence of love. It has to do with panexperientialism/panpsychism/material-mental monism – the inherent self-determination or self-causation of everything.

I take it to be true that love is always a relational process of giving and receiving, that love always acts for the good, that love always acts for the other as an end and never only as a means, and that love always wants a free response from the beloved. But if, by definition, nothing ever works as the sole sufficient cause, since everything down to the fundamental level has self-determination and self-causation of its own (however minor), then the nature of God’s actions is not because of the nature of love. It is because of the nature of the inherent relationality and self-determination of everything.

That said, do theists, as Oord suggests, have reason to believe that only the panentheistic God can be coherently conceptualized as essentially loving?

Classical theism entails that God is good because of God’s perfect being and actuality, not because of the things that God does or creates. Indeed, classical theists maintain that God is perfectly good – although not necessarily in a moral sense, because God is not a moral agent acting in the world. The traditional way in which classical theists understand God’s goodness relates to God as pure actuality. According to this classical theistic view, goodness and being are intimately related. Something is good in so far as it actualizes its potential, given its nature. The nature of a flower is to grow, bloom, and smell nice, look pleasing to attract bees, and so on. In so far as a flower

541 Oord, 161.
542 Oord, 206.
achieves this, it is a good flower. This is how classical theists tends to think of the relationship between goodness and the nature of that which is good.\footnote{Feser, “The Thomistic Dissolution of the Logical Problem of Evil,” 3–5; Davies, The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil, 202–4.}

God has no potentiality according to classical theism. God is pure actuality, with no potential or need for change. God already completes God’s nature in a perfect sense, which makes God perfectly good.\footnote{Charnock, Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 255.} In classical theism, the goodness of God is not dependent on God’s actions. In other words, God’s goodness is not primarily a moral goodness. God’s goodness is wholly independent of the creation, since the creation is contingent – God did not have to create good things to be good.\footnote{Davies, The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil, 204.} However, like Aquinas, classical theists attribute goodness to God, since the goodness in the world somehow resembles its ultimate cause: God. The effect is somehow like its cause, according to Aristotelian and classical theistic philosophy. Therefore, God can be said analogously to be good even in a moral sense, even though many classical theists maintain that the goodness of God is not really moral goodness but metaphysical goodness because of God’s \textit{perfect being} and \textit{pure actuality}.\footnote{Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, Q. 6, article 1-4.} According to classical theists, God is the source of goodness, being good by God’s own nature. “He [God] could not receive it [goodness] from the things he created, they are later than he: since they received all from him, they could bestow nothing on him […].”\footnote{Charnock, Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God, 259.} Classical theists can also, however, attribute moral goodness to God in the sense that God always acts in line with God’s own perfect nature. God’s moral goodness is derived from God’s ontological goodness as perfect being and pure actuality.\footnote{Ulf Jonsson, \textit{Med tanke på tron: en introduktion till fundamentaleologin Band 1 Naturlig teologi} (Skellefteå: Artos, 2018), 131.}

Classical theists thus claim that God is essentially good; and they can claim that God is loving by using the same analogical reasoning: God’s loving nature is derived from God’s ontological perfection and pure actuality. Nevertheless, I argue that theists still may have reason to think that panentheism depicts a more coherent view of God’s love. They may have reason to think that panentheism depicts a more loving God than classical theism does. What reason would that be, and is it a good reason?

As seen above, classical theists and non-process-panentheists affirm divine omnipotence and the possibility of coercive divine action. They can argue, just as open theists often do, that a God who is not metaphysically forced to love is “more” loving than a God who necessarily loves the creation. Theists of this kind are often reluctant to limit God’s sovereign power, and instead emphasize that God freely chose to create this world – just as classical theists claim.\footnote{“As an open theist, I cannot accept that God is metaphysically limited […]”. Pinnock, \textit{Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness}, 149.}
Theists of this kind maintain that God is free to create, and argue that free love is greater than forced love. If that is the case, the essential love argument gets turned on its head and becomes an argument against the panentheism it was initially supposed to defend. However, theists have no good reason to think that a God who loves by choice is more loving than a God who loves by necessity. The reason is that the loving nature of God is precisely because of God’s eternal nature. It would be like saying that a God who can choose not to exist is greater than a God who necessarily exists, or that a God who is not essentially omnipresent is greater than a God who is. A necessarily loving God everlastingly loves and cannot stop loving. That is surely greater than a God who could stop loving.

But must God love that which is not God? Must God eternally love creation? Can God not eternally love Godself? According to many Christian theists, the Trinity is enough to guarantee God’s eternal essence as love.\(^\text{554}\) This is also the stance of many classical theists.\(^\text{555}\) However, classical theism as a meta-theological position is not necessarily Christian. The Trinity is an extension claim in classical theism. That is not to say that belief in a Trinitarian God is somehow less important to the Christian classical theist. For a Christian, the Trinity is a fundamental part of reality. That belief in the Trinity is an extension claim only means that it is not essential to the meta-theological view of God as described by the core claims of classical theism. Those core claims could, in principle, be shared by non-Christian classical theists as well. The Trinitarian component thus extends beyond what non-Christian classical theists necessarily accept. Nevertheless, non-Christian classical theists could still maintain that God is essentially loving because God relates internally to Godself, and because God is perfectly good and loving owing to God’s perfect being and pure actuality.

Theists of this kind, whether classical theists, open theists, or qualified panentheists, believe that God created the world \textit{ex nihilo} freely and not out of necessity.\(^\text{556}\) As mentioned, some theists also believe that free divine love makes God’s love for the creation more profound than the love of a God who creates by necessity.\(^\text{557}\) William Hasker (an open theist) argues that God loves us necessarily since we exist, but that we exist contingently and not necessarily.\(^\text{558}\) Thus, according to this position, God loves that-which-is-not-Godself.


\(^{555}\) Franks, “The Simplicity of the Living God,” 281.

\(^{556}\) For more arguments in favor of the open view of God, see Pinnock, \textit{Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness}; Pinnock, \textit{The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God}.

\(^{557}\) In the words of Stephen Charnock, “It would not be supreme goodness, if it were not a voluntary goodness.” Charnock, \textit{Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God}, 266.

\(^{558}\) Hasker, “In Response to David Ray Griffin,” 47.
contingently and not necessarily. That is also a coherent position for classical
theists to have.

As we have seen, Oord disagrees. God necessarily creates and relates to the
world, since love is essentially relational. This applies to Christian theism
as well as to non-Christian theism. In other words, even with the extension
claim of the Trinity, the essential love argument claims God to be necessarily
related to a world – to that which is not Godself. Jürgen Moltmann and Keith
Ward argue on similar lines. Moltmann speaks of the Trinitarian persons, but
emphasizes monotheism – they are still one God. The Trinitarian persons’
eternal and essential love seeks communion with that which is not the divine
self. Ward also rejects the idea that God can relate internally within the Trin-
ity to satisfy God’s essence as love. That would be too close to polytheism,
making the persons of the Trinity into three distinct divine persons. Ward in-
stead argues that an essentially loving and relational God relates to the finite
and contingent world.

The difference between Oord and theists who affirm creatio ex nihilo and
divine coercive power is that the latter group believes that God – out of love
– freely chose to create the world, while Oord and others believe that God –
out of love – necessarily creates and loves the world. To them, omnipotence,
which necessarily entails coercive power, is logically incompatible with love.
“Love can’t be omnipotent,” Oord says, because love is inherently uncoer-
cive.

Which conception of God is the more loving? How can we tell? I have
already argued that coercive power is not necessarily bad and that persuasive
power is not always good. Limited to the question of love and power, a God
with purely persuasive power, therefore, is not necessarily a morally prefera-
ble or a more loving God.

However, when faced with evil and suffering, theists have reason to prefer
a loving God to a non-loving God. If theists accept the truth of the premise
that love is an inherently relational process, theists have reason to prefer rela-
tional theology, because only a relational God can be coherently conceptual-
ized as loving. An essentially loving God, therefore, is essentially relational
and thus affected by the happenings in the world to which God relates. If we
believe that God is essentially loving, we have a strong reason to embrace
relational theology.

So, do theists who seek a relational theology have reason to prefer panen-
theism to classical theism? Yes. Relational theology is not necessarily panen-
theistic, but there are reasons to think that classical theism is less coherently

560 Jürgen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress
562 Oord, The Death of Omnipotence and Birth of Amipotence, 122.
relational than panentheism. God, Millard Erickson says, “loves us on the basis of that likeness of himself that he has placed within us, in creating us (Gen. 1:27). He therefore in effect loves himself in us.”

Moreover, Brian Davies says it makes sense to speak of God as perfectly good without entailing moral goodness or love. In love, he says, one expresses an emotion, and the classical theistic God has no emotions. An emotion is an effect, a reaction to something; and the classical theist God does not react to the contingent happenings in the world. Davies himself says that “a God who experiences emotion cannot be the source of the being of everything other than himself. An emotion is an effect, yet there cannot be effects in that which accounts for the existence of everything other than itself.” He goes on to say that we can ascribe love to God figuratively but not actually. Just as God can be said to have ears to hear, we can say that God loves. It is only metaphorical.

Even if not all classical theists agree exactly with Davies’s view on divine goodness, the classical theistic God chooses to love us but does not essentially love anything but Godself. In the words of Erickson, “God does not need us. He can accomplish what he wishes without us.” Furthermore, the God of classical theism is timeless. But love is essentially a relational process that necessarily entails time. It is hard to make sense of the claim that a timeless and unaffected God essentially loves without having to resort to full-on equivocal language – but then we do not understand what the claim that God is loving means at all. Classical theists usually reject univocal descriptions of God; but even with an analogical interpretation, it is hard to claim coherently that the classical theistic God is essentially relational and loving. If God’s love is not even close to how we perceive love to be, it becomes problematic to claim analogously that God is loving or even essentially loving. The only way left is equivocal language; but again, if words do not refer to God at all, then theists have no reason at all to think that the classical theistic God is loving. The word “love” loses its meaning when applied equivocally to God.

It could be objected that the notion of divine love defended here is too univocal, too much like our love. In a sense it is, but in another it is not, because God loves everyone, everlastingly, perfectly, and necessarily, whereas we do not. If we are to understand God as loving, and even better as essentially loving, we cannot appeal to equivocal language because then we would have no idea at all what God’s love is like. Neither should we claim that God’s love is exactly like ours. I do not defend univocal religious language. The point is that the notion of love and goodness used by many classical theists is supposed to be analogous while, at the same time, rejecting all the essentials of love as we know it.

563 Erickson, Christian Theology, 264.
565 Davies, 209.
566 Erickson, Christian Theology, 263.
Understanding God as essentially loving and therefore needing to relate to the beloved – the world – is not a limitation of God. Classical theism claims that God is perfect and without limitation, and yet claims that God cannot sin or hate. There are lots of things that God cannot do without our needing to claim that God is limited. God cannot ride a bicycle, and an essentially loving God cannot stop loving. That does not make God limited or weak. God can do that which is within God’s nature to do; but God cannot violate God’s own nature. Even classical theists agree with this. Furthermore, love is essentially relational, so an essentially loving God is essentially relational. Moreover, an essentially loving God cannot stop loving us. God always loves.

If theists accept the truth of the premises that love is necessarily a relational process and that God is essentially loving, then they must accept the conclusion that God is essentially relational. But the classical theistic God is not essentially relational, only relational by choice (if an impassible and immutable God can be relational at all). At the very least, the classical theistic God is not a good or coherent example of an essentially loving God. The stronger claim is that the classical theistic God is not relational at all and, therefore, not loving.

If relationships are indeed timeful, even the Trinitarian extension claim cannot sufficiently make sense of God as essentially relational if God does not relate to anything in time. And the Trinity without any world is not in time.

A theology of relationality does not necessarily come only in the form of panentheism. It can be panentheistic, but it does not have to be. Open theism also affirms the timefullness and relational aspects of God, and open theism also rejects immutability and impassibility. However, relational theology cannot be coherently classically theistic without the words losing their meaning. Furthermore, only strict panentheism (for example, in the form of process-panentheism) entails an essentially relational God. Open theism affirms the relationality of God, but holds it to be voluntary and not necessary (although open theists think that God eternally relates and loves within the Trinity).

We can now see that the essential love argument must be modified. It is not an argument for why God is necessarily un-coercive. It is an argument in favor of strict panentheism, since only the strict form of panentheism holds God to be necessarily relational (and internal relations within God, such as the Trinity, do not qualify).

In conclusion, I have argued that the essential love argument for an un-coercive God is unconvincing if it is supposed to be an argument in favor of purely divine persuasive power. Instead, I argue that the essentially loving nature of God is a convincing reason in favor of a relational theology that rejects classical theistic immutability and impassibility because an immutable and impassible God does not need relationships at all. Furthermore, an essentially loving God cannot be timeless in the sense that time does not affect

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Godself. The reason is that love is essentially a relational process in time. Love affects. Love acts. If we remove the temporal and relational aspects of love, we are no longer talking about love as we know it. Theists would have to accept a full-scale equivocal understanding of language; but then they would have no idea what the statement that God essentially loves means at all.

Belief in an essentially loving and therefore relational God leads us to relational theology. Relational views of God offer a conception of God that we can understand to be truly loving without having to reject our understanding of what the essentials of love are and what loving acts are. We can understand God’s love to be analogous to our love, only maximized to divine and everlasting proportions. Panentheism of all sorts necessarily entails relational theology because of the feedback effect between God and the world; but not all sorts of panentheism entail a necessarily relational theology. Furthermore, relational theology does not necessarily imply only panentheism. Open theism is another example; but, like qualified panentheism, open theism maintains divine omnipotence and holds the God-world relationship to be voluntary.

In other words, if God is essentially loving, and if the Trinitarian extension claim is not accepted, then strict panentheism is the most adequate conception of God.

8.1.3.2. A suffering God

As previously mentioned, Linda Zagzebski argues for divine omni-subjectivity – that God is wholly empathetic and knows our first-person perspective and feelings, although they remain our feelings. Given classical theism, God is not changed or moved – not really. Classical theists only attribute Cambridge change to God, not real change. Again, a Cambridge change is not a real change but only a change in the relational situation. If my daughter grows to be taller than I am, I have not changed – she has.

Concerning divine empathy, the difference between panentheism and classical theism is minor, since classical theists deny that God would be indifferent to our sufferings. However, classical theists do accept divine immutability, since it follows from the other divine attributes, and immutability is part of the core claims of classical theism outlined in the introductory chapter. Jordan L. Steffaniak argues that classical theists, of whom he is one, must maintain strong immutability because otherwise God’s perfection is jeopardized. “To admit change is to destabilize God’s eternal perfect fullness.”

A panentheistic God who suffers with us is perhaps consoling and empathetic; but do we really need panentheism to have an empathetic God? No. Theists have no compelling reason to think that God needs to be physical or even partly physical to be empathetic. However, God needs to be essentially relational and thus affected by the process of time to be essentially loving.

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568 Zagzebski, “Omnisubjectivity.”
And what is empathy if not a kind of love? Strict panentheism necessarily entails a relational theology. Classical theism does not.

Nevertheless, all things being equal, is not a wholly loving and good God better than a God who suffers and participates in evil and suffering? Do true love and empathy presuppose the ability to feel what the other feels? Possibly; it is hard to determine. What I have tried to show is that it is very difficult coherently to conceptualize an unchanging and simple God as essentially relational and loving. Granted that our descriptions of God are always ours, and therefore flawed because they do not – and cannot – describe God in “God-self,” all God-talk is flawed. No conception of God fully captures God. Even accepting this, the argument still stands that love is a better analogy for the panentheistic God than the classical theistic one.

In the midst of suffering, theists have good reasons to think that a relational God is preferable, because a relational God can relate, emote, and be relied on. However, relational theology does not necessarily imply panentheism, although it can be in the form of panentheism. But because of divine simplicity, immutability, and impassibility, relational theology cannot be coherently in the form of classical theism.

The next parts of this chapter examine the problem of evil from a pantheistic perspective.

8.2. Pantheism and the problem of evil

The third tenet in my definition of pantheism states that the all-encompassing Universe/Nature/God is supremely good, or valuable, or sacred. This leads to a particular problem of evil for the pantheist because, if God is good or perfect, and God is everything, then everything is good or perfect. The problem is that not all things appear to be good or perfect. If a pantheist ascribes inherent value to God (the world), then it may appear that she must accept that everything in the world is equally valuable, since everything is God. This is the pantheist problem of value differentiation. The problem of value differentiation is thus intimately connected to the pantheist problem of evil.

Can pantheists coherently answer this challenge? If they can, how can a coherent pantheistic solution to the problem of evil be formulated?

8.2.1. Personal pantheism

Grace Jantzen, a personal pantheist, argues that the problem of evil is no more of a problem for pantheism than it is for classical theism (and for panentheism, I would add). She emphasizes the difference between the proposition that all things – including evil – are aspects of God and that God as a totality is evil. A classical theist maintains that everything is created and sustained by God.
This is a core belief for the classical theist. In the case of classical theism, God appears to allow evil; but is a God who is partly evil not worse?

According to Jantzen, the pantheistic belief that the universe is the divine “body” does not entail a worse problem of evil than classical theism entails. All the theodicy answers available to the classical theist are also open to the personal pantheist who believes that the universe is God. Jantzen claims that an appeal to free will, soul-making, and the overall good of the natural laws is also open to the personal pantheist.570

According to personal pantheists such as Jantzen, the difference that makes pantheism more appealing than classical theism is that the embodied pantheistic God suffers and thus understands suffering beings in a way that a cosmic dualist God supposedly never could.571 This is the same claim as presented in the empathetic-God argument of suffering, only in favor of pantheism instead of panentheism. Only a God who can suffer can be worthy of respect after Auschwitz, according to Jantzen. She writes that the sacrifice of Jesus is an example of the meaning of this: the sacrifice needed to be a true sacrifice of the body and not merely a “mental” sacrifice of the spirit.572 Only if God is embodied – only if the world is God’s body – can God truly know the pain and suffering of the world, according to Jantzen.

Even if that were so, pantheism, in contrast to panentheism, claims the world – God’s body – to be the entirety of God. The pantheistic God has no mind or spirit apart from the world-body. How, if at all, can personal pantheists coherently conceive God as being at least person-like?

According to Jantzen, the pantheistic God is perfectly good in a moral sense. Nothing about the embodiment of God makes it impossible for God to be perfectly good, she argues. God’s perfection is moral perfection, not, for example, spatial perfection.573 Spatial limitation does not matter because the perfection attributed to God is primarily about moral perfection and power. A pantheistic God of Jantzen’s kind, she maintains, can be morally perfect and have all the other divine classical attributes. She draws attention to the Western culture’s historical obsession with the transcendent and spiritual. Her point is that moral perfection – and thus personhood – is not connected to the transcendent. “[…] [H]ow could Jesus tell men to become perfect if perfection involves being pure act and incorporeal?” she asks.574

But is Jantzen right? Can a pantheistic God be a moral being? Only if God is personal or person-like can God be moral. Personal pantheists must have a theory of personhood that is coherent with pantheism. Jantzen argues for such a theory.

570 Albeit not for a pantheist of the Advaita Vedanta tradition.
571 Jantzen, God’s World, God’s Body, 90–93.
572 Jantzen, 85.
573 Jantzen, 108.
574 Jantzen, 111.
According to Jantzen, a person, as far as we know it, is only a personal self if she has a body. To have a body is a necessary condition for personhood. Jantzen favors a holistic understanding of the God–world relationship in which we cannot understand one part without the other. She is inspired by the old Jewish understanding of the human as a holistic unity, with bodily organs as necessary and non-reductive parts of the self. Genesis tells us that the human is a divine image. This includes the body, sexuality, the female, and the male. Furthermore, she argues that radical dualism between the body and the soul/spirit cannot be used as a model for the God–world relationship because, according to her, personhood necessarily consists of the holistic or non-reductive spirit-body. If personhoods are like this, then so is God’s.

Usually we think that God relates to and has perceptions and knowledge of the world. But how can someone have relationships and perceptions if she does not have bodily senses? Even if we cannot prove that eyes, ears, and a body are necessary for someone to see, hear, and feel, this is how we empirically experience it to be. Therefore, according to Jantzen, we should understand God’s personhood as analogous to our own and, thus, the universe as God’s body. The fact that this is highly anthropomorphic is not a problem, according to Jantzen, because of the belief that we are created imago Dei.

So far, I have presented a possible way to conceptualize the pantheist God–world as personal or person-like. What, then, of a non-personal pantheist answer to the problem of evil?

8.2.2. Non-personal pantheism

Timothy Sprigge is a non-personal pantheist, and he does not believe that the pantheist God is moral. Can non-personal pantheists claim the God–world to be perfectly good? If not, is there any other reason to think that non-personal pantheism has good resources to handle the existence of evil and suffering in a world that is believed to be divine?

Sprigge is a panpsychist pantheist, holding the universe to be a unified experience containing all contingent experiences. The pantheistic God–world is the totality and unity of consciousness. Contingent beings experience time and thus the change from good to bad states, but God – the conscious experiencing totality – is eternal and must therefore be understood to be good.

Since this whole is eternal, and change pertains to it only as an eternal ordering of events within it, it cannot suffer from the dissatisfactions of finite individuals. For dissatisfaction can only belong to something striving in time. Thus

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575 Jantzen, 70.
577 Jantzen, 6–9.
578 Jantzen, 73–78.
579 Sprigge, The God of Metaphysics, 519.
there can be no striving on the part of the whole. It must therefore experience the totality of things as being good.\textsuperscript{580}

Sprigge’s solution to the problem of evil is to assume that the universe/ God in its totality is good.\textsuperscript{581} He admits that evil and suffering are real parts of the world, and that it would be better if they were not. Evil and suffering are not valuable, and they do not serve a higher purpose. He rejects “greater good” theodicies and accepts that the divine unity contains evil and suffering. However, he assumes that God, the unified experience or consciousness, is overall more good than evil.\textsuperscript{582}

The divine unified experience/consciousness (God) contains all times, past, present, and future.\textsuperscript{583} However, the divine unified experience does not change because it is not itself in time. It is eternal and “experiences everything in a ‘frozen’ specious present.”\textsuperscript{584} From our perspective, time is real. Past, present, and future events are genuine realities. But from the perspective of the eternal experience/consciousness, all events are eternally there.\textsuperscript{585}

If the future is as real as the past and the present, the future is not open. If the principle of bivalence is true, then the truth value of all future propositions must be eternal (presuming that future statements are propositions at all).\textsuperscript{586} God as the timeless and unchanging totality of experience, according to Sprigge, is therefore necessarily just as God is. This entails that, if the pantheistic God is necessary, the world is necessary, since the world is God.\textsuperscript{587}

How does this affect the pantheist problem of evil? The necessity of the God–world makes Sprigge assume that overall it is good rather than bad. He argues that a necessary experience/consciousness does not feel the need to change, and that this ought to indicate a hedonistic state of mind: “For how can there be unhappiness without an urge to move to a different state of mind?” he asks.\textsuperscript{588} The God–world is eternal, but is not itself in time. If it is not in time, it has no future, making striving for something better an incoherent thought.\textsuperscript{589} We can strive after something better, but the divine totality – the God–world – does not. This, according to Sprigge, indicates that the conscious totality is in a hedonistic state in which the good outweighs the evil. The world is necessarily how it is. Even though the world would be better without evil,

\textsuperscript{580} Sprigge, 518–19.
\textsuperscript{582} Sprigge, The God of Metaphysics, 518–21, 527.
\textsuperscript{583} Compare with Spinoza, The Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata), 23. [1677] (Part I, Prop XXXIII, and proof.) Note II explains that God’s necessity follows from God’s perfection.
\textsuperscript{584} Sprigge, The God of Metaphysics, 496.
\textsuperscript{585} Sprigge, 495–96.
\textsuperscript{586} Dummett, The Seas of Language, 69–70, 467.
\textsuperscript{587} Sprigge, The God of Metaphysics, 521; Sprigge, “Pantheism,” 204, 206–7.
\textsuperscript{588} Sprigge, “Pantheism,” 207; Sprigge, The God of Metaphysics, 518–19.
\textsuperscript{589} Sprigge, The God of Metaphysics, 527.
the actual goodness would not be without all the other happenings in it. Sprigge explains it in the following words:

I can only suggest that all this evil must somehow be intrinsically bound up with what is good in the world, and that it simply had to be there if there was to be a world of any worth. Take anything in the world which makes it valuable, and it will be true that this could not have occurred unless the rest of history, human, natural, and cosmic, were just as it has been and will be and is ‘now’.

He means that the world would be better had it been devoid of all evil, but that the actual evil is necessary because the good things in the actual world would not be if the rest of the world were actual. The world cannot be otherwise than it is. However, we can still say that it would have been better had no evil and suffering existed. According to this view, God is still good overall.

Reality/God is not wholly good, according to this theory, but at least the good outweighs the evil. The evils in the universe are meaningless and do not serve an end of “higher good,” but our comfort is that the God-world in its totality is good. The evils must be there. All events and experiences are eternally there; they do not pass in and out of existence only because phenomenologically we experience them as such. All events are eternally there in the eternity of God or, as Sprigge puts it, “the future is as determinate as the past.”

We have seen some pantheistic responses to the problem of evil. Now I turn to evaluating these claims critically.

8.2.3. Evaluating pantheism and the problem of evil

Does a theist have reason to think that pantheism can offer a better solution to the problem of evil than classical theism or panentheism? Before evaluating the non-personal pantheist response to the problem of evil, I must evaluate whether personal pantheism is a coherent position at all. If a personal pantheist wants to argue that God is morally perfect, she must argue that God is at least person-like. If personal pantheism is an incoherent position, the pantheistic God cannot be coherently conceived of as person-like and, therefore, cannot be morally good, let alone perfectly good. If that is the case, personal pantheism fails to offer a coherent alternative to classical theism and panentheism regarding the problem of evil. I also evaluate whether the non-personal pantheist God can be coherently conceived of as good or even perfectly good.

Sprigge, 521, 527.
Sprigge, 520.
Sprigge, 520.
Sprigge, The Vindication of Absolute Idealism, 30.
8.2.1.1. Pantheism and divine personhood

Is personal pantheism a coherent position? To answer that, we must first know what signifies personhood. What necessary conditions are there in personhood, and does personal pantheism meet those?

Jantzen argues in favor of what I call the “embodied God” thesis. It entails that a personal, or person-like God, must be embodied, since that is how we experience personhood. Embodiedness is a necessary condition in the embodied God thesis. However, it cannot be a sufficient condition for personhood, since snails, tables, and trees also have bodies but not personhood.

Richard Swinburne disagrees with Jantzen, and instead argues that the essential aspect of personhood is not the physical body but the ability to make moral judgments and to express second-order wants. Contrary to Jantzen, Swinburne thinks that a person can be only spirit, and argues that a person can be either embodied or spiritual.

What appears to separate a person from an animal is a person’s ability to make moral judgments and to express second-order wants. A second-order want is something you wish that you did not want or something you want to want. For example, Peter does not want to eat candy because he wants to lose weight, but he wants to eat candy because he likes it so much. Alternatively, the reverse: Peter wants to eat candy, but he wishes that he did not because he wants to lose weight.

According to Swinburne, a person can be a person even if she does not have any weight or height or is not constituted by anything. The reason is that it is very hard, or even impossible, to know what it is that makes my body precisely mine. Continuity of memory, physical parts, and character does not seem to do the job, because we would hardly say that a person with robotic prosthetic arms and legs has stopped being the same person. A person with memory loss is still the same person, even if her personality changes.

Even without prosthetic arms or memory loss, we grow old and change our personalities slowly all the time, some to a greater extent than others. Is the core of the person located in the brain then? What happens to the person when she is

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594 Jantzen, God’s World, God’s Body.
595 Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism, 100–102.
596 Swinburne, 99.
597 Swinburne, 100–102.
598 Swinburne argues that a person X is someone who has P-predicates: e.g., X is in pain, X is smiling, X is hoping, X is afraid, X wants to eat ice cream. However, since animals also have P-predicates, this is not enough for personhood, because the argument presupposes that animals are not persons. See Swinburne, 100. Swinburne also calls weight, length, mass, color, and constitution “M-predicates.” He argues that someone can be a person even if he/she does not have M-predicates. See Swinburne, 102.
599 Even if we say, “You are not the same person anymore,” this statement, I take it, is supposed to be understood metaphorically, not as an indication that there has been an actual change of personhood in the same continuous body.
unconscious? Does she stop being the person she is?\textsuperscript{600} If not, is it the physical brain, regardless of activity, that we are talking about when we say that someone is a person? That does not seem right. We consider a dead person buried with her body intact to be just that: a physical body, and we would not say that we are burying the \textit{person}. It is the body of the person that is buried. At least in Western contexts, the personal self is usually understood as either dead or in heaven or something like that.

The only reasonable option, Swinburne concludes, is to think of personal identity as something ultimate.\textsuperscript{601} Think of the famous Ship Theseus. Perhaps there is something essential that makes it into the Ship Theseus, even if all the wooden planks are replaced. We may not be able to know what it is, but Swinburne writes that,

\begin{quote}
In general, there is plenty of evidence, normally overwhelming evidence, of bodily continuity, memory and character, as to whether or not two persons are the same, which gives very clear verdicts in the overwhelming majority of cases. Yet while evidence of continuity of body, memory, and character is evidence of personal identity, personal identity is not constituted by continuity of body, memory and character.\textsuperscript{602}
\end{quote}

Personal identity, according to Swinburne, cannot be observed apart from observations about the continuity of body, memory, and character. This does not mean that continuity of body, memory, and character are constitutive of personal identity. According to Swinburne, it is false that a person must \textit{act} on her feelings (run away if she is afraid, smile if she is happy, strive toward y if she wants y) because it is not true that we always act on, and show, what we feel and want. Moreover, a spirit can (supposedly) act and show what it wants even without a body.\textsuperscript{603} If this model of personhood is correct, then it is not the case that God \textit{must} be physically embodied to be personal. However, it could very well be the case that God is physically embodied.

A pantheistic God can be personal if the personhood is constituted by body only, or necessarily by both body and spirit. If personhood is necessarily only spiritual, then it seems as if the pantheist God is really panentheism in disguise. If the thesis of purely spiritual personhood is correct, we have no reason to be personal pantheists rather than classical theists or panentheists. In fact,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{600} Sam Coleman argues that we do not cease to be the same person when unconscious or asleep. He argues that personhood is the result of qualia of which we are not necessarily consciously aware. See Sam Coleman, “Personhood, Consciousness, and God: How to Be a Proper Pantheist,” \textit{International Journal for Philosophy of Religion} 85, no. 1 (2019): 77–98, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-018-9689-7.
\item \textsuperscript{601} Swinburne, \textit{The Coherence of Theism}, 119.
\item \textsuperscript{602} Swinburne, 120.
\item \textsuperscript{603} Swinburne, 106.
\end{itemize}
limiting our focus to the problem of evil, we then have a reason to reject personal pantheism, because that would mean that a pantheistic God without any spiritual component cannot be morally good, let alone perfectly good.

But is personhood necessarily a question of being connected to either the physical or the spiritual/mental? Personhood could be connected to the qualities or powers expressed. Recently, Andrei A. Buckareff has explored whether personal pantheism is a coherent position to hold. He concludes that, whatever it is that is essential for someone to be a person or person-like, it cannot be the fact that this someone has a conscious mind, because that would entail that many animals would have to be counted as persons as well.604 We could claim, of course, that many kinds of animals ought in fact to count as persons or person-like beings. However, we would still want to know what it is that makes someone a person or not.

Buckareff is inspired by Lynne Rudder Baker, who suggests that persons have a first-person perspective. The first-person perspective is essential to anyone and anything we conceptualize as a person.605 A person is aware of, and interacts with, its surroundings from the subject’s personal point of view. Rudder Baker nuances this by adding the notions of robust and rudimentary first-person perspectives: a robust first-person perspective entails having conscious awareness of oneself as a self, separate from others, while a rudimentary first-person perspective does not entail this awareness. Small babies and, plausibly, many animals have a rudimentary first-person perspective, meaning that they are subjects of conscious experience.606 Based on these distinctions, Buckareff suggests the following definition of personhood:

S is a person if and only if (i) S has the capacity for having a robust first-person perspective, (ii) S has the capacity to evaluate and respond to reasons (both theoretical and practical), and (iii) S has the capacity for exercising agency in pursuit of goals represented in plans.607

If this definition of personhood is correct, personal pantheists have a problem, because their position turns out to be incoherent. The reason that it is incoherent is the non-existing distinction between God and the world. If there is no distinction, no separation, between God and the world, there cannot be a divine personal self that conceives of itself as a self in relation to that which is not the divine self. If there is no such distinction, personal pantheism is an incoherent position. However, Buckareff finds resources in Peter Forrest’s thinking to resolve this problem.

604 Buckareff, Pantheism, 55.
606 Baker, 128–35.
607 Buckareff, Pantheism, 56.
How then, can personal pantheism be coherently combined with the condition that personhood requires the person to conceive of itself as a self, distinct from others?

Consciousness seems to be essential for personhood. Something that is never conscious, neither of itself nor of anything else, is not a person. Yet, as we have already seen, consciousness cannot be a sufficient criterion for personhood, since many animals are conscious but not necessarily persons. Furthermore, it seems false to claim that we cease to be persons when we are unconscious unless the state of unconsciousness is permanent. Instead, Forrest’s suggestion is that personhood is tied to proprioception – body-awareness. According to his theory, the personal self is constituted by a unity of body-awareness (proprioception).\(^{608}\)

Forrest’s pantheism is personal but without a spiritual component in God. In other words, God is not the “soul” and the world is not the “merely physical body.” His theory states that awareness by proprioception/body-awareness does not require a spirit or a spiritual self.

I then consider the Self, thus constituted, to explain in turn the unity of consciousness for the other senses. For instance, the unity of the heard and seen words derives from the way that the apparent place of hearing, between the ears, and the apparent point of view, behind the eyes, can both be located within the body-image, as well as the way that the muscles in the eyes themselves contribute to the body-image.\(^{609}\)

Forrest rejects Cartesian substance dualism, saying that the thing that is aware is always a spirit/mind. According to substance dualism, a person is aware of her body because her mind is aware of the merely physical body.\(^{610}\) However, according to Forrest, awareness does not require a transcendent spirit/mind, and so the God of personal pantheism can be aware of the universe as its body through proprioception.

A non-reductionist claims that human persons cannot be reduced to their physical parts or brain signals. A personal pantheist such as Forrest believes likewise that God is non-reducible to the physical parts of the universe – the divine body. God’s will, senses, and intellect are as dependent on the divine body as our will, senses, and intellect are on our bodies. We are not aware of our whole body; but God, who has much greater knowledge and power, is aware of the entire universe.\(^{611}\)

This means that God is not only conscious of the world but also conscious of the world in the form of proprioception – because the world is God’s body. The personal pantheist God is not a separate spirit that is conscious of the

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\(^{609}\) Forrest, 29.

\(^{610}\) Forrest, 24–25.

\(^{611}\) Forrest, 23.
world. Buckareff uses Forrest’s notion of personhood to explain how a personal pantheist God can be consciously aware of its body – the world – and how this God can relate to the world/body as a self-other. In other words, even if a robust first-person perspective is essential to personhood, personal pantheism could be a coherent position. Buckareff explains it as follows.

Notice that in proprioception there is no self-other distinction, but there is a representation of oneself and some parts of oneself. But there is room on this account for a robust divine first-person perspective if God’s self-consciousness involves awareness of some states of God’s body that are represented first-personally.612

Like Jantzen, Forrest believes that, as we know our bodies, God knows the world, but to a much greater degree, since God is omniscient.613 Conscious beings with first-person perspectives are part of the divine being, but these beings are not God-the-totality. Buckareff concludes that,

If Forrest is right, then God stands in a self-other relation to us qua centers of conscious cognition. Assuming the success of Forrest’s strategy, the threat posed by the Tillich-inspired argument [that there is no distinction between God and the world by which God could be aware of Godself as a self, distinct from the world] appears to be a chimera for the personal pantheist.614

Depending on how to conceptualize personhood, the verdict of whether personal pantheism is a coherent position comes out differently. On the other hand, this is the case for any conception of God – including classical theism and panentheism. We need only to conclude that personal pantheism is not necessarily an incoherent conception of God, which also means that personal pantheism can be coherently combined with belief in a morally good, personal God. The question relating to the problem of evil is whether this God can be conceptualized as perfectly good, and thus whether pantheism offers a pragmatically better way to reconcile belief in the existence of God with evil and suffering.

8.2.1.2. Pantheism and divine goodness

Personal pantheism thus appears to be a coherent position if personhood – and, therefore, also the ability to be moral – does not necessarily require a transcendent spiritual or mental component to be involved. However, can the pantheist God be coherently conceptualized as perfectly good? If not, how does that affect the theist when reflecting on the problem of evil?

Sprigge argues for a non-personal pantheist God who is, overall, more good than bad. He argues from a utilitarian and non-moral perspective, relating to

612 Buckareff, Pantheism, 59.
614 Buckareff, Pantheism, 59.
the overall hedonic state of the world. According to him, a non-personal God can be good in a non-moral sense even if such a God is not omni-good. The God–world can be good or bad in relation to the overall hedonic state of the world.\textsuperscript{615}

Furthermore, he argues that the unity of experience/ consciousness (God–world) is eternal and not in time, and thus does not change. Since this unchanging God–world is precisely unchanging and does not strive toward something better, Sprigge concludes that the totality is good overall (the hedonic state).\textsuperscript{616} The only choice, according to Sprigge, was between \textit{this} world and no world at all.\textsuperscript{617} However, from the premise that something cannot change metaphysically, we cannot conclude that it is good. Not being able to do \textit{y} is not the same as not wanting to do \textit{y} or that \textit{y} is good.

If the pantheist God is personal or person-like, then God can indeed be morally good or bad; but the question is whether a personal pantheist God can be wholly good if the world contains evil. No pantheist I know of denies that the world is partly evil; but most pantheists would, I suspect, reject the claim that God (moral or amoral) is overall evil.

To claim, as Sprigge does, that this is the best possible world because it is the \textit{only} possible world says nothing about the world’s goodness. The pantheist God is not automatically good only because the world is necessary and necessarily contains good and evil. The pantheist God, whether personal or non-personal, is not necessarily good overall only because the goodness and the evil in the world are necessary if, in fact, they are necessary. I find this to be a problem in the pantheism of Sprigge.

That this was the only world possible does not tell us anything about its goodness or badness. Sprigge and everyone else are, of course, at liberty to \textit{hope} that the God–world is more good overall than bad; but I cannot see how we reach this conclusion from the premise that an eternal God–world does not change. We only reach that conclusion from the belief that God is metaphysically perfect; but then we have gone full circle because the problem of evil emphasizes that the world is \textit{not} perfect – it is full of evil and suffering. If the pantheist response is only a “leap of faith” response by hoping that the world is truly good, then she can offer no better solution to the problem of evil than the classical theist or the panentheist.

If God is metaphysically perfect, as pantheists usually believe, then the world is metaphysically perfect as well. Again, the world certainly appears to be imperfect, which indicates either that the world is, in fact, truly perfect – a morally objectionable suggestion – \textit{or} that God is not perfect – a religiously dubious suggestion.

\textsuperscript{615} Sprigge, \textit{The God of Metaphysics}, 527.
\textsuperscript{616} Sprigge, 527.
\textsuperscript{617} Sprigge, 521.
Furthermore, I see no reason why a pantheist must claim that God does not change. God can be eternal and necessary but still be able to change. After all, nature changes; and if God is the same as nature, why should theists not think that God changes? If God changes, theists can claim that certain entities, happenings, and phenomena are better than others. This, however, entails that God is not wholly good and that the world/God is not metaphysically perfect, regardless of whether God is personal.

The panentheist can solve this dilemma by pointing to the difference between God’s eternal essence as love and the contingent events in the world. Process-panentheists of the Whiteheadian tradition speak of the primordial (eternal) and the consequent (temporal) nature of God. According to panentheists, the fact that God loves and is essentially loving never changes; but this does not mean that the world is perfect. Since panentheists reject the God–world identity of pantheism, they can coherently claim that some aspects of God are eternal and unchanging – such as God’s nature as love – while, on the other hand, the part of Godself that is the world is neither unchanging nor perfectly loving. A panentheistic loving God wants to prevent all evil and suffering; but evil and suffering are caused by creatures, since they have inherent freedom to act to cause both good and evil. According to process-panentheism, God does not even will the evil and suffering in the sense that God allows it (as in classical theism), since the process-God cannot override the inherent self-determination of free creatures.

What possible route, then, can a pantheist take regarding the problem of evil? If God truly is the world and nothing more, as pantheism claims, would we not have to deny the suffering and evil of the world to claim that God/the world is wholly good? A personal pantheist could claim that God truly is wholly good if she claims that the good is that which God wants (the Euthyphro problem). Then the world, which is God, must be exactly as God wants it to be. In other words, the world must be wholly good. However, this solution creates other problems for the pantheist. First, suffering and evil must be rejected as real. If the world is perfect and in accordance with God’s perfect will and character, then everything that appears evil must, in fact, be good. Second, if everything is God and everything is good, theists must conclude that everything is equally valuable. Yet how can they claim that some things are good and others are evil? How can theists claim that gender equality, or the well-being of animals and ecosystems, is better than patriarchy and the exploitation of natural resources and animals? They cannot. To make value differentiation, the pantheist must be able coherently to claim that certain entities and phenomena are more valuable than others, even if everything is God.

To summarize, the following answers regarding evil appear available to pantheists.

618 Oord, Pluriform Love, 120.
619 Griffin, Evil Revisited, 98; Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 23.
1.) The pantheist God, whether personal or non-personal, is not wholly good, since the world is partly evil.

2.) A world of evil and suffering is not metaphysically perfect. Thus God is not metaphysically perfect.

3.) God is metaphysically perfect. Thus the world, including evil and suffering, is metaphysically perfect.

The first two answers accept that pantheism is incoherent with belief in a wholly good God (whether personal or not). The third answer maintains a belief in a wholly perfect God with the consequence that all evil and suffering must be understood as good and perfect. Furthermore, there is no reason to think that the world is good overall merely because it is necessarily how it is.

8.3. Conclusions

The problem of evil is vast and complicated. In this chapter I have analyzed and assessed limited aspects of this problem. I have analyzed and evaluated some important and possible ways to respond to the problem of evil from panentheistic and pantheistic perspectives. Given the material, I concluded that the panentheistic and the pantheistic argument about the suffering of God who suffers with us is unconvincing if the claim is that God needs to be physically embodied to suffer and thus empathize with us. It is very hard to determine whether empathy presupposes the ability to feel physically what the other feels. However, I concluded that theists do have epistemic reason to think that a necessarily loving God is necessarily relational. Strict panentheism holds God to be necessarily relational. Classical theism and qualified panentheism do not. Relational theology is not necessarily panentheistic, but I argued that it is not in a coherent sense classically theistic. However, strict panentheism suggests a necessarily relational God. Theists, therefore, have reason to think that panentheism – especially strict panentheism – has better resources to cope with evil and suffering than classical theism, because the strict panentheistic God necessarily loves the world while the classical theistic God appears to be loving only by choice. A God who chooses to love could withdraw God’s love. Furthermore, I have tried to show that it is difficult to conceptualize coherently an unchanging and simple God as essentially relational and loving, even when accepting that our descriptions of God are analogies. Faced with evil and suffering, therefore, theists have reason to think that a relational God is preferable to a non-relational God, because a relational God can love, relate, emote, and comfort.

Process-panentheists do not appeal to “divine, mysterious ways” when dealing with the problem of evil. The God of process-panentheism, coherently and without having to use equivocal language, can be conceived of as essentially loving, although not as omnipotent. The God of classical theism can – but does not – prevent horrendous evil and suffering. The God of process-
panentheism wants to prevent it, and constantly works to do so, but cannot unilaterally do so on God’s own. The process-God always persuades the world to realize God’s loving purpose and aim; but this God cannot unilaterally prevent evil and suffering. The non-process-panentheist God can prevent all evil and suffering, but chooses not to do so, just like the God of classical theism (and of open theism). Non-process-panentheists, just like classical theists, must hope that God has really good reasons for this. Process-panentheists, on the other hand, are not left only with the hope that a God they cannot coherently understand as loving has a good plan for using suffering and evil as means to achieve some greater good. Process-panentheists believe in an essentially loving God who wants to prevent evil and suffering singlehandedly, but cannot.

Therefore, limiting the focus to the problem of evil and the material analyzed in this chapter, theists have reason to prefer strict panentheism (the essential love argument). Suppose that, when contemplating the problem of evil, the theist also can give up belief in God’s omnipotence. In that case, she has reason to prefer process-panentheism to other versions of theism, because it has no problem reconciling the existence of evil and suffering with an essentially loving God.

Finally, I concluded that a pantheistic God could not be conceptualized as omni-good and wholly loving unless we were prepared to claim that the evil and suffering in the world are part of a metaphysically perfect state. Personal pantheism is a coherent position, depending on how personhood is conceptualized; but this personal pantheistic God cannot be wholly good. The pantheistic God must be conceptualized as partly evil, since the world contains much evil and suffering. Pantheists cannot distinguish divine essence from experience. In pantheism, they coincide. Limiting the focus to the problem of evil, a problem that theists have to address one way or another, theists have no reason to prefer pantheism to panentheism or classical theism.
9. Worship-worthiness

“Tyrannical people may worship a tyrant God, but why should the rest of us do so?”

In this chapter, the notion of worship-worthiness is explored philosophically. That which is worthy of the title “God” is traditionally believed to be worthy of worship, and it continues to be a widely used criterion when analyzing whether a conception of God is adequate or whether it refers to an idol. The present chapter shows that worship-worthiness could entail much more than is traditionally accepted.

Epistemic and pragmatic reasons to favor or reject a conception of God are weighed against each other. In some instances, truth-driven (epistemic) reasons substantially impact us when considering how best to conceptualize God. In other cases, benefit-driven (pragmatic) reasons speak louder when guiding us toward conceptualizing God in a particular way.

Process-panentheism, and even more frequently pantheism, are often refuted as inadequate conceptions of God because critics believe that the God of process-panentheism and of pantheism cannot be worthy of worship. Critics reject pantheism, for example, for rejecting the notion of a Creator-God, or for not agreeing with the traditional conception of God as a perfect person-like being with the omni-attributes. On the other hand, if theists immediately refute all conceptions except the one they themselves accept, why engage in discussion at all? This chapter analyzes the grounds on which panentheism and pantheism can be thought to promote a God worthy of worship, because there are other reasons to worship God than the attributes defended within classical perfect-being theology.

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620 Hartshorne, Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes, 59.
9.1. The traditional and radical models of worship

Before analyzing epistemic reasons for why particular attributes or characteristics are worship-worthy or not, it is relevant to give a preliminary account of what worship is. I argue below that it is fruitful to understand worship as expressing a desire to be united (somehow) with the divine reality, a reality that makes us feel sincere love, deep awe, reverence, and/or gratitude. How theists express this desire is beyond the scope and purpose of this examination. With this notion of why rather than how to worship, I turn to analyze epistemic criteria for worship.

What conditions should be satisfied for worship to be a coherent activity in which to engage? The traditional model of worship says that the object that is worthy of worship must be (1.) personal or person-like (somehow); (2.) “out there” as something distinct and separate from the worshiper; (3.) transcendent/spiritual; and (4.) experienced as superior and supremely valuable. According to the traditional model of worship, only a personal or person-like being or deity is worthy of worship. Rudolph Otto, Ninian Smart, Richard Swinburne, Peter Forrest, Yujin Nagasawa, Tim Bayne, and many more assume that the traditional model of worship is correct. At least, they do not seem to question it. The reason that some think that only a personal being can be worshiped is formulated in the conceptual argument for worship.

The conceptual argument for worship states that only that which can experience, respond to, and appreciate the worship it receives is conceptually worthy of worship, because worship necessarily requires an address — the worship is directed at someone or something. The conceptual argument for worship thus entails that only a personal being can be worthy of worship because only a personal being can know, appreciate, and respond to the worship she/he/it receives. However, as will be shown, theists have reason to reject the conceptual argument and the traditional model of worship.

Joshua Cockayne argues that the conceptual argument for worship is too narrow even for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The first divine commandment in the Hebrew Bible makes clear that believers should not worship any god other than God. This entails that it is conceptually coherent to worship other gods. The command only states that it is morally inappropriate to worship other gods. In other words, according to the first divine commandment, the conceptual argument for worship is too narrow.

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622 George D. Chryssides, “Subject and Object in Worship,” *Religious Studies* 23, no. 3 (September 1987): 367–68, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500018928. I have added to Chryssides’ conditions the third condition (that what is worshipped is something transcendent and spiritual) because it is obviously a significant reason why many traditional theists argue against panentheism and pantheism.


624 Cockayne, 11.
Theists have reason to reject the traditional model of worship. In the sections that follow, I show why they have reason to reject the three first conditions in the traditional model.

9.1.1. Condition one: worship as personal address

First, theists have reason to reject the first condition in the traditional model of worship—that worship must be aimed at someone personal or person-like. Cockayne shows this by using the distinctions of “strong address” and “weak address,” originally presented by Nicholas Wolterstorff. A strong address in worship involves a hope that the person/thing one is worshiping will respond and listen to the worship. A weak address in worship involves no such hope. Cockayne argues that it is conceptually coherent to worship a non-personal God in the weak sense. If we do not hope for a response, we can coherently worship, for example, a non-personal pantheist God–world.

If I know Martin, I do not merely know propositions about Martin, and I gain this additional knowledge by spending time with him. Cockayne calls this object knowledge. He then compares object knowledge with the knowledge described in James Elkin’s *What Painting Is*. A painter can gain something other than a propositional knowledge of paint. This other kind of knowledge is gained through close contact and interaction with paint, its qualities, and its colors. Similarly, theists can come to know God as a “Thou” through a personal relationship. According to Wolterstorff, if theists approach God as a person, they can attain an object knowledge of God. Cockayne thinks that we can achieve the same object knowledge as the painter can of paint even of a non-personal God.

Suppose that the worship is of the weak address kind. In that case, theists can coherently worship a non-personal pantheist God, gain object knowledge, and not have merely propositional knowledge of the God–world. If theists believe in a personal God, it is appropriate to direct a strong address to God, since that God is believed to be able to respond to or appreciate and experience the worship. If theists believe in a non-personal God, a strong address is conceptually inappropriate; but they can still direct worship in the weak address way.

Versions of Buddhism and Hinduism, or conceptions of God such as non-personal pantheism, that emphasize the non-personal unity of the Brahman, if one follows this line of reasoning, will not be excluded from worshiping the holy, even if these religions reject the personal character of the divine. As far as I can see, there is nothing in Otto’s *mysterium tremendum* that makes a non-

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625 Cockayne, 12; Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology*, 56–57.
626 Cockayne, “Personal and Non-Personal Worship,” 14.
627 Cockayne, 16.
personal God conceptually inadequate to worship. If a non-personal God can invoke the *numinous* feeling of the holy, why can it not be conceptually coherent to worship that God? If we accept that we cannot conceptually direct strong, but only weak, worship to a non-personal God, it can be conceptually coherent. So long as theists do not hope or believe that the non-personal God will respond to or experience the worship, they can coherently worship a non-personal God.

Furthermore, according to classical theism, God is immutable and impassible. It would seem that such a God cannot experience and respond to worship. If not, then theists must conclude that the classical theistic God is unworthy of worship according to the conceptual argument. That appears to be too strong a claim. Theists thus have several reasons to reject the first condition in the traditional model of worship.

9.1.2. Condition two: worshiping something “out there”

Theists also have reason to be skeptical about the second condition in the traditional model of worship – that the object for worship must be “out there,” and that there must be a distinction between the worshiper and that which is worshiped.

Chryssides argues that a proper object of worship can be a non-personal non-being, and that it does not even have to be distinct from the worshiper. He agrees with Smart, Otto, and Wolterstorff that worship is directed toward *something*. However, a radical model of worship, in Chryssides’ terms, is one that rejects the notion that there has to be a distinction between the worshiper and the worshiped. In the traditional model, this divide is essential; but for some religious persons, such as pantheists, this divide is non-existent. It would be a mistake to exclude religions or theologies that do not emphasize the ontological difference between the world and the divine from investigation, only because a particular concept of worship excludes them.

In some versions of pantheism, there is no real divide between the worshiper and the worshiped, because reality is God/Absolute/Brahman, and the God/Absolute/Brahman is the reality. There are no ontologically separate entities. What I take to be myself is, in such a pantheistic philosophy, not separate from anything else. The perception of distinct entities or selves is an illusion (*maya*).

Chryssides argues that worship is to live in harmony, to come to terms with the principles of reality, and to accept life’s predicaments. This is not, he says, to pretend or to act *as if* the divine is a personal and transcendent deity. The

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628 Chryssides, “Subject and Object in Worship.”

“thing” that is worshiped, in this radical model, is not a personal being that is separate from us; but still, it is something real. It is a divine principle, a unifying “source, guide and goal,” and the worship is directed at something, albeit not a distinct, separate personal or person-like being. The difference is that this something is everything in a sense. Personalistic metaphors can be psychologically helpful as we, as relational beings, make sense of the divine reality without its being the case that the divine unity is in fact personal.

In conclusion, we have reason to reject the second condition in the traditional model of worship. It is not logically or conceptually incoherent to worship something that is not believed to be separate or ontologically “out there.”

9.1.3. Condition three: worshiping the purely transcendent

Theists also have reason to be skeptical about the third condition in the traditional model of worship: that what is worshiped must be purely transcendent/spiritual. One element that many have deemed equivalent to a rejection of worship-worthiness is embodiment. According to this view, an embodied God cannot be worthy of worship. This conclusion is linked to the historical abhorrence of the physical, nature, and the female.630

Edward Feser, a classical theist, naturally thinks that God is wholly transcendent and spiritual. According to classical theism, anything that is not God is necessarily unworthy of worship. Even if the classical theistic God turned out not to exist, classical theists would still maintain that only the classical theistic God is worthy of worship. If such a God does not exist, then nothing is worthy of worship.631 On the classical theistic account, God is worthy of worship only if God is the uncaused First Cause, the unmoved pure actuality that is necessarily simple and without parts. In the words of Feser, “Anything less than God, being essentially creaturely, is necessarily unworthy of that sort of devotion.”632 In other words, according to classical theists, for “God” to be the only God worthy of worship, God must necessarily be purely transcendent and non-physical.

However, Grace Jantzen argues that an embodied or physical God can be worthy of worship because there is nothing inherent in the physical embodiedness that makes God less good, omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent.633 If the divine reality truly is identical to the world, then all knowledge and power in the world can be coherently thought to belong to it. A pantheistic

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630 For a historical overview of the Western abhorrence of the physical, see Rubenstein, Pantheologies, 63–101.
632 Feser, 194. Emphasis in the original.
God is undoubtedly also omnipresent. However, I have argued against the conclusion that a pantheistic God is perfectly good. Nevertheless, no coherent argument shows why it would be conceptually inappropriate to worship an embodied God. Instead, Jantzen claims that it would be idolatrous to worship a purely transcendent God if God, in fact, is embodied.  

(Of course, Feser and other classical theists disagree, since they think that only the classical theistic God is worthy of worship, even if such a God does not exist.)

But why think that bodiliness is a reason not to worship God? First, Jantzen clarifies that it is incoherent for a Christian to think that God cannot be worthy of worship if God is embodied. Jesus was God, and Jesus was embodied. No Christian would claim that Jesus was not worthy of worship because he was a physically embodied human being. Therefore, it cannot be the body in itself that makes someone or something unworthy of worship.

Second, it is often denied that an embodied God is worthy of worship, because bodiliness is taken to entail limitation, which is considered a non-worship-worthy quality. But even a classical theistic God is limited. God cannot do that which is logically impossible or that which contradicts God’s essence. A necessarily good God cannot sin or act immorally. Even classical theists agree on this. A limitation, therefore, is not a reason not to worship God.

Furthermore, a purely transcendent God is limited in knowledge, for how can a purely transcendent God know how it is to be a physical body? We can compare this with the example of Mary. Mary knows all the propositions about color, but has never seen more than black and white. Similarly, a transcendent spirit is also limited. Why, then, would it be inadequate to worship an embodied God? On what grounds would we assume that embodiedness makes God unworthy of worship? Jantzen’s answer is “None.”

Asha Lancaster-Thomas even argues that physicality should have primacy when it comes to worship-worthiness. She argues that embodiedness and physicality are great-making properties that make a physical God worthy of worship. She gives four reasons why the physical should have primacy. First, a physical being has causal power. It is better to have causal power than not to have it. Since theists believe that God is the source and ground of the causal world, it is reasonable to think that God is the ultimate causal, physical ground. “So far as we can observe, then, physical entities have more causal power than non-physical entities, perhaps even enough to provide causal closure.”

Therefore, according to Lancaster-Thomas, causal power can be a great-making attribute.

634 Jantzen, 519.
637 Jantzen, 518–19.
Second, Lancaster-Thomas suggests that observability and availability can be great-making attributes, since it is better to be visible and available than not. An available God that is physically present is better than an unavailable God with whom we cannot interact. It would be simply wondertful to touch God, interact with God physically, and have a personal physical relationship with God. It is easier to worship a visible and present God than a God who seems to hide.\footnote{Lancaster-Thomas, 83.}

Third, Lancaster-Thomas suggests that a physical God is more reliable than a non-physical God. Physical entities are reliable in their behavior. They act and react in an orderly fashion. Cause-and-effect and comprehensibility are linked to physical entities. Lancaster-Thomas thinks that the reliability inherent in physical entities “is an appealing quality for a personal God to have because a personal relationship with someone you can rely on to behave in a similar way over the course of time is comforting.”\footnote{Lancaster-Thomas, 84.}

Fourth, the beauty in the physical universe is a good reason to worship. The aesthetic beauty of the physical world is awe-inspiring, and constitutes the fourth reason why Lancaster-Thomas considers physical primacy when discussing worship-worthiness.\footnote{Lancaster-Thomas, 84.}

Thus theists have reason to reject the third condition in the traditional model of worship, because it is not necessarily the case that it is logically or conceptually incoherent to worship a physical and embodied deity.

9.1.4. Condition four: worshipping the supremely valuable

Do theists have reason to reject the fourth condition as well? I think not. The fourth condition in the traditional model of worship states that that which is worshiped is conceived as of superior worth. I do not find this problematic, and I take this to be accepted by non-personal pantheists as well. Even non-personal pantheists claim that the unified God–world is supremely valuable. Classical theists, panentheists, and pantheists all take “God” to be the ground of being, although in different senses. And the ground of being is presumably considered supremely valuable.

Worship is a relational activity. Worship expresses the superiority of that which is worshiped.\footnote{Smart, The Concept of Worship, 21–27.} This coheres with the ideas of Wolterstorff, who argues that worship is directed, that it has an aim, and that this aim causes the feeling of awe, reverence, and gratitude in the worshiper.\footnote{Wolterstorff, The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology, 30–32.} When one experiences that which Otto describes as \textit{mysterium tremendum}, one experiences the \textit{numinous} feeling of something superior; and worship as a desire to be united
with the divine reality is an appropriate response.\textsuperscript{644} That said, we have seen that the aim may not necessarily be considered to be ontologically distinct.

Jantzen also argues that worship – if it is morally adequate – is always directed toward something superior. The superiority can be in the form of moral superiority and in relation to authority. The worshiper regards that which is worshiped as authoritative in some sense. When we worship, we express a desire to obey or follow this superior authority. It would be incoherent to worship someone but not obey their commands (if they/it expressed commands).\textsuperscript{645}

N.T. Wright argues that, from an exegetical perspective, “biblical worship is grounded in the fact that God is the Creator of all.”\textsuperscript{646} This is part of the classical theistic argument for why only the classical theistic God is worthy of worship. In this understanding, if God is not conceptualized as the Creator of all, then God is not worthy of worship. The rejection of creatio ex nihilo, as we have seen, is a reason why panentheism in the form of process-panentheism is criticized. But if creation had been a living hell, would the Creator still be worthy of worship? I think not. If God were to command us to do immoral deeds, God would not be worthy of worship. However, God commands us to do no such thing if God is loving and omniscient. Jantzen writes, “Thus we see that it is a necessary condition that any being worthy of worship must be both wise enough and good enough never to give immoral commands.”\textsuperscript{647}

Last, according to Jantzen, worship is an expression of a “sincere and loving response.”\textsuperscript{648} Theists do not obey because they must or because God is superior in power and wisdom. They obey or follow because they sincerely love God and put their trust in God. The superiority of the divine would then not be about power or God being the Creator, but owing to the superior good and loving essence of the divine. Humans have reason to long for and strive to be united with a supremely good and loving essence.

In conclusion, even if the fourth condition in the traditional model of worship is not rejected, we have seen several other reasons to reject the traditional model.

9.2. Worship as desire to be united with the divine

I have argued that we have reason to reject the traditional model of worship, and shown that the conceptual argument, which states that only a personal


\textsuperscript{647} Jantzen, “On Worshipping an Embodied God,” 515.

\textsuperscript{648} Jantzen, 513.
being can be worthy of worship, is false. I suggest that, in worship, theists express a desire to be united (somehow) with the divine they experience as the supreme ground of being. This is applicable to classical theistic, panentheistic, and pantheistic conceptions of God. It is also applicable to both ontologically dualistic and monistic accounts of the God–world relationship.

As mentioned, I find the notion of worship-worthiness outlined by Wolterstorff quite compelling. According to him, worship is an appropriate response when we feel awe, reverence, and gratitude.\textsuperscript{649} To this I would add \textit{sincere love}: that which is worthy of worship gives us reason to feel sincere love, awe, reverence, and/or gratitude. Wolterstorff, of course, only focuses on the Christian God; but awe, reverence, and gratitude can be applied to a broader context as well. John Grula, a pantheist, says that we can feel awe, reverence, and gratitude before a pantheistic God–world – even a non-personal God–world.\textsuperscript{650} It is fruitful, therefore, to understand worship as expressing a desire to be united (somehow) with the divine reality, a reality that makes the worshiper feel deep love, awe, reverence, and/or gratitude. In worship, the worshiper freely expresses her feelings of sincere love and desire for unity.

Suppose that we accept this model of worship. In that case, pantheists and other non-personal believers can be engaged in worship; but this worship is not directed at something external, transcendent, or personal. Pantheists may, of course, claim that it is improper for them to worship, but they would still be conceptually coherent in doing so. However, we should note that theists are only conceptually coherent in worshiping a non-personal God if they do not hope or believe that this non-personal God can respond to or experience the worship.

The traditional model claims that only a person-like transcendent spirit is worthy of worship. I have presented several reasons to think that a non-personal and embodied God \textit{can}, in principle, be worthy of worship. When considering whether God as described by a particular conception is worthy of worship or not, we must consider both epistemic reasons – such as the ones presented above – and pragmatic ones. \textit{If theists are to worship God rationally, then the conception of this God/the divine should not contradict the idea of the flourishing life because, if it did, God/the divine could not be understood as being of superior worth.} We would hardly feel love, awe, reverence, or gratitude toward something that hinders the flourishing of life. And we would hardly have a desire to be united with something that we perceive as evil, or as preventing the flourishing of life.

So far I have argued that the following epistemic criteria should be satisfied if the activity of worship is to be conceptually coherent: (1.) the worship has an aim; it is directed; (2.) that which is worshiped must be of superior worth;

\textsuperscript{649} Wolterstorff, \textit{The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology}, 32.
\textsuperscript{650} Grula, “Pantheism Reconstructed: Ecotheology as a Successor to the Judeo-Christian, Enlightenment, and Postmodernist Paradigms.”
the worshiper freely expresses sincere love and a desire to be united (somehow) with that which is worshiped.

These conditions relate to divine goodness and power. The next section expands on how and why that it so.

9.2.1. Goodness and power as reasons for worship

If in worship theists express a sincere love and desire to be united with the divine reality, divine immense goodness must surely be a necessary condition. Human beings can be very good, but they are not proper objects for worship. The goodness in question must be, if not complete (such as perfect love), then at least of immense quality. If the divine is not at least immensely good, why feel love and a desire for closeness and unity? I thus take immense goodness to be a reasonable and morally necessary criterion when evaluating whether a conception of God describes a God worthy of worship.

In the chapters on panentheism and pantheism, it became clear that those critical of panentheism or pantheism are critical because they claim, among other things, that a panentheistic (especially in the process-panentheistic form) or pantheistic deity cannot be conceived of as omnipotent. Even if God’s power is not the only reason to worship God, it appears to be an essential ingredient for many. But should it be? The reason that divine power is important for worship-worthiness is (1.) because it relates to the creation and continued existence of the world, and (2.) because it relates to the problem of evil and suffering. A God who gives us no reason to hope for the end of all evil and suffering is likely less to be worthy of worship than a God who does. John Roth claims, for example, that a God who is not omnipotent in the traditional sense – such as the God of process-panentheism – is pathetic and unworthy of worship. Stephen Davis also assumes that a traditional masculine conception of divine power is the only one worthy of worship. According to Davis, a being that does not have unilateral power over everything, a being that cannot control everything if it wants to, is not worthy of worship. He even likens the God of process-panentheism to a mad and morally culpable scientist who cannot control the world he has fashioned. Davis does argue that, in

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651 Open theist Richard Rice writes that, if God does not have both coercive and persuasive power, “[then] something important to God’s love is lost.” Rice, “Process Theism and the Open View of God: The Crucial Difference,” 200.


isolation, omnipotence is not enough to be worthy of worship since “an omnipotent scoundrel would not be worthy of worship.”655 Still, according to thinkers such as Davis and Roth, absolute power to do and control everything is a necessary but not sufficient reason to worship someone.

Divine power of some sort might reasonably be thought to play a part in worship-worthiness; but is divine omnipotence – in the sense that God can do and control anything as long as it does not contradict God’s nature – a reasonably necessary criterion for worship-worthiness? Are there reasons to reject the necessity of traditional omnipotence in a worship-worthy God? Yes. In fact, there are several reasons to reject omnipotence as a worship-worthy attribute in someone.

Idolizing God as omnipotent often leads to a twisted glorification of power, most clearly seen in human rulers. When total power is glorified as good and perfect, humans (human rulers) have reason to seek the same kind of power; and human history has already seen enough of dictatorship, oppression, fascism, wars, and demonstrations of power.656 If divine power is understood as complete power to control, it legitimizes human dominant power. Furthermore, if God is omnipotent, it seems as if God approves of oppressive leaders and dictators. That which an omnipotent God does not prevent is at least better than any other option. If an omnipotent God does not prevent genocides and wars, then they are allowed. People with oppressive power can, following this logic, claim divine right. If God does not prevent their rule, God must think it is good, or at least as good as it gets.

This is a pragmatic critique; it says that theists should not conceptualize God as omnipotent, since that attribute is not worship-worthy, and it would lead to a theology with potentially harmful consequences.

Philosophers and theologians such as Nancy Frankenberry, Beverly Clack, Grace Jantzen, and Mary Daly claim that absolute authority has been given to the traditional Father-God, simultaneously ensuring that “Man” has superiority over women.657 Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki agrees with Frankenberry and Daly when she writes that the classically theistic attributes of God such as strength, wisdom, immutability, reliability, and so on have been associated historically with men. At the same time, the opposites – sinfulness, weakness, ignorance, and hesitancy – have been associated with women.658 Pamela Sue

655 Davis, 135.
Anderson also criticizes the classical conception of God, and argues that supreme perfection as an ideal produces a patriarchal conception of God. In excluding bodily matters and emotions from the ambit of “rationality” and in idealizing perfect power and perfect rational knowledge, the traditional philosophy of religion – with the help of the classical omni-concept of God – has excluded half of the human race and treated them as unequal. “If God is omni-perfect, why has half of the human race been treated unequally?”, Anderson asks.

Giving supreme perfection, and so authority, to the ideal of reason ensures the man has his ultimate gender ideal: the omni-perfect Father/God. Often there is still no awareness among philosophers of religion that their ideal is problematic; and this is re-enforced by divine, omni-perfect attributes […] Naturally, some philosophers and theologians do not agree that the classical concept of God is ipso facto patriarchal, but argue that it is an unfortunate result of historical, contextual, and cultural circumstances. This is true. However, a concept does not convey anything in itself, but gets its meaning from how it is used. If it is used oppressively, then that becomes reality. Omnipotence is used with the sense of absolute power to do and control anything. As Jantzen points out, a glorification of dominant divine power is grounded in a masculinist desire. According to this critique, the traditional concept of omnipotence is no longer tenable as an attribute of a God that is worthy of worship.

It is problematic to conceptualize power in ways that glorify unjustified masculine and dominant power-over or power-to-control. When power is maximized to an omni-attribute, the adverse effects are also omni-maximized. Omnipotence, understood as maximal power to control or dominate, is a non-worship-worthy attribute in a God. To repeat the quote from the beginning of this chapter: “Tyrannical people may worship a tyrant God, but why should the rest of us do so?”

660 Dembrof, 13.
661 Dembrof, 12–13.
662 Taliaferro and Meister, Contemporary Philosophical Theology, 116–18; Judge-Becker and Taliaferro, “Feminism and Theological Anthropology,” 86.
663 Jantzen, Becoming Divine, 88.
664 Feminist perspectives on power are primarily described in terms of power-over and power-to. See Johanna Oksala, “Feminism and Power,” in The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy, ed. Ann Garry, Serene J. Khader, and Alison Stone (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 678–88; Allen, “Feminist Perspectives on Power.” Amy Allen’s three-fold distinction of power as a resource, power as domination, and power as empowerment can, in turn, be framed in terms of the two main models, power-over and power-to. Allen also writes about a third model: power-with. She writes that it is a version of power-to, and I agree. See Allen, “Rethinking Power.”
Nevertheless, divine power of some sort still appears to be necessary for a God that is worthy of worship. A God that is completely impotent cannot love, act, create, lure, or encourage flourishing and good states. Theists would hardly feel sincere love for or a desire to be united with a God who cannot do or realize any of those things. This brings us back to panentheism and pantheism and their relationships to goodness and power as reasons for worship.

In the remaining parts of this chapter, I analyze and assess epistemic and pragmatic reasons to think that panentheism and pantheism either can or cannot be thought to be adequate conceptions of a God that is worthy of worship.

9.3. Panentheism, pantheism, and worship-worthiness

So far I have argued that panentheists and pantheists are only conceptually coherent if they worship a panentheistic or pantheistic God. The question to answer now is whether there are reasons to think that a panentheistic or pantheistic God is in fact worthy of worship. In this part of the chapter, the threads of what I have concluded in previous chapters are tied together and related to the discussion of worship-worthiness from the perspectives of goodness and power.

9.3.1. Worship and divine goodness

Earlier it was concluded that the argument claiming that God is more empathetic if the world is an ontological part of God is unconvincing. Panentheists sometimes claim that it is an advantage that the world’s sufferings are part of God, because this is supposed to make God more empathetic than a God who takes no part in the suffering. I have questioned the assumption that we must suffer ourselves to be loving and empathetic. An omnipresent God with omniscience could, as mentioned, be fully empathetic and understanding even if suffering were not an essential part of Godself. However, I did argue that only a relational God can be coherently understood to be empathetic and loving. In other words, it is likely not the case that the world has to be an ontological part of God for God to be empathetic and loving; but it is very hard to conceptualize coherently a perfectly simple, immutable, impassible, and independent God as empathetic and loving.

Since love is a relational process that presupposes activity and changes both in the beloved and in the one who loves, it is very hard to make sense of the notion that an essentially unchangeable, unaffected, and timeless God is essentially loving. Panentheism offers a relational theology – although there are other versions of theism, such as open theism, that also reject classical theistic timelessness, immutability, and impassibility. In other words, relational theology is not necessarily panentheistic, although strict panentheism necessarily
entails relational theology. Once again, theists have reason to favor strict panentheism over classical theism and other versions of panentheism.

How does worship-worthiness relate to how the conception of God impacts our lived experience— that is, its pragmatic consequences? When the question of divine goodness and worship-worthiness is extended to include pragmatic consequences, theists have some reason to think that God, as described in panentheism in general, is more worship-worthy than in classical theism because of the pragmatic advantages panentheism has over classical theism regarding gender equality; but only strict panentheism has pragmatic advantages regarding environmental well-being.

Since panentheism holds that the world is part of God and not merely created and sustained by an ontologically independent God, the ontological God–world dualism of panentheism is still less dualistic than the ontological God–world dualism of classical theism. I have concluded that, all other things being equal, it is reasonable to think that strict panentheism in particular has the potential to contribute to a more gender-inclusive and nature-inclusive reality than classical theism. The benefits for gender equality and environmental well-being resulting from conceptualizing God and the world in panentheistic terms outweigh the disadvantages, even if panentheism is false.

As a preliminary conclusion: when it comes to divine goodness and worship-worthiness, theists have reason to favor a relational theology, such as strict panentheism, if they believe that God is essentially loving. And theists should believe that God is essentially loving, because an essentially loving God is more worship-worthy than a God who is not. Moreover, based on the plausibly good pragmatic consequences of conceptualizing God in panentheistic terms, theists have reason to prefer at least strict panentheism to classical theism.

What about pantheism and goodness as a reason for worship? Personal pantheists naturally ascribe personhood, intentionality, and goodness to the pantheistic God. If, as perfect-being theologian Katherin Rogers suggests, only a morally responsible and good God is worthy of worship, then, at least in principle, the personal pantheist God can be worthy of worship. However, in a previous chapter on pantheism, I concluded that a pantheistic God cannot be perfectly good. A personal pantheist God can be good, but not all good. Only if theists reject the reality of evil and suffering in the world can they claim that the pantheistic God is all good. The price to pay for this stance is very high, namely its moral insensitivity and the plausible psychological and spiritual damage that such a denial causes in victims of great evil and suffering. Given both personal and non-personal pantheism, we have no obvious reason to think that the world’s good outweighs the bad. Maybe it does; but the world is certainly full of unimaginable evil and suffering that is not worthy of worship.

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The world’s goodness/badness does not constitute a good reason to worship a pantheistic God–world.

Furthermore, if an essentially loving God is more worship-worthy than a God who is not, then theists have reason to reject the pantheist God–world as worship-worthy.

What about if worship-worthiness is related to how the conception of God impacts our lived experience – that is, its pragmatic consequences? I have concluded that strict panentheism, everything else being equal, plausibly contributes to a world with more ecological well-being than classical theism does. I have also concluded that theists have no reason to think that pantheism would be better in this regard than strict panentheism. Nor do they have reason to think that panentheism would be better for gender equality than strict panentheism would be.

Since panentheism – especially strict panentheism – coherently subscribes to a perfectly and essentially loving God and has good pragmatic consequences, panentheism – especially strict panentheism – is preferable to pantheism.

In conclusion, regarding divine goodness and worship-worthiness, theists have reason to think that strict panentheism describes a God that is more worthy of worship than both classical theism and pantheism do. The classical theistic God is said to be perfectly good, but is not coherently relational and, therefore, not coherently loving. The pantheistic God is not perfectly good at all, but rather ambivalent. Strict panentheism coherently depicts God as perfectly loving and relational – something that neither classical theism nor pantheism does. Furthermore, theists have reason to believe that strict panentheism, all things being equal, has better pragmatic consequences for gender equality and environmental well-being than classical theism, and consequences that are at least equal to those of pantheism. In other words, theists have reason to believe that strict panentheism describes a God that is worthy of worship.

9.3.2. Worship and divine power

Divine power is intimately tied to divine goodness and love. In a previous chapter I said that I take it to be true that love is always a relational process of giving and receiving, that love always acts for the good, that love always acts for the other as an end and never only as a means, and that love always wants a free response from the beloved. If God is perfectly good and loving, God’s power is restricted by God’s loving nature. Everything God does must be seen through the primacy of love.

As we have seen, process-panentheism is criticized for promoting a God that is unworthy of worship. “I believe Griffin’s God [the process-God] is nowhere powerful enough to merit worship. Could a sick person rationally pray
to such a being for healing?” Stephen Davis asks this question, and his answer is “No.” According to him, the conception of God entailed by process-panentheism is too weak to be worthy of worship. A God who cannot prevent evil and suffering but can only try to persuade beings not to cause evil and suffering cannot promise a future eschatological state in which goodness has prevailed.

It should be noted that the eschatological hope for a future without suffering and evil is an extension claim. It is not a core claim of classical theism, panentheism, or pantheism. That said, worship-worthiness relates to divine power and eschatological hope, because theists may rationally think that a God who can coherently promise the end of suffering is more worship-worthy than a God who cannot.

We have seen that panentheism in the form of process-panentheism entails a rejection of traditional omnipotence. The process-God is not omnipotent and cannot intervene to stop evil and suffering. God can only persuade, according to process-panentheism. Furthermore, it may seem as if God’s persuasion repeatedly fails. Why is God not better at persuading? However, we do not know all the cases in which God successfully persuades actual beings to fulfill their good initial aims. It could be that the process-God is very successful, just that we cannot see it.

William Hasker argues that it would be better if God could use both persuasive and coercive power. Even David Griffin agrees that the process argument that God only has persuasive power is not a moral argument. Griffin agrees that, if God were to have coercive powers, there would be situations in which coercive interference would be morally permissible. Thomas Oord also agrees with this. However, the God of process-panentheism has no coercive powers. It is metaphysically impossible for that God to intervene coercively, even if it would be morally appropriate. In respect of worship-worthiness, is this not a weakness of process-panentheism? The answer is both “yes” and “no,” but in the end I argue “no.”

In classical theism, God is ultimately responsible for the existence of evil and suffering. If God created the world ex nihilo by free choice, God could end all suffering and evil. God’s choice to sustain the world’s existence involves the risk of suffering and evil. If such a God exists, it appears to be worth this risk. Classical theists, open theists, and process-panentheists agree on this point. The difference is that open theists and classical theists believe that God can intervene, that God sometimes does intervene, and that ultimately God will make everything good. The power of God gives them an eschatological hope that the process-panentheists cannot match.

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Given that it would be very good and a moral advantage to have both coercive and persuasive power, since coercive power can be used in loving ways and persuasive power can be used in harmful ways: is not an essentially loving God who has both more worship-worthy than a God who has only one of the two? The question is, Can an essentially loving God have both coercive and persuasive power? Oord thinks not. However, I see no reason to think otherwise, because I have shown that the reason that process-panentheists attribute purely persuasive power to God is not because of the nature of love but because of the core claims of process metaphysics. An essentially loving God must be essentially relational, but could very well have both coercive and persuasive power, since both forms of power can be used either lovingly or destructively. Recall that the reason that the process-God has purely persuasive power is not the fact that coercive power is inherently un-loving, but the fact that everything has self-determination, and that God is a non-physical spirit who has no physical body with which to act coercively. The fact that process-panentheists reject divine coercive power is linked to the doctrine of panexperientialism and the inherent relationality of everything.

The process-God cannot promise a definite end to all evil and suffering. The process-God can only try to persuade the free agents in the world, but cannot provide a definite end to evil and suffering. If the world sees an end to all evil, it is because God and creatures creatively work together to achieve good. The risk or possibility of evil and suffering, however, will always remain.

But, if coercive and persuasive power are both morally legitimate and loving, is there reason to prefer the process-God to strict non-process-panentheism, which holds God to have both coercive and persuasive power? Concerning power as a reason for worship, theists do have reason to prefer an essentially relational God, because only an essentially relational God is essentially loving, thereby making all use of divine power essentially loving. The mutual feedback effect between God and the world inherent in panentheism speaks of relationality, respect, and mutual responsibility. From a pragmatic perspective of critiquing the notion of omnipotence as masculine dominant power-over or power-to-control, this mutual responsibility and relationality are appealing.

Of all the conceptions of God surveyed in this study, only strict panentheism entails an essentially relational God. Process-panentheism is a version of strict panentheism, but, for the reasons presented here, theists may appear to have reason to think that strict non-process-panentheism conceptualizes a God that is more worthy of worship because such a God could prevent a bullet from killing an innocent. The obvious downside with this model of divine power is that theists then must appeal to “divine mystery” whenever God does not prevent evil and suffering. Given the harms to which the “logic of omnipotence” (that whatever is the case must be willed by God) contributes, theists have...
pragmatic reasons to think that a God who is not conceptualized as omnipotent but who is perfectly loving is more worthy of worship than a God who is so conceptualized. And only process-panentheism coherently entails a rejection of omnipotence.

As a preliminary conclusion, limiting the focus to the question of divine power and worship-worthiness, theists have reason to think that process-panentheism conceptualizes a God that is more worthy of worship than non-process-panentheism and classical theism, because those conceptions of God have much more difficulty handling the problem of evil.

What, then, about pantheism and power as a reason for worship? The claim that omnipotence entails that God ultimately wills everything that happens (“wills” in the sense that God does not interfere to stop it) is coherent with pantheism, especially the monistic all-is-one type of pantheism in which the only active force to exist is God/Brahman. Monistic all-is-one pantheism, such as Advaita Vedanta, sides with classical occasionalists in believing that only God has power. However, that someone/something has ultimate power is not a good reason to worship her/it. Their worship-worthiness depends on how the power is used.

If it is crucial to distinguish between the bad and the good use of power, we are back to the need to differentiate value coherently. I have argued that pluralistic one-is-all pantheism can make value differentiation. In contrast, the monistic all-is-one kind of pantheism entails that we have no value differences.

Focusing on divine power, a pantheistic God is not worthy of worship, since pantheists need to claim one of the following alternatives: (1.) that the pantheist God is not wholly good (since the world is partly evil and is full of suffering); (2.) that God is flawed or imperfect because of the evil and suffering inherent in the God–world; or (3.) that the suffering and evil of the world is actually good. None of those answers suggest a divine power that is worthy of worship. In other words, even if complete goodness is not a necessary condition for worship-worthiness, the world’s state of evil and suffering gives theists no good reason to think that it is worship-worthy. We do not even have good pragmatic consequences from suggesting that a pantheistic God is worthy of worship, based on the notion of divine power.

Given pantheism, theists cannot understand divine power as always loving in the sense suggested previously. I concluded that loving power coheres very well with panentheism, since the notion of love I have proposed holds love to be a relational process of giving and receiving, acting for the good and for the other as an end in itself, and that love always wants a free response from the beloved. The loving self and the other coexist in a mutual relationship. Divine love-power always acts to promote love, and love entails a relationship. This fits panentheism well, but does it also fit pantheism? There is reason to think that it does not.
Even if—as previously suggested—Andrei Buckareff and Peter Forrest are right in arguing that personal pantheism is a coherent position, and that pantheism can, in fact, be conceptualized in respect of a self-other distinction, pantheism is still not coherent with the suggested notion of love. The reason is that the pantheist God is not all good; and so the power entailed by a pantheistic God–world could not be understood as always and only acting to promote love and relationship. A God whose power is always and necessarily a loving power is worthy of worship, whereas a God whose power sometimes can be used in non-loving ways is not.

In conclusion, from the notion of divine power, theists have reason to reject pantheism as non-worship-worthy and instead to prefer strict panentheism—especially process-panentheism, since it offers a solution to the problem of evil that does not appeal to greater goods or glorify dominant power.

9.4. Conclusions

In this chapter I have presented several reasons why a philosophical discussion of worship-worthiness is needed. Theists should not immediately reject conceptions of God that entail a non-personal or embodied God. It is conceptually coherent to worship both personal and non-personal and physical and non-physical deities. However, the nature of the worship will vary, and there are better and worse reasons to worship something. I have argued that an embodied and even non-personal God can—in principle—be worthy of worship. I have also suggested that divine power as an essential love-power that always acts for the good and for the other as an end in itself, and always wants a free response from the beloved, is worship-worthy. God as conceived in process-panentheism can be so understood; the God–world of pantheism cannot. Given love and power, strict panentheism—especially process-panentheism—suggests a God that is worthy of worship.

Finally, does coherence with natural science affect God’s worship-worthiness? Does internal coherency? In so far as there are epistemic reasons to think that something is true and coherent, these aspects affect whether a conception of God can be thought to be a live option for a theist. A conception of God that is not even a live option cannot be coherently worthy of worship. Coherence and consistency with the worldview that, with the help of science, we know and explore is, therefore, of importance. A conception of God that is inconsistent or incompatible with scientific knowledge is thus not a live option at all. I concluded that classical theism, panentheism, and pantheism are all consistent with natural science, but that scientific perspectives on the origin of the universe give theists reason to reject pantheism and instead to favor panentheism or classical theism.
All in all, theists have several reasons, pertaining also to worship-worthiness, to prefer panentheism – especially strict panentheism and even process-panentheism – to classical theism and pantheism.
Throughout this dissertation, reasons for and against panentheism and pantheism have been systematized, critically analyzed, and philosophically evaluated. They have been contrasted with classical theism, and have been compared with one another and with classical theism. The overarching purpose has been to answer what reasons a theist has for embracing a panentheistic or pantheistic conception of God rather than a classical theistic conception of God. By focusing on both epistemic and pragmatic reasons, I have suggested several different kinds of reasons to favor panentheism, pantheism, or classical theism. To be able to weigh the epistemic and pragmatic reasons for and against panentheism and pantheism, I have used worship-worthiness as a methodological tool when evaluating which of these conceptions is the most adequate (even if no conception of God ever describes God in “Godself”). The conclusions are built on the assumption that epistemic and pragmatic considerations are equally important for the question of worship-worthiness.

A recurring conclusion throughout the dissertation is that strict panentheism is often preferred to other versions of panentheism. Furthermore, contrasted with classical theism, strict panentheism has better resources for environmental well-being and gender equality. Strict panentheism has no obvious pragmatic advantage to pantheism regarding environmental well-being and gender equality; but neither has pantheism. Given that only strict panentheism coherently conceptualizes God as essentially loving and that only process-panentheism coherently conceptualizes God as having persuasive power (which does not come with a patriarchal and dominating glorification of power), theists have reason to think that strict panentheism, and especially process-panentheism, is a more adequate conception of a God that is worthy of worship.

Naturally, I do not wish to suggest that either strict panentheism or the more specific process-panentheistic form is entirely problem-free. This investigation has not focused, for example, on traditional ontological and cosmological arguments for the existence of God. Plausibly, there are philosophic-theological problems with strict panentheism and process-panentheism that have not been addressed in this study. Process-panentheism has the advantage of offering a theodicy that does not glorify dominant masculine power or appeal to divine, mysterious ways and a greater good theodicy. However, process-panentheism comes with a metaphysical package deal that not everyone is willing to accept. Theists who cannot accept it should at least prefer strict
(non-process) panentheism; but if they do, they must also accept that it offers no advantage over classical theism regarding the problem of evil. The reason is that strict non-process-panentheists have no coherent reason to reject divine omnipotence and God’s ability to exercise both coercive and persuasive power.

Furthermore, the advantages of the panpsychist aspect of process-panentheism suggested in this study must also be followed by good ontological arguments in favor of panpsychism as a probable metaphysical theory. This is entirely achievable, and many scholars have argued for the reasonableness of a panpsychist metaphysics, and for process metaphysics in general. I have argued that a panpsychist perspective has explanatory advantages pertaining both to the fine-tuning and expansion of the universe and to environmental well-being and the problem of evil. It would also be relevant to investigate further how strict panentheism in general, and process-panentheism in particular, combines with specific religious commitments such as belief in the Christian Trinity (although this is mentioned in this study as well) and belief in life after death.

Finally, I summarize some advantages of process-panentheism that have been made visible throughout this dissertation.

Metaphysical advantages: Process-panentheism, and strict panentheism in general, avoids the problems of unity, value differentiation, and personhood that face pantheism. Even though I have tried to construct ways for pantheists to overcome these difficulties, panentheism need not face them at all. Process-panentheism also combines well with panpsychism/panexperientialism. In fact, panpsychism/panexperientialism is a necessary part of process-panentheism. Panpsychism has metaphysical advantages in solving the interaction problem (how the mind can interact with the physical, and vice versa) and the ontological combination problem (how complex levels of consciousness emerge from low-level forms of mind). Panpsychism is not necessarily committed to saying that subjects, consciousness, or life are fundamental; but it

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670 There is a research project on panpsychism that is funded by The John Templeton Foundation. See more on “Panpsychism and Pan(En)Theism.” Philip Goff, one of the main researchers in this project, defends the reasonableness of panpsychism. See, e.g., Philip Goff, “Did the Universe Design Itself?,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 85, no. 1 (2019): 99–122, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-018-9692-z.


672 John Cobb devotes a chapter to how to conceive of the Trinity and Jesus as Christ from a process-panentheistic perspective, in Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 95–110.

673 Mikael Leidenhag argues that panpsychism of a particular kind, in which non-cognitive experience is fundamental, combines with weak emergence theory, thus escaping the ontological combination problem. Leidenhag, *Naturalizing God?*, 212–16.
does say that experience, or some rudimentary form of mentality, is fundamental. Subjects, consciousness, and life, however, are emergent from the fundamental experiencing level of reality. By accepting such panpsychism and rejecting reductive physicalism and substance dualism, we can offer a more coherent view of reality as we know it—a reality clearly containing both physical and mental aspects.

Furthermore, process-panentheists do not conceptualize the universe as eternal, which pantheists should. Process-panentheists do hold some aspects of the world to be eternally co-existent with God, or that God eternally creates from that which God previously has created. But process-panentheists do not hold our universe to be eternal—a metaphysical commitment that has no scientific backing.

**Theological advantages:** Process-panentheism is coherent with science, which makes it a rational option for everyone who wishes to harmonize their view of God with the truth claims based on science with which they otherwise act in accordance. In this study I focused on the beginning of our universe from a scientific perspective, and concluded that process-panentheism is consistent with at least some scientific available and probable theories. Process-panentheism also offers a coherent answer to the problem of evil, and points to a God of essential love. Given the primacy of love, we must understand God’s power and relationship with the creation through this most worship-worthy quality. Process-panentheism, and strict panentheism in general, coherently conceptualize God as essentially loving, and thus as essentially relational. When suffering evil, an essentially loving and relational God is preferable to a non-essentially loving and contingently relational God. Christian theists can follow open theism and claim that God essentially relates and loves Godself (the Trinity) but not necessarily creation. However, this stance indicates that God is omnipotent, and open theists must face the same problem with theodicy as classical theists. Furthermore, it is not the case that process-panentheism is without coherent eschatological hope for a time when God’s love reigns. Process-panentheists must, however, accept that the possibility for evil and suffering will always remain, even if God eventually persuades all of creation to work alongside God in love.

**Ecological advantages:** I have concluded that a panpsychist framework implies significant ecological advantages, since panpsychists attribute experience or some mentality to the fundamental level of reality. Panpsychism offers

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674 Oliver Li presents a solution in which the eschatological state in process-panentheism can be seen in analogy with mathematical “attractions.” Evil would exist as a possibility but never again as realized. Lina Langby and Oliver Li, “Processsteism Och Lidandets Problem,” in Vidgade Perspektiv På Lidandets Problem, ed. Francis Jonbäck, Lina Langby, and Oliver Li (Stockholm: Dialogos, 2022), 259–83.
a metaphysical framework that includes non-human reality in the moral community, and thereby values non-human reality to a significantly greater degree than do metaphysical frameworks such as reductive physicalism or Cartesian substance monism. Strict panentheism need not include panpsychism, while process-panentheism does. In process-panentheism, we find a version of panpsychism that has significant potential to contribute to a worldview and a metaphysics that also takes the non-human world to be significantly valuable.

Advantages for gender equality: Given the process-panentheistic emphasis on the primordial nature of the world, we are presented with a worldview in which female and male aspects are part of the divine. Even though process-panentheists, just like most other theists, reject conceptions of God that are too anthropomorphic, we can see that pure reason, spirit, and transcendence have been, and still are, conceptualized as and connected to the male. If God is pure act, pure spirit, and pure transcendence, God is to some extent conceptualized as male (despite the rejection of anthropomorphism). The metaphysics of strict panentheism in general, and of process-panentheism in particular, thus contribute to a worldview and a conception of God that cannot be so conceptualized. Female and physical aspects are necessary parts of reality, according to process-panentheism – a reality that is properly a God–world relationship.


Peacocke, Arthur. “Articulating God’s Presence in and to the World Unveiled by the Sciences.” In *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic


Prior to 2002, studies in philosophy of religion from Uppsala university were published in a joint series with Lund university: Studia Philosophiae Religionis. The following books were published in this series:

17. Anders Nordgren, evolutionary thinking: an analysis of rationality, morality and religion from an evolutionary perspective. 1994.