

1 Introduction

God in western theism is often understood as ontologically *other*. Most analytic philosophers of religion characterize God as being both transcendent and the one to whom all things in our universe owe their existence. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, God is also understood as immanent and omnipresent, being near us, even *in* us, in some sense. There is no shortage of imagery and metaphors offered to represent the nearness of God. They range from medieval mystics using erotic language to describe encounters with the divine to contemporary evangelical Christians referring to God as their friend who “lives in their heart.” But most theologically sophisticated adherents to the Abrahamic religions usually fall short of emphasizing divine immanence and omnipresence so much that they identify God or some aspect of God with the universe. This is most likely due to the influence, however indirect, of what is often referred to as “traditional theism.”

In contemporary philosophy of religion “traditional theism” picks out that metaphysics of the divine on which God is understood as being the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, morally perfect, eternal, creator, and sustainer of the universe. *Qua* creator, God is additionally taken to be wholly ontologically independent of God’s creation. Finally, many proponents of traditional theism take God to be a nonembodied *person*.¹ Of course, there is no shortage of debates over how to think about these various divine attributes and their compatibility with one another. Alternatives to traditional theism, such as pantheism, deny that God possesses one or more of the aforementioned attributes.

Given that my focus here is on pantheism, I will not be concerned with any other alternatives to traditional theism (such as *panentheism*), except to point out where they contrast with pantheism. Regarding pantheism and traditional theism, the central commitment of traditional theism that the pantheist denies is the assumption that God is ontologically independent of the cosmos. God is taken by the pantheist to be identical with the totality of existents. What the precise implications of this sort of identity claim happen to be is a matter of some dispute and will be discussed in later sections of this Element.²

¹ Perhaps the most prominent recent presentation and defense of the doctrine of divine personhood is Richard Swinburne’s (1993). For critiques of Swinburne’s case for divine personhood that vary with respect to whether or not God should be understood as personal, see Davies 2016, Thatcher 1985, and Hewitt 2019. For a general defense of exploring alternatives to traditional theism, see Bishop 1998.

² Some have denied that pantheism is committed to such an identity claim and have maintained that if God and the universe stand in a constitution relation to one another (with either God constituting the universe (Effingham 2021) or the universe constituting God (Coleman 2019)), then that is sufficient for pantheism. I offer reasons for rejecting this claim in Section 2.

The term “pantheism” comes from the combination of the Greek *pan* (all, every) and *theos* (god). Pantheism as a conception of God has an ancient pedigree,³ but it has always been a minority view. The term “pantheism” is itself of relatively recent origin. John Toland (MacIntyre 1967/2006; Mander 2020) is often credited with first coining the term in 1705. While Toland was the first person of whom we are aware to use the English term, “pantheism,” Joseph Raphson first introduced the concept (using the Latin term “pantheismus”) in 1697 – eight years before Toland – in his work *De Spatio Reali seu Infinito*. Toland had commented upon Raphson’s work. So Toland was certainly familiar with Raphson’s use of the concept (Suttle 2008, 1342).

Given the relatively recent origin of the term “pantheism,” it may be anachronistic to identify a figure in the history of philosophy and religion as having embraced pantheism. Moreover, some figures are sufficiently ambiguous to at least make a pantheistic interpretation of their position plausible. Furthermore, outside of the west and India in the common era, it is not at all clear that the views of some figures are best identified as *pantheistic*. Given the controversies that accompany historical commentary, in this work I shall mostly avoid any discussion of historical figures. Any discussion of historical figures in this Element will only be to help shed light on current thinking about contemporary pantheistic proposals in debates over the metaphysics of the divine. And my focus will be fairly narrow. I will attempt to situate pantheism as a metaphysics of the divine within the context of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. More narrowly, still, I will be largely preoccupied with whether a suitable account of the unity of the cosmos can be delivered that will provide us with the truthmakers for treating the universe as the divine mind. Therefore, in what follows, I will be engaging almost exclusively with the work of analytic philosophers and framing my treatment of pantheism against the backdrop of recent debates in analytic philosophy of religion, philosophy of mind, and metaphysics.⁴

My primary goals in what follows are conceptual and metaphysical and not epistemological. I am most interested in distinguishing pantheism from other ways of conceiving of God. And I am concerned with exploring what the world must be like in order for pantheism to be a tenable metaphysics of the divine. Any epistemological implications of what I am doing here will have to do with the *prima facie* reasonability of pantheism as a coherent metaphysics of the

³ In the west, the earliest proponents of a pantheistic conception of God might have been the Stoics (Baltzly 2003).

⁴ I recommend that readers interested in the work of various historical figures on pantheism begin by consulting William Mander’s (2020) excellent entry on “Pantheism” in the *Stanford encyclopedia of Philosophy* and go on to examine Michael Levine’s (1994) seminal lengthy survey of pantheism (1994) as well as T. L. S. Sprigge’s (2006) magisterial study of the metaphysics of the divine that pays considerable attention to pantheistic proposals.

divine that is consistent with a scientific worldview. Therefore, while there is interesting work to be done on what reasons we have for believing that the pantheist God exists, I cannot do these matters any justice in this Element.

I will proceed as follows. In Section 2, I will focus on clarifying the concept we have in mind when we are talking about pantheism. Next, in Section 3, I will discuss the question of what kind of unity the universe must exhibit to be a candidate for being identical with God. I will argue that it must exhibit the sort of cognitive unity characteristic of minds. In Section 4, I will consider some candidate ontological frameworks that might deliver cognitive unity. I will then, finally, turn my attention to the question of whether God can be personal on pantheism. Owing to constraints of space, I will not take up challenges to pantheism in the various sections in any depth. Moreover, there are a host of other topics I cannot take up here owing to limitations of space.

2 Clarifying What We Could Mean by “Pantheism”

In his tome on pantheism, Michael Levine identifies “the central problem of pantheism” as determining what is meant by “pantheism” (1994, 25). I take it that any account of what is meant by “pantheism” will assume that it is a metaphysics of the divine on which God is identified with the cosmos. Conceptions of God on which the cosmos is part of God but on which God’s being does not share the ontological boundaries of the cosmos, are *panentheistic*.⁵ The distinction between these approaches to conceiving of the divine is often glossed over. Moreover, some ways of characterizing pantheism even fail to distinguish it from some versions of traditional theism. In this section, I will attempt to clarify the pantheistic conception of God in a way that renders it distinct from other conceptions of God that are panentheistic or variants of traditional theism.

2.1 First Attempt

Suppose we follow Spinoza and say that “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God” (1677/1985, E1p15, 420).⁶ If such an understanding of the relationship between God and the cosmos is taken to be sufficient for pantheism, then we get something like the following definition for “pantheism.”

⁵ For this reason, I take Nikk Effingham’s (2021) proposal on which God constitutes the universe but whose being may extend beyond the cosmos to fail to count as pantheistic but rather as a sort of inverted panentheism.

⁶ I do not wish to assert that Spinoza is best read as a pantheist. For an argument for reading him as a panentheist, see Melamed 2018.

(PAN₁) Pantheism=_{df.} Everything is in God and nothing can be or be conceived apart from God.

PAN₁ fails to deliver a conception of God that is a genuine alternative to some variants of traditional theism. The basic idea expressed in the definition is found in orthodox Jewish and orthodox Christian thinking about the divine.

PAN₁ as a statement of God's relationship to the world is expressed in the Jewish Medieval liturgical poem, *Shir ha-Yihud* (שִׁיר הַיְחוד) which is sometimes translated as "Hymn of Unity," "Hymn of Oneness," or "Song of Unity." The most relevant parts of the poem express a relationship between God and the cosmos on which all that exists is somehow internal to God. Divine immanence is described using imagery that calls to mind how God is described in PAN₁: "Thou encompasses everything and fillest everything; and being everything, Thou art in everything." And the inseparability of what there is from God is clearly expressed: "And Thou art not separate and apart from everything, no space is void and free from Thee" (Friedlander 1888, 28). The Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides, hardly a pantheist under any description, in his *Guide for the perplexed*, describes the ontological dependence of the cosmos on God thusly: "[I]t is through the existence of God that all things exist, and it is He who maintains their existence by that process which is called emanation. . . . If God did not exist, suppose this were possible, the universe would not exist. . . ." (1190/1904, 104). Similar sentiments are found in the Christian tradition. The Apostle Paul, in his oratory before Stoic and Epicurean philosophers at the Aeropagus, described God as the one in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28 NRSV). And, much later, in his *Institutes of the Christian religion*, John Calvin asserts that "our very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God" (1559/1960, Book. I, Chapter 1, 35).

Whether or not Spinoza was influenced in his thinking about how God relates to the cosmos by such statements as the foregoing is unimportant. What is important is that the sort of account of God's relationship to the cosmos we get from PAN₁ is not sufficient for pantheism. The conception of God we get with PAN₁ is *consistent* with pantheism. Moreover, it may articulate some implications of a different, better formulation of pantheism. But *it is not sufficient* for pantheism.

There are two claims made in PAN₁ about God's relationship to the cosmos. First, everything is internal to God in some sense. Second, nothing can exist or be conceived apart from God. I will refer to the first claim as the "internality hypothesis" and the second as the "conceptual-dependence hypothesis." Neither of these is separately nor jointly sufficient for pantheism.

The internality hypothesis has been taken by some to be a direct implication of a proper understanding of divine omnipresence and omnipotence. We find this way of thinking about God's relationship to the cosmos expressed in multiple places in the orthodox theistic cannon in philosophical theology. For instance, Anselm of Canterbury expresses this idea quite clearly in Chapter XXIII of his *Monologion* when he writes that "The supreme nature exists in everything that exists, just as much as it exists in every place. *It is not contained, but contains all*, by permeating all" (1066/1998, 40).

More recently, Robert Oakes (2006 and 2012) has gone to great pains to distinguish *theistic internalism* from *theistic consubstantialism*.⁷ According to theistic internalism, the universe is somehow internal to God. According to theistic consubstantialism, the universe and God are essentially made of the same stuff,⁸ with God being either identical with or wholly constituted by the cosmos. While theistic consubstantialism implies theistic internalism, Oakes argues that the converse is not the case. He argues that theistic internalism is implied by two divine attributes, namely, divine omnipresence and divine omnipotence. Regarding omnipresence, there is no ontological room, Oakes argues, for natural objects that are "ontologically *exterior* to a Being Whose plenitude is absolutely limitless" (2006, 174). With regard to omnipotence, Oakes asserts that divine omnipotence must include the power to produce objects interior to God (2012, 71). Elsewhere, I have argued that a commitment to theistic internalism, when coupled with certain other commitments about the nature of divine omniscience, commits one to theistic consubstantialism (Buckareff 2018). I will not rehearse my argument here. Rather, I will simply register my agreement with theistic internalists like Oakes that a commitment to theistic internalism, on its own, does not imply a commitment to theistic consubstantialism. If it does not commit us to theistic consubstantialism, then it does not commit us to pantheism. Moreover, even if it did imply a commitment to theistic consubstantialism, it does not follow that theistic consubstantialism implies a commitment to pantheism. Theistic

⁷ Views on God's relationship to the world that are motivated by a particular understanding of divine omnipresence that can be described as variants of theistic internalism can be found in Hudson 2009, Pruss, 2013, and Swinburne 1993.

⁸ I have used the locution "stuff" rather than referring to God and the universe being identical with or constituted by the same "substance" in the interest of avoiding attributing any particular ontological commitments to either pantheistic or panentheistic conceptions of the divine. It is not obvious that substance monism is an ontological commitment of either account of the divine (see Levine 1994 and Johnston 2009). For that matter, I do not wish to suggest that either is committed to substance as an irreducible ontological category. Process theists, who are panentheists, reject the category of substance outright in their ontology (see Whitehead 1929). Either conception of the divine is consistent with a range of ontological commitments regarding the primary ontological categories.

consubstantialism is neutral between pantheism and panentheism (where, by “panentheism” I mean any metaphysics of the divine on which the universe is a part of God but is not identical with God). Thus, the truth of the internality hypothesis does not suffice for the truth of pantheism.

As for the conceptual dependence of all things on the concept of God, this sentiment is rarely expressed as clearly as in PAN₁. But it is often implied. For instance, if nothing can exist apart from God and God cannot be conceived as not existing, then whatever exists cannot be conceived as existing apart from God. This seems to be a direct implication of Chapters III–IV and XIII of Anselm of Canterbury’s *Monologion* (1077/1998). Again, such an understanding of how things are conceptually dependent upon the concept of God is not unusual in traditional theism. Like the internality hypothesis, the conceptual-dependence hypothesis does not suffice to get us to pantheism.

While neither hypothesis is individually sufficient for pantheism, might they be jointly sufficient? No. All that we get from the conjunction of the two is an understanding of God that is not uniquely pantheistic but is, rather, commonly expressed by traditional theists who expressly reject pantheism. That said, both of these hypotheses may be direct implications of pantheistic commitments. I will leave this question for now and will turn to consider some alternative definitions of “pantheism.”

2.2 Second Attempt

Suppose that I am right that it is uninformative to be told that pantheism is the doctrine that everything is in God and depends upon and cannot be conceived apart from God. Will the following definition be an improvement (Mander 2020)?

(PAN₂) Pantheism=_{df.} God is everything.

PAN₂ definitely distinguishes pantheism from traditional theism given that traditional theists will reject saying that God is everything. But it does little to distinguish pantheism from panentheism. The reason why is that we can understand the “is” in “God is everything” in terms of *either* identity or constitution. More clearly, PAN₂ is ambiguous between the claims that God is *wholly constituted* by everything (but *not* identical with everything) and that God is *identical* with everything. Moreover, further distinctions can be made between different ways to understand what the intended referent of “everything” is and how things must fit together in order for everything to be God. But that is something we will wait to take up in subsections 2.3 and 2.4. For now, it is worth noting just how uninformative PAN₂ is. In particular, I wish to focus on

the just-mentioned fact that it is ambiguous between an identity claim and a constitution claim (assuming that constitution is a relation that is different from identity). Let me explain.

Suppose that by “everything” we mean to refer to all of the existents in the universe. If God is wholly constituted by everything, then God and the universe are distinct coinciding entities that share all of the same properties. Some of these properties are essential properties of God’s and are merely accidental properties of the cosmos, and vice versa. A consequence of this is that God and the cosmos have different persistence conditions. So in assuming that God is everything, where the “is” is the “is” of constitution, then the conception of God that is correct would be panentheistic.⁹ This view can be contrasted with the pantheistic claim that assumes that God is *identical with* everything (where by “everything” we mean the entire cosmos). Nothing about the divine being transcends the universe on such a view. Yet, again, assuming that by “everything” we mean the totality of existents in the universe, both views can assert that “God is everything.” So how important is it that we insist on understanding pantheism as being committed to God’s being *identical* with the universe?

Consider the claim that God is identical with everything. I suggest that, in discussing pantheism and identifying God with everything, we restrict the extension of “everything” to the universe. Why do this? Failure to do this, again, will result in our failing to distinguish pantheism from panentheism. A panentheist can accept that God is identical with everything if everything includes entities that go beyond those that are constitutive of the universe. Charles Hartshorne underscored this difference between pantheism and his own preferred process version of panentheism. He noted that what makes God divine is distinct from the “cosmic collection” that is the universe (1948, 88). This is so for at least two reasons. First, “The divine personal essence . . . infinitely transcends the de facto totality . . .” (Hartshorne 1948, 89). That is, the divine is not limited to the totality of existents that we identify with the universe. Second, Hartshorne notes that “the essence of God is compatible with any possible universe” (Hartshorne 1948, 89). In light of the difference, he suggests that “panentheism” is the best term to pick out the metaphysics of the divine on which God is “in some real aspect distinguishable from and independent of any and all relative items, and yet, taken as an actual whole, includes all relative items” (Hartshorne 1948, 89). Hartshorne’s position is perfectly compatible

⁹ See Johnston 2009 for a presentation of this sort of panentheism on which God is constituted by the physical universe. See Buckareff 2016 and 2019 for critiques of this sort of view of God as well as arguments for why we ought to accept pantheism over such a panentheistic conception of the divine.

with the claim that God is identical with everything where everything may be constituted by more than the cosmos.

Thus, there are least two reasons we should resist taking pantheism to be the thesis that “God is everything.” First, if we limit the extension of “everything” to be all that exists in the universe, it could be true that God is everything, but God is not identical with everything (being wholly constituted by the universe in the aforementioned sense). Second, “everything” could include more than the cosmos, and God could be identical with everything, but the conception of the divine that results would, again, be panentheistic rather than pantheistic.

So, if we take pantheism to be the metaphysics of the divine on which God is everything, there are two assumptions that we must make. First the “is” in “God is everything” is the “is” of identity, not constitution. Second, “everything” is the totality of existents constitutive of the universe.

2.3 A Better Definition

Given the foregoing, I suggest that we accept the following as the working definition of “pantheism” for the purposes of this Element:

(PAN₃) Pantheism =_{df.} God is identical with the totality of existents constitutive of the universe.

This definition is not ambiguous in the ways that the previous two definitions are. PAN₃ would be rejected outright by both the traditional theist and the panentheist. For the former, it would be because it fails to respect the ontological cleavage between the creator and creation. For the latter, it would be because the “is” of identity expresses the wrong sort of relationship between God and the cosmos.

On PAN₃, pantheism is taken to be the thesis that God is only identical with those existents that are together constitutive of the universe and nothing more. But is this too restrictive? If it is not, what more might be included among the totality of existents? I propose that we restrict our focus to variants of pantheism that are consistent with ontological naturalism and *at least* a modest realism about the objects in our experience (where by “modest realism” I mean the metaphysical theory that holds that our representations of things in the world countenanced by the various sciences can be true even if there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the existents that make our representations true and the representations themselves). I will argue that this focus is not too restrictive. Rather, it provides us with some boundaries to help guide our inquiry in what follows. Given the assumptions of ontological naturalism and modest realism, the constituents of the universe will be the sorts of existents that are

consistent with our experiences and best scientific theories. Hence, we get a principled basis for the boundaries and for determining what would fall outside of them.

If we are going to understand pantheism as a metaphysics of the divine that is committed to a version of ontological naturalism, then a definition of “ontological naturalism” is needed. Here we must tread carefully, we need a definition that is neither too restrictive nor too liberal. The schema I will offer is based on a definition given by David M. Armstrong according to which ontological naturalism is the hypothesis that “reality, the whole of being, is constituted by the spacetime world” (1999, 84). So, consider the following:

(OntNat) A theory *T* is ontologically naturalistic if and only if *T* does not countenance the existence of any entities that are not constituents of the spatiotemporal system that is the universe.

If ontological naturalism is correct, then the world is the universe. Regarding the restrictions placed by this definition on what counts as a naturalistically admissible entity, entities such as Platonic Forms and other abstracta that are assumed to be nonspatiotemporal are regarded as nonnatural (as most of their proponents would admit). Hence, assuming the circumscribed parameters of what sorts of things are admissible in our ontology given OntNat, such things are precluded from being among the existents in the world.

A further advantage of OntNat is that it is a view that does not admit of entities that have more or less being. What is, simply is. Any actual objects are *real* objects. Assuming OntNat, there are not also, contra Alexius Meinong (and those sympathetic to proposals like his), *ideal* objects (1904/1960, 78–81). The only ontological status an entity has is either existing or not. There is not a *recherché* third category of being such as Meinong’s *bestehen* (“subsistence” – which, in contrast to existence, is a timeless mode of being).

A further advantage of OntNat is worth noting. While OntNat provides some parameters for what sorts of entities are admissible assuming ontological naturalism, it is more liberal than some other definitions of ontological naturalism. For instance, OntNat does not entail physicalism (by “physicalism” I mean the hypothesis that everything is physical in the sense of being the sort of entities whose nature is exhaustively described by a complete physical theory). OntNat leaves it an open question whether or not there are natural objects, properties, and laws involving them that are not physical in the relevant sense.

It may be argued that OntNat is too restrictive. For instance, it may preclude some recent pantheist proposals such as István Aranyosi’s “logical pantheism” (2013). On Aranyosi’s metaphysics of the divine, God is identical with logical space. First, logical space, on his account, is the “space of the Absolute

Everything” (Aranyosi 2013, 9). The space of Absolute Everything is larger than the space of all possible worlds (although logical space contains all possible worlds). It is the largest conceivable space. He refers to this as the thesis of “Logical Totalitarianism” (Aranyosi 2013, 13). Importantly, on logical pantheism, there is no such thing as existing *simpliciter*, but only “*existing-relative-to-a-region-of-logical space*.” And for an object, *a*, to exist-relative-to-a-region-*R*-of-logical-space is simply for *R* to depict *a* as being some way. For example, Pegasus exists-relative-to-Schwine’s-surroundings, which means that the story figuring Schwine depicts Pegasus as an existing winged horse (Aranyosi 2013, 25).

There is more to Aranyosi’s logical pantheism that I will ignore given that the remaining details are not relevant for my purposes here. For now, notice that if God is identical with logical space then such a metaphysics of the divine is not an ontologically naturalistic account of the divine given OntNat. What exists is not exhausted by what is in spacetime. Moreover, things do not exist *simpliciter*. Their being is relative to a region of logical space. The metaphysics of the divine that we get on logical pantheism fits comfortably in the same metaphysical neighborhood as Meinongianism about objects. But this is an allegedly pantheistic proposal. Given OntNat, I am suggesting we take logical pantheism to lie outside of the boundaries of what counts as pantheism and, hence, not consider it as a viable candidate for a pantheistic metaphysics of the divine. This may strike some readers as unduly restrictive.¹⁰

While some may find it worrisome that accounts like logical pantheism do not receive any attention in what follows, we should consider how the proponents of views like logical pantheism situate their metaphysics of the divine within philosophical theology. What may come as no surprise to some is that Aranyosi is careful to distinguish logical pantheism from what he refers to as “classical pantheism,” which identifies God with the cosmos. He explicitly characterizes logical pantheism as a species of *panentheism* on which God *contains* the cosmos.¹¹ In fact, logical pantheism, according to Aranyosi, “can be considered the most inclusive type of panentheism, because God is identified with Logical Space. . . .” (Aranyosi 2013, 117). Given Aranyosi’s own

¹⁰ Similar worries to the ones I am raising with respect to Aranyosi’s proposed theory apply to Eric Steinhart’s (2004) proposal that a class-theoretic Pythagorean ontology, on which God is identical with the plenum (which is the maximal consistent set), is the best candidate to support pantheism. Two problems arise for this account. First, Steinhart’s account countenances abstract entities that are nonnatural in the plenum. Hence, it runs contrary to OntNat. Second, God is more than the cosmos. So it looks more like panentheism. In fact, Steinhart effectively concedes as much by indicating that the plenum is supernatural (Steinhart 2004, 76).

¹¹ Incidentally, Nikk Effingham’s (2021) CaML Model of Pantheism implies that the cosmos is contained by God in some sense (with God constituting the universe but not sharing ontological boundaries with the universe).