International Journal for Philosophy of Religion (2019) 85:43–62
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-018-9695-9

ARTICLE

God's omnipresence in the world: on possible meanings of 'en' in panentheism

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Received: 2 November 2018 / Accepted: 13 November 2018 / Published online: 26 November 2018

Abstract

Panenetheism is the claim that God and the cosmos are intimately inter-related, with the cosmos being in God and God being in the cosmos. What does this exactly mean? The aim of this paper is to address this question by sheding light on four possible models of God-world-inter-relatedness. Being critical of those models, which understand maximal immanence in a literal, spatial sense, the paper argues in favor of a model, which cashes out immanence in terms of divine activity. God is, where God acts. Since God acts upon all of creation everywhere and anytime, God is omnipresent to it at all times. Thus, the proposal is to read the 'en' in 'panetheism' in an 'agential sense': God is in the cosmos by creating and sustaining it and the cosmos is in God by constantly being within the sphere of divine activity.

Keywords Panentheism · Divine immanence · Models of divine omnipresence · Metaphysics of material objects

Introduction

Panentheism has gained increased attention among theological circles in the last decades. By now it presents a traditional strand in theology on its own[1] with such prolific and productive representatives as Charles Harthshorne, Jürgen Moltmann, Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne, Joseph Bracken and Philip Clayton to name just a few. However, a clear classification has proven hard to achieve. Rather than a monolithic block, panentheism is better characterized as a cluster of different theological accounts sharing some common features.[2] For this reason, I consider

[1] See, for instance, Diller and Kasher (2013), who devote a separate section to panentheism.
[2] Clayton (2017).

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panentheism to be a theological research program rather than a specific theological thesis. Roughly put, a research program consists of a hard core, that is, its most essential presuppositions, and auxiliary hypotheses. Seeing panentheism as a research program brings with it a couple of consequences.

First, research programs are not true or false *simpliciter* but argumentatively strong or weak, scientifically progressive or degenerative, consonant or dissonant with our overall knowledge of reality.

Second, a research program consists of various sub-programs and different research accounts, which implies that a clear distinction of one research program from another is hard to achieve. There might even be a partial overlap among sub-programs of distinct research programs. For this reason, a primary aim of this paper is not to develop possible demarcation lines between panentheism and other accounts such as classical theism, although I will say a little bit about this distinction at the very end of this paper.[3]

More important for my purposes is to specify what the particular hard core of panentheism, or an essential part of it, might be. An obvious method obvious method for doing so is to identify central commitments of its proponents. In his survey article on panentheism, Michael W. Brierley enumerates the following central themes, among others: (1) the cosmos as God's body, (2) the cosmos as sacrament, (3) God's dependence on the cosmos, (4) the inextricable intertwining of God and cosmos and (5) divine passibility.[4] The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines panentheism as the view considering "God and the world to be inter-related with the world being in God and God being in the world."[5] Clayton says that, concisely put, "panentheism is the claim that *the world exists within the Divine, although God is also more than the world*."[6]

These brief statements highlight that proponents of panentheism challenge the view of a God being external to, separated from and unaffected by the cosmos—a view generally ascribed to positions labelled as classical theism. A unifying theme among panentheists is the aim to construct a maximally strong sense of divine immanence. The inter-relatedness between God and world is considered as something so strong that one is justified in saying that the cosmos is 'within' God and God is 'within' the cosmos not only in a metaphorical but metaphysical sense. However, this inter-relatedness does not collapse into a pantheistic identity-relation between God and the cosmos because panentheists explicitly stress that the cosmos is not divine. Thus, panentheists are seeking a passage between the Scylla of a strict ontological divide between God and cosmos on the one hand, and the Charybdis of God and cosmos collapsing into one.[7] Finding such a passage depends on how to spell out the 'en' in panentheism.

[3] There are intensive discussions about this issue. See, for instance, Göcke (2013) and Mullins (2016).

[4] Brierley (2004).

[5] https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panentheism/#ConExp (last access on October 15, 2018).

[6] Clayton (2017, 1045).

[7] Bracken's claim in Bracken (2015, 221), is a telling example of this driving panentheist motive: "[…] the aim of this article has been to eliminate any kind of dualism, even the dualism between God and the world of creation, through the employment of a uniform systems-oriented understanding of the God-world relationship."

The aim of this paper is to shed light on possible models of God-world-interrelatedness, which stress maximal divine immanence. Since the classical attribute of divine omnipresence presupposes a divine 'being present at'-relation to all places and parts of the cosmos, I will exploit recent discussions on omnipresence for explicating how one could conceive of maximal divine immanence. In what follows, I will discuss four models of God's presence in the world. The first is inspired by modern metaphysics on material objects; the second refers to the concept of absolute space, the third aims at explicating how immaterial entities can be omnipresent in strict spatial terms and the fourth alludes to an understanding of omnipresence in terms of divine agency.[8]

Clarifying groundwork

In order to avoid confusion some theoretical machinery is needed. One obvious point to start with is the claim that a material object bears a 'being present at'-relation to a specific region of space. 'Being present at' is a generic notion, however, which needs further explication. Thus, it is helpful to distinguish between basic and non-basic ways of a material object 'being present at'.

'Being present at' in a basic sense means that any locative facts about an object's presence in a region in space are entirely constituted by facts about this object itself and its relation of being present at this region in space.

'Being present at' in a non-basic sense, instead, means that any locative facts about an object's presence in a region in space are constituted by facts about another entity (or entities) bearing a 'present at'-relation in a basic sense and to which the object in question stands in a particular relation. Thus, 'being present at' non-basically amounts to being present at in a derivative sense.

'Being present at' in a basic and non-basic sense is mutually exclusive. One and the same entity cannot enjoy both relations to a region in space at the same time and place. A king, for instance, sitting on his throne is a material object being present at the specific location where his throne stands in a basic sense. The same king is present in a non-basic sense throughout his entire kingdom in virtue of official deputies representing him.

In a second step different modes of how a material object occupies a specific location can be differentiated. Hud Hudson identifies the following relations between material objects and locations.[9]:

> 'x is entirely located at r' = df x is located at r and there is no region of space-time disjoint from r at which x is located

[8] One may say that the first three accounts propose to construe God's presence in the world in a direct manner whereas the last one accounts for it indirectly in terms of God's omnipresent activity in relation to creation.

[9] Hudson (2009).

> 'x is wholly located at r' = df x is located at r and there is no proper part of x not located at r
>
> 'x is partly located at r' = df x has a proper part entirely located at r
>
> 'x pertends' = df x is an object that is entirely located at a non-point-sized region, r, and for each proper subregion of r, r*, x has a proper part entirely located at r*
>
> 'x entends' = df x is an object that is wholly and entirely located at a non-point-sized region, r, and for each proper subregion of r, r*, x is wholly located at r*

These definitions are in need of some specification. To begin with, one might be inclined to conflate being 'entirely located at r' with being 'wholly located at r'. The former, however, specifies that an object x is solely located at one region r_1 whereas the latter does not exclude the possibility that x is wholly located at a different disjoint region r_2 as well. So being 'wholly located at r' allows for multiple location but being 'entirely located at r' does not. If I am 'entirely located' in a specific region in my bathroom, then there is no region disjoint from my bathroom where I am located as well. The one and only region among all the existing regions in space I am occupying is the one region in my bathroom containing me. Being 'wholly located' in a region in my bathroom, instead, does not exclude my being 'wholly located' in another disjoint region as well—if I am able to bi-or even multi-locate.

The terms 'pertend' and 'entend' are analogous to the technical terms in the philosophy of time made prominent by David Lewis. He writes:

> Something *perdures* iff it persists by having different temporal parts, or stages, at different times, though no one part of it is wholly present at more than one time; whereas it *endures* iff it persists by being wholly present at more than one time.[10]

The leading assumption is that there are two possible modes of existence for objects in time. Either an object exists in virtue of distinct temporal parts being present at every time throughout its existence or an object is wholly present at every time of its existence because the object as such and not its temporal parts constitute its existence throughout time.

If this distinction is analogically applied to the dimension of space, two different modes of existence in space follow. To pertend in space means that an object is exclusively located at one specific region in space, r, and each proper part of this object is exclusively located at a proper sub-region, r*, of r. In other words, assuming that a region bears part-whole-relations to other (smaller) regions, which constitute proper parts of it, one can claim that an object is spread out through space because each of the proper parts constituting this object is exclusively located at one of the proper sub-regions constituting the overall region where the object in question is entirely located. Take, for instance, my body. It is located at a specific

[10] Lewis (1986, 202).

region—call it 'my-body-region'. If my body pertends, then one proper part of it, my head, is entirely located at one sub-region of my-body-region and another proper part of it, my right leg, is entirely located at another sub-region of my-body-region, and all these sub-regions with the proper parts of my body within them, constitute my-body-region with my body within it.

To entend in space, instead, means that an object in its entirety is located exclusively at one region and it is located wholly in all the sub-regions constituting this region as well. If my body entends, then my body is present at the region it occupies and not merely some proper parts of it. In a sub-region of my-body-region, say the one of my right leg, not only my right leg as a proper part of my body is located. Rather, the claim is that my body in its wholeness is located at this specific sub-region; and the same goes for all other sub-regions of my-body-region as well.

In order to complete the picture, I follow Hudson's reflections and discuss briefly two more options. Consider the question whether an object x, when located at a region r, is thereby automatically located at each of the sub-regions of r, r*, r**, etc., too. In the light of the aforementioned distinction, a proponent of entending will argue for the affirmative with the addition that x is wholly present at its sub-regions. A proponent of pertending will argue for the affirmative as well, however, with the addition that at each sub-region of r is located entirely a proper part of x. Another possibility for a material object to exist in space is that an object is wholly and entirely located at a region r but without bearing neither a pertending- nor an entending relation to r's proper sub-regions. So, the fact that x occupies region r does not imply that x either wholly or partly occupies one of r's proper sub-regions as well. Consequently, any form of multiple location is excluded. Figuratively spoken, such objects 'span' over the region at which they are located but without 'touching' any of the region's proper sub-parts. Hudson provides us with the following definition for them:

> 'x spans' = df x is an object that is wholly and entirely located at exactly one non-point-sized region, r, and there is no proper subregion of r, r*, such that any part of x is located at r*[11]

Finally, consider the question whether an object x, located at each of two regions, r_1 and r_2, is thereby located at the fusion of r_1 and r_2 as well. The natural suggestion is to give an affirmative answer. However, this is not the only answer possible. Think of the 'being located at'-relation not as a one–one- but as a one-many-relation (as friends of entension do). Then lift the requirement of an entending object to be wholly located at each of the regions where it is located. If so, then it is possible that a single object occupies all and only the members of the set of regions where it is located but not any fusions thereof.[12] In other words, there could exist an extended simple object enjoying a location-relation at two non-overlapping regions r_1 and r_2 but no other region. Such an object would be wholly located at more than one region, namely r_1 and r_2 (as entending objects would have it). Due to its extended

[11] Hudson (2009).

[12] For more details see Hudson (2009, 208).

simple-ness, however, it would not be located at any sub-region of r_1 and r_2 (as spanning objects would have it). Finally, such an object fails to be located at the fused region of r_1 and r_2 because it is exclusively located at r_1 and r_2. Hudson gives us the following definition of this kind of object in space:

> 'x multiply locates' = df (i) x is an object that is located at more than one region, and (ii) x is not located at the fusion of the regions at which x is located.[13]

This definition concludes this brief tour de force through the metaphysics of material objects and their location-relations. These considerations should help to put some flesh on the bones of the panentheist phrasing that God is in a maximally immanent sense in the cosmos and the cosmos in a maximally immanent sense in God literally and not merely metaphorically.

God's immanence in the cosmos: ubiquitous entension

Following Hudson's suggestions, an entity's relation to a region can be construed as pertending, spanning, being multiple located or entending. Applied to God, we yield the following results:

To pertend presupposes that an entity has proper parts, which occupy the sub-regions of the overall region containing it. This contradicts the traditional doctrine that God is without any parts and is therefore to be ruled out by those sticking to the doctrine of divine simplicity.

To span does not presuppose that an entity has proper parts but it excludes multi-location. Thus, there is only exclusive region of God's presence. All sub-regions thereof as well as possible super-regions containing the region of God's presence, instead, are places characterized by God's absence. This account appears far too restrictive for reconstructing divine omnipresence.

To be multiple located is a more liberal concept than spanning; however, it contains one unduly restriction: A multiple located entity cannot be present at all possible regions because its presence is excluded from the fusion of the regions where it is located. Thus, even though God might be present at all regions in the cosmos, He cannot be present at the most encompassing region resulting from the fusion of all other ones.

Therefore, Hudson's proposal is to construe divine omnipresence in terms of ubiquitous entension[14]: God is located at each region in space—wholly and entirely at the most inclusive region, say the cosmos, and wholly at all its proper sub-regions. Accordingly, there is no region disjoint from the cosmos where God is located too and within the cosmos God is present everywhere in its whole plenitude.

At this point one could raise the following worry: A entity might be able to achieve this because it has a body. To have a body appears to be a necessary

[13] Hudson (2009, 208).
[14] Hudson (2009, 209).

condition for bearing a location-relation to a specific region. Occupying a region implies having size, shape, dimensionality etc., in short, to be in a way traditionally associated with material existence. God, however, is traditionally considered to be immaterial. Hudson is aware of this worry and writes:

> Anyone similarly attracted to the simple occupancy analysis of 'material object' and these related theses has a bullet to bite if he wants to endorse an entension-based reading of omnipresence, for God will then exemplify the shape, size, dimensionality, topology, and boundaries of whatever is the most inclusive region. […] It would seem that some kind of embodiment will turn out to be an unavoidable cost of the present hypothesis […].[15]

According to Hudson's proposal, God is a material object in a literal sense. God is not just material in some indirect manner due to a specific relationship to a material world as, for instance, according to the constitution view a person is material because it bears a constitution-relation to the living organism as her material constituent.[16] Rather, God is material in a basic sense because God Himself is occupying the region of the entire cosmos and all its sub-regions in a direct and non-derivative sense.

Classical theists might find such a conclusion utterly inacceptable. James Arcadi, for instance, highlights that

> classical theists of traditional Christian, Jewish, and Muslim adherence would hardly countenance a view of God that entailed God was a material object.[17]

It ought to be recognized, however, that Hudson's God, though material, is still uniquely special within the multifarious world of material objects and shares many features ascribed to the God of classical theism. To begin with, only God enjoys ubiquitious entension. He exemplifies this property to the highest possible degree. Just as omnipotence can only be exemplified by a being who is maximally powerful, omnipresence can only be exemplified by a being who is maximally present. Ubiquitous entension amounts to maximal presence and as such it can be considered to be a great-making property.

Secondly, it is important to realize that God's materiality is not to be conflated with physicality in terms of being a subject of investigation of the physical sciences. To be material is a formal definition saying 'to be located at a region in space in a specific way'. A material God in terms of ubiquitous entension neither amounts to a pantheistic identification of God and cosmos nor puts us in any position to make a concrete picture of Him. In this respect, such a material God shares many features with the classical immaterial God.

Thirdly, one might worry that to be located at a region in space implies being contained and limited by the boundaries of this region, which would contradict the doctrine of divine aseity. The proposed account to divine omnipotence, however, does not claim that God necessarily has to be located at a region. If God had not

[15] Hudson (2009, 210, 211).

[16] See Baker (2000, 29–46), for details on the constitution view.

[17] Arcadi (2017, 635).

created a cosmos, there would not exist any regions within it and therefore no region where God would be located.[18] This amounts to the claim that God is accidentally ubiquitous entendend which seems to entail that God is not material before creation because there exists no region of space to be occupied by God. Thus, God turns into something material when creating. Although such a view contradicts the doctrine of divine immutability, a proponent of panentheism might welcome a change in God because it highlights that the God-world-relation is not one-but two-directional: It is not only God acting upon creation but God being affected by it as well. Accordingly, the most fundamental form of divine passibility would be God turning from something immaterial into something material.

Finally, here is the objection, which from my perspective amounts to the most serious challenge: Material objects inherit their spatial properties from the regions occupied. It seems natural to presuppose that a material object can only properly be located at a region in space if shape, size, structure etc. match. Since apparently no material object can have different spatial properties at the same time, the proposed account of divine omnipresence appears to amount to the view that God inherits many different spatial properties at the same time, which supposedly is an outright impossibility.[19] Hudson himself thinks that he can avoid this problem because God inherits only the spatial properties of the region where he is entirely present, the cosmos. Thus, even though an entending object is wholly located at many sub-regions, it is entirely located only at the maximally expansive region, which determines the material object's spatial properties.[20] Suppose, however, that there is no maximally inclusive region because each region is contained in a larger region. If so, then God would likely be 'only' wholly present at all of the infinitely many regions. Would this amount to the view that God is without any spatial properties in such a world?

In addition, Joseph Jedwab thinks Hudson's move won't do because there is nothing special in itself about the region at which a material object is entirely located. Why should we assume that a region bearing an 'entirely located at'-relation has the power to inherit its intrinsic spatial properties to the material object but a region bearing a 'wholly located at'-relation does not? Jedwab gives the following argument why a region as such determines the spatial properties of a material object occupying it, independently from the fact of being located entirely or wholly at the region:

> Suppose some photon is located at only two point-sized regions P and P' at once. The photon has a point-sized shape: the same in every point-sized region at which it is located. But since the photon is located at only P and P', and since P and P' are disjoint, the photon is *entirely* located at neither P nor P' and so the photon is *entirely* located at no region. So the photon has a shape but is *entirely* located at no region. The regions that determine shape are the regions at which a substance is located *simpliciter*. So, whether or not God

[18] Hudson (2009, 210).

[19] Jedwab (2016) raises this issue.

[20] Hudson (2006, 112), makes this suggestion.

> entends or is multiply located, if God is located at different regions with different shapes, God has different shapes, which is impossible.[21]

This objection has considerable force. Either one has to provide arguments why an object inherits only the spatial properties of one region although it is simultaneously occupying many other regions or one has to show how an object can acquire simultaneously all spatial properties of all regions where it is located at. The suggestion that such an object can exemplify all these different spatial properties under different respects won't do, however, because then the object would not have these properties in a strict but only loose sense.

To conclude, then, ubiquitous entension is an interesting proposal for conceiving of God's maximal immanence in creation in a literal way. However, the suspicion arises that this view entails the consequence that the same entity is able to acquire different and even opposite spatial properties at once, which—if literally understood—appears to be impossible. Even if this suspicion can be dispelled, many proponents of theism will feel an uneasiness at least to conceive of God as something material. Therefore, advocates of maximal divine immanence have reasons to look for other ways for construing the relation between divine immanence and the cosmos.

God's immanence in the cosmos: space as divine attribute

A central point of departure of the foregoing discussion has been a realist ontology of space being a kind of receptacle for material objects. If God Himself is entirely and wholly contained by the most expansive of all regions, the cosmos itself, then apparently God turns into something material. One way for avoiding this consequence is to deny that God Himself is occupying a region in space. The desiderata for such an account are then: (1) Propose an account of maximal divine immanence in the cosmos; (2) avoid that God Himself turns into a material object, and (3) respect the traditional ontological distinction between God and (any form of) creation.

In order to meet these desiderata, one might argue as follows: Beginning from a realist ontology of space again,[22] the familiar claim is that every material object exemplifies the property of being an occupant of a region in space. To be material necessarily entails occupying a region in space. Material objects are related to space in terms of unilateral necessity because the existence of a material object entails necessarily the existence of a region in space containing it but the reverse does not hold. There could also exist a region in space (or the cosmos as maximal aggregate of all regions in space), which is containing no material object.

[21] Jedwab (2016, 146).

[22] Taking space as a real and concrete thing is controversial. However, there have been good arguments developed in favor of it. See, for instance, the study of Nerlich (2010).

Applying these considerations analogically to the relationship between God and space,[23] one can refer to a tradition, which considers divine omnipresence as ontological ground for what has been called 'absolute space'. As is known, Isaac Newton famously argued for the view that (absolute) space emanates from God similarly to light emanating from a candle flame.[24] The two are ontologically distinct but not separable because God's existence entails the existence of absolute space. Newton writes:

> If ever space had not existed, God at that time would have been nowhere; and hence he either created space later (in which he was not himself), or else, which is not less repugnant to reason, he created his own ubiquity.[25]

On this account, absolute space is nothing created but a feature of divine omnipresence. The existence of an omnipresent God entails the existence of space, which potentially contains a creation. Presuming that God is free to create or not to create, space as an aspect of divine existence can be filled with creation but it can also remain empty. Empty space is, as Oakes highlights,

> […] not to be conflated with the *unreality* of space, i.e. with the nonexistence of that which God's omnipresence just *constitutes*.[26]

Space conceived of as an aspect of divine omnipresence meets the desideratum of accounting for maximal divine immanence in a direct sense. It grounds in the way God is, not in any specific creative act, which God performs. Therefore, it is decisive to distinguish two notions of space: Space as an aspect of the divine, that is absolute space, and the kind of space we are familiar with, that is physical space, which comes into existence with creation. Accordingly, we can distinguish three 'layers' *sub ratione*, which are constitutive for the spatial features of the cosmos: Omnipresence grounds absolute space, in the sense that omnipresence serves as *explanans* for absolute space in terms of the order of explanation. Because there is an omnipresent God, there is absolute space as well. Absolute space, in turn, serves as a 'receptacle' for physical space because the latter comes into existence with creation. If physical space is contained by absolute space, and absolute space is 'established' by divine omnipresence, then one can assert that the universe literally is in God. God is immanently present in the cosmos in virtue of facts about God Himself, about regions of space and the 'being present at'-relation between God and space.

Such an account appears to meet the first desideratum: It proposes maximal divine immanence. It seems to respect the second desideratum: God does not turn into something material Himself because God is not in some way contained by absolute space but the very ground of its existence. As Oakes notes:

[23] The following argument is worked out in detail in Oakes (2006).

[24] See Henry and McGuire (2018) for a helpful and clear discussion about the intimate relationship between God and space in Newton.

[25] Newton (1962, 137).

[26] Oakes (2006, 176).

> Surely, if God's Omnipresence is just what constitutes space, God could hardly be interior to space; obviously, God could not be an occupant of that which His Omnipresence constitutes.[27]

Finally, it fulfills the third desideratum because the distinction between creator and creation is maintained: The existence of absolute space does not necessitate any creation. Rather, it does justice to God's great-making properties because it is directly grounded in God's way of omnipresent existence, which sets God clearly apart from anything contingent, limited and finite.

In *God and Contemporary Science*, Philip Clayton is toying with this idea of absolute space from a theological perspective when he writes:

> […] space and time must be thought theologically, so that their origin within God becomes clear. […] As God can be present to every now while still subsuming all Now's within the eternal Now that transcends and encompasses finite time, so also God can be present here while still subsuming all Here's within a divine space that transcends and encompasses physical space.[28]

A major reason to be reluctant to conceive of created things as being 'internal' to God relates to the presumed conceptual connection between 'being ontologically distinct from God' and 'being located outside God'. However, as the foregoing discussion highlights, such a conceptual connection is unwarranted. Ontological exteriority of an entity to God is a sufficient condition for establishing a clear distinction between God and the said entity but it is by no means a necessary condition as well. Something can exist within God's absolute space without thereby reducing to an aspect of the divine. Something can be ontologically distinct from God but exist 'in' God. Clayton reminds us of this fact by highlighting that spatial notions of exteriority and outside-ness do not directly touch upon the crucial theological differentiations between God and creation:

> Fear of pantheism drove theologians to use spatial difference as the 'special difference' between God and world when they should have trusted the power of more fundamental theological categories: finite versus infinite, contingent versus necessary, imperfect versus perfect – created versus Creator. We are not God because we are different in our fundamental nature from God. Thus it does not matter where we are located […].[29]

This account—like the previous one—highlights that a conception of maximal divine immanence requires God being the reference point of any framework about space.[30] According to Hudson's view, God Himself is the greatest possible material being in space, which in virtue of entending is present to all of creation. According to this account of absolute space, absolute space is an aspect of God's

[27] Oakes (2006, 176).
[28] Clayton (1997, 89).
[29] Clayton (1997, 90).
[30] Of course, the same applies to time as well.

mode of existence, which contains in it all regions of space as potential receptacles for created objects. As a consequence, there is nothing outside God; the differentiation between absolute and physical space, however, clearly preserves the creator-created-distinction.

One may worry at this point about the coherence of the concept of absolute space as receptacle of physical space and physical entities contained by it. There seems to be something deeply peculiar about the claim that material objects require a non-material spatial realm to exist within. A defender of absolute space might claim at this point that such a peculiarity is the consequence of an unfounded naturalistic prejudice. Against a theistic background, instead, the default position is that everything is grounded in (an immaterial) God as its generating and preserving source. Therefore, it is central to theism that something immaterial is the ultimate cause of anything material. Rejecting this presumption as implausible implies rejecting a central strand of traditional theism as well. Though such a response is obvious and legitimate, one should note that the proper meaning of 'space' in absolute space appears to ultimately ground in God's omnipotence. Absolute space is established by divine omnipresence and divine omnipresence is a feature of divine omnipotence because God is present to everything by governing everything by will. If so, absolute space is not primarily a spatial concept in mathematical-physical terms but a concept grounding in divine almightiness.[31] I will return to this issue when discussing the fourth 'agentive' model of divine omnipresence. The discussion so far illustrates that presupposing an entailment-relation between occupying a region in space and materiality[32] and the concept of God being a receptacle of material things have to be taken with caution. This brings us to the next account.

God's presence in the cosmos: entending immaterially in space

There are doubts that the entailment-relation between occupation and materiality holds necessarily. Some voices claim that presupposing so is primarily an expression of modern-day accounts to material objects. Ross D. Inman, for instance, argues that Augustine and Anselm are just two examples of eminent pre-modern philosophers defending the view that extended location, immateriality and simplicity go together. If so, also an immaterial object has the capacity to occupy a non-point sized region in space.[33] This fits nicely with Robert Pasnau's claim that it was

[31] It may be instructive at this point that Henry and McGuire (2018, 596), note that 'in all the places where Newton discusses God's relationship with space, the operation of God's will is also discussed because absolute space is the venue in which God exercises His divine will'.

[32] One can argue that an occupation-account to the material has two primary advantages over other ways for defining materiality. The advantage over a Cartesian inspired extension-account is that it is able to characterize point-sized (subatomic) particles as material too. The advantage over a location-account is that it is not forced to categorize regions as something material as well. See Hudson (2006, 2, 3).

[33] Inman (2017, Sect. 3). Inman sets himself the task to propose a new principle for distinguishing material from non-material entities, which does not entail that God by occupying a region in space is material. He dubs the distinguishing principle of the material 'dispositional pertension'. It says that being disposed toward extended location by pertension is the mark of the material. Thus, it is not necessary that this dis-

theological commonsense in the premodern period to presume that the ability to occupy an extended region in space in a literal sense was no privilege of the material. He writes:

> Medieval Christian authors, despite being generally misread on this point, are in complete agreement that God is literally present, spatially, throughout the universe. One simply does not find anyone wanting to remove God from space, all the way through to the end of the seventeenth century. Of course, no one wanted to say that God has spatial, integral parts. So the universally accepted view was that God exists holenmerically throughout space, wholly existing at each place in the universe.[34]

To exist 'holenmerically' corresponds to Hudson's concept of entending, and the opposite, to exist 'meremerically', is equivalent to pertending. The classical example of holenmeric existence is the existence of the rational soul in the human body: The rational soul as the simple formal constituent of the human body that 'in-forms' all bodily parts and thereby provides their internal structural organization, exists as a whole in the entire body and as a whole in each bodily part too.[35]

According to this understanding holenmeric existence is by no means a mysterious way of existence. It may be easier for us to grasp meremeric existence because in a material world as ours material objects tend to be complex and thus, to pertend. However, if holenmeric existence is the constitutive way of existence for us as ensouled beings, then we have an immediate grasp of what it is like to exist holenmerically as well. We experience, so to say, our existence 'all at once' in space. In a certain sense, both forms of existence are interconnected in us due to the fact that we are ensouled beings having a body.

Pasnau illustrates this point by making use of mid-fourteenth century philosopher Nicole Oresme.[36] Oresme differentiates between a permanent core or essence of a thing—in scholastic terms the soul or form of a living being—and the entire substance or living being as such with its complex material body. Accordingly, a living being has the soul as holenmeric constituent but it does not exist holenmerically *simpliciter* because its material body exists meremerically. With such a distinction

Footnote 33 (continued)
position be actualized as well. Inhibiting factors such as divine intervention might prevent it from doing so. One less desirable consequence of Ross's account is that extended simples do not qualify as material. By lacking any parts, they cannot have a disposition to pertend.

[34] Pasnau (2011, 19).

[35] The reason why simple entities are able to occupy any region's spatial structure is that they have no internal spatial configuration of any parts. The structure of a simply entity is not conflicting with the topological features of a region in space. Therefore, a simple entity is maximally flexible in its occupying regions in space. Angels, for instance, it was argued, are not restricted to reside in any specific region because a region's topological features pose no obstacle to occupation. For an illuminating discussion about the possible place of spiritual substances see Cross (2016).

[36] See Pasnau (2011, 24–27), who treats this issue in detail by referring mainly to Oresme but to Boethius and Anselm as well. I should add that Pasnau discusses existence in time, not space. However, the points made about holochronicity and merechronicity are applicable to holenmeric and meremeric existence as well.

at hand, one can push the idea that ordinary existence of en-souled beings (in space and time) does not differ in one crucial respect from God's existence (in space and time). Our mode of existing holenmerically—freed from the characteristics of finite existence—might be perfect enough for God too. The crucial difference lies in the internal constitution of creator and creatures. It is reserved to God alone to exist holenmerically *simpliciter* without any limitations because God alone is both perfectly simple and omnipotent.

If these thoughts are correct, a view similar to Hudson's ubiquitous entension-account of divine omnipresence is known from medieval philosophy. The major difference, however, is that this view does not entail any materiality claim so that an immaterial entity is able to occupy and 'fill in' a region in space as well.

As previously discussed, it is hard to see how one can substantiate this claim. Again, if an entity occupies a region in space literally, then it seems to inherit this region's specific spatial features. An object fitting into the region of a rectangular solid has to have the form of a rectangular solid. So one has to explain how an object, even if immaterial, can exemplify all kinds of different spatial properties at once. To claim that the object's essence is protean and thus it is able to assume all kinds of shapes, won't help because then, literally speaking, this object has no shape at all but acquires spatial properties only derivatively.

It is enlightening at this point that the classical examples given in medieval philosophy do not clearly speak in favor of a literal spatial account. If, for instance, the claim is made that the soul as immaterial entity entends in a specific body, then this claim does not seem to entail that the soul is acquiring the body's spatial features. Rather, the claim involves that the soul as living principle of life endows this body with the powers for being alive and these are present and active 'all at once' throughout the entire body and each of its parts. Similarly, talk about angels occupying space is phrased ultimately in terms of powers[37]: The assumption seems to be that an angel fills in a region of space by exerting its powers. Consequently an angel is not able to entend in a region exceeding a determinate size. The decisive obstacle for this inability is not the angel's internal configuration because there is none but the angel's limited powers for doing so.[38] Finally, the same talk about powers in angels applies also to God: God in virtue of disposing of unlimited powers alone does not experience any limits in occupying any region in space.

To conclude, then, attempts to develop an account of immaterial entities occupying an extended region in space face also the question of how a multi-located entity

[37] For instance, Cross (2016, 401), writes: "So on my preferred reading of Aquinas's view, an angel's presence at a place is reduced to its immediate activity at that place."

[38] See Cross (2016, 397): "An angel's expanding itself into an infinite region would require infinite power—the more an angel stretches itself out, so to speak, the more power it expends. […] So there is a limit beyond which an angel cannot expand or contract, and the limit is determined by the extent of the angel's power over itself."

For a similar statement referring to causal powers too, see also Inman 2017, 31, where he discusses how 'dispositional pertension' can explain limiting constraints for multi-location: "Following Anselm, then, we might say that an object's inability to be wholly multi-located is a genuine limitation, perhaps due to the fact that the scope of the object's immediate causal activity is necessarily restricted to a single place at any given time."

is able to instantiate all the different spatial properties of the regions where it is located at simultaneously. In addition, the explanation of how an immaterial entity manages to occupy an extended region in space appears to refer to the entity's powers to 'fill in' the region to be occupied - similarly to Newton's concept of absolute space and the divine power of establishing it. This seems to make spatial features belong to said entity only in a non-basic sense. The powers are constitutive of the entity's existence conditions and basic in the sense that no other constitutive features are required for constituting these powers. The spatial features, instead, are accidental and non-basic because they are ontologically dependent on these powers (and their actualization). Thus, talking about powers enabling an object to fill in a determinate region in space weakens the literal sense of occupying said region.

In the light of these thoughts, one may wonder whether embracing openly a non-literal occupation-account does not fare better because the concept of absolute space as well as the idea that immaterial entities are able to occupy regions in space appear to point towards the agentive powers of the entities being present in space. This brings me to the model of divine presence in the world in causal and agentive terms.

Divine omnipresence as divine agency

There is a venerable tradition claiming that God is omnipresent in a non-fundamental occupational sense by presence, by power and by essence. The classical reference in medieval theology is the following passage from Peter Lombardus's *Sentences*:

> It should be kept in mind that God, who exists immutably in himself, is in every nature or essence by presence, by power, and by essence, without his being limited, and in every place without circumscription, and in every time without mutability. And furthermore he is in holy spirits and souls in a more excellent way, namely, indwelling by grace.[39]

The idea is that divine omnipresence is not a specific divine attribute in its own right but supervening upon more fundamental divine attributes such as omniscience and omnipotence. Accordingly, God is present in the world in a threefold way. To be present 'by presence' means that everything is immediately open and transparent to God's knowledge. Accordingly, omnipresence amounts to a kind of knowledge because each thing and region is completely transparent to God's direct perception. To be present 'by power', instead, is for God to control providentially all things and to conserve their existence. Finally, to be present 'by essence' has been interpreted as God being the author of all entities's being and nature. Edward Wierenga proposes to assimilate the third mode of presence to the second one because if God

[39] Lombard (1971–1981), Sententiae I, d. 37, c. 1, n. 2.

gives to every entity its specific being, then He does so by exercising His powers of creating and conserving everything.[40]

Without delving into ancillary details of this discussion here, it is safe to say that conceiving of God's omnipresence in terms of power and activity has been a particularly strong track of interpretation.[41] In addition to putting forward a metaphysical understanding of God's presence in the cosmos, this view is able to address head-on as well God's salvific actions towards His creatures as exemplarily described in biblical narratives and vividly documented in the lives of the saints. Eleonore Stump, for instance, aims at overcoming the shortcomings of mere metaphysical presence by proposing a relational-personal model of God's presence in the cosmos. In analogy to two persons being able to be present to and knowing each other in intimate ways by sharing attention and perceiving another person's mental states—provided that the appropriate willingness to be open toward the other is given—God is, everywhere and always present to creation in virtue of his omnipotence and loving openness towards the other.[42] Stump underlines:

> In one and the same eternal present, omnipresent God is available to share attention with any person at any place in any time. Because of the way God is present at a place and in a time, for all persons, in whatever place and time they are, God is at once present, in power and knowledge and also in person.[43]

A similar 'personal' dimension shapes also genuine theological accounts of omnipresence. Accordingly, Ingolf Dalferth emphasizes the specific theological understanding of omnipresence as follows:

> However, in all its varieties the Christian sense of the presence of God *individualizes*, i.e. transforms particular human beings into individual persons. [..] I begin to realize my infinite dignity and uniqueness of being singled out by God. God becomes present *to me* as *my God* or *God for me* and places me as his singled-out creature in the presence of my creator.[44]

[40] Wierenga (2010). See also Swinburne (1993, 104–107), who claims that God being everywhere by power and substance is a matter of all things being subject to God's immediate control without any intermediary causes. I read also Kant's equating of absolute space with the realm of God's presence along these lines. Kant (1986, 150, 151), writes explicitly that "the relation between things themselves is only possible insofar as God conserves them by his immediate and inner presence; thus he determines the place of each through his omnipresence. So to this extent God himself is the cause of space, and space is a phenomenon of his omnipresence."

[41] This interpretation is often associated with Aquinas. See Jedwab (2016, 147).

[42] One may wonder at this point whether such a model of personal omnipresence does not focus in impermissible ways on creatures with a mental life alone. Stump, however, stresses that divine openness relates to creation as a whole as her interpretation of God's second speech to Job indicates. See Stump (2010, 190).

[43] Stump (2013, 37).

[44] Dalferth (2006, 29).

Stump's and Dalferth's accounts are motivated, so to say, by the desire to speak of God's relationship to creation and they do so by 'presuming discontinuity with ordinary metaphysical accounts of how material objects possibly are present at a specific region of space'.[45] This alluded discontinuity refers to the omnipresence of a personal God because those taking explicitly into consideration how biblical narratives and those having (intense) religious experiences describe divine presence in the world ought to get along with what Arcadi calls 'the intensity puzzle'.[46] It says that

> if God ubiquitously entends all locations in the cosmos, then there is not a coherent way to explicate greater concentrations of God's presence, as the experience of the faithful indicates.[47]

The problem is that according to the biblical tradition and personal religious experiences God acts differently at different places. Consider, for instance, the biblical narratives of God appearing to Abraham in the form of three men visiting, God wrestling with Jacob, God speaking to Moses from the burning bush, God filling the temple with his presence or God transforming the life of the apostles at Pentecost. All these examples seem to presuppose that God is manifesting Himself in a singular way at a particular place and that God is simultaneously not present in this specific way at any other place. Consequently, an account such as ubiquitous entension seems to be in tension with the manner how religious traditions grounded in revelation describe God's (specific) presence in creation. This is not to say that the concept of ubiquitous entension is inconsistent or incoherent. It simply has a harder time to explain the religious datum of special divine presence, coming in degrees from less to more intense ways than an account of divine activity and power. Take Moses and the burning bush as example: The burning bush is not consumed by the fire because God is preventing with His divine power that the natural powers of the fire consume the bush. In addition, God commands Moses to take off his shoes because the place in the direct vicinity of the bush is holy, that is, filled with God's presence due to God's particular action upon and presence in the bush. Thus, in this narrative we can distinguish between a weaker and a stronger form of theophany. The bush not consumed by the fire and from which God speaks to Moses is the very center of God's presence and particular agency. This presence and agency, however, is also emanating to the nearby periphery thereby making the ground around the bush holy. This example highlights how an agentive account of divine omnipresence has the resources to explain how God can simultaneously be present at different places in different degrees.

Such an account helps to interpret the classical distinction between general divine action, which 'merely' conserves creation, and special divine action, which 'interferes' purposively in the course of creation, as one kind of action differing only in terms of agentive intensity. Special divine action is 'special' because we experience divine presence in a more intense manner due to God's particular activity. General divine action, instead, we do not conceive of as anything extraordinary because we

[45] I borrow this phrasing in a modified way from Gordon (2018, 537).

[46] Arcadi (2017). See also Jedwab (2016, 148) and Gordon (2018, 537–539).

[47] Arcadi (2017, 635).

do experience the same degree of God's presence in virtue of the same conserving action all the time. In conclusion, then, God is omnipresent because he is omniactive by creating things, conserving them and, according to many religious traditions, acting from time to time upon them 'specially' in miraculous ways.

Conclusion

Panentheists look for a particular intimate relationship between God and cosmos. Therefore, a central focus lies on the 'en' in panentheism: I have been exploring four different models explicating how God is in the cosmos and the cosmos in God. I found the first account proposing divine immanence wanting. The second and the third account, instead, lean towards an understanding of divine immanence in terms of divine activity. Therefore, I side with the model favoring divine omnipresence in terms of divine activity: God is there, where God acts. Since God acts upon everything there is, God is present to everything there is.

This model provides a clear notion of divine omnipresence: It shows that God is immanent in a profound manner and it offers an explanation how we can make sense of the idea that God's presence might differ at different places and times. Divine immanence does not ground in a God literally containing the cosmos or in a literal intertwining of God and cosmos but in a God who acts throughout all places and times of the cosmos.

If this reading is appropriate, the distinction between classical theism and panentheism becomes fragile. Once you have a creator-God existing necessarily, being omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, free and pure act—to name just a few of the classical divine attributes—you have also a God being close to his creation everywhere and always in the most intimate manner possible. For what kind of additional intimacy and proximity could one imagine beyond God creating, preserving and directing all of his creation in the most perfect manner possible?

Maybe classical theism was primarily concerned to highlight the deep ontological divide between a necessarily existing God and his contingent creation. This focus on divine transcendence resulted in a severe neglect to contemplate the other side of the same coin, divine immanence, in the same manner as well. Panentheism aims at rectifying this imbalance and emphasizes the intimate relation between God and creation. At the very core of this relation is the belief that anything created falls back into nothing if God is not sustaining it and caring for it at every single moment. All of creation is within the sphere of God's creative, sustaining and caring agency or it is not at all. From my perspective, such an agentive reading captures in the most convincing way the core meaning of the particle 'en' in panentheism. As a consequence, classical theism and panentheism are not two rival accounts of God; rather, they underline different aspects of one and the same God who is maximally transcendent and immanent at the same time.[48]

[48] I would like to thank Simon Kittle and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on a previous draft of this paper. This work was funded by the Sir John Templeton Foundation, Grant No. #57397 ("Analytic Theology and the Nature of God"), whose support I gratefully acknowledge.

Acknowledgements Open access funding provided by University of Innsbruck and Medical University of Innsbruck.

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