

Panentheism and Classical Theism

Benedikt Paul Göcke

Published online: 25 March 2012
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2012

Abstract Panentheism seems to be an attractive alternative to classical theism. It is not clear, though, what exactly panentheism asserts and how it relates to classical theism. By way of clarifying the thesis of panentheism, I argue that panentheism and classical theism differ only as regards the modal status of the world. According to panentheism, the world is an intrinsic property of God – necessarily there is a world – and according to classical theism the world is an extrinsic property of God – it is only contingently true that there is a world. Therefore, as long as we do not have an argument showing that necessarily there is a world, panentheism is not an attractive alternative to classical theism.

Keywords God · World · Panentheism · Classical Theism · Omniscience

Panentheism seems to be an attractive alternative to classical theism.¹ It is not clear, though, what exactly panentheism asserts and how it relates to classical theism. By way of clarifying the thesis of panentheism, I argue that panentheism and classical theism differ only as regards the modal status of the world. According to panentheism, the world is an intrinsic property of God – necessarily there is a world – and according to classical theism the world is an extrinsic property of God – it is only contingently true that there is a world. Therefore, as long as we do not have an argument showing that necessarily there is a world, panentheism is not an attractive alternative to classical theism.

¹Although from a systematic point of view it is not the case that theists either have to be classical theists or panentheists, I only focus on panentheism and classical theism in this paper, and I bracket other possible theistic positions like pantheism or open theism. My intention thus is not to compare classical theism with all versions of non-classical theism, but only with panentheism. However, the arguments are also sound if instead of classical theism – according to which God is eternal, simple and a necessary being, etc. – a weaker version of classical theism is assumed to hold according to which God is either classical or at least has one of the classical attributes of God.

B. P. Göcke (✉)
Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University, 64 St. Giles, Oxford, England
e-mail: benedikt.goecke@gmail.com

The term ‘pantheism’ was coined by Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832), and according to its Greek etymology asserts that ‘All-is-in-God’ or that ‘Everything-is-in-God.’² Over the last few decades, initiated by philosophers and theologians like Whitehead, Clayton, Reese and Hartshorne, pantheism apparently has become an attractive alternative to classical theism.³ Apart from the vague intuition that everything is in God; it is, however, unclear what the thesis of pantheism amounts to and how it differs from classical theism as long as it is unclear what is meant by the corresponding terms ‘Everything,’ ‘in’ and ‘God.’ Therefore, in order to be able to specify what exactly pantheism asserts and how it relates to classical theism, we need to clarify what is meant by each of the corresponding terms.

Everything in God

It is often argued that it is not clear what it means to say that everything is ‘in’ God and that therefore pantheism is unclear.⁴ But this is not a sound objection against pantheism as such. Classical theism asserts that everything is completely ‘outside of’ God; pantheism claims that God is ‘identical with’ (the sum of) everything. As regards both, classical theism and pantheism, one could object that it is not clear what it means to say that everything is ‘outside of’ God or that God is ‘identical with’ (the sum of) everything. That it is unclear what it means to say that everything is ‘in’ God therefore is not a specific pantheistic problem but precisely an expression of the problem of determining the relation between God and everything else.

Peterson argues that ‘[i]t is noteworthy that pantheism implies in its very name what may be called a locative or spatial metaphor. That is, God and world are conceived as occupying different, spatial locations, with one being inside the other.’⁵ Although it is true that most prepositions like ‘in’ or ‘outside of’ have a spatial connotation when they are used as expressions of a natural language, it is wrong to suppose that we are committed to a spatial interpretation of these prepositions. Indeed, in the same way in

² According to Krause, ‘Pantheism’ is another name for the system of science as such: ‘Since it is found in the intellectual intuition of God that God, as the One, is everything as well as the whole of finitude as such, in, below, and through Himself, we could, following this insight, say that the One is everything in and through itself [...]; and since it is recognised in the intellectual intuition of God that God is everything in and through himself, it would not be wrong to call science pantheism’ (Krause, Karl Christian Friedrich: *Der zur Gewissheit der Gotteserkenntnis als des höchsten Wissenschaftsprinzips emporleitende Theil der Philosophie*. Prague 1869, p. 313, my translation).

³ Cf. Brierley, Michael: ‘Naming a Quiet Revolution. The Pantheistic Turn in Modern Theology’ In: Clayton, Philip and Arthur Peacocke (ed.): *In Whom We Live and Move and have our Being. Pantheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*. Eerdmans Publishing 2004.

⁴ Cf. Gregersen, Niels Henrik: ‘Three Varieties of Pantheism.’ In: Clayton, Philip and Arthur Peacocke (ed.): *In Whom We Live and Move and have our Being. Pantheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*. Eerdmans Publishing 2004, p. 19: ‘The little word “in” is the hinge of it all.’ Cf. also Clayton, Philip: ‘Pantheism in Metaphysical and Scientific Perspective.’ In: Clayton, Philip and Arthur Peacocke (ed.): *In Whom We Live and Move and have our Being. Pantheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*. Eerdmans Publishing 2004, p. 252: ‘Already the etymology of the term “pan-en-theism” suggests that the little pronoun “in” linking “all” and “God” must bear the brunt of the interpretive burden. Can it hold up under the pressure?’

⁵ Peterson, Gregory R.: ‘Whither Pantheism’ In: *Zygon*. 36 (3). 2003, p. 399.

which it is inadequate to suppose that classical theism asserts that the world is outside of God in a spatial sense, it is inadequate to suppose that the ‘in’ in panentheism is used as a spatial preposition – as if God’s all-inclusiveness was ‘that of a man in relation to his cells, merely stretched to cover the universe.’⁶ Instead, we are free to define these prepositions as technical terms of a philosophical language. The only limitation we have to obey is that the interpretation of ‘in’ has to be such that it excludes the possibility that classical theism could agree on what it entails as regards the relation between God and everything else; that the interpretation of ‘outside of’ has to be such that panentheism cannot agree on what it asserts as regards this relation. Otherwise the distinction between panentheism and classical theism might collapse right from the start.

Apart from the spatial interpretation, the following interpretations of ‘in’ are discussed in recent discussion: ‘The world is “in” God because: [...] 2. God energizes the world, 3. God experiences or “prehends” the world [...] 4. God ensouls the world, 5. God plays with the world [...] 6. God “enfields” the world, 7. God gives space to the world, [...] 9. God binds up the world by giving the divine self to the world, 10. God provides the ground of emergences in, or the emergence of, the world [...], 11. God befriends the world [...] 12. All things are contained “in Christ” [...] 13. God graces the world.’⁷ None of these interpretations, however, is actually adequate since they are all consistent with classical theism. Even if, as classical theism entails, there is a strong ontological distinction between God and the world, God can still be said to energize the world, to experience the world, to befriend the world and so on.⁸ The reason is that almost any interpretation of ‘in’ that understands the relation between God and everything else as an *internal* and intimate relation between God and everything else can also be thought of as an *external* and intimate relation, and *vice versa*.⁹

Therefore, I suggest another interpretation of ‘in’: x is in y if and only if the identity of x is completely determined by the identity of y without y ’s identity being reducible to the identity of x .¹⁰

Let me clarify this definition by way of dealing with some possible objections to it. (1) Some people may object to treating the identity of a thing as a property of it for the reason that identity is not an empirically detectable property and therefore should not be counted as a property at all. This, however, would not be

⁶ Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese (ed.): *Philosophers Speak of God*. Amherst 1963, p. 16.

⁷ Clayton, Philip: ‘Panentheism in Metaphysical and Scientific Perspective.’ In: Clayton, Philip and Arthur Peacocke (ed.): *In Whom We Live and Move and have our Being. Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*. Eerdmanns Publishing 2004, p. 253.

⁸ In fact, some of the present interpretations of ‘in’ even seem to entail a strong ontological distinction between God and the world. That God plays with the world, for instance, seems to presuppose that God and the world are distinct entities.

⁹ To use an analogy, anything important that can be said about the intimate and *internal* relation between a mother and the child in her womb shortly before birth can be said of the intimate and *external* relation between the mother and her child shortly after birth.

¹⁰ Within boundaries, this interpretation is also able to account for an apparently spatial use of ‘in.’ According to it, the sun is in the universe if and only if the sun’s identity is completely determined by the identity of the universe without the identity of the universe being reducible to the identity of the sun. Since the specific identity of the sun is determined by the very nature of the universe without the universe as such being identifiable with the sun, that is, since the sun is the kind of object it is only because the physical universe is the kind of object it is, it follows that the sun is in the universe.

a good objection: that something is identical to itself is a necessary condition for it to play a role in the sciences. It is trivial that science can only detect properties if there are entities which are self-identical.

(2) One might argue against the proposed definition that identity is a *relation* that obtains between a thing and itself – not a *property* of that thing (as the definition seems to suggest). Such an objection, however, seems to presuppose that there is no relation that is a property, an assumption that is rarely met. It is simply irrelevant for the present definition of ‘in’ whether identity is supposed to be a one-place predicate of x or a relation between x and x .

(3) One might object as follows: when we look for the ground of the fact that every entity is self-identical – if indeed this fact has any ground – then it is plausible that we look to the very thing or, more likely, to the nature of the identity relation to explain this and not to something outside the thing in question. This objection, however, is not sound either: if the identity of an entity was a sufficient ground or explanation of the entity in question, then, because everything is essentially self-identical, everything would exist and everything would exist of necessity.¹¹ There could not be any object that is merely possible. Since there are possibilities it follows that the identity of an entity is not self-explanatory and that it does not entail a contradiction if we look for something that is not x in order to understand the identity of x .

(4) A similar objection might be to argue that the modality involved is too strong. Can the identity of a thing really be determined by something outside it, as the definition entails? Does it or does it not follow from the definition of the ‘in’ relation that the drawer in my desk would not be the very thing that it is were it not in my desk? According to the present definition this follows indeed. And although it might at first glance appear to be wildly implausible, it turns out to be almost a truism: If the drawer was not in my desk for a certain period of time, then it simply would have had another history than the one it actually has. It would lack certain properties that in fact now belong to its very identity – to whatever it is that makes the thing in question the thing in question.¹²

Therefore, since none of the objections against the proposed definition is sound, I take it to be a genuine metaphysical or logical property of every entity that it has self-identity and that at least sometimes this identity is due not to the entity in question itself but something outside of this entity. We obtain the following clarification of pantheism: Everything is *in* God if and only if the identity of everything is

¹¹ Think of Santa Claus and let us refer to him as ‘a.’ Surely it is true that $[a = a]$. However, if the identity of Santa Claus were self-explanatory in the way the objection presupposes, then this seemed to justify that – given $[a = a]$ – we can conclude $[\exists x(x = a)]$. But it is simply not something that belongs to the identity of Santa Claus that he exists. Therefore, there are cases in which we have to look for something outside the entity in question in order to understand its identity. In the case of Santa Claus we would have to ask whether he could have had existed in other circumstances etc.

¹² Developed further, this track of thought leads to a notion of individual essences, whereas an individual essence E of an entity x is a set of properties such that necessarily whatever entity y exemplifies all the properties in E is identical with x . Plato’s self-identity, for instance, grounds in his individual essence, i.e., in his ‘Platonity’. Cf. Plantinga, Alvin: ‘Actualism and Possible Worlds’ In: Loux, Michael (ed.): *The Possible and the Actual. Readings in the Metaphysics of Modality*. Cornell University Press 1979, p. 263: ‘Some have displayed a certain reluctance to recognize such properties as this, but for reasons that are at best obscure. In any event it is trivially easy to state conditions under which an object has Platonity; an object has it, clearly enough, if and only if that object is Plato.’

completely determined by the identity of God without God's identity being reducible to the identity of everything. That is to say, although God cannot be identified with any particular entity, every particular entity is what it is because God is self-identical, whereas the proposed definition does not specify whether the determination is brought about logically or causally.¹³ Nevertheless, this interpretation of 'in' does not specify a particular demarcation of panentheism in reference to classical theism either since, even on theistic premises, the world can be said to be 'in' God according to the present interpretation. In fact, any position according to which God is the first principle or cause of everything entails that everything is 'in' God in the specified sense. Therefore, since according to both classical theism and panentheism God is the first principle or cause of everything, the proposed interpretation of 'in' is only a minimal requirement that has to be specified further in order to obtain panentheism and classical theism.

Since classical theism and panentheism cannot differ as regards the scientific description of the world, that is, since they cannot differ on what the world factually is like, it follows that if there is a difference between panentheism and classical theism at all, it has to be a difference as regards the interpretation of the modal status of the relation between God and everything else. That is to say, the difference between classical theism and panentheism does not rest on a difference concerning God's *factual* relation to the world, but on a difference as regards the *modal status* of God's relation to the world.¹⁴

The modal status of God's relation to the world can either be contingent or necessary. If it is contingent, then God might not have been related to the world at all, which, given that God is the first principle or cause of everything, entails that there might not have been a world. If it is necessarily the case that God is related to

¹³ One might object that this just looks like 'For all x , $x=x$ iff $God=God$.' This statement is certainly true, but also completely vacuous. However, it is not what is meant. If we deploy the definition of 'in' that I propose, then it follows that for all x , $x=x$ iff $God=God$ and God is not reducible to any x , which is a coherent notion of a first principle or cause: a first principle is such that everything is what it is because the first principle is what it is in such a way that it is not identifiable with anything it is the principle of.

¹⁴ It seems to me that sometimes panentheists assume that panentheism is more compatible with science or is itself more scientific than classical theism. However, this is just postulated. Panentheism in itself is neither more nor less scientific than classical theism. The reason is that both are metaphysical theses the truth of which does entail any particular consequence as regards scientific theories. Only if we supposed that classical theism entails that in order to understand the natural world we have to refer to supernatural causes – as if God was pushing around tiny particles – could such a case be made. However, classical theism simply never was that naïve. One might object that some metaphysical theories are such that their truth would entail the falsehood of many widely accepted scientific claims (e.g., presentism about time looks incompatible with the relativity of the simultaneity relation) and that classical theism and panentheism belong to these theories. While it is certainly true that some metaphysical theories entail the falsehood of currently accepted scientific claims, this is not relevant for the case at hand because I am only arguing that panentheism and classical theism differ only as regards their stance on the modal status of the world, not as regards their stance on scientific claims concerning the nature of the actual world. Therefore, insofar as the empirical sciences are concerned with what is actually the case, and not with what could have been the case, panentheism and classical theism do not entail different stances on scientific claims and the objection is not sound. For an account of panentheism and science cf. Peacocke Arthur: 'Articulating God's Presence in and to the World unveiled by the Sciences.' In: Clayton, Philip and Arthur Peacocke (ed.): *In Whom We Live and Move and have our Being. Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World*. Eerdmans Publishing 2004. For an account of classical theism and science cf. Koons, Robert C.: 'Science and Theism. Concord, not Conflict.' In: Copan, Paul and Paul K. Moser (ed.): *The Rationality of Theism*. Routledge 2004.

the world, then there is a world of necessity. Therefore, what really is at stake as regards the question concerning the relation between classical theism and pantheism is the question whether, in addition to God, there is something of necessity.

Classical theism asserts that ‘God in himself is maximal Being – absolutely self-sufficient, eternal, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, completely active, and most excellent in every way. *Although he does not need the world*, God eternally and freely chooses to create it from nothing and sustain it through time.’¹⁵ Although factually there is a world, it could have been the case that there is none, which is to say that it is contingently true that there is a world. If we conceive of there being a world as a property of God, then we can state this in another way: it is a contingent and in this sense an extrinsic property of God that there is a world, a property the exemplification of which does not change the essence of God.¹⁶ As a corollary we obtain the following: if classical theism is true, then *complete* knowledge of God does not entail knowledge of anything else since it might have been the case that there is nothing apart from God.

According to pantheism, ‘God requires a world.’¹⁷ In contrast to classical theism, it is not merely factually, but necessarily true that there is a world. If we conceive of there being a world again as a property of God, we can state the point as follows: there being a world is an essential and in this sense is an intrinsic property of God.¹⁸ As a corollary we obtain the following: on pantheistic premises *complete* knowledge of God entails knowledge that there is a world. It could not have been the case that there is none.

The conclusion that on classical theism the world is an extrinsic and contingent property of God while according to pantheism it is an intrinsic and essential property of God enables us to specify what it means to say that the world is ‘outside of’ God, respectively, that it is ‘in’ God in a way that demarcates classical theism and pantheism unambiguously: that the world is *outside of* God means that the world is an extrinsic or contingent property of God and that the world is *in* God means that it is an intrinsic or essential property of God. In more detail, according to pantheism, everything is *in* God if and only if the identity of everything is determined by the

¹⁵ Cooper, John W: Pantheism. *The Other God of the Philosophers. From Plato to the Present*. Baker Academic 2006, p. 14, my italics.

¹⁶ In other words, according to classical theism, it is a Cambridge property of God that there exists a world at all, a property that does not add anything to God as an individual. Cf. also P.T. Geach: ‘God’s Relation to the World,’ in: *Sophia* vol. 8, 2 (1969), 1-9, for an analysis of God’s relation to the world according to Thomistic theism and for some remarks on Cambridge properties and Cambridge change. According to Geach (1969: 4): ‘The great Cambridge philosophical works published in the early years of this century [...] explained change as simply a matter of contradictory attributes’ holding good of individuals at different times. Clearly any change logically implies a “Cambridge” change, but the converse is not true; there is a sense of “change,” hard to explicate, in which it is false to say that Socrates changes by coming to be shorter than Theaetetus when the boy grows up, or that the butter changes by rising in price [...]. In each of these cases, there is a “Cambridge” change of an object [...] but no real change of that object. Now the denial that God is “really” related to creatures is quite traditionally bound up with the denial that God undergoes change. This latter denial can be true only if we are thinking of “real” change; for all things are subject to “Cambridge” changes – even a timeless abstract entity like a number is subject to a “Cambridge” change if it comes to be thought of by A, or ceases to be the number of B’s living children.’

¹⁷ Charles Hartshorne: *A Natural Theology for our Time*. La Salle 1967, p. 64.

¹⁸ Although according to the pantheism developed the universe exists of necessity, it does not follow that it is a mereological part of God. Neither the classical theist nor the pantheist in question assumes that God has proper parts in any sense relevant for him to be a mereological sum.

identity of God without God's identity being reducible to anything in particular *and necessarily there is something in addition to God*. According to classical theism, everything is *outside of God* if and only if the identity of everything is determined by the identity of God without God's identity being reducible to anything in particular *and it is only contingently true that there is something in addition to God*.¹⁹

That on pantheism it is necessarily true that a world exists and on theism only contingently is a conclusion that as such does not entail a definite stance on the temporal duration of the world, which is to say that the putative necessary existence of the world is independent of questions of whether the world is everlasting or had a temporal origin. If there is a first point of time and it is necessarily true that there is a world, then it follows that there can be no time without the world, which seems plausible given current physics and its assumptions about the spatiotemporal nature of the universe.²⁰ If there is no first point of time, i.e., if for any point of time there is a prior point of time and necessarily there is a world, then it follows that time belongs to the essence of God in the same way in which the world does. Therefore, the only condition that the necessity of the world entails as regards the temporal duration of the world is that there must not be a point of time t such that God exists at t but the world does not because in that case God rightfully could be said to exist without the world.

The same conclusion, however, follows from the assumption of classical theism as regards the contingency of the world. As Aquinas argued, that it is only contingently true that there is a world – that God could have refrained from creating – neither entails that there is first point of time of the world nor that there is none.²¹ Classical theism also excludes the possibility that there is some point of time t such that God exists at t and the world does not. If there was time before the creation of the world, then we have to assume that God could change in order to understand why at some point of time t God (suddenly?) decided to start creating the world when for any other point of time before t he did not want to create it. Since according to classical theism God is immutable, it follows that there can be no time before the creation of the world.²²

¹⁹ This conclusion enables us to understand in which sense according to pantheism God is dependent on the world: God could not be God if there was no world because the world is an intrinsic property of God the loss of which he could not survive. In other words, if we refer to the world as the realm of finitude and to God as the one infinite being, then the present interpretation can also be paraphrased as saying that in the same way in which the finite needs the infinite, the infinite also needs the finite. Both necessarily co-exist and could not exist without the other.

²⁰ Cf. William Lane Craig: *Time and Eternity. Exploring God's Relationship to Time*. Crossway Books 2001 for an interesting analysis of God's relation to time.

²¹ Cf. Steven E. Baldner and William E. Carroll: *Aquinas on Creation. Writings on the 'Sentences' of Peter Lombard*. Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies 1997, pp. 114-122, in particular p. 119: 'It is thus, therefore, clear that to say that something has been made by God and that it has always existed is not a contradiction. If there were a contradiction, it is a wonder that Augustine did not see it because this would have been the strongest way of disproving the eternity of the world.'

²² Cf. Richard Swinburne: 'God and Time.' In: Stump, Eleonore: *Reasoned Faith*. Cornell UP 1993 for an interesting argument according to which time exists even before the creation of the world. For an analysis of this argument cf. Göcke, Benedikt, Matthias Hoesch, Peter Rohs: 'How to Heckle Swinburne on God and Time.' In: Nicola Mößner, Sebastian Schmoranz, Christian Weidemann (eds.): Richard Swinburne. *Christian Philosophy in a Modern World*. Ontos 2008.

Therefore, it follows that as regards the temporal origin of the world there is no genuine difference between pantheism and classical theism.²³ On the assumption that there is no time without there being a world, both can account for an everlasting world as well as for one that has a temporal beginning.

Furthermore, since 'creation is concerned with ontological origin, not temporal beginning,'²⁴ it follows that both pantheism and classical theism can agree on the world being created since according to both God is the first cause or principle of everything. Since furthermore *creatio ex nihilo* means that the world is not created out of prior material – 'creation is *ex nihilo* in the sense that God's causing a creature to exist is without any intermediary'²⁵ – and since neither the classical theist nor the pantheist assumes that there is anything apart from God that is necessary and sufficient for creation, it follows that pantheism and classical theism can both agree on the world being created out of nothing. The only difference is that on pantheism God could not have refrained from creating a world, and according to Classical theism he could have done so.²⁶

²³ Meister Eckhart seems to have struggled with the same questions as regards God, time and the existence of the world: 'So when someone once asked me why God had not created the world earlier, I answered that he could not because he did not exist. He did not exist before the world did. Furthermore, how could he have created earlier when he had already created the world in the very now in which he was God? It is false to picture God as if he were waiting around for some future moment in which to create the world. In the one and the same time in which he was God and in which he begot his coeternal Son as God equal to himself in all things, he also created the world' (Meister Eckhart: *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, edited by Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn. New York 1981, p. 85). Cf. also Leftow, Brian: *Time and Eternity*. Cornell UP 1991, p. 290: 'So if God is timeless and a world or time exists, there is no phase of his life during which he is without a world or time or has not yet decided to create them, even if the world or time had a beginning.'

²⁴ Polkinghorne, John: 'Critical Notice of *Cosmos as Creation*, edited by Ted Peters.' In: *Expository Times* 101. 1990, p. 317 [Quoted from: Craig, William Lane: *Time and Eternity. Exploring God's Relationship to Time*. Crossway Books 2001, p. 211].

²⁵ Copan, Paul and William Lane Craig: *Creation out of Nothing. A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration*. Baker Academics 2004, p. 148.

²⁶ Against the account developed so far one might object the following: 'Pantheism denies a fundamental tenet of theism's picture – God's transcendence. The theist holds that, whether or not there is a world, it is not in God. God is distinct from and transcends any world that he creates. To deny this the pantheist need not hold that necessarily there is a world. He need only hold that *if* there is a world, then necessarily it is in God. If pantheism is true, then it is not possible that there should be a world that is not in God. If classical theism is true, then if there is a world, it is necessarily not part of god. In that case, so the objections goes, what I allege of pantheism is plausibly true of pantheism: If God is a necessary being and if pantheism is true, then it seems that necessarily there is a world since that world is one with God (in some sense). What, then, do the pantheist and the pantheist disagree about? Surely it must be that god is not exhausted by the world: the world is a proper part of god – not the whole of God.' However, this would not be a sound objection. (1) There is not a single pantheist who denies God's transcendence for the very simple reason that otherwise pantheism collapsed into *pantheism*. It is precisely the point of pantheism to establish an intelligible synthesis of classical theism and pantheism. (2) The objection supposes that there is a clear and distinct idea of what it means to say that the world is 'in' or 'outside of' God with which we can work with before we clarified the thesis of classical theism and pantheism. My argument, though, is precisely that an intelligible interpretation of 'in' and 'outside of' can only be developed in terms of the world's being necessary, respectively, contingent. That being the case, the objections collapses. (3) Apart from the fact that the objection seems to work with an incoherent concept of pantheism according to which God does not transcend the world but at the same time is not exhausted by the world it relies on a mereological interpretation of 'in' and 'outside of.' I do not think that there is any reason to share this assumption as God is not a mereological sum, neither on classical theism nor on the pantheism I develop.

Everything in God

According to an often met assumption, panentheism is a purely ontological thesis about the relation between God and the physical world. The world is understood to be a system of different systems the constituents of which are interrelated and causally interact at different emerging levels such that ‘God incorporates both the individual systems and the total system of systems within Godself. [...] God is present to the wholes as well as to the parts.’²⁷

To conceive of panentheism as a purely ontological thesis, however, is just one side of the coin. The often neglected other side of panentheism is its epistemological or transcendental interpretation. While ontological panentheism understands the implicit universal quantifier ‘everything’ to range over everything physical, epistemological panentheism understands the extension of ‘everything’ to include the mental realm of being. There is a real need for the recognition of epistemological panentheism since if it is true that everything is in God, then not only everything in the physical world is in God, but also everything in the mental world. The assumption that panentheism is exclusively an ontological thesis about God and the physical universe is problematic as it conceals the full impact of the thought that everything is in God.

Corresponding to the two different notions of everything, i.e., ‘everything’ as referring to the physical realm and ‘everything’ as referring to the mental realm, we obtain two specifications. According to ontological panentheism, the physical realm is in God if and only if its nature is determined fully by God without God being reducible to the physical realm and necessarily there is something physical. According to epistemological panentheism, the mental realm is in God if and only if its nature is determined by God without God being reducible to the realm of mentality, and necessarily there is something mental.²⁸

If ontological panentheism is true, then, if there is knowledge of the physical world in itself, epistemological panentheism has to be true as well. If epistemological panentheism is true, and if there is knowledge of the physical world in itself, then ontological panentheism has to be true. The reason is that knowledge of the physical world as it is in itself entails that we are able to know things in themselves. Since ontological panentheism entails that everything in the physical world according to its categorical nature is what it is because God is what God is, and because to know

²⁷ Peacocke Arthur: ‘Articulating God’s Presence in and to the World Unveiled by the Sciences.’ In: Clayton, Philip and Arthur Peacocke (ed.): *In Whom We Live and Move and Have our Being. Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*. Eerdmans Publishing 2004, p.147.

²⁸ The physical realm is the realm of mind-independent entities, their structures and interrelations. For instance, atoms, tables, planets and their relations belong to the physical realm. The mental realm correspondingly is the realm of mind-dependent entities, their structures and interrelations. For instance, phenomenal states, cognitions and their relations belong to the mental realm as well as the transcendental reflection on the categories of reason. The mental world is the world as it is investigated by transcendental epistemology or phenomenology and the physical world is the world as it is investigated by classical ontology. Assuming that every transcendent entity is determined by transcendent categories of being, the thesis that the physical world is in God entails that God is the one transcendent category of ontology that determines the physical realm and everything in this realm. Assuming that everything in the mental realm is determined by transcendental categories of epistemology, the thesis that the mental world is in God entails that God is the one category of transcendental philosophy.

things in themselves entails to know the categorical structure of things in themselves, it follows that there can be knowledge of things in themselves if and only if the transcendental categories according to which our mind is structured are identical with the transcendent categories of things in themselves. This identity, however, is only intelligible if the principle that determines the physical world is nothing over and above the principle that determines the mental world. According to a full-blown pantheism, God is the *one* principle of ontology and epistemology.²⁹

Insofar as classical theism entails the intelligibility of the world, however, it entails the same conclusion. According to classical theism, the world is created by God in such a way that science is possible and that we can obtain genuine knowledge of the world. Since this is only possible if the transcendental structure of our mind is the same as the transcendent structure of the world – if as classical hylemorphic theism would have it ‘the soul is in a way all existing things’³⁰ – it follows that according to classical theism God is the one principle of ontology and epistemology as well.³¹

Therefore, as regards the interpretation of the implicit universal quantifier ‘Everything,’ classical theism and pantheism entail the same conclusion: on both accounts, ‘everything’ refers to the physical and the mental realm in such a way that there is a one to one mapping between the categories of epistemology and the categories of ontology – otherwise neither account could explain the intelligibility of genuine knowledge of the world.

Everything in God

According to pantheism, everything is in God if and only if every mental and every physical item is what it is because God is what God is and necessarily there is something mental and something physical. As a consequence: if we know what everything is like, then we know what God is like, and if we know what God is like, then we know what everything is like. Because apart from the controversial concept

²⁹ One might object that this conclusion is too strong and that one can have accurate representations R_1, \dots, R_n of an object x without the object x being present in or isomorphic to that which represents it. I do not have the space to deal with this in detail, but such an assumption, if it is intelligible at all, seems to me to entail the collapse of our concept of knowledge of the world: if it is possible that R_1 is an accurate representation of x (supposing that knowledge is about representations of objects for the sake of argument) without x being present in or isomorphic to R_1 , then certain questions arise: (1) What is the relation between x and R_1 ? (2) What is necessary and sufficient for this relation to be accurate? As regards (1): Causation seems to be the most relevant relation in this case. But if the relation is a causal relation such that x causes R_1 , then it is false that x is not present in R_1 : x is present in R_1 as the cause of R_1 . As regards (2): Ex negativo, if it is not a necessary and sufficient condition for R_1 to be an accurate representation of x that it is isomorphic to x or that x is present in R_1 , then the relation is ontologically entirely arbitrary and epistemologically it is in principle beyond our reach to know anything about x as such. In effect, we ended up with a Kantian Ding-an-sich. The above assumption concerning the identification of the transcendental and transcendent categories avoids these complications and can account for genuine knowledge of the world.

³⁰ Barnes, Jonathan: *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Princeton UP 1995, p. 686 [Aristotle: *On The Soul*, 431b20].

³¹ In fact, any account according to which genuine knowledge of the world is possible entails that there is a one to one mapping between the categories of epistemology and the categories of ontology. Only accounts that posit a Kantian schism between our transcendental constitution and things-in-themselves cannot explain how genuine knowledge of the world is possible.

of intellectual intuition there seems to be no direct and immediate way to obtain knowledge of what God is like, it follows that in order to justify a particular concept of God, we have to proceed in the classical way which involves the dialectic between negative and positive theology. That is, we have to suppose that as a first principle or cause of everything God at least has all the properties that are exemplified in the universe because nothing is in the effect that is not in the cause.³² Since, however, there are mutually excluding properties in the world, the concept of a first cause or principle of everything differs fundamentally from the concepts we deal with in daily life. Whereas these concepts function essentially by way of exclusion – e.g., the concept of a table excludes the property of being a self-controlled agent – the concept of God as a first principle cannot exclude any property, which is why we cannot subsume it under any particular conceptual category. Although we can understand how to construct a concept of God as a first principle or cause of everything, we cannot understand the construed concept.

Apart from the fact that on pantheistic premises the world exists of necessity, the concept of God which pantheism leads to thus turns out to be indistinguishable from the concept of God that we find in classical theism: both theses agree that as the first principle and cause of everything God has to have every property there is in the world in a supreme and unified way beyond contradiction. Therefore, what Turner says about Thomas Aquinas' theistic conception of God can also be said about the pantheistic concept of God: 'That we cannot form any "concept" of God is due not to the divine vacuousness, but, on the contrary, to the excessiveness of the divine plenitude. That excessiveness eludes our language because we could not comprehend it except in a surplus of description which utterly defeats our powers of unification under any conception.'³³ Therefore, according to the logic of a first principle or cause of everything, pantheism and classical theism cannot differ as regards their conception of God.

It is often argued that there is nevertheless a real difference between classical theism and pantheism that consists in the former's rejection and the pantheistic approval of the thesis that the world can influence God. It is said that on pantheism God can change and on classical theism God is absolutely immutable: 'The real difference [between classical theism and pantheism] is that [according to classical theism] the natures and activities of the creatures do not have a real feedback effect on God. There is, in other words, no return from the world into God. As pure activity

³² It is notoriously difficult to spell out in detail what it means to say that God 'has' all the properties that we can find in the world. God does not exemplify properties in a way in which particulars exemplify properties. However, if there is a property F in the world, and if God is the first principle or cause of everything, then it follows that God at least has to have F in the minimal sense that F-ness is part of the divine essence. Otherwise God could not be the first principle or cause of particular's being F, and thus would not be the first principle.

³³ Denys Turner: *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*. Cambridge UP 2004, p. 187/188. Further: 'That is why we cannot comprehend God: the "darkness" of God is the simple excess of light. God is not too indeterminate to be known; God is unknowable because too comprehensively determinate, too actual. It is in that excess of actuality that the divine unknowability consists' (ibid). However, this does not entail that on my account classical theism and pantheism need to rely on some theory of analogical predication. It does entail, though, that whatever theists and pantheist will have to say about the concept of God as such – independent of the concept of the world – has to be the same due to the logic of the notion of a first principle. Independent of whether predication of God is univocal or equivocal or analogical, both theism and pantheism are on a par as regards their concept of God as such.

(*actus purus*), God is the eternal realization of all positive predicates. Accordingly, there is nothing God can “learn” in relation to the creatures, no “challenges” to be met, no free acts to “wait for.” The world is utterly dependent on God for its existence, while the world cannot really affect the being or mind of God.³⁴

In order to evaluate whether this is a genuine distinction between classical theism and pantheism we have to clarify what it could mean to say that the world influences or changes God. Since neither classical theism nor pantheism assumes that God is a particular object amongst others, it follows (a) that God does not stand in any relation which is like the relations among particulars and (b) that the way in which the world could influence or change God cannot in any way be similar to the way in which particulars influence each other. If we suppose that causation is a paradigmatic way of how particulars influence or change each other, then we can exclude the possibility that the world can causally influence God, which is to say that nothing causally interacts with God.

If, however, God cannot be influenced causally, then it seems that we are running out of options of how the world could in principle change God. The only option left is a logical influence on God according to which a change in the world logically entails a change in God. The only intelligible example of such a logical influence on God, however, concerns the knowledge of God. Consequently, that on pantheistic premises the world can change God means that ‘God’s [...] knowledge changes because the creatures, with their power of self-determination, constantly do new, unpredictable things.’³⁵

Therefore, the putative difference between classical theism and pantheism is that according to pantheism the world can change God insofar as worldly agents by way of exercising their freedom change or add to the knowledge of God whereas according to classical theism there is no such influence.³⁶ In other words, the putative distinction between pantheism and classical theism rests on different answers to the problem of libertarian freedom and divine omniscience. The question we have to answer is whether it is consistent to suppose that on pantheism the world adds to the knowledge of God, whereas on theism it does not.

Both theism and pantheism agree that God is omniscient, and both agree that this means that God knows all that is logically possible to be known. Therefore, what is at stake is whether it is logically possible to know in which way agents exercise their freedom. If it is logically possible to know this, then God knows it and consequently does not change. If it is not possible, then we have to suppose that free acts add to the knowledge of God and consequently have to suppose that God changes in this regard.

A necessary condition in order to be able to know what free agents do is that there are true propositions concerning their behavior, whereas I assume that the relevant

³⁴ Gregersen, Niels Henrik: ‘Three Varieties of Pantheism.’ In: Clayton, Philip and Arthur Peacocke (ed.): *In Whom We Live and Move and have our Being. Pantheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*. Eerdmans Publishing 2004, p. 24.

³⁵ Griffin, David Ray: ‘Pantheism: A Postmodern Revelation.’ In: Clayton, Philip and Arthur Peacocke (ed.): *In Whom We Live and Move and have our Being. Pantheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*. Eerdmans Publishing 2004, p. 44.

³⁶ This fits well with the alleged fact that according to classical theism the world is a Cambridge property of God. See footnote 16 above.

propositions are of the form ‘At t , x freely decides to perform A .’ Embedding a temporal index into the form of the proposition enables us to avoid getting sidetracked by irrelevant matters. The problem of whether it is logically possible to know what free agents do, then, is not primarily the problem of whether at a certain point of time t God knows what an agent *will* do at some later point of time t^* , but simply the problem of whether it is true that the agent behaves in a certain way at t^* . Therefore, it is irrelevant for the preset problem whether we suppose that God exists within time and knows the future or whether he exists timelessly and knows what happens at t^* .

According to the standard account, propositions are abstract entities that are either true or false. The truth or falsity of a proposition, however, is a logical property of the proposition in question, a property that it exemplifies timelessly. Accepting the standard account entails that any proposition of the form ‘At t , x freely decides to perform A ’ is either true or false timelessly and consequently can be known by God. Keeping in mind that truth is a logical property enables us to avoid the problem of theological determinism according to which God’s omniscience denies the possibility of libertarian freedom.

Roughly, the problem of theological determinism runs as follows: if God knows what somebody does at a certain point of time, then that person cannot refrain from doing so and therefore cannot be said to act freely. It is argued that in order to rescue libertarian freedom we have to suppose that God does not know what free agent do until they do it – which makes the pantheistic thesis *prima facie* attractive. But this argument assumes that truth is a *causal* property of propositions according to which a true proposition about free acts somehow causes the person in question to behave in a certain way. It is exactly the other way about: if x freely decides to perform A at some point of time t , then this is what makes the corresponding proposition timelessly true and enables it to be known by God.

If x decided to perform B instead of A , then God would have known this instead of what he knows factually. In other words, it is not the truth of the proposition that causes x to perform A at t , but the free act to perform A at t that enables God to know timelessly the truth of the corresponding proposition. Therefore, the pantheistic assumption that God’s knowledge changes or is added to due to the behavior of free creatures is implausible given that truth is a logical property of propositions. The only argument against this assumption, i.e., the argument that the timeless truth of propositions about free acts entailed the impossibility of libertarian freedom is not sound because it wrongly assumes that truth is a causal and not a logical property of true propositions.

Therefore, the argument that according to theism God is immutable and according to panentheism God changes is not a sound argument and therefore does not demarcate theism from panentheism.

Panentheism and Classical Theism

Panentheism is the thesis that (a) the identity of every mental and every physical item is determined by the identity of God without God’s identity being reducible to any physical or any mental thing in particular and (b) necessarily there is something mental and something physical. Classical theism agrees on (a) but rejects (b). According to classical theism, it is only contingently true that there is something mental and physical apart from

God. As we have seen, this is the only difference between classical theism and panentheism. According to either position creation out of nothing and a temporal beginning of the world is intelligible, and according to both God is the one principle of ontology and epistemology. Both theses operate with the same concept of God and the putative distinction that on panentheistic premises God can be changed while on classical theism God cannot be changed turned out to be untenable. It follows that the only argument that could decide between classical theism and panentheism had to be an argument entailing either the conclusion that of necessity there is a world or the conclusion that it is only contingently true that there is something in addition to God.

However, we might not be in a position to decide between panentheism and classical theism. Arguments for the contingency of the world are based on the premise that it is conceivable that there might not have been a world and that therefore it is possible that there might not have been one. There are two problems with these kinds of argument. Firstly, they presuppose the assumption that conceivability entails metaphysical possibility, an assumption that is often criticized in recent discussion.³⁷ Secondly, they face the problem of whether we can actually conceive of there being no world. Arguably, this is a capacity we lack. As Rundle argues, ‘our attempts at conceiving of total non-existence are irredeemably partial. We are always left with something, if only a setting from which we envisage everything having departed, a void which we confront and find empty, but something which it makes sense to speak of as having once been home to bodies, radiation, or whatever.’³⁸

As regards arguments for the necessity of the world we can exclude arguments for the eternity of the world since even the contingency of the world does not exclude its eternity. Nevertheless, it seems to me that there are two kinds of argument that could be deployed in order to show that there is a world of necessity and that I would like to mention briefly. The first kind of argument is familiar from considerations to be found in the tradition of German Idealism. According to this kind of argument, finitude entails there being infinitude in much the same way in which the infinite entails there being the finite.³⁹ Therefore, if this is true and we assume that the world is finite and God infinite, then it follows that there has to be a world of necessity.⁴⁰

The second kind of argument is concerned with the *prima facie* plausible principle of sufficient reason. Leibniz states the principle thus: ‘Now we must rise to *metaphysics*, making use of the *great principle* [...] which holds that *nothing takes place*

³⁷ Cf., for instance, Chalmers, David: ‘Does Conceivability Entail Metaphysical Possibility?’ In: Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne (ed.): *Conceivability and Possibility*. Oxford 2002.

³⁸ Rundle, Bede: *Why there is something rather than nothing*. Oxford 2004, p. 110.

³⁹ Cf. Gregersen, Niels Henrik: ‘Three Varieties of Panentheism.’ In: Clayton, Philip and Arthur Peacocke (ed.): *In Whom We Live and Move and have our Being. Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*. Eerdmans Publishing 2004, p. 29: ‘Hegel came to the rescue by proposing a deeper concept of infinity [...]. According to Hegel, Fichte was right in insisting that infinity should not be understood in contrast to finitude. Infinity is not that which starts on the other side of finitude. Neither is infinity just the endless process of transcending, in analogy to an endless series of numbers. These examples constitute only the concept of a “bad infinity” (das schlechte Unendliche). The concept of genuine infinity (das wirklich Unendliche) is rather that which includes finitude within itself.’ Also Krause, the unrightfully forgotten German idealist, argued that finitude is an essential element of the *Absolut-in-itself* such that although properly understood there is Absolute as such is without limitation, it is of necessity limited in itself as finitude.

⁴⁰ Of course, this only entails that some world has to be, not that the actual world of necessity is the actual world.

without sufficient reason, that is to say that nothing happens without its being possible for one who has enough knowledge of things to give a reason sufficient to determine why it is thus and not otherwise.⁴¹ Deploying the classical theist's assumption that the world is contingent – that it is only contingently true that there is a world – together with the principle of sufficient reason as stated we obtain the contradiction that it is necessarily true that there is a world.⁴² Here is why: suppose that x is the sufficient reason that explains there being a world contingently. Itself x is either contingent or necessary. If x is contingent, then according to the principle of sufficient reason there is another sufficient reason y explaining x ad infinitum. If, however, x is necessary, then x is a necessarily sufficient reason for there being a world. And if x is a necessarily sufficient reason for there being a world, then x cannot fail to be the reason for there being a world which is to say that there is a world of necessity. We obtain the contradiction that the world is both necessary and contingent.⁴³ Whilst the classical theist rejects the principle of sufficient reason or tries to find a weaker version in order to rescue the contingency of the world, the pantheist could happily endorse the principle of sufficient reasons as it stands and reject the assumption that it is only contingently true that there is a world.⁴⁴

Anyway, the aim of this paper is not to decide between classical theism and pantheism, but only to show that as long as we do not have a sound argument entailing the necessity of the world, pantheism is not an attractive alternative to classical theism.

⁴¹ Mary Morris (ed.): *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*. J.M Dent & Sons 1934, pp. 25–26.

⁴² This contradiction is also implicitly in Leibniz. Cf. Sobel: 'Leibniz had a problem, for he had two horrors. He had a horror of BRUTE FACT, and he had a horror of UNIVERSAL NECESSITY. He wanted to deny the first without falling into the second. And so he ran into difficulty, for he *wanted desperately* to "square a circle". He wished for *sufficient* reasons for all *contingencies*, whereas *sufficient* reasons, by their natures, are not possible for *any* contingencies. He wished to ground all contingencies in necessities. But contingencies can be grounded, if at all, only in other contingencies, so that it is *impossible* to ground them all' (Jordan Howard Sobel: *Logic and Theism. Arguments for and Against beliefs in God*. Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 231.)

⁴³ Peter van Inwagen argues in a similar way. The principle of sufficient reason, however, 'has a consequence most people would have a very hard time accepting: that all true propositions are necessarily. In broad outline, the argument is this: if there are any contingent propositions (that is, contingently true propositions), then there is a set of all contingent propositions; but an explanation of any set of contingent propositions must appeal to some contingent propositions outside that set; hence, the whole set of contingent propositions can have no explanation; hence, if every set of true propositions is such that there is an explanation for the fact that it contains only truths (as the Principle implies), there can be only necessary truths' (Peter van Inwagen: *Metaphysics*. Westview Press 2002, p. 119). Cf. also Sobel: '[The principle of sufficient reason] is inspired by the idea that contingencies, one and all, must be grounded in necessities. In fact, however, necessities can have nothing at all to do with contingencies. [...] There is a chasm between necessities and contingencies, and though relations of relevance and of reasons run on both sides of the divide, there are none that run across either way.' Jordan Howard Sobel: *Logic and Theism. Arguments for and Against Beliefs in God*. Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 225.

⁴⁴ Assuming for the sake of argument that the actual world is in fact the best of all possible worlds, there is, of course, the further problem of whether God – if God is omniscient, omnipotent and morally perfect – had to create the best of all possible worlds or whether he could have refrained from doing so. If he had to create this world, then the world exists of necessity. If not, then it is contingent but hard to understand that God is morally perfect and omniscient and omnipotent since it seems to be of positive moral value that the best of all possible worlds exists. And it seems to be ad hoc to argue, as Leibniz does, that 'God is metaphysically perfect of necessity [but] he is [not] morally perfect of necessity, but rather [only] by choice' (Robert C. Sleight: 'Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.' In: R. Audi: *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 425–429.)