Three Varieties of Panentheism

NIELS HENRIK GREGERSEN

> Willst du ins Unendliche schreiten, geh im Endlichen und
> schaue nach allen Seiten.
>
> *J. W. Goethe, letter to Herder, 1787*

Literally, pan-en-theism means that "all" (Gk. *pan*) is "in" God (Gk. *theos*), but God is not exhausted by the world as a whole (G > W). As such panentheism attempts to steer a middle course between an acosmic theism, which separates God and world (G / W), and a pantheism which identifies God with the universe as a whole (G = W). Positively speaking, panentheists want to balance divine transcendence and immanence by preserving aspects of the former's claim of God's self-identity while embracing the latter's intimacy between God and universe.

So far it seems to me that panentheism offers a general direction of thought that should be welcomed by Christian theology. The problem is, however, that the concept of panentheism is not stable in itself. The little word "in" is the hinge of it all. There may be as many panentheisms as there are ways of qualifying the world's being "in God." The idea of panentheism therefore needs specification, and this can be offered only by the interpretative frameworks of specific philosophical or religious doctrines of God. In what follows I shall thus propose a typology of three versions of panentheism within Western tradition. (I suspect that more varieties could be identified in Eastern religion and philosophy, but I shall not attempt an exhaustive taxonomy here.)

I further argue that the philosophical and theological viability of pan-

entheism depends on the particular version of panentheism appealed to, and on the status that one will accord the panentheistic imagery. Let me begin by pointing to two caveats. First, does God literally "contain" the universe in a spacelike manner? From the perspective of a Christian doctrine of creation the answer would be negative, for in this case the transcendence of God would be understood as a mere extension of the world's space. But "God is His own space," as an old principle says (formulated by John of Damascus in *On the Orthodox Faith* 13.11). The point here is that the Creator's "space" is not based on the created time-space continuum; rather the world's spatial-temporal existence is opened by and embraced by God's unimaginable "roominess." In this sense God's embrace of the world of nature is fully affirmed, but the container metaphor should not be taken to suggest a spatial continuum from the world to God. Similarly with the claim that God "has" a body, and that the world is therefore "God's body." This metaphor should in my view be used with even more care. While the soul in antiquity was seen as the life-supporting part of the human person, "mind" is, in today's anthropology, generally viewed as a "supervening" reality based on the "subvenient" causal basis of the human body.[1] Attractive as the soul-body metaphor may have been in the past, it no longer commends itself as an adequate contemporary model for the God-world relationship. God would appear as an emergent reality arising out of natural processes rather than the other way around.

There is, however, an important ontological position, which is more or less shared by all versions of panentheism, and which I find theologically central. This is the claim that there exists a real two-way interaction between God and world, so that (1) the world is somehow "contained in God" and (2) there will be some "return" of the world into the life of God. The idea of bilateral relations between God and world may even be said to be distinctive for panentheism. At least the idea that the world affects God differs markedly from the monism of pantheism, which does not allow for any God-world interactionism, and from classic philosophical theism, which has traditionally claimed that God remains unaffected by the fates and fortunes of the world.

Three Varieties of Panentheism

Setting up a *typology* means proposing a map of viable options within a more general landscape of intellectual pathways, but not a comprehensive map of the whole territory. In contrast to a taxonomy, a typology does not necessarily operate with either-or alternatives. But even if there are overlaps between, say,

type 1 and type 2, and between type 2 and type 3, there need not necessarily be a common substrate between types 1, 2, and 3. Often we are dealing with what Wittgenstein called "family resemblances" beyond identifiable essences. The only generic elements I presuppose is the claim of a two-way traffic between God and world.

The first version I call a *soteriological panentheism* because the world's being "in God" is not taken as a given, but as a gift. It is only by the redeeming grace of God that the world can dwell in God; not everything shares automatically in divine life. Wickedness and sin, for example, have no place in the reign of God. Thus in a classic Christian perspective the world's being "in God" does not so much state a general matter of fact, but is predicated only about those aspects of created reality that have become godlike, while they still remain a created reality. Only in the eschatological consummation of creation shall God finally be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

Another form of panentheism I call a revelational or *expressivist panentheism*. This idea came up in the context of early-nineteenth-century German idealism in order to overcome a purely anthropocentric concept of God.[2] The point here is that the divine Spirit expresses itself in the world by going out of God and returning to God, enriched by the experiences of world history. This kind of theology can be seen as a universalized but also as a secularized version of the received Christian view. In fact, the term "panentheism" emerged in the context of post-Hegelian philosophical theology.

Finally, we have the *dipolar panentheism* of Whiteheadian process theology. Here God is assumed to be in some aspects timeless, beyond space and self-identical, while in other aspects temporal, spatial, and affected by the world. While dipolar process theism is conceptually worked out in terms of panentheism, the two aforementioned models of thought can be termed panentheistic only in a restricted sense. The soteriological model would say that the self-revelation of divine love is not found everywhere in a world, but only here and there. In this sense the "all" of *pan*-en-theism is qualified: while truth, love, and beauty certainly "exist in God," evil cannot be said to exist in God in the same manner. The expressivist model would add that only when the history of the world has been completed and sublated in God will the circle of divine self-expression and self-return be closed. In this sense also the "in" of pan-*en*-theism is called into question. By implication it seems that a full-blown panentheism risks the twofold danger of not fully preserving the identity of God while at the same time giving evil an ontological status not accorded it in the three Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Whether or not these dangers can be circumvented remains to be seen.

Generic, Strict, and Qualified Panentheism

With these distinctions in mind, we may ask: What constitutes the common aspiration of the three versions of panentheism? I suggest that they all *share the intuition of a living two-way relation between God and world, within the inclusive reality of God.* Accordingly there are both active and responsive aspects of divinity vis-à-vis the world. Thus understood, a broad or general notion of panentheism seems to include at least two elements:

Generic Panentheism, Defined
1. God contains the world, yet is also more than the world. Accordingly, the world is (in some sense) "in God."
2. As contained "in God," the world not only derives its existence from God but also returns to God, while preserving the characteristics of being a creature. Accordingly, the relations between God and world are (in some sense) bilateral.

As is evident, the difficulty in both (1) and (2) is to determine the "in some sense." A panentheism in the strong sense holds that there is a *necessary* interdependence between God and world so that the world contributes to God as much as God contributes to the world. This view is unreservedly expressed by Alfred North Whitehead,

> It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.
> It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many. . . .
> It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.
> It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.[3]

This symmetrical view of the God-world relation was further developed by Charles Hartshorne into the concept of process panentheism or "surrelativism."[4] On this account, God is metaphysically limited by the world, since God cannot exist without a world, though God could coexist with another world than our present cosmos. Furthermore, even though God's actual being is affected by the indelible freedom of natural events, God is surpassing the world by God's eternal envisioning of all potentialities. These tenets of process theism differ not only from a classical substance theism, but also from

the relational theism of Christian trinitarianism (panentheism 1) as well as from the romantic expressivism (panentheism 2). The differences may be stated as follows.

Strict (Dipolar) Panentheism, Defined
1. God cannot exist without generating a world, analogous to the way a soul cannot exist without a body; however, God can exist by embodying other worlds than our physical cosmos.
2. It is by a metaphysical necessity that God and world coexist and codetermine one another, so that God influences the world and temporal experiences flow into the actual nature of God; all that exists necessarily participates in divine life.

Qualified (Christian) Panentheism, Defined
1. While the world cannot exist without God, God could exist without a world; accordingly, the soul-body is at the most a useful metaphor for the intimacy of the God-world relation once the world is created out of divine love.
2. It is by divine grace that the world is codetermining God, so that temporal events may influence God and creatures share the life of God; all that is redeemed participates in divine life.

Defining panentheism as a distinct position, however, faces the problem of demarcation. What differentiates panentheism from classic tradition? Proponents of panentheism often claim it better articulates the immanence of God than classical theism. I believe, however, that this claim is unwarranted, for classical theism, even in the form of substance theism, entails a very strong doctrine of divine immanence. Hear the answer of Thomas Aquinas to the question "whether God exists in everything": "God exists in everything; not indeed as part of their substance or as an accident, but as an agent is present to that in which its action takes place. . . . Now since it is God's nature to exist, he it must be who properly causes existence in creatures, just as fire itself sets other things on fire. . . . So God must exist intimately in everything" (ST I 8 a 1).[5] Thus the immanence of God in the creatures is indeed asserted by classical theism, since God is identified as the power to exist in and above all that exists. Without the creator becoming a creature ("part of their substance") and without God being an emergent property of the world (an "accident"), God creates the world as if from within. At this juncture Thomas is able to use both the body-soul metaphor and the container metaphor. In fact, Thomas is able to use panentheistic imagery, but he makes clear their metaphorical status: "That in which bodily

things exist contains them, but immaterial things contain that in which they exist, as the soul contains the body. So God also contains things by existing in them. However, one does use the bodily metaphor and talk of *everything being in God* inasmuch as he contains them (ST I 8 a 1 ad secundum)."[6] Thus the real demarcation line between panentheism and classic philosophical theism is neither the immanence of God nor the use of the metaphor of the world's being "in" God.

The real difference, according to Thomas, is that 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 *(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 (*Summa Theologiae* 1.28.a.1). In short, Thomas rejects not the first but only the second tenet of generic panentheism, as defined above.

Soteriological Panentheism in the Context of Trinitarian Thought

What follows is thus an attempt to sort out different ways of developing the intuitive idea of the world's being "in God." I see at least three ways something can be "in" something else. The first way of in-being is like a ball placed in a bowl in a physical sense. Most would agree that this container model does not work when talking about the God-world relationship. However, there is also the case where a finite realization of some possibilities is placed in a wider set of possibilities. In this quasi-mathematical sense the world's being in God can be expressed as follows: something real but finite (the world of creation) is carved out, as it were, and allowed to exist out of infinite divine possibilities. This is a far more suggestive way of understanding the world's being in God, especially if it is made clear that natural events are not simply "parts" of the divine but realizations made possible by divine creation. But third, and most importantly in our context, something can be in another thing in a qualitative sense, such as when the beloved is present to the lover, even when physically absent, or when the playing of a symphony orchestra is so sensitive that each member of the orchestra becomes one of many in the unified experience of the symphony. The experience of attunement is here at the forefront. This third understanding of our "being in God" is the one emphasized in trinitarian thought.

As is well known, Thomas developed his philosophical theology within the confines of an Aristotelian substance metaphysics. According to Aristotle, relations are only "accidents" that cannot and do not change the "essence" of things. Relations are external, not internal, to substances, and so is the relation of the world to God. There is, however, another route to follow within classic Christian thought which starts out from a reflection on the three divine persons rather than from a presupposed model of divine simplicity. This is the preferred way of Eastern Orthodoxy.[7] The "essence" *(ousia)* of the divine life is thus a result of the reciprocal relations between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so that, for instance, the Fatherhood of God is coconstituted by the Son, and vice versa; likewise the Holy Spirit is not a free-floating force but has the personal character of wanting to accomplish the will of the divine community. Accordingly, the life of God is a *community* constituted by the interdependencies of divine persons. God exists as God only in the eternal mutual relations of self-donation and interpenetration *(perichoresis)* between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Trinitarian doctrine is thus one way of explicating the biblical message that "God *is* love" (1 John 4:16).

In his influential book *Being as Communion*, John D. Zizioulas has further argued that the trinitarian dogma entails a more general ontology: there is no true being without community, and no individual is conceivable in isolation from others. This ontology, according to Zizioulas, also entails a vision of created personhood: "Communion which does not come from a 'hypostasis,' that is, a concrete and free persons, and which does not lead to 'hypostases,' that is, concrete and free person, is not an 'image' of the being of God."[8] Now the question is whether this trinitarian idea of divine relationality can be extended so as to encompass the world and thus allow for a "return" of the world into the being of God. It should here be noted that seen from a historical perspective, there is no such direct way from a trinitarian view of God to asserting a two-way traffic between God and world. But there might be an indirect route. For what is characteristic of trinitarian thought is a highly developed notion of a human participation in divine life.[9]

Key elements of this idea of a sharing of divine life are thus present in broad strands of the biblical traditions, not least in the context of the Spirit of God who in the last days shall be poured out on all flesh (Joel 3:1-5 [2:28-32]; Acts 2:17). And 2 Peter 1:4 sets forth the promise that "you may be partakers in the divine nature."[10] More than anything else, however, it was the Johannine tradition that gave the impetus for patristic trinitarian reflection and for the idea of a human participation in God. The prologue of Saint John's Gospel reads, "In the beginning was the Word *(Logos)*. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. It was with God at the beginning. All things came into be-

ing through the Word, and without it not one thing came into being. What has come into being in it was life, and the life was the light of all people" (John 1:1-4). The Logos (which in v. 14 is identified with Christ) is here said to be (1) "one with God" and thus to share the divinity with the Father. But the Logos is also (2) the principle of creation, through which "all things came into being," and finally (3) the principle of revelation, "the light of all people." Thus the divine Logos has both a cosmological and a revelational function.

The difficulty was to convey this message in Latin. The later standard translation of the Vulgate from around 400 translates "Logos" with the Latin *Verbum* (Word), which is still the usual translation. However, the earlier church fathers knew well that "Logos" could be translated both with *ratio* (Reason or Pattern) and *sermo* (Sermon or Dialogue).[11] In fact, the idea of a divine Pattern/Dialogue, putting the two together, expresses the unity of the two functions of the Logos as the principle of creation and revelation. Accordingly we could translate the opening passage of Saint John's Gospel as follows, "In the beginning was the Pattern *(Logos = ratio)*, and the Pattern was with God, and the Pattern was God. . . . All things came into being through this Pattern, and without it nothing came into being." On this account every configuration within the world of creation is a specified pattern elicited by the all-pervasive creative Pattern of the Logos. Being a creature simply means participating in a creaturely network of configurations, which is continuously reshaped by the creative information of the divine Logos. In this perspective the being in God of the creatures is not like a ball in a bowl, but they are specified configurations out of the endless fecundity of the divine Logos. However, God is not only creative, but also communicative. Each and any creature is addressed by the Logos. Here the informational or revelational aspects of the Logos come to the fore, and we could translate the prologue as follows, "In the beginning was the Dialogue *(Logos = sermo)*, and the Dialogue was in God, and the Dialogue was God. . . . All things came into being through this Dialogue, and without it nothing came into being." The world, we might say, is "in God" insofar as nothing can exist apart from the network of relations shaped and sustained by the divine Pattern, which also provides the divine milieu for all communication taking place within the world.

In the farewell discourses of John 14–17 (the main exegetical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity), we find a stronger sense in which the divine *perichoresis* extends to a *perichoresis* with worldly creatures. The basic formula is that Christ is "in the Father," and the disciples are "in Christ." There is, first, the mutual indwelling of the Christ (on earth) and the transcendent Father: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (14:10). This mutual indwelling expresses itself in the conformity between the works of Jesus and the will of God.

But there is, second, a similar relation between Christ and his followers. Jesus encourages his disciples by promising them that the Spirit will come to liberate them and fulfill the work of Christ and the Father. At that time, finally, there shall be a mutual coinherence between Christ and the believers, which leads to a union with God: "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (14:20). In this trinitarian vision ultimate salvation means participating in the divine community. However, the statement of the disciples being in God is not a proposition about a present state of affairs, but is part of a future-oriented promise: "On that day you will know. . . ."

In this temporal world, however, we are not yet there. Only that which is born out of love is attuned to the love that God eternally is, and only that which is attuned to divine love can dwell in God. While the prologue of John spoke of the world as participating in the life and light of the Logos, elements of the world are here said to be present in God in the qualitative mode of an indwelling. Eastern Orthodox theology does not shrink away from saying that salvation means becoming like God, *theosis*, or even being deified in a process of *theosis*. Even though the being *(ousia)* of God is incommunicable, it is claimed that the uncreated activities *(energeia)* of God do include human beings.[12]

At this juncture, however, the spiritual tradition of Christianity distrusts a general metaphysical doctrine that holds that just anything, regardless of all its qualities, is "in God." It would be asked, Are all things really united with God? Is small-mindedness, miserliness, hatred, torture, terror, war? The biblical tradition denies this by saying that expressions of sin ("flesh and blood") shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). Only faith, hope, and love can abide in the extended divine network of personal relations (1 Cor. 13:13). "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16). To be "in God" is possible only by being attuned to the self-giving, communicative Love that binds all things together. In this sense the "in" of pan-*en*-theism is highly qualified. Panentheism could not be affirmed as a matter of fact, but only as a movement of conversion and attunement to God, a movement not fulfilled until after the resurrection. Soteriological panentheism could thus also be referred to as an "eschatological panentheism," to use the term employed by John Polkinghorne.[13]

Expressivist Panentheism in the Context of German Idealism

We now turn to the expressivist version of panentheism in romanticism and idealism. The very term "panentheism" was coined as late as 1829 by the post-

Kantian philosopher and mystic Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832). Notorious for inventing new and often obscure neologisms, he has had a considerable degree of success with the term "panentheism."[14]

Following the subjective idealist Fichte, Krause took his point of departure from the experiencing ego. His point was that anyone who realizes his or her own finitude also reaches a spiritual intuition of the infinity of God as the primordial being. With Schelling, the thinker of objective idealism, Krause referred to God as the one who in himself — as *Orwesen* (another neologism!) — is beyond all dualisms, but who nonetheless — as *Urwesen* in relation to the world — manifests both Contrabeing *(Gegenwesen)* and Unified Being *(Vereinwesen)*. Hereby Krause emphasized that God's internal being contains more than is manifest in the world. Yet at the same time all divine activity is motivated by the divine love, which promotes otherness and brings back the world into the divine life: "Love is the living form of the inner organic unification of all life in God. Love is the eternal will of God to be lovingly present in all beings and to take back the life of all his members into Himself as into their whole life."[15] We immediately recognize the important motif of the world returning into divine life. Human reason and nature are seen as subordinate beings, ontologically distinct from, yet somehow lying within, God. Each in their way, humanity and nature express the richness of divine life. However, since humanity epitomizes the synthesis between nature and reason far beyond that of plants and animals, humanity is seen by Krause as particularly expressive of the divine life. In this way the pious strife for a union with God *(Gottesinnigkeit)* is part of a comprehensive metaphysics of love according to which nature is contained within the human community, and the human community within the life of God. Krause's panentheism shares the goal of romanticism and idealism, viz., to overcome the split between humanity and nature and to move beyond the alternatives of a supernaturalist theism (as epitomized by Leibniz) and the idea of pantheism (as formulated by Spinoza).[16] The remedy was the idea of nested hierarchies: nature in humanity, and humanity in God.

This expressivist view of divine love emerged in a situation when philosophical theologians attempted to find a third way between pantheism and supernaturalism. The challenge of Spinoza's pantheism was his thesis that there is "a oneness of the supreme God with nature itself, or with the universe of all things."[17] In his *Ethics* from 1677, Spinoza distinguished between God as the "one substance" of all things and all things as the "modes" or "affections" of God" (bk. I, def. 3).[18] God is not the external creator, but the "immanent cause" of all things (bk. I, prop. 18). In this context also Spinoza can occasionally use the panentheistic formula that "everything is in God" (bk. I, prop. 15).

However, Spinoza's first-cause theology implies quite a few philosophical problems. First, he presupposed a deterministic worldview. Whether one perceives the world from the "vertical" perspective of the creative principle of "God" *(natura naturans)* or from the "horizontal" perspective of natural networks *(natura naturata)*, all is determined by God or nature (bk. I, prop. 29, 33). Secondly, Spinoza had difficulties in accounting for the ontological status of individual beings. The stone on the beach, the horse on the field, and the mathematical argument are all "modes" of the same substance, but not really discrete events. Finally, Spinoza found that the world is perfect, because it derives its existence from a perfect divinity (bk. I, prop. 33; bk. III, preface).[19] The romanticists were for good reasons not willing to subscribe to any of these implications.

Paradoxically Leibniz's perfect-being theism had come into disrespect for similar reasons. Also Leibniz subscribed to a doctrine of determinism, a doctrine which was not seen by the German idealists to give proper room to human freedom. And while Leibniz certainly was able to safeguard the reality of individual beings (the "monads"), he subscribed to the idea that the world must be "the best possible world" since it originates from an omnipotent and benevolent God.

Thus both pantheism and supernaturalism seemed to face unsurmountable problems. Add to this the critique of Fichte that the very notion of divine personhood implies a finitization of divine infinity. Being a person means to stand in a relation to another, but the idea of true infinity seems to exclude the borderlines of a person "here" standing in a relation to another person "there."[20]

Here Hegel came to the rescue by proposing a deeper concept of infinity which also implied a new view of divine perfection. 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 schlecht Unendliche)*. The concept of genuine infinity *(das wirklich Unendliche)* is rather that which includes finitude within itself. In this sense the finite world has its being "in" the infinite God. Panentheistic formulations seemed almost unavoidable.

From this infinity-based concept of God Hegel reconceived the idea of divine causality and divine perfection, while also safeguarding the subjectivity of God. Hegel did so by expanding the dogma of the Trinity into a universal vision for the God-world relation. To create a world is not a free option for God, but is an implication of the self-giving nature of God. It belongs to the perfec-

tion of God to set free and to include finitude. As absolute being, God (the "Father") is no longer the remote inaccessible deity of a first-cause theology, but the kenotic, self-divesting, and relational Being, who manifests himself in the history of humanity (the "Son"), and does so in the form of a self-consciousness ("Spirit"). The overarching model of God is here one of a self-conscious subjectivity who creates the otherness of creation in order to bring it back into divine life. As expressed in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, "God is only God to the extent that God knows godself; God's self-knowing is, further, a self-consciousness in humanity and humanity's knowledge *of* God, which proceeds to humanity's self-knowing *in* God."[21] Thus the Spirit both proceeds from God and returns to God, enriched by the experiences in the world of creation. Hegel is here an heir of the Western version of trinitarian theology that gives priority to the unity of God, here in the form of the self-manifesting subjectivity of the Father. However, when Hegel sees the creation and redemption of the world as the self-realization of divine life, the divine life opens up and embraces the world. The internal divine life will thus in the end coincide with the history of divine redemption. Thus the concept of divinity includes three elements in which the Absolute presents itself, "(a) as eternal content abiding with itself in its manifestation [Father]; (b) as differentiation of eternal being [Son] from its manifestation, which through this differentiation becomes the phenomenal world into which the content enters; (c) as infinite return [Spirit] of the alienated world and its reconciliation with eternal being."[22] The characteristics of a generic panentheism (as defined above) are no doubt present in Hegel. But note also the continued presence of the soteriological pattern of Christian trinitarianism. That is, the world is not yet fully in God, but is destined to be reconciled with God. Hegel is not compelled to say, with Leibniz in his *Theodicy* from 1710, that our world, as it is, is "the best possible world." Evil exists, and evil cannot exist — as evil — in God. However, evil is a necessary by-product of the self-alienation which logically follows from finite knowledge. (This is, according to Hegel, why the fall of Adam and Eve is connected to the eating of the fruits of the tree of knowledge in Genesis 3.) Stones, plants, and animals don't sin. But the evils of self-alienation are necessary stages of human emergence. (Here Hegel appropriates the old idea of a *felix culpa* or felicitous fall.) In this manner God's creation of finite awareness coincides with the fall away from God. Only in the long process of returning into the divine will the alienated world be reconciled with God.[23] Evil shall then be "sublated" or absorbed by God. Put in traditional terms: only at the consummation of world history will the "economic Trinity" (God's relation to the world) coincide with the "immanent" Trinity (God's internal life). This whole process is guided by the idea of the self-expressive yet self-divesting divine Spirit.

In this sense the core of the romantic-idealist tradition of philosophical theology has helpfully been termed "natural supernaturalism."[24] For it is *in* the "natural" world that God's love becomes manifest. And yet it is only in the return to God that the world of nature participates in "supernatural" life, liberated from the alienations of finitude.

Dipolar or Whiteheadian Panentheism

We have seen that straightforward panentheistic formulas can occasionally be found in both Thomas and Spinoza. I also argued that the defining feature of the world's return into God can be traced back to some forms of trinitarian theology that were later highlighted in expressivist romanticism. However, it was not until the work of the process philosopher Charles Hartshorne that the idea of panentheism was promoted as a distinct option in philosophical theology. Already in the programmatic article "A Mathematics of Theism" from 1943,[25] Hartshorne argued that among the formally possible forms of theism, panentheism commended itself as the "higher synthesis" of theism and pantheism. Whereas traditional theism claims God to be the universal cause (C) and pantheism understands God as the all-inclusive reality of the world (W), panentheism holds that God, without contradictions, is CW, i.e., both the universal cause and the all-inclusive reality.

This solution is semantically stable only if one distinguishes between two aspects or "poles" of the one and same God. The backbone of Hartshorne's panentheism exactly lies in his dipolar concept of God. In one respect God is essentially unchangeable, but in another respect God is dependent on all that is encompassed by God. According to Hartshorne, no power is conceivable which is not influenced by that over which the power is exercised. Therefore Hartshorne rejects the idea of a divine creation "out of nothing" resp. "out of God." God necessarily stands in relation to a necessarily preexisting world. God is the world's creator insofar as God gives form and shape to everything, but God is also a creature of the world who absorbs and coordinates the events that from time to time enter into divine experience. The world transcends God as well as God transcends the world.[26] Irrespective of the manner in which the universe is actually developing, the absolute self-identity or essence of God is thus preserved: "God as CW 'transcends' the world, not only as every whole transcends each and every one of its parts, but in the uniquely radical way of containing an essence or element of self-identity absolutely independent of whichever among possible contingent things are actual as parts of the Whole."[27] Hartshorne's dipolar concept of

God is thus the key to his revision of first-cause theology. As rightly observed by Hartshorne's collaborator William L. Reese, it is the dipolar concept that specifies Hartshorne's panentheism, and not the other way around.[28]

In the same vein, Hartshorne proposed a highly influential reconception of the idea of divine perfection. In classical philosophical theism, divine perfection is understood as the prior possession of all possible predicates. God is the perfect absolute (A). By contrast, pantheism understands God as the perfect relative (R). But also here panentheism follows the "golden mean" that God is AR, i.e., both the unsurpassable perfect and the self-surpassing perfect that ever grows in perfection.[29]

On the classical understanding as represented by Thomas or Leibniz, God is the *actus purus* who leaves no values unrealized in divine experience. God therefore cannot discover anything, since no knowledge is new to God. Nor can God be affected by the creatures. But according to Hartshorne, the capacity for universal empathy also belongs to the perfection of God. God is the unsurpassable nature, but divine perfection includes a capacity for surpassing Godself by being "sympathetically dependent" on all that happens in the world.[30]

This important idea of divine relativity changes the understanding of divine love. A love which is not sensitive to the particular needs of the beloved is not perfect love. Love is to stretch out and surpass oneself in the direction of the other. It belongs to the greatness of God to be empathically related to all individual events, not only as a passive receptacle for worldly events but also as the one who provides the creative impetus for further developments in the world.

Hartshorne should be given credit for developing a thoroughly social conception of God within philosophical theology. He succeeds in preserving a high degree of divine self-identity, and his panentheism gives full weight to the idea of individuals or "parts" of creation. Hartshorne's worldview, in contrast to Spinoza's, is one of freedom and individuality. It seems to me, however, that the problem of the persistence of evil is not appropriately reflected in Whiteheadian panentheism. For sure, Hartshorne avoids the Spinozistic presupposition that the world is perfect as it is, and process theology provides a theoretical solution of the "theodicy problem" by removing the omnipotence of God. But thereby the practical problem about how to overcome evil is only worsened! There seems no redemption possible for the tragically unfilled aspirations of life, nor for the problem of horrendous evils of wickedness. The closest we come are formulations like these: "What is in the parts is in the whole; so, for example, our misdeeds are in God; but not as his misdeeds, or his deeds at all — rather as his misfortunes. They make his overall

satisfaction less than it otherwise would be, but not his goodness of decision."[31] God's moral identity seems here to be bought at the expense of the tragedy of those creatures who — both as perpetrators and as victims — fail. Dipolar panentheism expresses the passive absorption of experiences into God but has difficulty in speaking about the active transformation of creatures. A soteriological deficit is obvious, because Hartshorne's theory of the God-world relation is general in nature. By contrast, trinitarian panentheism is centered on the soteriological vision of transforming the world into the complex community of divine and creaturely lovers.

There are also important differences to the expressivist version of panentheism. Both Hegel and Hartshorne expound universalist models of the God-world relationship, models that entail a two-way flow between God and world. However, the process view of divine action seems to endanger the idea of divine infinity. Since the creativity of the world is an eternal principle alongside God, God cannot be truly infinite but will always be one factor among other factors. For sure, the divine lure is a factor in all events, but the Christian naturalist assumption that God is at work "in, with, and through" natural processes cannot be articulated. For in a relativistic cosmology based on autonomous local prehensions, God may provide the stimulus for creaturely activity *prior* to natural events and God can absorb the worldly events *after* their occurrence, but God cannot be *simultaneously present* with the creature. To the mind of God, actual occasions remain black boxes.[32] This is an unavoidable consequence of Whitehead's presupposition that God is subdued under the general metaphysical principles as their "chief exemplification."[33]

On this point there is hardly a mediation possible between Hartshorne and the understanding of divine causality in the Abrahamic tradition, which was also presupposed by Hegel. The point of demarcation is whether creativity derives from God the creator or belongs to the everlasting world.[34] We here face a genuine metaphysical alternative: either the matrix into which the transient creatures are woven is the energies and actions of the living God, or God and world share a third common platform within which God and world coexist and subsequently coadapt to one another.[35] For Palamas and the Eastern tradition, the matrix for the divine-human communion is the uncreated energy of God; for Hegel the matrix is the twofold movement of the divine Spirit itself; for process thought the matrix is coconstituted by several actors and principles: (1) the world of eternal objects or possibilities (as envisaged by God), (2) the creativity inherent in actual occasions (be they divine or worldly), and (3) the actual occasions themselves. On the latter account, God and world are different sorts of actual societies whose influences go from here to there. But never is the one the creator and the other the creature. On the

former accounts, however, the infinity of God does not inhibit the freedom of finite beings, since it is the very divine activity that elicits, upholds, and embraces creaturely freedom. On this crucial issue there seems to be no way of mediating between the solution of an infinity-based theology and that of process theology.[36]

Concluding Perspectives

If my observations so far are essentially correct, panentheism should not be regarded as a perennial philosophy. Panentheism came up in the specific context of German idealism as part of various attempts to escape the alternatives of Leibniz's supernaturalism and Spinoza's pantheism. Only later, in the mid–twentieth century, did Hartshorne turn the vexed term "panentheism" into a clear position guided by the specific premises of dipolar theism.

But even though panentheistic systems are relatively new, we have seen that the basic intuitions and metaphors of panentheism can be traced further back in religious tradition. The metaphor of the world's "being in God" is present in many traditions, albeit with different meanings. In the present context I have confined myself to the Christian tradition, but similar metaphors appear in the sacred writings of Hinduism.[37] As argued by the cognitive scientists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, a spatial thinking in "containers" and "contained" is virtually universal.[38] We even found the container scheme in Thomas and Spinoza.

I have therefore proposed the supplementary criterion that in order to count as panentheism (in the broad generic sense), the world is not only in some sense internal to God but there must also be some feedback from world to God. On this definition part of trinitarian tradition as well as Hegel's philosophy of religion can also be termed "panentheist" (even if the term itself is not used). Thus, reading backwards, we come to the threefold typology of soteriological, expressivist, and dipolar panentheisms.

The critical lesson to be learned from this essay is that anyone who wants to describe himself or herself as a panentheist should from the outset make clear what kind of panentheism he or she is endorsing. Panentheism should not be seen as a solution to the problem of thinking about God in a contemporary context. But it may serve as a fruitful heuristic concept, which then immediately requires a specification in order to avoid confusions. I have thus argued that while there is a substantial overlap between soteriological and expressivist panentheism, dipolar panentheism is incompatible with both of them. A clear choice of metaphysical principles will have to be made.

However, even if panentheism is not a stable philosophical "doctrine," its metaphors can still be illuminating. Understanding all things to be in God, as it were, means that we can be at home with God anywhere in the universe. The logic of infinity permits us to think of the presence of God in the midst of reality — without replacing the finite with the infinite. Since there exists no matter without God being present in it, we have the interesting formulas: *God + nature = nature* while *nature - God = 0*. This is another way of stating an old principle from my own Lutheran theological background: *finitum capax infiniti* (finitude allows for the presence of infinity). The infinite God is in principle graspable within finitude. This is aptly expressed by Wolfgang Goethe in the sentence placed at the beginning of this essay: "If you want to enter the infinite, walk in the finite world, and look to all sides." God speaks both in the starry heaven which attracts our eyes and in the cry of the child, who demands our attention. God is to be discovered in the miniatures of life.

The difficulty lies in grasping it, or in being grasped by it. This is why the concept of revelation becomes so important to religion. God's ambiance can in principle be felt by swimming in the ocean as well as in the intricate pattern of the snowflake. For all that is exists as a specified pattern somehow carved out of the creative pattern of God. But to grasp it or not to be grasped by it, that's the crucial question.

Summary

It is argued that the concept of panentheism, attractive as it is, is far from stable. That God is present everywhere in the world, and that the world is somehow present "in God," was already made explicit by the substance theist Thomas Aquinas and the pantheist Spinoza. Against this background a generic concept of panentheism is developed, according to which panentheism contends that (1) the world is somehow contained by God and (2) the world affects God and returns to God. Against this background a typology between three distinct types of panentheism in Western thought is developed. In classic trinitarian thought, dating back to the fourth century, we find resources for what might be dubbed a *soteriological panentheism*. In the context of nineteenth-century romanticism, especially in Hegel, we find a universalized *expressivist panentheism*. In the twentieth century, finally, Charles Hartshorne developed a *dipolar panentheism* in continuation of Whitehead's process philosophy. It is argued that the dipolar panentheism is not compatible with the two other forms of panentheism, and that a metaphysical choice has to be made between them.