

VERITAS INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS GOD?

AN EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION OF PANENTHEISTIC GOD-WORLD MODELS

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## Contents

<b>Thesis</b> .....	3
<b>Defining and Describing Panentheism</b> .....	3
<b>Varieties of Panentheism</b> .....	8
<b>Tracing the Historical Roots of Panentheism</b> .....	9
<b>Panentheism’s Appeal</b> .....	14
Close—but not too Close! .....	14
Better than Deism .....	17
Theodicy .....	18
Ecumenical Bridging .....	19
Modern and Quasi-Scientific .....	19
<b>A Philosophical (Metaphysical) Evaluation of Panentheism</b> .....	21
The Devil in the Details .....	21
The God of the Philosophers? .....	22
An Uncritical Synthesis of Unharmonizable Opposites .....	30
<b>Biblical and Theological Analysis of “Christian Panentheism”</b> .....	37
Acts 17:28 .....	38
Romans 11:36 .....	41
Ephesians 4:6 .....	42
Col 1:16-19 .....	43
2 Cor. 5:19 .....	44
Jeremiah 23:23-24 .....	45
Psalm 139 .....	45
Isaiah 40:18-26 .....	46
The Shechinah (or Shekinah) Glory of God .....	46
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	48
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	50
<b>Appendix I -Scriptural Passages Emphasizing God’s Transcendence</b> .....	52
<b>Appendix II - Catalog of Passages Showing God Sends Rain and Grows Grain</b> .....	60
<b>Appendix III - Tracing the Ideological Inheritance of Panentheism</b> .....	63

## Thesis

Of all the major worldviews, panentheism gets the least recognition, fosters the most confusion, seems to find its way into every religious philosophy, and is therefore the greatest, most underestimated threat to the classical monotheism of biblical Judaism and historically orthodox Christianity. The reasons for this will become clear as we trace its history, its varieties, and the reasons for its appeal. Critical analysis of panentheism will then be offered from philosophical and theological perspectives.

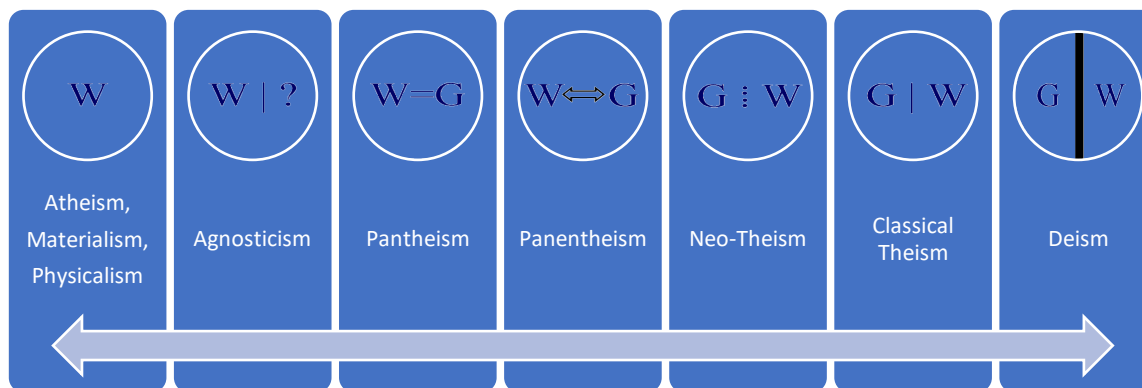
### Defining and Describing Panentheism

The word panentheism is derived from *pan+en+theos*, three Greek words which translate rather straightforwardly into English as *everything+in+God*. This is not to be confused with pantheism (*pan+theism*) which indicates everything is God. All of the panentheistic God-world models agree that the world is inside of God in at least one very profound way ( $W \rightarrow G$ ) and that God is also inside the world ( $G \rightarrow W$ ) in some profound way. They still maintain some line of demarcation between God and the world, where the world ends and where God begins, but those lines are quite permeable and there is considerable interplay between the two ( $G \rightleftharpoons W$ ). By insisting that God exists beyond the world and is more than the world is ( $G > W$ ), panentheism steers a course between pantheism, which holds God and the world as identical ( $G = W$ ), and theism, which views God as totally distinct from the world ( $G \mid W$ ). While this helps get us closer to an understanding of panentheism, it doesn't solve the problem of ambiguity for what exactly is meant by pan, en, and theism.<sup>1</sup> The following graphic shows where panentheism fits in the middle of the spectrum

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<sup>1</sup> See Andrew M. Davis, "Ambiguities in Panentheism: Definitions, Distinctions, and Demarcations."

immediately between pantheism and theism, and, in the greater scheme of things, between atheism and deism.



The term *panentheism* was coined in 1828 by Karl C. F. **Krause** (1781-1832), to distinguish the views of Friedrich W. J. **Shelling** (1775-1854), Georg W. F. **Hegel** (1770-1831), and his own from those of Baruch **Spinoza** (1632-1677). However, Shelling had actually used the word *panentheismus* in 1809 and so could be argued to be the true originator of the term. Prior to this distinction, the term *pantheism*, coined over 120 years earlier by John Toland in 1705 in reference to the view of Spinoza, was an umbrella term that sheltered both pantheistic and panentheistic notions. This is why Shelling and Friedrich D. E. **Schleiermacher** (1768-1834), for example, famously identified themselves as pantheists despite actually being panentheists instead.

As Krause's term only began to gain wide acceptance in the 1950s, and still hasn't achieved universal acceptance today, it is still quite normal for panentheists to be mislabeled as pantheists today. For example, Hegel is still quite typically today labeled pantheist despite panentheist being the more technically accurate label. Meanwhile, Spinoza, whose writings certainly influenced Shelling, Hegel, and countless other panentheists and pantheists, is normally classified as a pantheist. However, based on a few of his writings, more than one person has made a case for Spinoza actually being a panentheist. Given Spinoza's background in Kabbalistic Judaism, it may

be that technically Spinoza was more of a panentheist than a pantheist and perhaps his interpreters tend to interpret him in pantheistic terms. Then again, the Rabbis who would have tolerated panentheism did condemn Spinoza's excesses so perhaps he did cross the line into pantheism. Regardless of who might consistently fit into what category, there is ample room for confusion.

Adding to the confusion, some refer to panentheism as "monistic monotheism," suggesting that God created the world out of himself but is still somehow distinct from the world in one or more ways. Others have referred to it as "di-polar theism" or "bi-polar theism," suggesting that God has one aspect of Itself outside of the world and one pole inside of the world. In their *Introduction to Philosophy*, Geisler and Feinberg list the "emanational pantheism" of Plotinus and Neo-Platonism, the "modal pantheism" of Spinoza, and the "developmental pantheism" of Hegel as varieties of pantheism rather than panentheism. Obviously, there is room to argue here about how to classify the views of these thinkers. They explain, "with the exception of Parmenides' absolute pantheism, all other pantheistic views grant that some kind of distinction (through no division or separation) exists in reality. Whether, however, the distinction is emanational, modal, or developmental, each view holds that reality is ultimately One and that the many exist only in the One."<sup>2</sup> These are very helpful distinctions for thinking about different types of pantheism. They also show how it is difficult for thinkers to be consistent monists and pantheists. Even when the lines between Creator and creation are being erased, some distinction between Creator and creation seems to be impossible to ignore. This also shows how the logical lines between pantheism and panentheism are faint and permeable. Curiously, Geisler and Feinberg, proceed from pantheism to panentheism as if they are two distinct worldviews and relegate panentheism to the thinking of

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<sup>2</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980) 278-279.

Alfred North **Whitehead** and Charles **Hartshorn**. And other “process thinkers” and aptly describe panentheism as “a kind of ‘halfway house’ between theism and pantheism.”<sup>3</sup> Since the lines between pantheism and panentheism obviously blur, Geisler and Feinberg are not wrong in their categorizations. But it seems that if the point is forced, Hegel’s God-world model is probably better categorized as panentheistic. The same might be said of Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists view of the One and the world. In his recorded lectures on Plotinus, Geisler has insisted that Whitehead (and many others) plagiarized heavily from the thought of Plotinus.<sup>4</sup> The influence is likely. Norman Geisler, one of the only evangelicals who has critiqued pantheism, panentheism, and process thought between the 1980 and 2013, consistently equates panentheism and process thought in all of his many books while categorizing the thought of Spinoza and Hegel as pantheism. John W. Cooper is one of the only other evangelicals who has written a major critique of panentheism and he puts Hegel and many others in the category of panentheism. So, while there is obviously room to argue about various God-world models being pantheistic or panentheistic, the time may be overdue to start classifying Plotinus/Neo-Platonists, Hegel, and many others as panentheistic. But rather than getting too focused on how similar views should be classified, it may be more important to see the whole spectrum of views, and see how different models differ more by a few degrees than by type.

While panentheism is relatively new as a classification, as a worldview it may be quite ancient. Although it is a debatable matter, some believe they hear panentheistic undertones in the monotheistic reforms of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaton (d.1358 BC) and in some of India’s oldest holy books—the *Rig Veda* (~1,100 BC), the *Bhagavad Gita* (500-200 BC), and the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 281. In this paper, “process thought” is used as a blanket term for both “process philosophy” and “process theology.”

<sup>4</sup> This lecture is available at <http://normangeisler.com/listen/panentheism.html> as of May 1st, 2019.

*Upanishads* (100 BC - 400 AD). Certainly a few Hindu schools of thought have been more panentheistic than pantheistic. At least one modern Buddhist thinker prefer to be classified as panentheistic rather than atheistic. Panentheism also echoes in the writings of a few thinkers from the Middle Ages in Islamic Sufism, the Kabbalah and mystical thinkers of kabbalistic Judaism, Chasidic Judaism (the thought of which is based variously upon the Bible, the Talmud, the Kabbala, and other oral, and the teaching of various Rabbis), and some other mystical traditions of the world.<sup>5</sup>

Panentheism also may have a noteworthy American heritage. Some of the North American native religions may have had a panentheistic God-world model. One of the more prominent examples would be the Algonquian concept of *manitou*, an animistic and spiritual power that flows through everything in the world, and which has some close connection with the Kitchi-Manitous (or “Great Spirit”), a person who seems like an echo of “primitive monotheism” deity.<sup>6</sup> The Sioux concept Wakan-Tanka, the supreme Spirit among many spirits, and *wakan* as the spirit that is immanent in our world is another good example.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Loriliai Biernacki and Philip Clayton, eds., *Panentheism Across the World's Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> For a further discussion of manitou from an evangelical perspective, see Winfried Corduan, *In the Beginning God: A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monotheism*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 98, 205-7, 216. Corduan does not distinguish between theism and panentheism here but makes a case for what would today be described as henotheism and/or panentheism being an echo of an older monotheism that fits with classical theism.

<sup>7</sup> Eric J. Sharpe, “North American Religion.” S.G.F. Brandon, *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (New York: MacMillian Publishing Company, 1970) 472: “North American Amerind tribes which subsisted on hunting had an animistic belief in spirits, a sense of a Supreme Being (possibly a henotheism), a Demiurgos Trickster, and a multitude of lesser spirits. Kitci Manitou of the Algonkian, Tirawa-Atius of the Pawnee, Wakonda or Wakan-Tanka of the Sioux, and Winnebago Earthmaker are examples of High Gods. “The Supreme Being, whatever his name, is a creator whose power pervades all things and who is concerned with [the] welfare of man. But he does not as a rule intervene directly in human affairs. . . . sends help to us by these lesser powers. . . . everyday practice of religion is concerned less with the Supreme Being than with his emissaries. It should be noted that the name of the Supreme Being is frequently identical with, or similar to, [the] name given to [the] concept of sacred power, or force, present in all things in proportion as they partake of nature of the sacred. Typical words for this power are the Algonkian *manitou*, the Sioux *wakan*, and the Iroquois *orenda*. . . . No clear distinction seems to be drawn between the spirits—of which the Great Manitou was chief—and their supernatural power.”

## Varieties of Panentheism

Precisely which way or ways is God in the world? There are differences of opinion among panentheists about the degree to which God permeates, animates, sustains, influences, and experiences the world. Some see God's energies working in the world to redeem it and gradually turn it into something more indistinguishable from God. Others see God expressing Itself into the world and returning back to God. Some suggest God suffers along with the world and others say God evolves as the world evolves. In all variations, the line between Creator and creation becomes blurred.

Is the world a necessary part of God? Or is it a voluntary extension of God? Does God determine everything that happens in the world? Or is there cooperation between creatures and Creator? Is God personal or is It nonpersonal? Not all panentheists answer the same way.<sup>8</sup> Many assume God to be nonpersonal while some argue that It is personal. Most say God produced the world out of Its self while some say God created the world out of nothing.<sup>9</sup> The former may tend to analogize the relationship between God and the world to the relationship between our minds and bodies. The latter may prefer to liken the God-world relationship to that of an adult mother carrying a developing infant inside of her womb. Others may see God to be something like a seed that unfolds into a flower.

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<sup>8</sup> Most of these distinctions are taken from J. Cooper, *Panentheism*, 27-30, and Niels Henrick Gregersen, "Three Varieties of Panentheism," *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being*, eds. Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (Grand Rapids: MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 21.

<sup>9</sup> Griffin posits "most of the problems of Christian theology, I have emphasized, have been due to, or at least aggravated by the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which was introduced at the end of the second Christian century." David Griffin, *Two Great Truths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 83. The term "creation *ex nihilo*" (out of nothing) may have been coined in the second century but the underlying concept is implied in many passages in books of the Bible that date back many centuries prior.



Some panentheistic God-world models are influenced more by the Plato-Schelling stream while others take their cue from the Plotinus-Hegel stream; some are intoxicated by both. Some may be more influenced by Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Kaballism, Stoicism, Swedenborgism, or Theosophy while others may be more influenced by Spinoza, Stoicism, Hinduism, or Buddhism. Some variations adapt parts of Christianity to their framework while others are antagonistic to it. Similarly, some lean more towards the pantheistic end of the spectrum while others try to stay closer to theism. Physicist and Christian apologist John Polkinghorne is one example of a thinker who stresses God's transcendence in the present time (putting him in the theistic camp) but expects some future eschaton where God absorbs the world into himself (making him a future panentheist). Technically speaking, not all panentheistic models are based on process theism. For all practical purposes, however, the majority of pantheistic models have a God who is in the process of becoming something new and a world that is also in process of becoming something new. Both are changing, evolving, becoming. A focus here will be given on process-thought based panentheism models because they tend to be lauded as the most brilliant and sophisticated. They are the highest evolution of panentheism arguably.

### **Tracing the Historical Roots of Panentheism**

Every Christian who holds to a classical, monotheistic view of God can of course trace the inheritance of their idea of God back to Jesus, Jesus's apostles and their coworkers, Moses and the Hebrew prophets Jesus quoted frequently. While many panentheistic thinkers today don't hesitate to co-opt some of the things that the apostles and prophets wrote, the actual ideological lineage of panentheism actually bypasses the Old and New Testaments and instead goes ultimately back to ancient and pagan Greek metaphysicians such as Parmenides, Plato, and Plotinus.

My introduction to panentheism in my early teenage years through the writings of Tom Brown, Jr., an American from New Jersey, a once-famous instructor in wilderness survival, tracking, and a light-weight guru in a vague, mystical, and nonthreatening spirituality. In place of the word God he would use either “the Great Spirit”<sup>10</sup> or “the Creator.” But of even greater relevance for Brown was “the spirit that moves in all things” which was connected with the Creator in some uncertain way.<sup>11</sup> Brown’s primitive panentheistic God-world model was influenced by those of Native American tribes which believed in a distant and transcendent Sky God who is higher than all other spirits in the hierarchy of spirits and in an animistic sort of force or spirit that is immanent in the world. That spirit is especially detectable in all living things but also may be found in material things like mountains and streams. Brown was also influenced by Henry Davidson Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and other transcendentalist thinkers who helped move many Americans away from theism and towards panentheism and pantheism in the 1930s.

The echoes of transcendentalism also fascinated me in those teenage years where I was forced to do schoolwork when I would have much rather been exploring the fields, streams, deserts, and forests of the natural world. Being in nature and more at one with nature, as opposed to being in the city, made me somehow feel closer to God than being inside of a church building listening to a sermon. Although the influence of Brown and the transcendentalists upon my own God-world model didn’t completely overwhelm the God-world model of classical theism bequeathed to me

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<sup>10</sup> Tom Brown Jr., *The Search* (New York, NY: Berkley Books, 1980) 201.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Brown Jr., *The Tracker* (New York, NY: Berkley Books, 1978) 24. The cover of the book touts itself as “the most powerful and magical high spiritual adventure since The Teachings of Don Juan.” Don Juan was a shaman or sorcerer who also used Yaqui tribe mythology, spirituality, and hallucinogenic herbs to assist Americans in leaving their theistic and Christian upbringing and embracing pantheistic, panentheistic, and animistic God-world models in the 1960s. Also, Tom Brown, Jr., *The Vision: The Dramatic True Story of One Man’s Search for Enlightenment* (New York, NY: Berkley Books, 1988) 108-109. Brown seems to limit the spirit that moves in all things to the life force of living things.

by my parents, grandparents, and church, it did muddle my teenage thinking about God and planted seeds of uncertainty. The uncertainty turned to doubts after encountering the “eastern mysticism” pushed by Frigjof Capra’s *The Tao of Physics*, the Jungian thought and Hinduism of many of Joseph Campbell’s books on comparative religion and mythology, and the thought of Alan Watts, a convert from Christianity to Buddhism whose pendulum moved from classic theism to pantheism and panentheism.

In my later teenage years, these uncertainties about God helped cause me to leave my biblical studies major at an evangelical Christian university for the study of philosophy at a secular university. I wanted to see if it would be possible to remove the freedom-restricting God of the Bible from my thinking and replace him with some other rational standard for meaning and morality. The first and main philosopher we studied was C. S. Peirce (1839-1914), a panentheist. I was hoping my study of the philosophy of pragmatism might help me shift from theist to atheist, getting rid of God entirely if possible, but Peirce, who was obviously one of the most brilliant thinkers who ever put pen to paper, kept injecting God back into my consciousness. The God-world model he was sharing, however, was a panentheistic model which served to confuse me more about what “God” might actually mean. I was frustrated that Peirce didn’t help me get rid of God and frustrated even more that I was less able to define God. Peirce is important to this essay not just for the minor merit of my own personal nostalgic reminiscing but because he is one of the few who helps explain how panentheism became widespread among English-speakers of the post-Calvinist era of New England. His view of the cultural and metaphysical shift is fascinating:

I have begun by showing that tychism [absolute chance] must give birth to an evolutionary cosmology, in which all the regularities of nature and of mind are regarded as products of growth, and to a Shelling-fashioned idealism which holds matter to be more specialized and partially deadened mind. I may mention, for the benefit of those who are curious in studying mental biographies, that I was born and reared in the neighborhood of Concord—

I mean in Cambridge—at the time when Emerson, Hedge, and their friends were disseminating the ideas that they had caught from Schelling, and Shelling from Plotinus, from Boehm, and from God knows what minds stricken with the monstrous mysticism of the East. But the atmosphere of Cambridge held many an antiseptic against Concord transcendentalism; and I am not conscious of having contracted any of that virus. Nevertheless, it is probable that some cultured bacilli, some benignant form of the disease was implanted in my soul, unawares, and that now, after long incubation, it comes up to the surface, modified by mathematical conceptions and by training in physical investigations.<sup>12</sup>

I inherited some panentheistic concepts from Tom Brown, the Transcendentalists, and C.S. Peirce. Peirce was self-aware enough and courteous enough to explain that he inherited those memes, almost as if by osmosis, from Shelling, Boehm, Plotinus, and others. This idea of meme inheritance is important. Much like parents pass their genes on to their children and those children pass their genes on to their children, many philosophical God-world models are transmitted mimetically (memetically) as ideological grandfathers pass their memes down to ideological fathers and ideological sons.<sup>13</sup> Or, alternatively, as Peirce put it, like an infection of a virus or bacteria.<sup>14</sup> Attempting to trace out the ideological inheritance is important.

Around 465 BC, Parmenides taught that ultimate reality boils down to being, that there is only one kind of being, that things can only differ in terms of being versus non-being, and that therefore everything that exists is part of one unchanging, monistic reality. Heraclitus (~450 BC) taught that ultimate reality is all about change. Was ultimate reality all about change or was it all about not changing? Greek metaphysical thought was stuck at this impasse. until Plato came along and combined the two opposing and contradictory views into a new hybrid view that captured the

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<sup>12</sup> C.S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955), 339.

<sup>13</sup> Biologist Richard Dawkins coined and popularized the word “meme” to represent imitated behaviors and ideas that seem to be transmitted from person to person because of some propensity in us to want to mimic (Greek: mimeme) others. These are inherited like “mind viruses” in a way that is somewhat analogous to the way genes are passed on. <https://www.richarddawkins.net/2014/02/whats-in-a-meme/>. Accessed 5/4/2019.

<sup>14</sup> The idea of ideas spreading like infections was also used by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:16-18: “But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.”

imaginings of many. Around 300 BC, Plato applied Parmenides's view to the "ideal world" (the higher reality, the superior, metaphysical realm) and applied Heraclitus's view of reality to our lesser world of "forms" and physical stuff that our five senses can observe. The problems of this synthesis echo around in panentheistic discussions from Plotinus to Hegel to Whitehead and on.

Platonism and Neo-Platonism both played seminal roles in the development of the many variations of panentheistic God-world models in the West. While it may be too great of a stretch to say that Plato himself was a panentheist, he should at least qualify as a "proto-panentheist."<sup>15</sup> John Culp Plato "plays a role in the development of implicit panentheism although there is disagreement about the nature of that role. Hartshorne drew a dipolar understanding of God that includes both immutability and mutability from Plato."<sup>16</sup> Assuming the attempt by James Cooper to trace the memetic inheritance over the centuries is correct, one of Plato's ideas would inspire two highly contagious, influential, and panentheistic streams of thought. One stream can be seen flowing through Shelling, Schleiermacher (the father of theologically liberal Christianity), German Romanticism, English Idealism, English Romanticism, Transcendentalism (including Emerson and Thoreau), and C.S. Pierce, the founder of pragmatism and pragmatism. And through his Neo-Platonic interpreters, some of Plato's other ideas would inspire a second panentheist stream that can be traced through Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart, Böhme, Georg W. F. Hegel, Henri Bergson, and A.N. Whitehead.<sup>17</sup> The two streams often mingle and of course some thinkers were inspired by both streams.

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<sup>15</sup> James W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 32-38.

<sup>16</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panentheism/>. Accessed 5/27/2019.

<sup>17</sup> James Cooper's book *Panentheism* provides the most extensive job of tracing the philosophic influences upon panentheism. Geisler provides a more intensive effort in explaining process thought, one of the more prominent forms of panentheism. Norman L. Geisler, *The History of Western Philosophy, Volume II: Modern and Post-Modern* (Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, 2012), 404-435. Although he does not distinguish between pantheism and

A.N. Whitehead is famous for summarizing the entire sweep of Western philosophy as nothing more than “a series of footnotes to Plato.”<sup>18</sup> Most historians of philosophy would probably grant that there is a hint of truth in this statement but that it is ultimately a large exaggeration. But, when applied to his own panentheistic philosophy, Whitehead’s pronouncement may not be exaggerated at all. For his own philosophy may be little more than a series of footnotes on Plato. The same applies to most, if not all, panentheistic models. They are all a series of footnotes on Plato and/or Neo-Platonists like Plotinus. And although there was a hint of truth in what Friedrich Nietzsche said about the European forms of Christianity in his day being “Platonism for the masses,” the differences between Platonism and Christianity outweigh the similarities. It would be truer to say that panentheism is Neo-Platonism for the masses.

### **Panentheism’s Appeal**

The panentheistic God-world model has some curb appeal. For some, it can shine like the new model on the block that sits between two dusty, dented, worn-out antiques. Attempting to find a happy medium between extremes, this adaptable view capitalizes on some of the strengths of pantheism and theism while distancing itself from some of their perceived weaknesses.

Close—but not too Close!

In affirming God’s radical immanence without denying Its transcendence, it appeals to those who think the God of pantheism too impersonal and the theistic God uncomfortably personal. The famous Albert Einstein, who believer in the non-personal, pantheistic God of Spinoza, asserted, “The main source of the present-day conflicts between the spheres of religion and science

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panentheism, Herrick provides a very helpful historical survey. James A. Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of Western Religious Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 39.

lies in the concept of a personal God.”<sup>19</sup> Einstein didn’t want to believe in a personal God. Here we see how pantheism really isn’t different from atheism. Many pantheists say that all that is real (such as our material universe, its energies, and the laws that govern them) is God and that there is nothing beyond our universe. That’s the same thing that the atheists say. Only atheists avoid using the word God and pantheists just confuse the word world with the word God. Carl Sagan, the famous apologist for humanistic science in the 1980s, is generally thought of as an atheist. But Pantheism.org claims him as a pantheist. Carl Sagan’s son insists, “My father believed in the God of Spinoza and Einstein, God not behind nature but as nature, equivalent to it.”<sup>20</sup> Seeing “God to be essentially the sum total of the physical laws which describe the universe,” Carl Sagan explained, “[the God of theism] is emotionally unsatisfying... it does not make sense to pray to the law of gravity.”<sup>21</sup> Some of us don’t see a real difference between the two; neither have a God who is beyond the world.

C.S. Lewis helps explain the appeal of an impersonal God as he speaks of a pantheism in line with Spinoza-Einstein-Sagan model:

Men are reluctant to pass over from the notion of an abstract and negative deity to the living God. I do not wonder. Here lies the deepest tap-root of Pantheism and of the objection to traditional imagery. It was hated not, at bottom, because it pictured Him as a man but because it pictured Him a king, or even as warrior. The Pantheist’s God does nothing, demands nothing. He is there if you wish for Him, like a book on a shelf. He will not pursue you. There is no danger that at any time heaven and earth should flee away at His glance. If this were the truth, then we could really say that all the Christian images of kingship were a historical accident of which our religion ought to be cleansed. It is with a shock that we discover them to be indispensable. You have had a shock like that before, in connection with smaller matters – when the line pulls at your hand, when something breathes beside you in the darkness. So here; the shock comes at the precise moment when the thrill of life is communicated to us along the clue we have been following. It is always shocking to meet life where we thought we were alone. “Look out!” we cry, “it’s alive.” And therefore this is the very point at which so many draw back - I would have done so myself if I could

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<sup>19</sup> Philipp Frank, *Einstein: His Life and Times* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 285-286.

<sup>20</sup> <https://pantheism.com/about/luminaries/carl-sagan/>. Accessed 5/3/2019.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

– and proceed no further with Christianity. An “impersonal God” – well and good. A subjective God of beauty, truth and goodness, inside our own heads – better still. A formless life-force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap – best of all. But God Himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at an infinite speed, the hunter, king, husband – that is quite another matter. There comes a moment when the children who have been playing at burglars hush suddenly: was that a real footstep in the hall? There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion (“Man’s search for God”!) suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found Him? We never meant it to come to that! Worse still, supposing He had found us? So it is a sort of Rubicon. One goes across or not. But if one does, there is no manner of security against miracles. One may be in for anything.<sup>22</sup>

It is true that some people find emotional comfort in the idea that there is a personal God out there who watches over us and will reward us. It is equally true, that many other people find more emotional comfort in the idea that there is *no* personal God who can relate to us as a person, as a father to his children, as a shepherd to his sheep, and as a kind and judge to his citizens. There is a third option which appeals to a third group. They’d like to imagine a God who is personal, but not too personal, and close enough for comfort, but not too close for comfort. For them, panentheism delivers the best of both worlds. It can take as much advantage as it pleases of God being non-personal, irrelevant, and nonthreatening as pantheism, deism, and atheism hold. But since this God is a God of opposites, It—their God is more of an It than a he or a she—can also seem as personal and intertwined with the world—the world at a safe distance—as one might wish to imagine. Much like pantheists, and unlike deists and theists, a panentheist can still touch a blade of grass or hear the wind blow through the trees and imagine they’re sensing God directly in some profound way. The God of panentheism can also be thought of as more personal than the God of pantheism too. Since God is a person, and not an impersonal force, there is the possibility of relating to God in personal ways. The idea that God would be a harsh judge with the world when

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<sup>22</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, 93-94.



the world is sort of like his own body, or like the baby in the mother's womb, is unlikely when imagined. H. Richard Niebuhr described the panentheistic God of Schleiermacher (and the rest of liberal Protestant "modernism" movement of the 1920s) as "a God without wrath [who] brought man without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."<sup>23</sup> The God of panentheism can offer a vague spirituality of "the spirit that moves in all things" and a plan of salvation where everything—God, the world, world history, life, and human civilization—are all evolving from imperfect towards perfection.

### Better than Deism

The rise of panentheism in the nineteenth century is part of the zeitgeist reaction to the Deism of the eighteenth century. This shift from deism to panentheism is depicted in the James Cameron movie *Avatar* (2009), the world's highest grossing film in terms of sales, and a panentheism propaganda film. At various times in the movie, the high priestess of the goddess Eywa, a Gaia-like, mother-earth type of finite goddess, insists that Eywa is indifferent to various groups of created beings and doesn't take sides. But in the final climactic battle for the planet Pandora, Eywa hears Jake Sully's prayers for help, and comes to the aid of the native Na'vi defenders in the form of animals. The spirit-that-animates-and-unites-all-living-things on Pandora compels the dangerous animals of the planet to attack the greedy, environmentally unfriendly, colonizing humans. "Eywa has heard you!" Neytiri shouts. And the invaders are defeated and sent back to earth.

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<sup>23</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, 1934. Page unknown.

The rise of panentheism in our century is in part a reaction to atheism and agnosticism in the wake of the intelligent design movement. There obviously is some intelligence built into the system. There must be mind before and beyond our universe was created. Panentheism is the logical step up the chain from Atheism and Pantheism.

### Theodicy

The problem of evil and suffering can also incline some towards adopting the God of panentheism. Such a dynamic God may somehow seem exempt from accusations of blame for the problem of evil. Whitehead argued that “traditional theism, by regarding God as having created the world out of absolute nothingness, left no alternative except to discern in [God] the origin of all evil as well as of all good.”<sup>24</sup> One possible answer to this objection, given long ago by Augustine and Aquinas, is that evil a privation of something good rather than a created thing. God created the conditions where evil becomes possible but did not create evil itself.<sup>25</sup>

Others find solace in the idea that God’s nexus with our world implies that It suffers when we suffer. The idea that God also suffers when the world itself is harmed is helping panentheism grow in popularity among those who are concerned with the ecological health of the earth.

Similarly, the P god is here, is immanent, is with us. Immanuel – God with us. The God of AAA is way out there not in outer space but in a space beyond outer space. We can’t reach him. He isn’t like us. He doesn’t really have feelings. Prayers cannot change him. Talk of god repenting is just phenomenological language and that isn’t really biblical.

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<sup>24</sup> David Griffin, *Two Great Truths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 88

<sup>25</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *On Evil*. Translated by John Oesterle and Jean Oesterle. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 13.

### Ecumenical Bridging

It also may also provide a framework which traditional religions like Christianity and Buddhism can be reinterpreted into and enhanced by. Perhaps someday a panentheistic God-world model will become the ecumenical bridge between the great religious traditions of East and West.<sup>26</sup> The great humanistic goal of creating global governance could benefit from a unifying metaphysical philosophy that seems to many like a good compromise between the God-world views of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism.

One common view of the great major religions of the world is the idea the problem of the blind men and the elephant. Six blind men examine an elephant, report something about it that has a hint of truth about it, but none of them get it right. Panentheists may say that all the old religions of the world come close to getting something about God right but none get it quite right. They're all factional views of God. Panentheism is the attempt to get the complete and holistic view of God.

### Modern and Quasi-Scientific

The most modern panentheistic models offer tantalizing fusions and compromises. They try to blend some of the latest trends in science with benign notions of spirituality. A survey of a few the titles and subtitles of panentheistic books from the early 21<sup>st</sup> century show the importance of this fusion to the movement:

- *Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith*
- *Panentheism and Scientific Naturalism: Rethinking Evil, Morality, Religious Experience, Religious Pluralism, and the Academic Study of Religion*
- *All That Is: A Naturalistic Faith for the Twenty-First Century*
- *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming-Natural, Divine and Human Paths from Science Towards God: The End of all Our Exploring*

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<sup>26</sup> Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 119-120, 167, 188.

- *The Cyclic God Hypothesis: Why and How God Experiences the Universe through You: A Brief Introduction to General and Special Scientific Panentheism*
- *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?*

This appearance of accommodating the “truths” of modern science is attractive to those who believe that life evolved basically as Darwin imagined, but with a little help here and there from an intelligent designer who is intertwined with the world. By selectively confusing the supernatural world with the natural world, those who feel the need for some type of unobtrusive God can embrace most of the naturalism (and anti-supernaturalism) that dominates scientific academia today without totally rejecting some notion of the divine.

The failure of Darwinism and Neo-Darwinism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is actually a condemnation of panentheism. Plotinus gave the world the idea that the world is evolving. People like the idea that the world starts in chaos or disorder and gradually evolves into something more orderly, complex, ideal, beautiful, magnificent, and awesome. The idea that this could be applied to biology is understandably tempting. But it’s not what the fossil record shows. Panentheists have the cart before the horse. They like to imagine that modern science supports biological macro-evolution and therefore their model of a God who is evolving with the world and a world that is evolving with God is scientific. But modern science only supports micro-evolution within a type and has shown no change from one type to another type. So they’re wrong there. But the error goes even deeper. It was actually modeling of the God-world models after a Platonic/Neo-Platonic model that led to the creation of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Erasmus Darwin (1731-1803), the grandfather of the famous Charles Darwin, believed that plants had soul, wrote books and poems that “traced the progress of life from microscopic specks in primeval seas to its present culmination

in man,” shocked many of his patients with electricity to try to understand the “universal life force” (which led Mary Shelley to write her book *Frankenstein*), passed this faith on to Charles.<sup>27</sup>

These are some of the main reasons why the panentheistic model of God has quietly replaced the traditional view of God in many divinity schools, pulpits, and universities. And take over it has. Westminster/John Knox Press sounds like a publisher that should be every bit as theistic as John Calvin, the Westminster divines, and John Knox were. But it has become a fountain of panentheistic thought. Supposedly Wesleyan or Nazarene or Methodist divinity schools teach Shubert Ogden style God. Proof?

### **A Philosophical (Metaphysical) Evaluation of Panentheism**

#### The Devil in the Details

The crux of the matter is what we mean when we say God is in the world. In what way is God in the world? There is a sense in which every non-deistic theist would agree with every panentheist that God is in the world in a very profound way. When thinker of the classic theist category talks about God’s *immanence*, he stresses that while God is in the world, he is not of (identifiable with) the world. When he speaks of God’s *omnipresence*, he means that God is present in the world but not part of the world.<sup>28</sup> Many panentheists, however, think of God as being in the world in a more inert sort of way. For them God is somehow identifiable, for example, with the electricity that courses through our electro-chemical brains and causes our muscles to move around in the world. God then is in every living thing, plant, animal, or human. Or, alternatively, for example, for some panentheists, God may be somehow identifiable with the course of the history

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<sup>27</sup> See chapter six (“Evolution and Advancement: The Darwin’s Spiritual Legacy”) of James Herrick’s *The Making of the New Spirituality*.

<sup>28</sup> Norman L. Geisler’s *Systematic Theology*, whether in the one-volume edition or four-volume set, is certainly the best systematic theology for making these points clear.

of mankind. Or perhaps God is coterminous with the other forms of energy and/or the laws of physics that permeate our cosmos. As long as theists in the academy and in the pulpits have uncertainty and fuzzy thinking about their ideas of immanence, omnipresence, transcendence and more, with respect to God, the growth of panentheism and neo-theism will continue.

### The God of the Philosophers?

But which of the two camps is correct? The theists and panentheists are saying different things. And they cannot both be right. Making the problem more acutely felt, this is a good time to bring up the objection known as “the God of the philosophers.” Many “Christian panentheists” and Christian non-classical theists attempt to discredit classical theism’s view of God as being “the God of the philosophers” (in contrast with the God of the Bible). Some panentheists and neo-theists have charged classic theism with interpreting the Bible, and the God of the Bible, through the lenses of Greek philosophers rather than the lenses of the Hebrew prophets. Their logic flows something like following:

- (1) The biblical Hebrew view of God was dynamic and relational and changing
- (2) The Greek view of God was static, nonrelational, impersonable, absolute, and unchangeable
- (3) The original Christian view would have agreed with the Hebrew view.
- (4) But the prominent thinkers of the Greco-Roman Church in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century exalted the Greek view over the Hebrew view and created “classical theism.”
- (5) The philosophical root and theological fruit of classical theism are misguided and unbiblical.
- (6) To reform our view of God, we need to repent of the evil and philosophical view of God and return to a Hebraic, original, biblical view of God as relational, dynamic, personable, changing, and intertwined heavily with the created world.

When answering Tertullian’s famous question of “What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?” this objection assumes Jerusalem should have nothing to do with Athens. God

revealed his will and words through prophets to the Jews, not to the Greeks. In this way, they assume the high ground of piety.

There are several *possible* responses to this. My first response is that anyone who argues, “The idea originated in the Greek tradition and therefore the idea is wrong,” commits the logical fallacy known as the “genetic fallacy.” It doesn’t matter where an idea is from. If it is a Greek idea, that doesn’t mean it is wrong. Nor does it mean that it is right.

Second, even if we concede the idea that the idea was of Greek origin (which we’re not), rather than Hebrew, there is the possibility that a Greek idea may be indirectly Hebrew. While there does not seem to be a strong inheritance of the Greeks from the Hebrews, there was at least some. The fact that the Greeks write with the Greek alphabet proves that there is some intellectual inheritance from the Hebrews, who seem to have invented and used the first known alphabet, and passed it along to the Phoenicians, who in turn passed it along to the Greeks.<sup>29</sup> If there is an inheritance of symbolic thought in the form of alphabets, there is the possibility of the transmission of other aspects of thought as well—such as ideas about God. But during time of the reign of King

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<sup>29</sup> The debate over whether Moses could have written the Torah in Hebrew (or proto-Hebrew rather) is introduced in the film by Timothy Mahoney, *Patterns of Evidence: The Moses Controversy* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2019). Mahoney draws heavily from the work of Douglas Petrovitch and David Rohl, two scholars who don’t have perfect agreement with one another in every detail but agree that Moses did write in proto-Hebrew. Mahoney, Petrovitch, and Rohl make the case that Moses was able to use an alphabet that was created by Joseph, or someone like him who was familiar with the cumbersome Egyptian hieroglyphic system of writing and took some of its characters to make a far more efficient, flexible, and universal way of writing words. That alphabet was not invented by the Canaanites or Phoenicians around 1050 BC, as is commonly assumed in history textbooks today. Instead it was used by Moses before 1400 BC (possibly 1800 BC) and was carried with Moses and the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan when the Israelites invaded Canaan. From there it spread from the Israelites to the Canaanites and Phoenicians. And from there it spread to the Greeks, Romans, and eventually even the barbarians of Europe and England. While we are not necessarily endorsing their theories with full confidence here, we do at least think they deserve to be heard, and are very possibly are making progress towards a factually correspondent theory of the evolution of alphabetic scripts. Douglas Petrovitch, *The World’s Oldest Alphabet: Hebrew as the Language of the Proto-consonantal Script* (Jerusalem, Israel: Carta Jerusalem, 2017). David M. Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015) 216-231. David M. Rohl, *The Lost Testament* (Century, 2002).

Solomon, when Israel was at its Zenith, the Hebraic wisdom of Solomon had an impact in all directions—from Ethiopia to Lebanon at least.

Similarly, there is also the possibility that Plato may have picked up some Hebrew thought in his travels to Egypt, which had a large Hellenized-Hebrew population. Some thinkers in the Greek Orthodox Christian tradition speculate that just as God used Moses as the schoolmaster who prepared the Hebrew people for Christ, so to God used Plato and Aristotle to prepare the Greeks. Even though I do not agree with this view, we can admit that it is a possibility. Diving further down this rabbit trail, is it possible that Moses influenced Plato? Some noteworthy early Christian thinkers (Justin Martyr, Augustine, and others) suggested that Plato actually got some of his ideas from Moses. I suggest this is unlikely, but not impossible. Plato did visit Egypt, seems to have gleaned some of his philosopher-king theory from the priestly-theocracy of Egypt, and may have been influenced in some ways there. There were Hellenistic Jews living in Egypt at the time of Plato. And perhaps the echo of the time when Joseph, the son of Jacob/Israel, was a ruler in Egypt could have continued in Egypt and onto Plato. This proposed overlap seems a little contrived at best. But it is nevertheless possible.

There is also the possibility (again, not likelihood but possibility) of a Hellenistic inheritance from Mesopotamia and, therefore, a possible inheritance of the wisdom of Daniel the Hebrew prophet and the lessons learned by Nebuchadnezzar. If these Magi who set out in search of the King of the Jews were from Babylon or Persia, the Daniel-impact is a plausible theory. When the wisemen of Persia were about to be slaughtered, Daniel spared them, became their leader, and surely imparted some Hebraic metaphysical wisdom to them.

There is also the possibility of echoes from the original and so-called “primitive monotheism” that could have carried on from the time of Noah to all the nations that would



develop—including ancient Greece, and certainly including all the many nations all over the Mediterranean-rimmed world whose ideas which Hellenism syncretized from and remixed. Religions did not evolve (in Darwinian style) from primitive animism and shamanism to polytheism to henotheism of sky-god and mother-earth-goddess dualism and onto the pinnacle of pantheism. They devolved. They devolved from monotheism into henotheism and polytheism. Then they devolved further into panentheism in some places. Although it is admittedly a marginalized and minority view at this time, a very strong case can be made for primitive monotheism.<sup>30</sup> Even in the time of Abraham, when the Chaldeans were all polytheists, worshipping localized city-based gods, there were still thinkers like Melchizedek in the world who were monotheists. Plato was philosophizing at a time when the thinking Greeks had turned away from the myths of the Olympian gods of Homer. There is also then room for the possibility that Plato could have taken some ideas, whether directly or indirectly, from the Hebrews or other Gentile monotheists.

A third possible answer to the problem is that Paul, whom the panentheists and neo-theists of the Christian inclination certainly wish to have on their side, seems to have had one foot firmly rooted in ancient, classic Hebrew metaphysics, and another foot in the classical Greek world. We cannot minimize the fact that Paul seemed favorable to the idea that we humans “live and move and have our being in God.” While it is true that Paul was “a Hebrew of Hebrews” it is also true that he was a Roman citizen and fairly well-versed in pagan Greek literature. It may be possible that Paul had the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree in humanities from the University of Tarsus and his MA or PhD from the University of Jerusalem, to put it in modern terms. Tarsus was not an “obscure city” (Acts 21:39); it was the third most prestigious city of the Greco-Roman world in

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<sup>30</sup> Winfried Corduan, *In the Beginning*.

terms of Hellenistic scholarship. (Only Athens and Alexandria carried more academic clout.) Paul seems, in my estimation, to make some allusions to Platonism in his letters without crossing the line into Platonism. The claim that some have made that Paul turned Christianity into a Greek philosophy is of course outrageously false. But the point here is that Paul could have drawn from Stoic and Platonic philosophy. If the panentheists agree with Paul that we “live and move and have our being in God,” Paul is quoting a stoic philosopher there. And, therefore, the panentheists are siding with a stoic, pagan philosopher. They have not escaped the “God of the philosophers” trap that they have set for classical theists.

Fourth, it is important to note that we who champion the biblical, Judeo-Christian faith over all of its many competitors, are under no obligation to say that other philosophical-religious traditions are entirely wrong in everything they hold. We are only obliged to say that they are wrong in the statements that contradict what the Bible says. We should be surprised if other philosophies do not also have some truth in them—at least enough to keep them afloat. We hold the Bible as authoritative because of its internal claims to be the word of God and because of the proofs which authenticate it as God’s word. And we do not hold any other nonbiblical philosophy as authoritative. Suspect even! But it is still possible for a any human on the planet to think about God and perhaps articulate some important realization about God/metaphysics. Solomon said eternity is set in the hearts of men. Paul says in Romans 1 that everyone of us has things we should know about God (and suppressed) and in Romans 2 that we all have a law written into our hearts. Paul also said in Acts 17 that all peoples—even those without *bona fide* prophets of God—could seek God, feel their way to God, and perhaps find him, because he’s not that far away from us. Even if a pagan doesn’t find their way fully to God, it is still possible that some pagans could find their way part of the way to God and, in turn, have something important to say about it. It is not

impossible that some thinkers in the Greek tradition could, as Paul said to the pagan stoic and epicurean philosophers in Athens, “seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him” (Acts 17:26). If it can be proven, for instance, that a classical theistic philosopher like Augustine, Anselm, or Aquinas was influenced in some way about his thinking about God by a pagan philosopher, which indeed could be argued,<sup>31</sup> that does not mean that the pagan idea is wrong. It could actually be profound. The real question then would be not whether it is pagan or not but whether it is truly harmonizable with the views of God articulated by Hebrew prophets that God revealed himself to. Perhaps there is something in the apex of Greek metaphysical philosophy that, once corrected, reformed, and purified, seems to be harmonious with the ancient Hebrew monotheism.

My fifth response is that there could be “Egyptian gold” to plunder from some Greek philosophers. We can and should concede cautiously that Augustine and Aquinas did so. But it is important to also argue that Augustine and Aquinas did a most admirable job of “testing everything and holding fast [only] to what is good” when considering pagan metaphysics. It is true that both Augustine and Aquinas were extremely familiar with Neoplatonism and influenced by it in some significant ways. But they rejected all of its parts that were not reconcilable with the writings of the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament apostles, and the early church fathers. Gilson says it well:

There is a great deal of Neoplatonism in Augustine, but there is a point, and it is a decisive one, at which he parts company with Plotinus: there is nothing above God in the Christian world of Augustine, and, since God is being, there is nothing above being. ... he parted from Plotinus on this fundamental principle of the primacy of Being.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Geisler points out “were it not for studying Plotinus, Augustine ... would not even be able to conceive of a spiritual being, let alone believe in one.” *Harvest Handbook of Apologetics*, 24. Similarly, some debt to Parmenides and Plotinus can be traced in the thought of Aquinas, who was familiar with seemingly all the ancient Greek philosophers, corrected many of them, and learned from more than one of them—Aristotle being the most obvious example.

<sup>32</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 31.

The differences between the God of classical theism and the highest metaphysical principles that the pagan Greek thinkers could conceive of are far more profound than any possible similarities of inheritance. As Norm Geisler puts it:

... the Christian view of God is not Greek in origin. No Greek ever had a triunity of three persons in one eternal essence. In fact, no Greek philosopher ever identified his ultimate metaphysical principle with his God or gods (see Gilson, *GP*, chapter 1). This was the unique contribution of theistic thinkers.<sup>33</sup>

... there are many things about the traditional Christian view of God that are contrary to Greek thought, including the concept of a Trinity of one essence and three persons. Further, the Greeks never identified their God(s) with their ultimate metaphysical principle. The ultimate in Plato's system was not God (the *Demiurgos*), but the Good (the *Agathos*). Likewise, Aristotle never considered his many unmoved movers to be the object of worship, but simply to be the explanation for movement in the universe. The unique (but not Greek) contribution of Christian thinkers was to identify their ultimate metaphysical principle with the God they worshiped (see Gilson, *GP*, chapter 1).<sup>34</sup>

God's impassibility is derived from sound understanding of the biblical and theological data apart from any thought borrowed from Greek theology. Furthermore, the roots of biblical theism are not found anywhere in Greek thought; as we have seen, no Greeks had an infinite personal God, to say nothing of a triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

The Greek "gods" of Plato and Aristotle were finite beings: They were limited in their very nature. In fact, they were not gods, since they were not worshiped; rather, they were ultimate metaphysical principles. By contrast, the God of the biblical prophets and apostles is infinite (unlimited) in His Being. This conviction is firmly rooted in Scripture and good reason as well as unanimously expressed by the orthodox Fathers of the church.<sup>36</sup>

My sixth response is that their argument backfires on their own position. No theology can develop in a philosophical vacuum. Bucking one philosophical trend simply requires the adoption of another. The choice here is not between a pure theology that is wholly uninfluenced by the metaphysical philosophizing of the ancient Greeks and a theology tainted by it. The choice, rather,

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<sup>33</sup> Norm Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, volume II, 55-56.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 86-88.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

is whether philosophy will serve theology, in harmony with divine revelation (philosophy being the “handmaiden” of theology, as the medieval churchmen were fond of saying), or will theology be forced to fit a pagan philosophy that it at odds with revelation. The classical theism of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas makes philosophy the handmaiden of theology. They interacted with Neoplatonism, understood it, abandoned most of it, took some of it and corrected it. The pantheism and non-classical theism of today, by contrast, machinate their pantheistic God-world models from Platonic and Neoplatonic building blocks and thus exalt Neoplatonism over scripture. For them philosophy becomes the master of theology while they claim deceptively that philosophy is not their master at all.

Not only is it simply impossible for theologians today to avoid some interaction with Greek metaphysics either consciously or unconsciously, such that decisions about what to reject and what to agree with are made, the pantheists (and to a similar but lesser degree the neo-theists) are actually more guilty of the charge of succumbing to the gods of the pagan Greek philosophers. They strain at the gnats while swallowing the camel. For every pantheistic model has been built mainly of blocks from many pagan philosophers—whether Plato or Plotinus chiefly. While the Pantheists, Process Theology guys, and Open theology guys who challenge the traditional view of God claim that the traditional view is tainted with a bad strain of Greek theology, and their model of God is somehow the purer, most reformed, most accurate view of God, the piquant irony is that they themselves are basing their model on a competing Greek strain permeated with the thought of Heraclitus, Plato, Plotinus, Hegel, and Darwin. Pantheism then is, to understate it, “the other God of the philosophers.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cooper summarizes, “Most contemporary alternatives to classical theism are branches of a single-family tree with roots in Plato and Neoplatonism. Broadly speaking, this is the ancient tradition of pantheism. ... it is not, however, possible simply to equate Neoplatonism and pantheism...” Cooper, *Pantheism*, 17-19. Norm

If they want to play that blame game, they lose. But ultimately, we want to avoid the genetic fallacy ourselves when tempted to say that panentheism is wrong because it is hypocritically more Athenian than “Jerusalamic,” so to speak, or more Neoplatonic than orthodox Hebrew. It is important to realize that classical theism is arguably both 100% biblical and 10% predicated upon some insights of the pinnacles of pagan philosophy while panentheism is 100% plagiarized from popular pagan Greek philosophy and only superficially biblical.

### An Uncritical Synthesis of Unharmonizable Opposites

Philosophically, we must consider the nature of being. Panentheism obviously blurs the lines between the creation and the Creator. They fail to accept the classic idea that whatever is contingent, contains potentiality, changes, is temporal (not eternal), material (instead of immaterial), finite, divisible into parts, caused, plural, less than all-powerful, and/or is less than perfect, it is simply NOT GOD. It cannot be God. By setting one of the loci of God in the world, as if God could somehow be both beyond the world and also somehow also part of the world at the same time, they are calling the worldly part of God contingent, changing, finite, and divisible. But that simply cannot be part of God. Consider, for example, how Norm Geisler defines God with the following deductive, eighteen-point sorites:<sup>38</sup>

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Geisler pushes it further back than Plotinus and Plato to Heraclitus: “...even those who object to immutability accept views held by Greek philosophy. **This includes their ideas of process, which are rooted in Heraclitus**, who said, ‘No man steps into the same river twice.’ Likewise, they use logic, which finds its source in the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.). **They also carry on the tradition of Plato** (c. 427–347 B.C.) by their belief in an eternal world of properties (forms).” Emphasis added. Norm Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume II*, 86–88. Both Geisler and Cooper are right since Plato’s thought involved a synthesis of the dynamism of Heraclitus’s view of ultimate reality (in this theory of the forms) and static ultimate reality Parmenides (in his view of the ideal realm).

<sup>38</sup> Norman Geisler, *God: A Philosophical Argument from Being*.

- 1) Being is. That is, something exists.
- 2) Being is being. A thing is identical to itself.
- 3) Being is not non-being.
- 4) Either being or non-being. Something cannot both exist and not exist at the same time.
- 5) Non-being cannot cause being. Nothing cannot cause something.
- 6) A caused being is similar to its Cause.
- 7) A being is either necessary or contingent but not both.
- 8) A necessary being cannot cause another necessary being to come to be.
- 9) A contingent being cannot be the efficient cause of another contingent being.
- 10) A necessary being is a being of Pure Actuality with no potentiality.
- 11) A Being of Pure Actuality cannot cause another being with Pure Actuality to exist.
- 12) A being that is caused by a Being of Pure Actuality must have both actuality and potentiality.
- 13) Every being that is caused by a being of Pure Actuality must be both like and dislike its Cause.
- 14) I am a contingent being.
- 15) But only a necessary being can cause a contingent being to exist.
- 16) Therefore, a Necessary Being (of Pure Actuality) exists who caused me (and every other contingent being there may be) to exist.
- 17) This Necessary Being of Pure Actuality (with no potentiality) has certain necessary attributes:
  - A) It cannot change (= is *immutable*)
  - B) It cannot be temporal (= is *eternal*)
  - C) It cannot be material (= *immaterial*)
  - D) It cannot be finite (= *infinite*)
  - E) It cannot be divided or divisible (= *simple*)
  - F) It must be an *uncaused* being since it is a necessary being
  - G) It must be only *One* being
  - H) It must be infinitely knowing (= *omniscient*) Being
  - I) It must be all-powerful (*omnipotent*) Being
  - J) It must be an absolutely *morally perfect* Being
  - K) It must be a *personal* Being
- 18) Therefore, one infinite, uncaused, personal, morally perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful Being who caused all finite being(s) to exist is what is meant by a theistic God. Hence, a theistic God exists.

Assuming Norm's reasoning is correct, those who hold pantheistic, panentheistic, polytheistic, finite-god-istic, or neo-theistic views of God need either to switch to classical theism or at least

give up the word “God” when discussing whatever it is that they worship. The real philosophical problem with pantheism is that it tries to mix two diametrically opposed opposites in its metaphysics—two things that can only mix in the imagination of someone who doesn’t think too logically or deeply about reality. To explain this, we have to trace through the history of metaphysics.

There is general agreement among historians of western philosophy that the real father of metaphysics is the pre-Socratic philosopher known as Parmenides of Elea (b. 515 BC). Parmenides argued that ultimate reality is unchanging (and in this sense similar to the immutable, impassible God of classical theism) and that ultimately everything that exists must be of one substance. This is the metaphysical and absolute monism and, if ultimate reality is then called “God,” it is also pantheism.

There cannot be two realities or beings, for if this were so, one would have to differ from the other. If there were no difference, then they would be one identical reality and not two. In order for there to be really different things, there must be some real difference. On the one hand, everything that differs either by being or by non-being, since there are no other ways to differ. However, two beings cannot differ by nothing or nonbeing. To differ by nothing is not to differ at all.<sup>39</sup>

The philosopher Heraclitus agreed that reality was ultimately one thing (monism) but he argued that it was all about change. Everything was changing, including that which is the highest and most ultimate form of being. Plato and Plotinus and Porphyry and the other neo-Platonists were uncritical synthesizers. They blended the dynamic monism of Heraclitus and the static monism of Parmenides to end the metaphysical stalemate that had gone on for a few centuries. They said both were true, just in different ways. This is brilliant in one way but very sloppy and unhelpful in

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<sup>39</sup> Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*. Cited in *The Harvest Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 395-396. Compare Norm Geisler, “Monism” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999) 495.



another. It attracts those who like to tickle their ears with fancy new sophistry brilliance and see truth as wide. But it disappoints those who see truth as narrow. For it is not an answer at all. It doesn't really solve the dilemma. It just dances around it. It is arguably a brilliant compromise; but it is an unnatural chimera. It is the mixing of oil and water in the same jug or the firing of a statue of clay mixed with iron. It can have the appearance of cohesion under some circumstances but the appearance is a fleeting illusion.

The first and only philosopher who has so far given an answer to Parmenides was Aquinas. He did so by avoiding the Platonic/Neoplatonic synthesis of unmixable. Aquinas argued that there are two types of being: the infinite type of Being that God is, and the finite and analogical (the same in one way but different in another way) type of being that we possess simply because we have been given existence by God. This is why thomistic philosopher Norman Geisler insists:

The heart of Aquinas's metaphysics is the real distinction between essence (what something is) and existence (that which is) in all finite beings. Aquinas argued that only God is uncomposed Pure Being, which was known to him as Pure Actuality, with no "potentiality" whatsoever (i.e., no potential to gain, lose, or change His being in any way). Humankind is a composition of soul and body, which is composed of act (i.e., being) and potency (i.e., the finite potential to change, something that all creation possess). ... Unlike all of creation, which merely has being, God is Being. ... God is a unique Being in that His essence is identical to His existence, whereas there is a real distinction between essence and existence in all of creation. ... Aquinas provided a philosophical answer to the growing influence of the "finite god" of process theology (or its modern evangelical offspring, known as open theism), which is the belief that God changes and develops over time in a manner similar to human beings. There is no better philosophical system capable of answering the threat raised by process theology [and/or panentheism] and defending the traditional theistic view of God as an eternal, unchanging, and absolutely perfect Being.<sup>40</sup>

At only a slight risk of oversimplification, the choice here ultimately is between Aquinas and Plotinus. When faced with the dilemma proposed by Parmenides, that the choice is ultimately

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<sup>40</sup> Geisler "Who was Thomas Aquinas?" in Joseph Holden ed., *The Harvest Handbook of Apologetics*, 424-425.

between Parmenides (monism/pantheism), Plato/Plotinus (uncritical synthesis of Parmenides and Heraclitus into panentheism), or Aquinas (theism with a critical anti-thesis to monism and panentheism). If one chooses a Plato-inspired routes, one will end up a panentheist or a progressive neo-theist. If one chooses the Aquinas route, one will be a classical theist. Aquinas tangled with Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, and Plotinus and came out stronger for it. In some ways he agrees with Parmenides and Plotinus about Being; in most other ways he disagrees and rejects their views. While Aquinas was the critical synthesizer, Plato was the uncritical synthesizer.

The panentheistic retreat back to the metaphysics of Plato and Plotinus was a retrogression because the pinnacle of Greek metaphysical philosophy was a not a particularly high one.<sup>41</sup> Plato's "solution" to the problems left by Heraclitus versus Parmenides was no solution at all. When subsequent thinkers take his dazzling solution as their starting point, they end up playing a game of reconciling the irreconcilable. Applying two different metaphysical views to be applied to two different layers of reality and inserting God into the confused model. Plato never solved his own problem and neither have moderns. It just dazzles those who find the attempt to reconcile that which is irreconcilable to be profound. The history of panentheism may be the history of some very intelligent thinkers trying to make an inherently unworkable system seem to some to work.

That which changes is not God. This is the same as saying that which is actualized is not the unactualized actualizer. Our world is limited in size, limited in age, caused, and changing. God is not. At the outset, it seems like a fool's errand to try to mix these logically unmixable things together. But this is what the hard-core panentheists so audaciously do. Whitehead, for example, concluded that God and the World are somehow both permanent and fluent, one and many,

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<sup>41</sup> As Gilson concludes in his survey of Greek philosophy, "When Greek philosophy came to an end, what was sorely needed for progress in natural theology was progress in metaphysics." Gilson, *God and Philosophy*. 37.

immanent in one another, transcendent to one another, and created by the other.<sup>42</sup> The god imagined by John Cobb is constantly being destroyed and recreated in every moment of world history.<sup>43</sup> What philosophical arguments can they rally to commend and defend such credulity-straining Gods? Such a bizarre idea of God would require extra strong reasons for commending it, right? In this case no. It's not that they have strong logical arguments to compete with the arguments of Aquinas. It's more that they just assume (incorrectly) that the traditional reasons given for theism were overturned long ago and, therefore, they don't really need to compete in that arena. Panentheists generally assume that the five ways Thomas Aquinas used to argue logically for the existence of God were discredited by modern philosophers like Hume and Kant. Feser, however, argues that they did not understand Aquinas properly and only succeeded in knocking over straw men.<sup>44</sup> They are not aware that good arguments for the existence of a classical monotheistic God exist.<sup>45</sup> It is this doubting that reason should play a heavy role in faith about a God that exists outside of our universe might help explain their shift towards a more world-centered, scientifically trendy God.

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<sup>42</sup> Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology*, 104. Cobb points out that these “antitheses” which Whitehead is famous for are not in violation of the law of non-contradiction because God has two “natures” and therefore these propositions are true in slightly different ways.

<sup>43</sup> That this god that is constantly being recreated every moment was made clear in a public debate between classical theist Norm Geisler and process panentheist John Cobb. “Process Theism versus Classical Theism.” April, 1988. <http://normangeisler.com/listen>. Like Whitehead, his God has an infinite pole beyond the world and a finite pole in the world. It is easier to imagine their view as two separate Gods—one great, unchanging, uncreated, and infinite God in the metaphysical world, and a lesser, changing, created, dying, recreated, temporal god inside our physical world. But then the two have to be cobbled back together into one internally inconsistent and impossible God.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (London, England: OneWorld, 2009), 8-9; Edward Feser, “Taking Aquinas Seriously,” *First Things*, June 30, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2017/06/taking-aquinas-seriously>; Edward Feser, *Five Proofs for the Existence of God* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2017). Also see Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition*.

<sup>45</sup> For good introductions to the arguments for the existence of God, see chapters 12 and 13 of Joseph M. Holden, ed., *The Harvest Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2018) and chapter three of Norman Geisler, *The Twelve Points that Show Christianity is True* (Charlotte, NC: NGIM, 2016). For advanced readings consider Edward Feser, *Five Proofs for the Existence of God* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2017) and Norman Geisler, *God: A Philosophical Argument from Being* (Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, 2015).

Even so, some arguments for a panentheistic God have been advanced. Some, for example, have argued that since God is absolutely infinite in every possible way, it must be impossible for anything else to exist outside of God.<sup>46</sup> But the insistence that an infinite God is somehow too limited to create a world that fits in the palm of his hand (Psalm 95:3-5), so to speak, while not being confusable with his hand, seems a little presumptuous. God is present in the world without being either limited by it or part of it. Creating the material universe out of nothing with words and its 4 or more dimensions of space-time does not cause him to be part of those dimensions. God is infinite but he is not infinite in a material way—the way we normally think since we are material beings. But God is immaterial. So there is a category mistake of logic here to think that God’s infinity is affected by the material world. As Norm Geisler says, “God is infinite in a metaphysical way, not in a mathematical way; He is an actual infinite Being, not an abstract one.”<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere Norm wrote,

God has no limits in His Being: He is without boundaries, a Being beyond the limits of the created universe. God is not an infinite such as is found in mathematics, where there are an infinite number of points between A and B; this is an abstract infinite, not a concrete one, as God is. God is infinite in a metaphysical way, not in a mathematical way; He is an actual infinite Being, not an abstract one. Further, God is not an infinite series of real things; He is not an endless series of moments, for example, of one after another. At best, this would only be a potential infinite—where one more could always be added. God is neither a series of moments nor is He capable of being added to them.<sup>48</sup>

As Whitehead’s God-world model is acclaimed as one of the most brilliant panentheistic models to date, we might expect to find persuasive arguments in his writings. Cobb, one of the foremost experts on Whitehead, concludes that “Whiteheadian theology is not for those who seek

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<sup>46</sup> Cooper, *Panentheism*, 339.

<sup>47</sup> Norm Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume II*, 125.

<sup>48</sup> [Need to find which book and page number this was. Sorry!]

certainty” because our understanding of the world is constantly changing.<sup>49</sup> Commending a changing worldview about a changing God based on our changing understanding of our changing world would be a challenge for anyone.

Not surprisingly then, both Cobb and Whitehead wrote and taught “as though there were no philosophical reason for affirming [their view] of God other than the demand of a coherent completion of the idea of God as actual entity.” Only twice did Whitehead begin to make a half-hearted and “obscure” argument for his God.<sup>50</sup> “Has Whitehead ‘proved’ the existence of God?” Cobb asks. “Obviously the answer to these questions is no,” he answers. “Nothing is proved in this sense. ... Whitehead’s argument for the existence of God, insofar as there is an argument at all, is primarily the traditional one from the order of the universe to a ground of order.”<sup>51</sup> But since it is impossible for the panentheist to even know where to draw the line between Artist and artwork, the argument for God from order fits better with classical theism.

### **Biblical and Theological Analysis of “Christian Panentheism”**

The biggest problem with all the attempts to “reinterpret” Christianity into a panentheistic framework is that the biblical data does not ultimately favor it. The scripture passages panentheists offer as proof-texts are few in number and are heavily outnumbered by many less ambiguous passages which stress God’s transcendence, otherness, and separateness from the world. Also, their proof texts may be interpreted better in theistic ways.

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<sup>49</sup> Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology*, 138.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-105.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107.

## Acts 17:28

“for in him we live and move and have our being.”

The 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts contains the most powerful proof-text Christian panentheists can cite. While reasoning with Stoic (pantheist) philosophers (:18), the Apostle Paul quoted the Stoic poet Epimenides, saying, “for in him [Zeus] we live and move and have our being” (:28). Since Paul seems to quote this favorably, we are left wondering seriously if Paul is sympathetic to pantheistic and panentheistic views of God. We are left with the serious question of whether the Apostle Paul here is opening the door to the possibility that the line between creature and Creator is at least a little blurred. Several responses are possible.

A favorable-seeming quote in the attempt to establish some common ground and stretch the thinking of the audience is not necessarily a full-blown endorsement of the view in the quote without caveats and qualifications. It is not clear at the outset how much agreement Paul has with Epimenides on this point about our being, life, and movement being in God. Perhaps he has full agreement with it or partial agreement with it. We cannot know. We can safely presume that Paul did not believe in the existence of Zeus, the most supreme god of the Greek pantheon. It seems safe to assume that Paul was just using Zeus as an analog or rough equivalent of Yahweh, the Most High God. We could then also presume that Paul was just using Epimenides statement as a rough equivalent to his thoughts about the relationship of the being that we humans possess and the Being that we refer to as God, the Being that gave us our being. In his other reference to Epimenides, found in Titus 1:11-12, Paul does call Epimenides a prophet (by Cretan standards, but not necessarily by his own standards) and says he was right about one thing: That all Cretans are liars. This suggests Paul would not generally trust statements by Epimenides.

Assuming some or even full agreement with Epimenides, there is a lot of room left open for what being in God means. The Greek word translated into English as “in” here is ἔν, a preposition which can mean “to,” “in,” or “with.” There is the risk of making a mountain out of this molehill. With this one ten-word quotation by itself, there is no way to know whether Paul means ἔν in a thomistic/theistic, stoic/pantheistic, or neo-platonic/panentheistic sense. That question should be decided with the immediate context of the passage in mind.

The other things Paul says in conjunction with it seem to fit better with the sense which Thomas Aquinas is famous for unpacking twelve centuries later. His next quote, of the pagan poet Arastus, in the second half of verse 28, seems to clarify Paul’s meaning immediately: humans are the offspring of God. In other words, when it comes to the question of being, God is to humans something like a father is to his human children. This doesn’t seem to support an “emanational pantheism” view. Also, when the quote is viewed in the light of a few verses before and after verse 28, it should be clear that Paul was not sympathetic to Stoicism and pagan ignorance at all. He was correcting their misguided metaphysic by making several points that oppose pantheistic, panentheistic, and polytheistic God-world models:

- 1) they did not know God at all (:23),
- 2) Paul did know this God and needed to explain Him to them (:23)
- 3) they were ignorant (:30)
- 4) God made the world and does not live in any part of it (:24);
- 5) humans do not contribute anything to God or satisfy any of God’s needs (:25);
- 6) humans are not part of God (:26-27)
- 7) God is not far from us (but not in us) and must be searched for and found (not in mystical union with the One but in repentance from idols and faith in the resurrected one who is appointed to judge the world).
- 8) God is nothing like the things we form from created matter (:29).

There are absolutely no hints here that the line between Creator and creation are blurry or permeable in Paul’s mind. There is no accommodation to pantheistic or panentheistic God-world models. This is in harmony with the rest of the scriptures which never depict earth as an emanation

of, extension of, or dwelling place of God—it is never his temple. There may be some legitimate reason to say that when God created the earth itself, or even the cosmos itself, that he did create it at a temple for himself.<sup>52</sup> Some say that the Garden of Eden itself seems to have been modeled in a temple like fashion. While that may be true in some sense, neither the earth nor the cosmos seem to be the normal, regular, default, and consistent dwelling place of the Lord. The Bible regularly depicts heaven (the third-heaven<sup>53</sup>) as the throne which God sits upon and the earth as his “footstool” (Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:35; Acts 7:49).

Solomon gave no room for a panentheistic view of the world when he prayed, “But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, *heaven and the highest heaven* cannot contain you, how much less this house [temple] I have built ... for your name, then hear from heaven *your dwelling place* their prayer and their pleas” (2 Chronicles 6:18, 39, italics added). Although God is fully able to reach into our universe and can even manifest himself in some localized way at any time he chooses, he does not, contrary to the panentheistic models, dwell inside of our universe. After Solomon’s prayer, a manifestation of God’s glory did come from heaven to earth. And for a time, God—or a finite manifestation of his glory rather—was in the world. More specifically, God was in the temple that Solomon built.

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<sup>52</sup> Nicholas J. Schaser, in “The World as God’s Temple” at <https://israelbiblecenter.com/world-gods-temple> (accessed 5/11/2019) suggests that the earth was built to be a temple. John H. Walton, in chapter 8 of *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009) suggests that the entire cosmos is a temple of God. Others have suggested that the garden of Eden was modeled after the temple in heaven. Even if there is some modelling between any of these, the point still stands that the “temple” God dwells in is in the highest heaven and not inside of our cosmos.

<sup>53</sup> It is important to clarify which of the three senses the Hebrew concept of “heaven” is in focus here. Most immediately, heaven may refer to the sky immediately above us where birds fly and clouds float—the troposphere. Second, it may refer to the larger area where the moon, planets, and stars can be found—the “outer-space” beyond the earth’s atmosphere. Third, it may be a place entirely outside of our universe. It is this third sense is the one I am using here. In 2nd Corinthians 12:2, Paul refers to the realm where God lives as “the third heaven.” This corresponds with the third sense. The third heaven is called “the highest heaven” in 1 Kings 8:27, 2 Chron 2:6, 2 Chron 6:18, and Psalm 148:4.



See Appendix 1 (“Scriptural Passages Emphasizing God’s Transcendence”) to see several more passages that show God’s natural abode is in the highest heaven rather than earth. But he is able to reach down from heaven, so to speak, at any time and interact with our world.

Romans 11:36

"from [God] and through him and to him are all things."

Some thinkers have connected this saying of Paul to the “emanation-return scheme” of Plotinus.<sup>54</sup> In response, first of all, there is no good reason to read Plotinus into Paul. There are reasons not to do so. There is nothing in the immediate context that warrants it. The statement in verse 36 comes immediately after Paul says that God’s wisdom and knowledge and judgments and ways are deep, unsearchable, inscrutable, and unknowable (:33-34). This suggests that we foolish humans might not be able to understand verse 36, which is the conclusion of his thinking, very deeply.

Second, this unfathomability is very much against the main point that Plato, Plotinus, and the Gnostics were trying to make—that man can gain gnosis, wisdom, secret knowledge, enlightenment, knowledge of the ideal world, and such through some philosophy. Paul’s Hebrew God evidently operates on higher levels than the ultimate aspects of reality imagined by the Greeks.

Third, Paul’s statements in 34 and 35, which indicate that no human has ever contributed any wise counsel to God or given anything to God, flies in the face of all process philosophy (which holds that we creatures are giving much to God) and in the face of most panentheistic models (which assume considerable interplay back and forth between creation and Creator).

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<sup>54</sup> Cooper, 41.

Fourth, the entire discussion of Romans 9-11, which is concluded in 11:36, is about God interacting with men (both Israel and Gentiles) much like a potter interacts with the clay he is forming into useful pottery (Rom. 9:20-21). This imagery fits perfectly with classic theism and does not fit at all with panentheism or emanational pantheism.

Fifth, there is nothing in the entire Pauline corpus that legitimizes the reading of Plato, Plotinus, or any pagan notion into Paul here. On the whole, and especially in his warnings against proto-gnosticism in the Corinthian letters and in the letter to the Colossians, was anti-gnostic and anti-neo-platonic.

Sixth, see Appendix 1 (“Scriptural Passages Emphasizing God’s Transcendence”) to help understand the few unclear passages in the light of the many clear ones.

#### Ephesians 4:6

"[There is ...] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all"

Here we must admit that it is legitimately biblical to say that God is through all things and that God is in all things. So in some sense, at least one type of panentheism might be biblical. However, the problem of ambiguity about what is meant by pan and what is meant by “in” is not solved. Nor does this open the door to all possible panentheistic models. In what way is God through all and in all? We can not be sure what Paul means from Ephesians 4. All classic theists will be quick to admit that God is omnipresent in our world and is therefore in our world in some way. It is impossible to flee from his presence. But this does not mean that God is part of the world, or interwoven with the world, or the substance that the world is made of. Given the fact that Paul describes Gentiles (meaning here Greeks that lived in Ephesus) as having futile minds (:17),

darkened understanding, ignorance, and hardened hearts (:18), there is reason to assume the biblical Hebrew view of God and avoid injecting any of the Greek metaphysical speculation of Plato or Plotinus. See Appendix 1 (“Scriptural Passages Emphasizing God’s Transcendence”) to help understand the few unclear passages in the light of the many clear ones.

Col 1:16-19

“All things were created through him and for him.  
 ... and in him all things hold together. ... God was pleased...  
 through him to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven.”

From this passage it does seem that in some real, undeniable, profound, and mysterious way, every thing in our created, material world is hold together in Jesus, the Creator. In one sense then, all things of the world, and therefore the world itself, is in God the Son. What exactly is meant here is uncertain. It seems to refer to the continuing activity of God (of Jesus more specifically) in sustaining and maintaining the world that he created earlier. What is the so-called “strong force” that holds together the sub-atomic particles in the form of atoms? Scientists know there is such a force but no scientist can explain this force. Could this be a force exerted by Jesus? Perhaps so. Perhaps not. We don’t really know. Whatever the meaning may be, this does leave room for us to say that in some way the world is in Jesus/God.

However, the meaning of the Greek words here may not mean “in” like we think of “in.” It may just mean “through.” In verse 16, the NET Bible translation team translated it “all things in heaven and on earth were created in him” while other translation teams translated it as “were created through him.” The ESV translators translated it “For by him all things were created” and

their footnote beside “by” says “that is, by means of; or in.” The same may be true of the “in him” of verse seventeen as well. It could mean all things hold together “by means of” Jesus rather than “in Jesus.” There is some semantic flexibility in this particular preposition we translate as “in.”

From Colossians 1, however, we can say that Jesus existed before the world was created (:17) and not originally part of the created world (:15). The idea of Jesus creating the world suggests (but does not absolutely demand) theism rather than panentheism. The default position is that Jesus created the world out of nothing rather than creating it out of some preexisting material or out of the spiritual substance of God. We also see that “the fullness of God” was “pleased to dwell” in Jesus (:19), rather than in the world. So the natural reading here is that God was not in the world. But God was in Jesus and Jesus was in the world for thirty or so years. While Jesus was in the world, walking around the Galilee and Judea as a man, we can say that God was in a man, that man was in the world, and therefore God was in the world. But before the incarnation and after the ascension of Christ, we can’t say that God was in the world in any tangible way. Also, the reconciliation of all things to God (:20a) clearly refers to the saving work of Christ on the cross (:20b, :22). Also, the “all things” that were reconciled by Christ clearly in the context of :20-22 does not refer to everything in the universe or in the earth; it clearly refers to the peoples of the world known to Paul as Gentiles (1:12, 13, 21, 27).

2 Cor. 5:19

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.”

Any attempt to use this verse out of context to support a panentheistic interpretation of God-and-the-world would be misguided or mischievous. The immediate context of this verse has

nothing to do with God merging the cosmos or earth with his own being; It is about God the Father making a way for sinful humans to stop being enemies with God and start to enjoy a peaceful relationship (reconciliation) with him thanks to the death of Jesus Christ.

#### Jeremiah 23:23-24

“Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away?

Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord.

Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.”

If it is true that the Lord fills both heaven (the first, second, and/or third heavens) and the earth, then it must be biblical to say that God is in the world in some sense. He is omniscient and all-seeing because he is omnipresent. Classic theists don't deny God's omniscience and omnipresence. We just emphasize his transcendence more than his immanence. In what way is God in the world? It is difficult to say. From this passage we can say God is in the world in such a way that he can see everything in the world.

#### Psalm 139

“Where can I flee from your presence?”

Classical theists do not deny that God is present in our world in such a way that anything in our world escapes his notice. He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground. He knows how many hairs we have on our heads. If we try to run away from God's presence (here meaning mainly his awareness) we are attempting something futile. If we throw ourselves into a volcano, into the

depths of the ocean, into the core of a star, or the center of a black hole, God doesn't lose track of us. But God is not part of the world. He is present in it but not part of it. If we could destroy planet earth, we are not destroying a part of God. Here presence seems to indicate something more like omniscience.

#### Isaiah 40:18-26

“God sits above the circle of the earth ... heavens like curtain, like a tent to dwell in.”

This passage could make it seem like the Lord lives inside of our cosmos (second heaven) like a tent. See Appendix 1 to interpret this uncertain passage in the light of the several more-certain passages.

#### The Shechinah (or Shekinah) Glory of God

From the Hebrew root *shachan*, meaning “to dwell,” and the Greek word *skeinei*, which means “to tabernacle” (to dwell in a tent), the Hebraic concept of the Shechinah glory of God should help settle the debate over God's immanence and transcendence. The scriptures are clear that normally God is not in the world. God sits above it. The earth his footstool, metaphorically speaking. But God can intrude into our world and take on a localized form whenever he pleases. There are several important ideas to keep in mind. First, this localization, no matter how small or great it is, does not encompass the full presence of God; it is just him touching the tip of his finger to the earth, so to speak. Second, this localization is the exception, the temporary oddity, and so far in human history, not the norm. Invariably the localization appears to the human eye as something of an anomaly into the natural order. When God manifests his presence in our world in some localized and partial way, there is usually a burst of noteworthy, glorious, and often times frightening or otherwise overwhelming radiation associated with it. These manifestations leave no

room for us to say that God is here with us all the time in the trees, the wind, the normal laws of physics, the light of the sun, or such. The manifestations always impress the viewer with how odd, different, abnormal, unnatural, and supernatural the event is. Third, it is important to sort out the purely biblical facts about the shekinah glory from later traditions about the glory that were added later by into post-biblical, non-canonical Jewish holy books such as the Kabballah and some gnostic scriptures. The biblical traditions support the classical theistic God-world model and the anti-biblical kabbalistic accretions tend to support panentheistic models.<sup>55</sup> Dr. Arnold Fructenbaum lists twenty-something times in the Old and New Testament books where the shekinah glory came to dwell in our world in a localized (not world-permeating) way.<sup>56</sup> Here are a few of those examples:

First, the glory of God “was placed” (*vayashkhein*) at the east entrance of the garden of Eden in Genesis 3:23-24 and is described as a flaming sword. Second, in Genesis 15, the glory localized in front of Abraham and passed through the pool of blood to signify that God had entered into a unilateral covenant with Abraham. God’s glory was described as darkness, a smoking furnace, and a flaming torch. Third, in Exodus 3:1-5, a portion of God’s glory appeared to the prophet Moses and was described as a bush that was on fire but never consumed by the fire. Fourth, in Exodus 13 and 14, the glory of God manifested itself as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Fifth, in Exodus 19, the glory manifested itself in an even more glorious fashion than before on Mount Sinai when God gave the laws through Moses to Israel and entered into a marriage covenant with Israel. There the glory was described as smoke and fire that makes some people imagine a very active volcano and a voice louder than thunder. Sixth, in Exodus 33:17-23, Moses

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<sup>55</sup> For an example of Kabbalistic interpretation of the Shekinah glory, see Theresa Ibis, “Shekinah – the Feminine Presence of God,” at <http://www.universalkabbalah.net/Shekinah>. Accessed 5/26/2019.

<sup>56</sup> Arnold G. Fructenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events, Revised Edition* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Press, 1982) 591-620.

asked God to show him his glory. God showed Moses part of his glory. Moses did not see God as He really is, for no man can even do that and survive the encounter, but Moses still saw more of God's glory than any other man so far had. Seventh, in Exodus 29, the glory of God rested on the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and dwelt (*shachanti*) with the Israelites for many years. The glory being transferred from the tabernacle to the Holy of Holies in the first temple (1 Kings 8:1-13 and 2 Chron. 5-7) and departed from the temple in four stages per Ezekiel 9:3, 10:4, 10:18-19, and 11:22-23. It did not return when the second temple was built.

In the New Testament, the shekinah is seen during the transfiguration of Jesus (Mt 17, Mk. 9; Lk. 9, 2 Pet. 1:16-18). Jesus's face shined like the radiance of the sun and his garments became white as light. A bright cloud enveloped him. Second, in Acts 2:1-3, the shekinah descended upon the twelve apostles and appeared as "tongues" or flames of fire which sat upon them. Third, it subdued Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus per Acts 9:3-8, 22:6-11, and 26:13-18. Fourth, the glory will be visible when Jesus returns "in the glory of his father" with his angels in the second coming (Mt. 16:27; 24:30). Fifth, in the future, during the millennial reign of Jesus on earth, the glory will return to the temple in Jerusalem per Ezekiel 43:1-7 (Compare Isa. 4:5-6; Isa. 35:1-2; Zech. 2:4-5; and Haggai 2:9). Sixth, after the millennial age ends, and the eternal order begins with new heavens and a new earth, "the tabernacle of God is with men and he shall dwell with them" (Rev. 21:1-3, 10-11, 23-24).

### **Conclusion**

A choice has to be made between classic theism and panentheism. They cannot both be right. And the attempt to compromise between the two, with a neo-theistic model is an illegitimate



slouching away from theism towards panentheism. Just as there is no good reason to attempt to force an uncritical synthesis of the dynamic monism of Heraclitus and the static monism of Parmenides together into an impossible hybridized model, so too there is no good reason for—and every good reason against—trying to mix an infinite, unchanging, transcendent God with a finite, changing, immanent god. For those seeking a logical, intellectually satisfying God-world model, panentheism may dazzle then disappoint. By contrast, the case for a God that is entirely different from everything else proves far more logically compelling.

It is clear from the history of the development of panentheism that it is far more open to the charge of being the illegitimate “God of the philosophers” than classic theism is. There are biblical passages which could be open to panentheistic interpretations. But two important interpretive principles to maintain are (1) “the plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things” and (2) “scripture should interpret scripture.” The many and clear passages stress God’s transcendence and immutability. The less clear passages that suggest God is omnipresent and immanent can be better interpreted in a classic theistic sense than in a panentheistic sense. The panentheists (and neo-theists who are headed in their direction) have missed the brilliance of Aquinas’s answer of analogous being to Parmenides’s problem. They also have a bad habit of mistaking analogical/metaphorical/anthropomorphic/phenomenological language in the Bible as being univocal language. Instead of allowing the clear passages to shed light on the unclear passages, and the main passages to help interpret the minor passages, they inject their own metaphysics into their re-interpretation of some Bible passages. They are the “ignorant and unstable” who “twist to their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16). It is better to side with King Solomon and Paul the Apostle rather than Plotinus or Hegel.

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### Appendix I -Scriptural Passages Emphasizing God's Transcendence

The table below contains a partial list of scriptural passages (current count is 152 total) which stress God's transcendence and/or otherwise support classical theism and injure panentheistic God-world models.

Book	Chap. & Verse	Notes
Genesis	14:19,22	Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth ... I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth,
Genesis	24:3,7	swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth ... The Lord, the God of heaven...
Exodus	6:6	The Lord will deliver you from slavery ... redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.
Deut	4:34	Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?
Deut	5:15	the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.
Deut	7:19	the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out.
Deut	9:29	God changes human history "by your great power and by your outstretched arm."
Deut	11:2	And consider today (since I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen it), consider the discipline of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm,
Deut	26:8	And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders.
1 Sam	4:4	God is enthroned on the cherubim (in the third heaven and temporally on the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle?)
2 Sam	6:2	God sits enthroned on the cherubim (in the third heaven or on the ark in the tabernacle or both)
2 Sam	22:14	The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered his voice.
1 Kings	8:10-53	Solomon's amazing prayer stresses transcendence despite localized glory
1 Kings	8:42	God has a mighty hand and outstretched arm to use when answering prayers. (He reaches down out of heaven into earth, so to speak.)
1 Kings	8:27	"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!

1 Kings	19:11-12	“Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.” (God is not in the created world.)
2 Kings	17:36	God rescued Israel from Egypt with signs and wonders, with great power and with an outstretched arm.
2 Kings	19:15	God is enthroned above the cherubim and he alone made heaven and earth.
1 Chron	13:6	God sits enthroned above the cherubim (in the third heaven and/or on the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle?)
1 Chron	28:2	I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God, and I made preparations for building.
2 Chron	2:6	But who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even highest heaven, cannot contain him? Who am I to build a house for him, except as a place to make offerings before him?
2 Chron	6:32	God has a mighty hand and outstretched arm to use when answering prayers. (He reaches down out of heaven into earth, so to speak.)
2 Chron	6:1-7:3	God dwells in thick darkness. The temple is for the name of the Lord. Spread his hands towards heaven and said "God, there is no one like you, in heaven or in the earth..." Will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this temple. listen from heaven your dwelling place. hear in heaven. hear from heaven. ... fire came down from heaven and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.
2 Chron	36:23	The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.
Ezra	1:2	The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.
Ezra	5:11	We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth
Ezra	5:12	angered the God of heaven
Ezra	6:10	sacrifices to the God of heaven
Ezra	6:9	offerings to the God of heaven
Ezra	7:12	“Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven. Peace. And now
Ezra	7:23	Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons.
Nehemiah	2:4	prayed to the God of heaven.
Nehemiah	1:4-5	the God of heaven... Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God
Nehemiah	2:20	The God of heaven
Job	12:7-10	his hand made animals, is not animals. In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of mankind

Job	22:12-14	God is high in the heavens. He walks on the vault of heaven.
Job	23:8-10	he is not there, he is not perceived or beheld, not seen. But he knows.
Job	37:23	we cannot find God
Job	38:4	he laid the foundation of the earth
Psalms	8:03	the world is the work of fingers, but not to be confused with his fingers.
Psalms	18:13	The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.
Psalms	19:102	The heavens declare God's glory, proclaims his handiwork. Knowledge from effects to cause. Artist is distinct from his artwork.
Psalms	19:1-4	the heavens declare His glory, sky his handiwork. Nature reveals God but is not God.
Ezra	7:21	“And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence,
Psalms	29:3,10	Lord sits enthroned over the flood. Is over the waters. ?????
Psalms	33:14	from where he sits enthroned, he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth,
Psalms	33:6-15	Lord looks down from heaven, sees, sits enthroned, looks out over the earth, observes.
Psalms	50:10	God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He is not part of cattle or hills. He is distinct from both, as owner is from owned.
Psalms	50:1,4	God speaks and summons the earth. He calls to the heavens above and the earth.
Psalms	53:2	God looks down from heaven on humans
Psalms	57:3,5,11	God sends from heaven. He is exalted above the heavens.
Psalms	65:6	God established the mountains by his strength. (He is not in the mountains)
Psalms	68:33	God rides in the heavens
Psalms	73:25	Whom do I have in heaven but God?
Psalms	80:1	God sits enthroned upon the cherubim (in the third heaven)
Psalms	89:6,11	God is not comparable to anything being in the skies or heavens. The earth and heavens are his. He founded them.
Psalms	96:5,11,13	God made the heavens, reigns over the world, judges the earth and the peoples.
Psalms	96:11-13	The heavens and earth and sea and field and everything that fills them and trees and forest are totally distinct from the Lord. They will rejoice when he comes to judge the earth some future day. He will judge the world and the peoples/nations. God is distinct from the natural world. Like a Judge to the judged.
Psalms	97:9	For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.
Psalms	99:1	God sits enthroned upon the cherubim (in the third heaven). Let the earth quake.
Psalms	99:5	Exalt the Lord our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he!
Psalms	99:1,5,9	God sits enthroned upon the cherubim. Worship at his footstool. (Tabernacle/Temple on earth? Cherubim on ark of covenant? Or cherubim in highest heaven?)

Psalm	102:19	God looks down on the earth from the heights of heaven
Psalm	102:25-27	laid foundation of earth, heavens are the work of his hands. They will perish but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away. But you are the same, and your years have no end.
Psalm	104	God sustains the earth. He made creatures. He is distinct from creation. Creation totally depends on his care.
Psalm	103:19	established his throne in the heavens
Psalm	113:4-6	God is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Seated on high. Looks far down on the heavens and the earth.
Psalm	114:7-8	the earth should tremble at the presence of the Lord who overrides natural order
Psalm	115:2-4, 15-16	Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. He made heaven and earth. The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of men.
Psalm	123:1	God is enthroned in the heavens
Psalm	123:1	God is enthroned in the heavens.
Psalm	132:7	“Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!” (The temple on earth is God's footstool)
Psalm	135:5-7	God does whatever he wants to do in the earth and the heavens and oceans. He can make it rain if he wants to, for example. But he is not part of the natural order. He commands it with a word or an outstretched arm from heaven.
Psalm	136:5-25	his arm is in the world (but is not part of the world)
Psalm	136:26	The God of heaven
Psalm	136:12, 26	God's power is like "a strong hand and an outstretched arm" ... Give thanks to the God of heaven
Psalm	139:2	he discerns our thoughts from afar and knows all about us.
Psalm	138:6-8	the lord is high above men but stretches out his hand to reach us. We are the work of his hands.
Psalm	148:4	Praise the Lord from the highest heavens... All angels... Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!
Psalm	147:4,8,15-18	he makes the stars but he is not in them. He sustains the sky, rain, earth, grass, hills, but he is not to be confused with them. He sends out his command to the earth. He sends his word to the earth. This controls the weather.
Psalm	148:3-5	God created with a command. Sun, moon, stars, highest heavens, waters above heavens are distinct from God. Not to be confused. Those things should praise God. Not praise themselves.
Psalm	150:1	everything should praise God in his mighty heavens/expanse, in his sanctuary. (third heaven? Or second heaven?)
Proverbs	15:3	The eyes of the Lord are in every place. (But the rest of him is not.) (Immanence as omniscience.)
Isaiah	6:1	Saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. ?
Isaiah	14:14	I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'
Isaiah	14:12-14	the heights of the Most High are above the clouds, above the stars (?), a high throne
Isaiah	29:16	God is the potter and we are the clay. He made us.
Isaiah	29:23	people are the work of God's hands

Isaiah	31:3	don't confuse men with God and animals and flesh with spirit. Also, God stretches out his hand to accomplish things in the earth.
Isaiah	33:5	God dwells on high.
Isaiah	37:16	"O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.
Isaiah	37:16-20	God is enthroned above the cherubim (of the Ark in the temple? Or actual angels in heaven???) and made heaven and earth. Idols are no gods but the work of mens' hands, wood and stone. Nothing divine about that material stuff.
Isaiah	40:18-26	nothing compares with God. Not idols. It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, grasshoppers, heavens like curtain, like a tent to dwell in. (But which heavens?)
Isaiah	45:5-8	created the heavens and stretched them out, spread out the earth, gives breath to people. Gives his glory to no other (not idols)
Isaiah	43:10 B	no polytheism or ditheism
Isaiah	44:6-8	no polytheism or ditheism. If God is in the world, then idolatry is not wrong and creation-Creator confusing is not wrong. Is there any God besides God? No. No room for two Gods. No room for an infinite God and a finite god too?
Isaiah	44:24	God alone made all things, earth, and heaven. No sense of him making it out of himself. Seems distinct from him.
Isaiah	45:5-22	There is no other God. None besides me. No other lord. He creates and forms. He sustains. He is like a Potter working with clay. Don't confuse the potter and the clay. He made the earth and created man on it. It was his HANDS that stretched out the heaven. He hides himself. .
Isaiah	46:5-11	Nothing compares to God. No equal. Certainly not material, finite idols. Knows beginning and end. Sovereignly accomplishes all he decides to do. Everything he speaks or purposes will happen.
Isaiah	47:8-10	there is no one besides God. (no being in same class)
Isaiah	48:12-13	God is first and last. His HAND laid the foundation of the earth. His hand spread out the heaven.
Isaiah	57:15	God is high and lifted up, inhabits eternity, dwells in the high and holy place. Also dwells with those who are contrite and lowly in spirit.
Isaiah	63:12, 15	God used his arm to divide the waters. The arm is not confused with water. The arm is from heaven and it reaches into the earth. Also God looks down from heaven and see from your holy habitation.
Isaiah	64:1-8	God could rend the heavens and come down to earth. No eye has seen a God besides you. God is the father. We are the clay and you are out Potter. We are all the work of your hand.
Isaiah	65:17	God will create a new heavens and a new earth.
Isaiah	66:1-2	Heaven is God's throne and the earth is his footstool. He doesn't fit in any houses men might build. Everything was made by his hand. All these things came to be.
Isaiah	66:1-2	"Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? What is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place



		of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be.
Jeremiah	10:6, 12, 14, 16	there is no one like God. God made the earth by his power, established the world by his wisdom, stretched out the heavens by his understanding, and formed all things. (indicates separation between Creator and creation.) God's "breath"/wind/spirit is in the world as the power that makes us humans alive and more than just dust.
Jeremiah	25:30	The LORD will roar from on high, and from his holy habitation utter his voice.
Jeremiah	27:5	God made the earth by his great power and outstretched arm
Jeremiah	27:5	"It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me.
Jeremiah	32:17	'Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.
Jeremiah	32:21	God intervenes in human history with a "mighty hand and an outstretched arm" which manifest themselves as signs, wonders, and miracles.
Jeremiah	51:15	God made the earth by his power and wisdom stretched out the heavens
Jeremiah	51:20, 25	The kingdom of the Medes is God's hammer and weapon of war which he breaks Babylon up with when he stretches his hand against Babylon. God is in the flow of human history, but not like Hegel imagined. God reaches down from heaven into earth to change things up on earth. People become the instrument of his work, but not part of him.
Lam.	1:13	from on high he sent...
Lam	2:1	God cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger.
Lam.	3:41	lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven
Lam.	3:50,66	until the Lord from heaven looks down and sees... from under your heavens, O Lord.
Ezek.	12-14	Lifted me up... lifted me up...
Ezek.	8:3	Lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem
Ezek.	11:1	Spirit lifted me up... and brought me to the house of the Lord.
Ezekiel	20:33-34	God intervenes in human history with a "mighty hand and an outstretched arm."
Ezek.	43:1-8	The temple is the place of Gods throne and the place of the soles of his feet, where I will dwell forever. The glory of the Lord fills the temple.
Ezek.	48:35	And the name of the city shall be The Lord is There
Daniel	2:18-19	seek mercy from the God of heaven ... blessed the God of heaven
Daniel	2:19-22	The God of heaven changes times and seasons, sets up and removes kings, gives wisdom

Daniel	2:37	You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory,
Daniel	2:44	the God of heaven
Daniel	2:28, 36, 44	There is a God in heaven. The God of heaven... the God of heaven.
Daniel	4:17	know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.'
Daniel	4:34	lifted my eyes to heaven and blessed the Most High
Daniel	4:17, 24, 25, 26	angel comes from heaven, from the Most High. "Heaven rules."
Daniel	4:25, 32	know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.
Daniel	5:21	until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.
Daniel	5:23	human breath/wind/spirit is in his hand does not equate with his hand
Amos	9:5-6	When God touches the earth, it melts. His upper chambers are built in the heavens, his vault on the earth.
Jonah	1:9	the God of heaven who made the sea and land
Jonah 1:9		And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."
Micah	1:2-4	God is in heaven and when it is time for judgement, he will come down to earth and mountains will melt and valleys will split like wax before the fire. [He can and will visit the earth. But this is in a future time.]
Micah	6:6	God on high
Nahum	1:3-6	God can interact in whirlwinds, storms. Clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry. He dries up rivers. Mountains quake before him. The hills melt. The earth heaves before him. The world and all who dwell in it. Rocks are broken. (When God interacts with the world, it really changes things around.)
Habk.	3:1-16	When God comes down, his splendor covers the heavens. He unleashes glory and wrath. He shakes the nations. Mountains give way.
Zech.	12:1	God stretched out the heavens, founded the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him
Matthew	5:35	Jesus said the earth is God's footstool
Acts	7:48-50	The Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands. Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all of these things?
Acts	17:24-29	God made the world and everything in it, does not live in temples, nor is he served by human hands
1 Tim.	6:16	God "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see."
Rev	4:11	God created all things and by his WILL they existed and were created.
Rev	11:13	glory to the God of heaven.
Rev	16:11	cursed the God of heaven



## Appendix II - Catalog of Passages Showing God Sends Rain and Grows Grain

The following list is a partial list of the passages that show that God sends rain and grows grain and fruit for humans to enjoy. The idea of God sending rain implies that he is outside of the natural system (i.e., super-natural) and that he indirectly controls the forces of nature. He is not the God of Deism who is uninvolved with the world. But he is not the God of pantheism who is intertwined with the world. This is the God of classical theism who interacts with the world through the outstretching of his arm/hand (so to speak) or the speaking of his word.

The pantheist is likely to see something divine in the forces at work that take water from the oceans and lakes and deposits them on the mountains and fields to produce the soil and food that we eat. And rightly so. But how divine? The sending of rain by God is a good example of a God who is outside of our world but, like a gardener who waters his or her garden, cares for the garden by sending water where it needs to go and by occasionally reaching down into it. This eliminates all possibility of deism as a biblical God-world model. It doesn't go as far as pantheism may want to take the involvement. There is no room here for confusing the gardener with his garden. These fit the model of classical theism best.

Book	Chap. & Verse	Notes
Job	5:8-11	
Psalms	65:5-13 (9)	You visit the earth and water it.
Psalms	65:9-13	
Psalms	68:9	Rain in abundance you shed
Psalms	68:9	
Psalms	104	
Psalms	104:10,15,30	
Psalms	107:31-38	
Psalms	111:1-6	
Psalms	135:5-7	
Psalms	136:25	
Psalms	145:15-16	
Psalms	147:4-18	
Isaiah	32:15-20	Spirit is poured upon us from on high and wilderness becomes a fruitful field.
Isaiah	44:3-4	pour my spirit and pour water.
Isaiah	45:8,12,18	
Isaiah	55:1	come, everyone who thirsts. Come to the waters.
Jer.	3:3	
Jer.	5:24-25	
Jer.	10:13	
Jer.	10:12-13	God established the world by his wisdom. With his voice causes waters to tumult out of the heavens, makes the mist rise, makes lightning for the rain, brings wind.
Jer.	51:16	
Ezek.	36:29	God will summon the grain and make it abundant.
Hosea	2:8-12	God gives grain, wine, olive oil, wool, flax, vines, fig trees
Hosea	2:22	The earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil.

Joel	2:19-25	God will send grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied. God will give the early rain, poured down abundant rain, the early and the latter rain. Grain. Vats overflow with wine and oil. Pastures are green. Tree bears fruit. Fig tree and grape vines give their full yield.
Joel	3:18	God causes mountains to drip sweet wine and hills shall flow with milk. Streambeds will flow with water.
Amos	5:8b	
Amos	9:6, 13,14	calls for water from the sea and pours them on the surface of the earth (as rain). The days are coming when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the trader of grapes him who sows the seed. Mountains will drip sweet wine and all hills show flow with it. they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, make gardens and eat their fruit.
Haggai	1:10-11	God causes the heavens above to withhold the dew and the earth its produce. God called for drought, on grain, wine, oil.
Zech.	3:10	God will make it so every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree.
Zech.	9:17-10:1	God's goodness will make young men flourish with grain and young women flourish with new wine. Ask rain from the Lord in the season of the spring rain, from the Lord who makes the storm clouds, and he will give them showers of rain to everyone the vegetation of the field.
Zech.	14:16-19	God will withhold rain from some.
Malachi	3:10-11	God opens or closes the windows of heaven for men and pours down blessing until there is no more need. Fruits of soil. Vine in field will not fail to bear. A land of delight.
Mt.	5:45	God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.
Mt.	6:11	Give us this day our daily bread.
Mt.	6:26	Look at the birds of the air... your heavenly Father feeds them.
Acts	14:8-18	God did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.
1 Tim.	6:17	God richly provides us with everything to enjoy.
		"Human vanity can best be served by a reminder that, whatever his accomplishments, his sophistication, his artistic pretension, man owes his very existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil--and the fact that it rains." - Anonymous
		<i>Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, hamotzi lehem min ha'aretz. "Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth."</i>
		Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, Melekh ha'olam, bo're minei m'zonot. "Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, Who creates varieties of nourishment."
		Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, Melekh ha'olam, bo're p'ri hagefen. "Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine."

	Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, Melekh ha'olam, bo're p'ri ha'etz. "Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree."
	Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, Melekh ha'olam, bo're p'ri ha'adama. "Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the ground."
	Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam, bo're minei b'samim. "Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, Who creates varieties of spices."
	Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, Melekh ha'olam, shehakol nih'ye bidvaro. "Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, through Whose word everything comes into being."

