

# Panentheism(s): What It Is and Is Not

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*There has been much written of late on the topic of panentheism. Dissatisfied with many contemporary descriptions of “panentheism” and the related “pantheism,” which we feel arise out of theistic presuppositions, we produce our own definition of sorts, rooted in and paying respect to the term’s etymology and the concept’s roots in Indian religion and western philosophy. Furthermore, we consider and comment on the arguments and comments concerning panentheism’s definition and plausibility put forth by Göcke, Mullins, and Nickel.*

**Key words:** panentheism; pantheism; pandeism; monism; dualism; theism; Indian conceptions

## 1 “Panentheism” “Defined”

Given that mainstream philosophy of religion in the west is mostly concerned with classical theism and is a field dominated by theists, it is very heartening to see that there has been some interest of late in alternatives such as panentheism (not to be confused with the similar pantheism). In fact, an entire issue of one journal was recently dedicated to panentheistic thought.<sup>1</sup> However, the recent literature on panentheism comes from a variety of authors, and there seems to be much disagreement on what panentheism actually is. But before we try to describe panentheism, we first wish to briefly discuss pantheistic models of divinity.

We consider classical theism, or simply “theism,” to be one of many possible models entailing a transcendent god or gods. These are models where the world has been created from something wholly other, often considered to be “nothing” (Craig 2013: 590).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, pantheistic models are monistic and concern a non-transcendent deity (or perhaps “deities”); “pan-theism” means “all is god.”<sup>3</sup> They say that the world either is or is a part of the deity. It is arguable that pantheistic models are to be preferred to models involving transcendent gods, since they do not rely on evidentially unjustified concepts like substance dualism and *creatio ex nihilo*, but that is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>4</sup>

There are many varieties of pantheistic thought. Etymologically, what we call “generic” pantheism merely asserts that god is everything and everything is god.<sup>5</sup> There are also naturalistic forms of pantheism, in which god is essentially a redundant concept, reduced to a synonym of the natural world; there are no supernatural entities.<sup>6</sup> However, we shall overlook those here. One particularly interesting form of pantheism is pandeism, which involves a creative act, somewhat similarly to traditional monotheism. In pandeistic scenarios, there is a powerful deity who sacrificed itself in order to create the Universe. This has interesting implications for analyzing which of the god models is most plausible, as it merges the concepts of pantheism and deism.

One may wonder how this pandeism differs from a form of Christianity that entails a kenotic creation. We would answer that if the creation is divine, then this form of Christianity is monistic; what type of monism may depend on the status of the Creator after the creation, if the creation is even a finite process. Relative to classical theism, pandeism would seem to be more probable, as it is inherently simpler (being monistic), and would better explain the evidence (of divine hiddenness, and possibly of gratuitous evil). Despite the great variety of pantheisms, they tend to share one crucial element, which leads to numerous differences with monotheistic traditions: the Universe, and all that lies within, is god. That is, it consists of divine “stuff.” Such a view of the world has important implications, especially in relation to the widespread classical theism.

These monistic models directly oppose theistic notions of transcendence—that the creation is separate from God (Craig 2013: 590).<sup>7</sup> One example of the incompatibility of these opposing views is demonstrated by the Abrahamic traditions’ prohibitions on idolatry.<sup>8</sup> If everything is divine, it would be entirely counterintuitive to outlaw reverence towards trees, heroes, statues, and other objects. And while the God of theism is personal, the pantheistic types of god could well be impersonal; in fact, under pandeism, it may be considered that the god that did exist no longer exists as “god,” and humankind is largely left to its own devices. In such a world, it is not necessary to believe in and please the divine. Theistic religions, however, such as mainstream Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, generally implore adherents to seek and to please God. On many pantheisms, such action is completely unnecessary and even fruitless. For god is within, and humankind’s only “requirement” is to *be*; seemingly this would be all a pantheistic god would desire of us, if anything.

Various forms of divine monism, such as pandeism, might provide a more appealing alternative to the skeptical modern secularists who sometimes point to the lack of evidence of God, with a heavy focus on monotheistic gods and associated fundamentalisms.<sup>9</sup> The clear lack of dogmatic adherence to a particular god in many pantheistic models may foster more religious tolerance, and could lead to wider acceptance of non-theistic and possibly more tolerant religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, or indigenous animisms. Pantheistic worldviews tend to be relatively inclusive, and could thus have many positive societal impacts.

For example, rather than teaching that there exists a special race of people, from a special species, chosen by the one true God, pantheists understand that “all are one.” Everything that exists is part of the one divine reality. The divine does not choose one people/species and command them to kill or subjugate other peoples/species who do not please him, as may be the case with certain incarnations of classical theism.<sup>10</sup> Rather, all people are divine. All species are divine. And all that is, from the glorious mountain, to the lowly ball of dung, is divine. Worldviews that encourage reverence for humanity and nature may increase the chances of cooperation, egalitarianism, and unity, and could result in ecological benefits, as thought by Urquhart (1911: 323).<sup>11</sup>

Now these monistic models are not mere notions; they have much historical precedent. Many of these concepts are even older than classical theism. It is relatively easy to find pantheistic ideas among early indigenous, animistic, and Pagan traditions, such as the identification of divinity in animals, plants, and even inanimate objects and reverence for the natural world. The Chinese concept of the Dao, for example, seems synonymous with the all-encompassing pantheistic “deity” and may have influenced Zen Buddhism (Heitz 2007: 57 and Fowler 2005: 79).<sup>12</sup>

From the *Daodejing*, supposedly penned by Laozi, we find that the Dao, apparently the essence of the pantheistic god, is eternal and all-encompassing; it is said to be older and greater than “god” or the universe.<sup>13</sup> From another influential Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi, “The universe and I exist together, and all things and I are one” (*Daodejing* 1963: 186). Pantheistic

elements can also be found among certain—often “mystical”—streams of traditionally theistic faiths, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>14</sup> There are also various Chinese folk myths about Pángǔ, a primordial being who created the universe and simultaneously destroyed himself; his body parts are said to have formed many aspects of our world.<sup>15</sup> The motif of the world being formed from the body or bodies of slain powerful beings can also be found among Babylonian, Scandinavian, and Polynesian myths.<sup>16</sup>

These monistic ideas can also be found in contemporary contexts. New Age religions, for example, often contain many pantheistic elements, such as an all-pervading divinity, interconnectedness, tolerance, and reverence for nature.<sup>17</sup> In response to physicist Leonard Mlodinow on the *Larry King Live* television program, New Age guru and best-selling author Deepak Chopra demonstrated his pantheistic, or specifically pandeistic, worldview.<sup>18</sup> Academics from varying fields have either noted modern pantheistic trends or otherwise argued for pantheism. Religious studies scholar Carole Cusack asserts that the west has gradually become “easternized,”<sup>19</sup> with a move from its more traditional values, such as monotheism, to foreign concepts such as deep ecology and pantheism (Cusack 2011: 308 and Cusack 2010: 65).<sup>20</sup>

Theoretical physicist Paola Zizzi also seems to support a pantheistic view, arguing that at the end of cosmic inflation (occurring almost simultaneously with the Big Bang), the universe could have had a “primordial conscious experience” in which the universe “selected” one out of many possible universes (2003: 309).<sup>21</sup> Astrophysicist Bernard Haisch recently espoused a pandeistic worldview, implying that pandeism combines scientific knowledge with more inclusive religious ideas.<sup>22</sup> Physicist Albert Einstein seems to have personally held some sort of pantheistic worldview: “I believe in Spinoza’s God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with fates and actions of human beings” (Clark 1971: 413-14).<sup>23</sup> Astronomer and physical cosmologist Carl Sagan seemed to espouse a naturalistic pantheism in his popular book, *Pale Blue Dot* (which also alluded to the relative insignificance of humankind):

A religion old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science, might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge (Sagan 1994: 77).<sup>24</sup>

Pantheistic forms of divine monism have also been popular throughout history. To clarify, we consider pantheism to be a type of pantheistic model of the divine.<sup>25</sup> Etymologically, “pan-en-theism” means “all is in god,” which implies that the world is a part of the divine reality, but does not comprise all of it; the deity and the world are not ontologically equivalent. On pantheism, while the world is divine, there is more to the deity than the world.<sup>26</sup> By way of analogy, the world in pantheism could be considered the left arm of the divine.<sup>27</sup> This indicates a compromise between pantheism and the historically great models of theism. While the world is divine and not wholly other, there is indeed more to the deity than the world. Several streams of Indian religion, arguably including Advaita Vedanta, do describe what seem to be pantheistic and panentheistic teachings via the concept of the Brahman.<sup>28</sup> Brahman is reality; all that exists is incorporated into it. Brahman is often considered to be largely indistinguishable from the natural world, leading some Hindus to assert *aham Brahmāsmi*, “I am Brahman” (*Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10, Peters 2007: 281).<sup>29</sup> The question about whether there is any difference from pantheism is dispelled in part by Krishna’s teaching in the *Bhagavad Gita* (9.4) that while everyone abides in him, he does not abide in them. Somewhat similarly, the *Purusha Sukta*, part of the *Rigveda*, explains how “all creatures” make up but one quarter of the

Supreme Being, which is all that ever has been and all that will be; the majority of the Supreme Being is “transcendent,” something other and superior to the creation.<sup>30</sup>

So the concept of the world as being a part of the divine reality, a concept traditionally considered blasphemous by those who see the world as wholly other, is to be found in ancient religious teachings of the east<sup>31</sup> (and also elsewhere),<sup>32</sup> and is reflected well by the literal meaning of the term “panentheism.” Some western philosophers have also demonstrated panentheistic thought. To focus on Ancient Greece, Neoplatonism is clearly panentheistic, and even Plato himself may have expressed a panentheistic view via his *Timaeus*.<sup>33</sup> In more contemporary times, it is generally agreed that the term “panentheism” was coined by a German theologian in the early nineteenth century: either Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, in 1829, or Friedrich Schelling, in 1809 (Clayton 2010: 183).<sup>34</sup> It is also typically accepted that panentheism underlies the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and the process theology of Charles Hartshorne (Clayton 2010: 184-87).

We shall also briefly articulate a deeply personal aspect of what a panentheistic understanding could mean to a believer.<sup>35</sup> A bare panentheistic view of the world typically lacks an authoritarian deity dictating commands from on high. Only the divine can tell us what to do, but we are the divine! And unlike the poor theists, who are told that they are imperfect and must take action to get closer to the deity, we need do nothing, and we need feel no guilt. For we know that we are god. And we are what we are meant to be, at any moment in time. We do not wage destructive wars based on who worships the correct god. For we are *all* god.

If this view of panentheism seems simple, it is because it is. It does not have to be particularly complex. The panentheisms are a group of god models entailing that the world is divine, but that there is more to the divine than the world. This includes a myriad of possibilities, which include, for example, monotheistic and polytheistic varieties, interventionist and non-interventionist varieties, created and non-created universes, and so forth. That the universe is divine differentiates panentheism from classical theism, and that the universe and the divine are not identical differentiates it from a generic pantheism. The seemingly simple concept of a divine being encompassing the world whilst also transcending it is well represented in both eastern religion and western philosophy, and aligns well with the term “panentheism.” *Sophia’s* recent special issue on panentheism seems to have made this clear. So why the need to reiterate what has apparently already been explained numerous times in the literature? Because unfortunately, many—often theistic—philosophers still seem to misunderstand what panentheism is: that it takes many forms and/or that it is indeed a plausible alternative to classical theism. Case in point: Oxford theologian Benedikt Paul Göcke.

## 2 Göcke: Misrepresentation and Bitterness

Göcke has previously made the case that panentheism is not an attractive alternative to classical theism.<sup>36</sup> This riled several non-theistic philosophers and prompted a somewhat bitter exchange between Göcke and Raphael Lataster, who had been researching alternatives to classical theism for his doctoral thesis on infamous apologist William Lane Craig’s case for God’s existence; a summary and analysis of this exchange shall now be presented.<sup>37</sup> As we shall see later in this article, Göcke has since surprisingly altered his views; his prior position is typical in the field, however, and well worth our discussion here.

Göcke began his 2013 *Sophia* article by acknowledging that “panentheism” means “everything is in god” (2013: 62).<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, while trying to explain what this means, he avoids any reference to the many ancient peoples who believed in the divine world with its quasi-transcendent deity, despite his use of Philip Clayton’s influential work. In Lataster’s first reply, it

was also noted that Göcke for the most part failed to reference *Sophia's* recent issue dedicated to the topic at hand. After some discussion on what the “in” in “panentheism” might mean, Göcke claims:

Since classical theism and panentheism cannot differ as regards the scientific description of the world, that is, since they cannot differ on what the world factually is like, it follows that if there is a difference between panentheism and classical theism at all, it has to be a difference as regards the interpretation of the modal status of the relation between God and everything else (Göcke 2013: 65).

And so we arrive at perhaps the biggest disagreement between Göcke on the one hand and Lataster and numerous other scholars, such as Purushottama Bilimoria, on the other. Why assume that classical theism and panentheism “cannot differ on what the world factually is like?” It would seem very clear that the non-divine world of theism and the divine world of panentheism are remarkably different. A starker difference could hardly be possible, and it has historically been a literal matter of life and death. For example, at the height of its power, the Roman Catholic Church routinely persecuted and killed such monistic “heretics.” While discussing noted Hindu theologian Ramanuja’s panentheism, Clayton notes that the deity is not merely “the efficient cause of things, the way that the potter molds the clay, but is also the substrative cause, that of which everything is made” (Clayton 2010: 189). To the panentheist, the “stuff” of the universe is quite literally the “stuff” of the deity; this is generally a blasphemous notion to the mainstream theist. Continuing this vein of thought, Bilimoria and Stansell interpret Ramanuja as explaining that “the individual as a body, and so on, is part and parcel of God’s body and yet delimited by a soul” (Bilimoria and Stansell 2010: 252).<sup>39</sup> They also discuss pantheisms that more explicitly involve the world as literally originating “from his body” (Bilimoria and Stansell 2010: 240, 258).<sup>40</sup> Göcke then admits his important assumption that the deity is not a mereological sum “on the panentheism I develop” (2013: 68). We can now be suspicious that Göcke neglects one of the defining characteristics of panentheism and is merely erecting a straw person, in order to privilege his preferred divine model.

Moving on, Göcke surprisingly asserts that the two views must differ regarding the modal relation between the deity and “everything else,” otherwise “the distinction between panentheism and classical theism might collapse right from the start” (2013: 63). The latter can be expected to happen when one of the defining characteristics is overlooked, but we digress. Göcke now explains that, on his view, the deity is always necessary, the world is contingent on theism, and the world is necessary according to panentheism.<sup>41</sup> It seems that Göcke’s panentheism is identical to his view of classical theism, except that the world is necessary rather than contingent. Unfortunately, he does not thoroughly describe the various notions of necessity and does not at all explain how he can know that certain things are contingent or necessary. In any case, Göcke’s framing seems incoherent. If the free choice of the necessary God of Göcke’s classical theism to create the world somehow results in a contingent world, it is unclear why the similar choice of a panentheistic deity cannot also result in a contingent world. The “stuff” may be necessary, but the eventuating universe need not be. Thus, Göcke has not demonstrated that the modal status of the universe in relation to the deity *must* differ between the two views; he has only asserted it.

Another problem with Göcke’s “panentheism” is that the panentheistic deity is supposedly immutable (2013: 73). Again, Göcke is at odds with earlier accounts of panentheism. For example, Stephen H. Phillips, an expert in the philosophy of South Asia, has discussed, in considerable detail, the mutability of the deity among both eastern and western pantheisms.<sup>42</sup>

Yet another mark against Göcke's formulation is his seemingly unorthodox understanding of *creatio ex nihilo*. He makes use of Paul Copan and William Lane Craig's claim that "creation is *ex nihilo* in the sense that God's causing a creature to exist is without any intermediary" (they are, in turn, interpreting Thomas Aquinas) (Copan and Craig 2004: 148).<sup>43</sup> Assisted by a particularly narrow understanding of creation, Göcke interprets it in such a way so as to argue that even the panentheistic deity must (or could) have created the Universe *ex nihilo*, as there was nothing else besides the deity (2013: 68). This overlooks the possibility of the universe as "divine stuff," the many possible pantheisms in which a creation did not occur, and the fact that *creatio ex nihilo* is traditionally taken to indicate a total separation between the deity and humanity.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, in the very same source invoked by Göcke, Copan and Craig reveal that they would disagree with Göcke's interpretation, suggesting that "*ex nihilo* creation is incompatible with true pantheism."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Copan and Craig associate pantheism with *creatio ex materia* (leaving open the possibility for *creatio ex deo*, which many ancient religious sources do indicate).<sup>46</sup> The following pages of Copan and Craig's book, *Creation Out of Nothing*, reveal that there are major differences between *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio ex deo* that cannot be reconciled, as Göcke seems wont to do. Additionally, Ankur Barua noted that ancient forms of pantheism did involve the concept that the world was literally "the Lord's body" and also that many modern proponents of pantheism, such as Hartshorne and Jantzen, explicitly rejected *creatio ex nihilo*.<sup>47</sup>

It is by now very clear that Göcke's pantheism is idiosyncratic, being at odds with the etymology of the term, as well as ancient religious descriptions and contemporary philosophical conceptions of pantheism/s. However, Göcke is not content to leave it at that. He also seemingly aims to reveal that pantheism is not an attractive alternative to his classical theism. In fact, Göcke concludes:

Anyway, the aim of this paper is not to decide between classical theism and pantheism, but only to show that as long as we do not have a sound argument entailing the necessity of the world, pantheism is not an attractive alternative to classical theism (Göcke 2013: 75).

By our reckoning, what Göcke has described is not pantheism. Nevertheless, let us see if he has indeed shown that his concept—let us call it GP—is indeed "not an attractive alternative to classical theism." We find this judgment to be unsubstantiated. Recall that GP is identical to Göcke's view of classical theism, except that the world is necessary rather than contingent. Interestingly, Göcke himself provides several reasons for doubting that the world is contingent, even on classical theism:

Arguments for the contingency of the world are based on the premise that it is conceivable that there might not have been a world and that therefore it is possible that there might not have been one. There are two problems with these kinds of argument. Firstly, they presuppose the assumption that conceivability entails metaphysical possibility, an assumption which is often criticized in recent discussion. Secondly, they face the problem of whether we can actually conceive of there being no world. Arguably, this is a capacity we lack. As Rundle argues, 'our attempts at conceiving of total non-existence are irredeemably partial. We are always left with something, if only a setting from which we envisage everything having departed, a void which we confront and find empty, but something which it makes sense to speak of as having once been home to bodies, radiation, or whatever' (Göcke 2013: 73-75).<sup>48</sup>

These comments are immediately preceded by a number of arguments (elaborated in the footnotes) for the universe's necessity, including an acknowledgement that everything could in fact be necessary and that the panentheist could simply argue for a necessary world by endorsing the principle of sufficient reason (2013: 74-5). Somehow Göcke then counterintuitively concludes that "we do not have a sound argument entailing the necessity of the world," intimating that theism, and its associated (and supposed) contingent world, should somehow "remain" the more attractive—or at least the default—option.<sup>49</sup> In light of all this, it seems to us that GP is an attractive alternative to Göcke's classical theism after all. In sum, Göcke's original article has him formulating his own model, which may actually be a slightly improved version of classical theism, which he has simply labelled "panentheism," and counterintuitively implies that it is less preferable or at least not more preferable than his preferred classical theism.

Göcke did not take kindly to such criticisms and initiated a response by saying, "Good criticism shows that at least one premise in an argument is not true—which is to say that the argument is not sound—or it shows that the premises could be true while the conclusion is false—which is to say that the argument is not valid (2014: 397)."<sup>50</sup> A surprising response given that the onus was on Göcke to justify his rather strong claims and not merely to wait for his interlocutor to decisively refute them. Göcke further admits that he critiqued a model of his own making, as he developed what he considered to be "the most plausible version of panentheism" (2014: 397). However, apart from expressing his disdain for notions such as the world literally residing in the body of god, Göcke did not demonstrate that GP is a plausible interpretation of panentheism, and certainly did not do enough to eliminate all forms of panentheism from the discussion.

Göcke also objected to Lataster's critique that he had not justified his assumption that the two models cannot differ factually or scientifically on what the world is like, finding it "tiresome to point Lataster [sic] to my footnote number 14" (2014: 398). Göcke reiterates that he finds it "inadequate to suppose that the 'in' in panentheism is used as a spatial preposition—as if God's all-inclusiveness was 'that of a man in relation to his cells, merely stretched to cover the universe (2014: 398).'" That the world may be a proper part of god's body is precisely compatible with many panentheistic beliefs and has not been demonstrated as being implausible. As a theist, Göcke could be forgiven for personally finding such ideas incongruous and even blasphemous, but he would need to explain the link between what he finds agreeable and what is more plausibly true.

To his credit, Göcke does admit that one criticism struck true: "Lataster [sic] is right. I did not provide a full account of our knowledge of necessities and contingencies (2014: 399)."<sup>51</sup> Göcke continues, "I would not know how to do that in a single paper dealing with a different topic (2014: 399)." Of course, we do not consider that a convincing argument for the claims Göcke made about contingencies and necessities, which proved quite crucial to his argument that GP is not an attractive alternative to theism. Göcke then continues to insist that "both panentheism and classical theism are consistent with creation out of nothing" as part of his strategy in showing that there is not much difference between the competing models (2014: 399). Again, this ignores the numerous—and more mainstream, as well as etymologically appropriate—panentheistic models where *creatio* is *ex deo* rather than *ex nihilo*, and similarly overlooks panentheistic models entailing no creation at all. Due to that latter point, and for other reasons, his claim that "on panentheism God could not have refrained from creating a world" can also be dismissed (2014: 399).

Göcke was unconcerned by the charge that he had overlooked ancient Indian panentheistic ideas, indicating their irrelevance, noting that "the term 'panentheism' was not used by ancient Indian mystics" (2014: 400). Colonialist attitudes aside, this seems akin to claiming

that the ancient Israelites did not believe in God because the term “God” was not in use by them. Furthermore, the likes of Clayton, whom Göcke refers to, acknowledge the influence of the Indian models on their views regarding panentheism.<sup>52</sup>

Unimpressed by Lataster’s ongoing criticisms, Göcke again responded, outlining “at least five points that need to be clarified” (2015: 99). Most of these are not substantial enough to merit a response, though he does continue to claim that “creation out of nothing does not contradict *creatio ex deo*,” which suggests that he still does not take seriously the possibility that the deity creates from her own substance (2015: 100). Göcke also took umbrage with the claim that *creatio ex nihilo* “lacks evidence,” and reiterates that he is “convinced that it is false that the universe is (a part of) the body of God,” providing no argument to justify his position whatsoever (2015: 100). Then, in what seems like a duplicitous move, Göcke says:

I still think that his term ‘being of the same substance’ is unclear, and I hope that Lataster comes forward with a paper that clarifies this term. Anyhow, I have not asserted that there is no thesis of panentheism that supposes that the ‘in’ is spatial and neither have I said that it is incompatible with the panentheistic tradition to suppose that ‘in’ is spatial. I argued that the spatial interpretation *could not demarcate* between classical theism and panentheism. There is a difference between saying ‘No thesis of panentheism assumes that “in” is spatial’ and ‘The spatial interpretation of “in” cannot demarcate between classical theism and panentheism’ (Göcke 2015: 101).

But if Göcke admits that he had formulated his own form of “panentheism” and admits that there are other possible forms of panentheism, we can wonder why he would write the article at all, and why he concludes that panentheism is not an attractive alternative to theism. Göcke’s final comments on the universe as the deity’s body are multiply problematic: for instance, he overlooks possibilities entailing that the universe, as *part* of the deity’s body, is contingent, though the deity’s body as a whole is necessary (2015: 101-102). In other words, there are panentheisms where the world is necessary, where the world is contingent, where the universe is the deity’s body, where the universe is a part of the deity’s body, where the world is created, where the world is not created, and so forth. This entire nuance is obviously lost when Göcke distills “panentheism” to a single concept, far removed from its etymological, religious, and philosophical roots, and then so casually declares that “it” is not an attractive alternative to classical theism. Since the latter is said without convincing argument, and since *creatio ex nihilo* lacks evidence (and especially since panentheism seems older), it seems to us more proper to assert that “classical theism is not an attractive alternative to panentheism.”

Please note that Göcke is certainly at liberty to use the terms as he wishes, but it would be difficult to avoid suspicions about his intentions. As many from the non-analytical philosophical tradition have intimated, perhaps “God” is “the search for God”; or love; or existence; or happiness. Just as the apologist may overcome the challenge over God’s existence by unorthodoxically positing that God is love rather than an actual person as most believe, Göcke, in ascribing to panentheism a meaning that it has never before had and that is at odds with its etymology, is able to appropriate it and claim, “I have overcome the challenge of panentheism. In fact, there is no challenge.” At best, Göcke’s work here adds nothing positive to the discussion. At worst, it creates confusion as to what panentheism actually is.

Unfortunately, Göcke is not the only scholar to have misunderstood the panentheistic models.<sup>53</sup>



### 3 Mullins: Inventing Arbitrary Standards

Philosopher R. T. Mullins recognizes that many attempts to demarcate panentheism from its rival models of the divine have failed, but almost immediately seems to have fallen into the trap of assuming that panentheism is a single concept, rather boldly asserting:

It seems that panentheism needs to offer a clear way of demarcating itself from other positions, and this is not something that contemporary panentheists have done. Nor is it clear that many are even interested in the task as the remark from Lataster suggests.

Yet this is a serious problem for panentheism, and its proponents should acknowledge it. If panentheism cannot be clearly demarcated from its rivals, it cannot justify its claims to be more scientific and theologically adequate. Nor can it justify its claims to be more relational and dynamic than theism. Further, if there is no definitive concept of panentheism, one cannot justify the claim that panentheism is an ancient idea found in the history of religious ideas. If panentheism is left as a vague and nebulous concept, all bets are off as to who in history is in fact a panentheist (Mullins 2016: 325-26).<sup>54</sup>

In fact, much of the article is taken up by descriptions of *various forms* of theism and pantheism, leaving us again wondering why there must be but a single panentheism (2016: 327-34). Moving on to panentheism, Mullins wonders how it is different from these other models without ever taking seriously that the world is literally of the substance of the deity, unlike in classical theism (2016: 334-36). We also feel that there is something dishonest in defining or outlining numerous types of “theism,” then claiming that “panentheism” offers nothing new. This is particularly illogical given the piecemeal approach, e.g., panentheism has  $x$  in common with theism #4,  $y$  in common with theism #27, and  $z$  in common with theism #123,456,789. Mullins does not seem to realize that this could be true even while panentheism offers a *unique combination* of characteristics. His work here also seems rather arbitrary. Mullins could simply have described “pantheism” as a type of theism also, thereby eliminating yet another important rival to theism(s). This would be like describing Taoism, Islam, and Zoroastrianism as types of Christianity—an unjust approach to be sure. Of course, Mullins could just as easily grant some of the theistic models a panentheistic label, particularly if they were influenced by panentheistic thought; after all, many pantheisms are far older than many of the theisms Mullins describes.

Mullins shifts attention to a single scholar’s (Clayton’s) view of panentheism, contrasting this with a single scholar’s (Spinoza’s) view of pantheism, which allegedly reveals that panentheism cannot be demarcated from pantheism, but actually reveals that Mullins does not properly account for the great variety of pantheisms and panentheisms, some of which may overlap, as with the panpsychisms (2016: 337-38). We also wonder about the practical implications of seeing panentheism as a form of pantheism. What of it? Whatever labels are applied, the panentheistic hypotheses are still “rivals” to classical theism, and they present significant challenges for those wishing to argue that the hypothesis of theism is probably true.<sup>55</sup>

Mullins then considers Göcke’s attempt to demarcate panentheism from theism. While he points out some flaws in Göcke’s article, such as that theism may indeed entail a necessary universe (which would mean that Göcke’s “theism” is impossible and that his GP is actually theism and not panentheism) (2016: 340),<sup>56</sup> Mullins inexplicably agrees that “the panentheist should not opt for a mereological approach to God and the universe,” and claims that “a mereological approach [...] does not tell us anything unique about God,” adding: “Say that the

panentheist holds to an unrestricted composition such that God and the universe comprise a larger whole. Any theist could adopt this mereology without changing her doctrine of God” (2016: 339). This, to us, seems simply astonishing, being very different from the view of most mainstream theists. Our suspicion that Mullins seeks to privilege theism by arguing that alternatives are merely types of theism seems well affirmed now. As with Göcke, Mullins fails to consider the panentheistic views of earlier Chinese, Indian, and other philosophers, who did see the universe as literally a part of god, and he fails to give proper credence to the vast majority of classical theists who find such views blasphemous. Nevertheless, Mullins realizes that “Göcke’s demarcation fails to correspond to the views that panentheists espouse,” adding, “As Lataster puts it, Göcke is only interested in a God of his own making” (2016: 341).

Thankfully, Mullins does not simply assume that since Göcke failed, panentheism cannot be demarcated; he offers his own attempt. Immediately, this article rejects his claim that panentheism needs to say “something unique about God that other models do not say,” since it is only the combination/s of elements that need/s to be unique (2016: 342). As for Mullins’ demand that panentheists illuminate “the claim that the universe is *in* God,” we have already described above the mereological approach, which he has too hastily brushed aside (2016: 342). This all too brief section includes such counterintuitive propositions as “The panentheist should not insist that God and the universe are the same substance,” and further suggests that panentheists adopt other positions that they do not yet hold (2016: 343-44). It is also far too hasty to consider a handful of interpretations and then ask, “Is panentheism actually a position at all (2016: 344)?” It is hard to avoid the conclusion, then, that, like Göcke, Mullins is creating his own model and labelling it “panentheism” so that he may “develop arguments for the truth or falsity of panentheism,” with a focus on the latter (2016: 344).

Realizing that panentheists might not affirm his proposal for demarcating panentheism, Mullins is prepared to “leave it to the panentheists to explain” what panentheism is (2016: 344). As we have demonstrated, many already have. Mullins should have realized this, given his acknowledgement that “world inclusion” is ambiguous, and his brief references to Barua and Ramanuja (2016: 335-37). Finally, we reiterate that whatever label he wishes to ascribe to views that differ from his preferred theistic view, they are still alternative positions that may be just as—or more—plausible.

Thankfully, not all of the recent articles on panentheisms have been so uncharitable.

#### 4 Nikkel: A More Generous Yet Flawed Critique

Scholar of religion David H. Nikkel starts off his article on the topic promisingly:

In this article, I will analyze and critique several versions or purported versions of panentheism. In so doing, I will reference contributions from *In Whom We Live and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World*, especially that by Keith Ward, and several other contemporary sources, as well as German idealist, process, and Hindu thinkers. I will conclude that a viable embodied, panentheistic model of the nature of God is feasible, one that draws from the strengths and avoids the weaknesses of other models (2016: 291).<sup>57</sup>

Unlike the previous authors, Nikkel acknowledges that there are several forms of panentheism, respects panentheism’s Asian roots, and asserts that at least one panentheistic model is feasible. However, even Nikkel places limits on what should be called “panentheism,” or indeed what can be called a god-concept altogether, when he asserts, “Ward and I agree on the need for creaturely

freedom in a viable concept of God,” completely without argument (2016: 297). Nikkel also seems to simply presuppose that the universe was created, and that it was created *ex nihilo*, which precludes pantheisms, especially those entailing an uncreated universe (2016: 298). There is also too much focus on Nikkel’s intuitions and beliefs rather than on what he can demonstrate as being probably true.<sup>58</sup>

Nikkel then brings up the problem of evil, noting, “Some, however, reject panentheism because they cannot countenance the notion that any evil exists ‘in God’” (2016: 300). We appreciate his willingness to view evil as a part of the divine and his acknowledgement that the “in” in panentheism is ambiguous when he says, “In defending that the evil along with the good of this universe is in God, I would first point out that ‘in’ is a spatial metaphor for the relationship of God and world, open to various interpretations,” though we do not accept, as he seems to, that the deity must be morally perfect, nor—as he interprets from Keith Ward—that the world as the body of the deity should be metaphorical (2016: 300-01).

For some reason, most theistic philosophers seem unable to take seriously the possibility that the world is quite literally the body of a deity, or part of the body of a deity, or made of a deity’s very substance. Apart from the lack of awareness about non-theistic and/or non-western religions, which is quite common (and not only in the philosophy of religion), we suspect that the reason is that they are theists, who accept *creatio ex nihilo*, and who presuppose that the world is wholly other.

## 5 Göcke Redux: Panentheism is Attractive After All

Around 2016/2017, Göcke ostensibly so radically altered his views on panentheism that another section bearing his name is warranted. In a recent article, Göcke claims in the abstract that “that the most promising concept of God is panentheistic, on which the universe is essentially divine but is not exhaustive of the divine being” (2017: 1).<sup>59</sup> Given his earlier approach, we must carefully consider what he considers panentheism to be. After declaring that “On *theism*, God and reality are essentially ontologically distinct,” and that the theistic God “creates the world *ex nihilo*,” Göcke says, “On panentheism, reality is (completely) in God. The being of the world is supposed to be completely in God while not exhaustive of the divine being” (2017: 5). This certainly sounds promising, although we must again be careful, particularly as this definition could hinge on what Göcke means by “in.”

It does not take long for our excitement to start dissipating. Göcke quickly proclaims that “it seems reasonable to suppose that the existence of reality is contingent.”<sup>60</sup> This is the very sort of presupposition we found so off-putting in Göcke’s earlier work and that we argue against more generally. As he weighs up various models, such unjustified assumptions lead Göcke to dismiss several alternatives, leaving him to think that “theism and panentheism provide the only consistent models to think of God and His relation to reality” (2017: 6). He continues, “The only difference between theism and panentheism is in the interpretation of the ontological relation between reality and its ultimate ground. On theism, reality is not ‘in’ God, whereas on panentheism, it is ‘in’ God.”

It no longer seems as though Göcke has substantially changed his view. Indeed, if this is the only difference, and theism involves *creatio ex nihilo*, then it again appears that Göcke still thinks that panentheism entails a creation, a *creatio ex nihilo*, no less. As we explained, there is no need whatsoever to build a creation into the definition of panentheism, especially not a *creatio ex nihilo*. It is not necessary to point to instances of such in history, only possibilities, but scholars might consider actual examples from Laozi’s *Daodejing*, Śaṅkara’s *Advaita*, and the *Purusha Sukta*; particularly interesting is Mahāvīra’s Jainism, which entails the existence of gods, and has been

theorized as being panentheistic, but which explicitly denies a creation and rejects the existence of a creator god.

Göcke's proceeding comments rely on yet another unjustified assumption, that "we must not identify reality with the ultimate ground of reality." We do not necessarily accept this assumption, indicating that there is little point to our continued analysis of Göcke's apparently "new" position. But he surprises us, finally abrogating this distinction (although it seems strange to us that he abrogates the very principle he used to eliminate more generic pantheisms from his discussion) (2017: 6-7).<sup>61</sup> We continue to be pleasantly surprised when he acknowledges that "the infinity of God [should not] be limited by the existence of finite reality," but wonder why he does not reference his erstwhile opponent Lataster, who earlier argued the same thing (2017: 7).<sup>62</sup> And while we continue to reject his apparent insistence that panentheism entails a creation, Göcke has at last declared that it cannot be an *ex nihilo* creation.

Göcke proceeds to explain how panentheism can be compatible with Christianity, which we, recognizing the diversity of religion, have little objection to (2017: 8). In his conclusion, Göcke completely contradicts his earlier view, for which Lataster unashamedly lambasted him, finding panentheism to be "attractive" after all:

Although there are in principle four different ways how God and reality could relate, a panentheistic concept of God is the most attractive one based on philosophical, theological, and scientific justification. At least, that is, it is a very attractive worldview to live by (Göcke 2017: 9).

While Göcke still clings to the notion that panentheism entails a creation, still seems to reject that the world/reality could be necessary, and still seems to deny that a great variety of pantheisms are possible, he has certainly made progress in his position on panentheism, and how he portrays it in academic literature. And for that we are grateful.

## 6 Conclusion

We have simply, and from a non-theistic perspective, attempted to provide a broad definition of panentheism, while highlighting the flaws in arguments put forth about panentheism from primarily theistic philosophers. The aim of this article is not to argue that panentheism is a plausible and even probable alternative to classical theism; that has been done elsewhere. It is just to shed some light on what panentheism is, or what it can be, and what it certainly is not. We have also shown the value of articles such as this one in shaping the discourse and guiding scholars towards more consistent and cogent views, as the recent change in Göcke's position seems to demonstrate. May it long continue.

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- <sup>1</sup> *Sophia* 49, no. 2, (2010).
- <sup>2</sup> ed. Edward Craig, *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2013).
- <sup>3</sup> Please note that “God” typically refers to the god of classical theism, while we generally use the term “deity” or “god” in a more generic sense.
- <sup>4</sup> Some scholars argue that pantheistic models are to be preferred due to both logical and pragmatic reasons. See Raphael Lataster, “Pantheistic God-Concepts: Ancient, Contemporary, Popular, and Plausible Alternatives to Classical Theism,” *Literature & Aesthetics* 25, no. 1, (2015): 65-82. It is worth noting that *creatio ex nihilo* is not yet known to be possible, let alone probable.
- <sup>5</sup> That everything is god could be seen as distasteful and even horrifying to some. That means that everything that is “evil” and “ugly” is also divine.
- <sup>6</sup> “Commentary on the Wpm Belief Statement,” accessed 01/18/2013, <http://www.pantheism.net/about/manifest-note.htm>.
- <sup>7</sup> “God” referring to the god of classical theism.
- <sup>8</sup> For example, see Exodus (20:4).
- <sup>9</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006); Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007); Christopher R. Cotter, “Consciousness Raising: The Critique, Agenda, and Inherent Precariousness of Contemporary Anglophone Atheism,” *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 2, no. 1, (2011): 77-103.
- <sup>10</sup> Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005).
- <sup>11</sup> W. S. Urquhart, “The Fascination of Pantheism,” *International Journal of Ethics* 21, no. 3, (1911): 313-26, here 323; Michael P. Levine, “Pantheism, Ethics and Ecology,” *Environmental Values* 3, no. 2, (1994): 121-38; Robert S. Corrington, “Deep Pantheism,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 1, no. 4, (2007): 503-7.
- <sup>12</sup> Marty Heitz, “Knocking on Heaven’s Door: Meister Eckhart and Zhuangzi on the Breakthrough,” *Dao* 6, no. 1, (2007): 53-61; Merv Fowler, *Zen Buddhism: Beliefs and Practices* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2005).
- <sup>13</sup> *Daodejing* 4, 25; Wing-Tsit Chan, ed. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 139-76; here p. 152.
- <sup>14</sup> Nils Bjorn Kvastad, “Pantheism and Mysticism, Part I,” *Sophia* 14, no. 2, (1975): 1-15; G. J. Stokes, “Gnosticism and Modern Pantheism,” *Mind* 4, no. 15, (1895): 320; eds. Loriliai Biernacki and Philip Clayton, *Panentheism across the World’s Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- <sup>15</sup> Xiaodong Wu, “The Rhinoceros Totem and Pangu Myth: An Exploration of the Archetype of Pangu,” *Oral Tradition* 16, no. 2, (2001): 364-80; Xiaodong Wu, “Pangu and the Origin of the Universe,” in *China’s Creation and Origin Myths: Cross-Cultural Explorations in Oral and Written Traditions*, ed. Mineke Schipper, Shuxian Ye, and Hubin Yin (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 163-76.
- <sup>16</sup> L. W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation: The Babylonian and Assyrian Legends Concerning the Creation of the World and of Mankind* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 75-7, 87; David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Warsaw, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 194; William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon, *The Story of the Volsungs* (London: Walter Scott Press, 1888), 9-10; Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 312-4.
- <sup>17</sup> For example, see Dennis D. Carpenter, “Emergent Nature Spirituality: An Examination of the Major Spiritual Contours of the Contemporary Pagan Worldview,” in *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 35-72.

- 18 “Cnn Larry King Live (Transcript): Interview with Stephen Hawking; Science and Religion,” accessed 01/07/2013, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1009/10/lkl.01.html>.
- 19 Which might confuse those in the east, who wish to become “westernized,” seemingly demonstrating the idiom that the “grass is always greener on the other side.” See Frank C. Darling, *The Westernization of Asia: A Comparative Political Analysis* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979); Gopa Bagchi, Pradosh Kumar Rath, and Guru Saran Lal, “Westernisation of Indian Culture: A Study of Chhattisgarh,” *Shodh Sanchayan* 2, no. 1, (2011): 25-9.
- 20 Carole M. Cusack, “The Western Reception of Buddhism: Celebrity and Popular Cultural Media as Agents of Familiarisation,” *Australian Religion Studies Review* 24, no. 3, (2011); Carole M. Cusack, *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010).
- 21 Paola A. Zizzi, “Emergent Consciousness: From the Early Universe to Our Mind,” *NeuroQuantology* 1, no. 3, (2003): 295-311.
- 22 Bernard Haisch, *The God Theory: Universes, Zero-Point Fields, and What's Behind It All* (York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 2006); Bernard Haisch, *The Purpose-Guided Universe: Believing in Einstein, Darwin, and God* (Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Books, 2010).
- 23 Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1971).
- 24 Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space* (New York: Random House, 1994).
- 25 As with other types, there are many possible forms of panentheism. Patrick Hutchings, a Christian theist, also notes the great diversity of panentheisms and yearns for a definitive panentheistic concept. See Patrick Hutchings, “Postlude: Panentheism,” *Sophia* 49, no. 2, (2010): 297-300. Some might also effectively conflate panentheism with panpsychism, as alluded to in Freya Mathews, “A Contemporary Metaphysical Controversy,” *Sophia* 49, no. 2, (2010): 235. However, we favour drawing a distinction by taking panpsychism, as per Schopenhauer, as entailing that everything is conscious. Cf. “Panpsychism,” accessed 02/20/2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panpsychism>.
- 26 Cf. “Panentheism, however, is distinguished in its assertion that although the world is a dynamic manifestation of God, God is ultimately beyond the reality of the world. In other words, although the world is nothing but God, God is not limited to the world” (Sharify-Funk and Dickson 2014: 149-50) See Meena Sharify-Funk and William Rory Dickson, “Traces of Panentheism in Islam: Ibn Al-‘Arabi and the Kaleidoscope of Being,” in Biernacki and Clayton (2014: 142-60).
- 27 This is but one of many possibilities.
- 28 Urquhart (1911: 313); Ellen Stansell and Stephen H. Phillips, “Hartshorne and Indian Panentheism,” *Sophia* 49, no. 2 (2010): 285-95.
- 29 Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajur Veda, 1.4.10, in S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads* (Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 1955), 68; Ted Peters, “Models of God,” *Philosophia* 35, no. 3 (2007): 273-88.
- 30 Cf. Biernacki’s comments in Biernacki and Clayton (2014: 1, 161). Biernacki further describes panentheistic elements of certain Indian Tantric traditions. See also Purushottama Bilimoria and Ellen Stansell, “Suturing the Body Corporate (Divine and Human) in the Brahmanic Traditions,” *Sophia* 49, no. 2 (2010): 237-59, here: 239-40.
- 31 For some discussion on the panentheistic elements in Neo-Confucianism, see Hyo-Dong Lee, “The Heart-Mind of the Way and the Human Heart-Mind Are Nondual: A Reflection on Neo-Confucian Panentheism,” in Biernacki and Philip Clayton (2014: 37-62).
- 32 For instance, the Lakota of North America are believed to have held panentheistic views. See J. Baird Callicott, *Earth’s Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 122.
- 33 See Dirk Baltzly, “Is Plato’s Timaeus Panentheistic?” *Sophia* 49, no. 2, (2010): 193-215.

- Philip Clayton, "Panentheisms East and West," *Sophia* 49, no. 2, (2010): 183-91.
- We try to stick to logical arguments, but were encouraged by a reviewer to briefly mention some of the pragmatic outcomes.
- Benedikt Paul Göcke, "Panentheism and Classical Theism," *Sophia* 52, no. 1, (2013): 61-75.
- Raphael Lataster, "The Attractiveness of Panentheism—a Reply to Benedikt Paul Göcke," *Sophia* 53, no. 3, (2014): 389-96; Benedikt Paul Göcke, "Reply to Raphael Latester," *Sophia* 53, no. 3, (2014): 397-400; Raphael Lataster, "Theists Misrepresenting Panentheism—Another Reply to Benedikt Paul Göcke," *Sophia* 54, no. 1, (2015): 93-8; Benedikt Paul Göcke, "Another Reply to Raphael Lataster," *Sophia* 54, no. 1, (2015): 99-102.
- Benedikt Paul Göcke, "Panentheism and Classical Theism," *Sophia* 52, no. 1, (2013).
- Bilimoria and Stansell (2010).
- For more on such panentheistic notions, see Anne Hunt Overzee, *The Body Divine: The Symbol of the Body in the Works of Teilhard De Chardin and Ramanuja* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See also Ankur Barua, "God's Body at Work: Ramanuja and Panentheism," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 14, no. 1, (2010): 1-3 for some discussion about Christian reactions to notions of the world where the deity and the Universe are of the same substance and Ramanuja's belief that the "world literally *is* the body of Brahman." Barua further discusses the thought of Ramanuja in Ankur Barua, "Myth as Metaphysics: The Christian Saviour and the Hindu Gods," *Sophia* 51, no. 3, (2012): 379-93.
- Göcke's support for the necessity of the world on panentheism is nicely summarized on page 66: "According to panentheism, 'God requires a world.'" The quotation comes from philosopher Charles Hartshorne, who, as noted by Philip Clayton, ascribed a number of attributes to the panentheistic deity which not all panentheists would agree on, and who is also ignored by Göcke when it comes to the issue of *creatio ex nihilo*. See: Clayton (2010: 184).
- Stephen H. Phillips, "'Mutable God': Hartshorne and Indian Theism," in *Hartshorne: Process Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Robert Kane and Stephen H. Phillips (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 113-34. This research has been reworked and modernized. See Stansell and Phillips (2010: 285-95).
- Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).
- On the later point, see ed. Edward Craig, *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2013), 590.
- It would seem, at least according to the authorities Göcke does choose to reference, that what he is describing is indeed not "true panentheism." See Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 13-4.
- (Copan and Craig 2004: 14). Cf. Purushottama Bilimoria, "Why Is There Nothing Rather Than Something? An Essay in the Comparative Metaphysics of Nonbeing," *Sophia* 51, no. 4 (2012): 509-30.
- Barua (2010: 10, 21) concluded that Ramanuja would reject "creation out of nothing," as he believed that the world always existed in the sense that it is literally of "the Lord's Body."
- For more on these criticisms, see David J. Chalmers, "Does Conceivability Entail Metaphysical Possibility?" in *Conceivability and Possibility*, ed. Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Bede Rundle, *Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 110.
- It seems that with "attractive," Göcke means "plausible." If it is granted that classical theism and panentheism differ on the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* (in his view, they do not), it would be interesting to see Göcke's arguments on why *creatio ex nihilo* could be considered plausible (compared with the eternal world or world created *ex deo* that is common to most panentheisms

and pantheisms). It is worth noting that the Leibnizian question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” is loaded. It seems to suggest that nothingness, itself an unknown concept, is the natural state, and that the existence or appearance of something is the aberration. Tyler Tritten alludes to an improved question, recalling that the “traditional metaphysics of presence asked not why is there something rather than nothing but first and foremost: ‘What is?’” See Tyler Tritten, “Nature and Freedom: Repetition as Supplement in the Late Schelling,” *Sophia* 49, no. 2 (2010): 268. For an interesting treatment of the something-nothing debate, including the flippancy of the intent of the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?”, the need for classical theists to discuss the issue, and the assumptions commonly made about nothingness, again see Bilimoria (2012: 509-30).

50 Göcke (2014).

51 As an aside, Göcke here accuses Lataster of misspelling “preposition,” though Lataster’s response does not contain this alleged error. In an ironic twist, Göcke misspells Lataster’s name throughout.

52 “Thus it is the nature of infinite reality (if such exists) to contain all things within itself. Panentheists in the East and West are those who believe there is in fact an infinite or ultimate reality and who agree with Hegel that it cannot be limited by anything outside itself. *Brahman* for many in the Vedic traditions, and God for many theologians in the West, is such a reality. Hence they are panentheists.” See Clayton (2010: 184). In fact, Clayton considers the work of Ramanuja “to be one of the greatest expressions of panentheistic thought across the world’s tradition, and I hold it up unapologetically as a model for contemporary Western panentheisms” (2010: 187). While discussing Ramanuja’s panentheism, Clayton notes that God is not merely “the efficient cause of things, the way that the potter molds the clay, but is also the substrative cause, that of which everything is made” (189). Note that like certain Indian mystics, other western panentheistic scholars explicitly rejected *creatio ex nihilo*, such as Hartshorne and Jantzen. See Ankur Barua, “God’s Body at Work: Ramanuja and Panentheism,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 14, no. 1 (2010): 10, 21.

53 We will comment on his more recent views later.

54 R. T. Mullins, “The Difficulty with Demarcating Panentheism,” *Sophia* 55, no. 3, (2016), 325-46.

55 Interestingly, Mullins later considers, briefly, the apparently unpalatable possibility that previous thinkers normally considered theists might actually have been panentheists. See Mullins (2016: 341-2). There is nothing wrong with this, in principle. After all, the Sun existed before we could even verbalize our thoughts.

56 Mullins also does well here in indicating that panentheists need not believe that the universe is necessary, or in *creatio ex nihilo*.

57 David H. Nikkel, “Affirming God as Panentheistic and Embodied,” *Sophia* 55, no. 3, (2016): 291-302.

58 For some quite explicit examples, see Nikkel (2016: 299).

59 Benedikt Paul Göcke, “Concepts of God and Models of the God–World Relation,” *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 2, (2017): 1-15.

60 This also brings to mind how quickly, in his earlier article, he dismissed mereological views of god.

61 Perhaps in the future, he will shed more presuppositions and look upon more generic pantheisms more favourably.

62 We also wonder why there is no mention of how Lataster may have helped convince him to adopt this new position, which seems likely, given their intellectual debate and the quick reversal.