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Pantheism, Omnisubjectivity, and the Feeling of Temporal Passage

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Abstract: By “pantheism” I mean to pick out a model of God on which God is identical with the totality of existents constitutive of the universe. I assume that, on pantheism, God is an omnispatiotemporal mind who is identical with the universe. I assume that, given divine omnispatiotemporality, God knows everything that can be known in the universe. This includes having knowledge *de se* of the minds of every conscious creature. Hence, if God has knowledge *de se* of the minds of every conscious creature, then divine omniscience implies omnisubjectivity. Assuming that eternalism is true, robust temporal passage is an illusion. But, conscious creatures, such as human persons, experience robust temporal passage. If God has the attribute of omnisubjectivity, then God experiences temporal passage. However, God also has a unified experience of the entire spatiotemporal continuum. God’s having these two perspectives creates a tension for pantheism given that God would seem to experience both temporal passage and an absence of temporal passage. I compare non-personal pantheism and personal pantheism and consider which one has better resources to answer the foregoing puzzle. I argue that personal pantheism is better equipped to address this problem than non-personal pantheism.

Keywords: pantheism; God; omniscience; omnisubjectivity; time; eternalism; temporal passage



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1. Introduction

Discussions of pantheism typically proceed in relative isolation from any consideration of broader issues in metaphysics. This is unfortunate given that the tenability of pantheism is not independent of how it connects to other metaphysical positions. In this article, I will consider the implications of eternalism for divine knowledge on a pantheistic model of God. Why this is a topic worthy of explanation requires some motivation.

The problem I wish to consider stems from four assumptions. First, pantheism is true, where this implies an identity claim about God and the cosmos. Second, we live in a block universe, which entails that eternalism is the correct metaphysics of time. Third, God is omniscient and omniscience entails omnisubjectivity.¹ Fourth, eternalism is incompatible with the reality of temporal passage as we experience it (and, hence, our conscious experiences of temporal passage misrepresent the qualities of the universe). A puzzle emerges at this juncture. If God has the attribute of omnisubjectivity, then God experiences temporal passage owing to God’s having knowledge *de se* of the contents of the minds of conscious creatures. However, *qua* divine mind, God also has a unified experience of the entire spatiotemporal continuum. God’s having these two perspectives creates a tension for pantheism given that God would seem to have a single conscious experience that includes both temporal passage and its absence.

In what follows, I argue that the problem I have identified is especially problematic for non-personal pantheism and less of an issue for the proponent of a particular version of personal pantheism. This is a problem for non-personal pantheism because the conscious experiences of the divine mind would include both the experience of temporal passage and its absence. If omniscience entails omnisubjectivity and God would have a unified

conscious experience of the goings on in the universe everywhere and everywhen, then God will lack omniscience since God would not know what it is like to experience temporal passage. I will present a version of personal pantheism that does not face this problem.

I will not present arguments here for accepting either pantheism or eternalism (although I think that they are the most tenable conceptions of God and time, respectively). Moreover, I am not arguing for passage illusionism (while I endorse temporal non-dynamism, I am an agnostic with respect to the debate over *passage illusionism* about the phenomenology of temporal passage versus what Kristie Miller (Forthcoming) labels *the veridical passage-less view*). My purpose here is simply to consider whether any species of pantheism can account for divine experiences of temporal passage in a block universe without resulting in God's consciousness being a phenomenological mess.

I will proceed by first articulating some further assumptions that will be operative in this paper. Next, I will present an argument from the phenomenology of temporal passage for why God would not be omniscient if the truth of pantheism and eternalism are assumed. I will then articulate the main differences between personal and non-personal pantheism. This will be followed by a consideration of the reasons why personal pantheism is immune to the problem of the phenomenology of temporal passage. I will finally consider some objections.

2. Assumptions

In this section, I will spell out some of the assumptions about fundamental ontology, the nature of God, and the nature of time and temporal passage that will be operative in the remainder of this article.

2.1. Fundamental Ontology and the Mental

For my purposes here, I only need to say something about the account of properties I am assuming given the centrality of what I assume about properties in what follows (particularly in offering an account of the causal process that produces the divine experience of temporal passage). I take properties to be real distinctive ways substances are. In referring to the properties of objects I should be understood as referring either to the property instances of immanent universals or else the particulars modes (tropes) of irreducible substances.²

I assume that the intrinsic properties of objects are powerful qualities.³ They are causal powers. But, they are also qualities. If you would like, they can be described as powerful under a description and qualitative under a different description. Consider, for instance, the roundness of a ball. It is a quality of the ball but it is also a power. The ball *qua* round can do certain things (e.g., roll down an incline). So, on the view of properties I assume, the same property of an object will provide the truthmakers for representations involving both categorical-predicates about the object and dispositional-predicates.⁴

Regarding the role of properties *qua* powers in causal processes, I assume that they are typically manifested in response to being partnered with some appropriate reciprocal manifestation partner(s).⁵ In addition, such manifestations occur when the objects of which some given powers are properties interact with one another. (Exceptions are so-called *spontaneous powers* that do not require any partnering with other powers to be manifested. For instance, the power of strontium-90 to beta-decay would be such a power.) Causation, on this view, is an internal relation that holds in virtue of the nature of the powers that are reciprocal manifestation partners in causal processes whose manifestations polygenically generate an outcome. Consider a simple example, the manifestation partner *Q* of a power *P* would be a power at which *P* is directed at a specific manifestation when partnered. *Q*, in turn, would be directed at a specific manifestation when partnered with *P* (hence, their being *reciprocal* manifestation partners). Any causal production occurs as the polygenic outcome of the manifestations of each of the members of a constellation of reciprocal causal powers of objects. Given that powers are directed at manifestations with other powers that

serve as manifestation partners, we can describe powers as “for” or “about” manifestations with other powers.

A benefit of accepting a powers ontology is that it can help us in developing a metaphysics of mind (including the divine mind, assuming pantheism). This is so because a commitment to properties as powerful qualities can easily lend itself to understanding the properties of simple substances as proto-mental (at least under a description). This view of properties can take us some distance towards giving a story about the ontological basis for mentality. This is because a metaphysics of properties as powerful qualities can provide us with the truthmakers for describing objects as exhibiting intentionality and being conscious.

First, regarding intentionality, all objects exhibit intentionality of some form owing to the directionality of their properties *qua* powers.⁶ Something exhibits intentionality to the extent that it is (1) about, for, or directed at something; (2) directed at things that are present or may not be present; and (3) may exhibit indeterminacy with respect to that to which it is directed (with its reference fixed by context). Regarding (1) owing to the directionality of all properties *qua* powers, we get a sort of *aboutness* to powers that is characteristic of intentionality (Martin 2007, p. 59; Molnar 2003, p. 63). Regarding (2), the powers of objects include “a capacity to project to the non-existent”, which is the second mark of intentionality mentioned above (Heil 2003, p. 221; cf. Martin 2007, p. 59; Molnar 2003, pp. 63–64). What powers are directed at manifesting in response to are not always things that exist in their environment. For instance, what the causal powers of a chemical compound are directed at can exist or not exist. Even if there were no hydrochloric acid in this part of our universe, sodium bicarbonate would still have a power directed at neutralizing it. Finally, regarding the third mark of intentionality mentioned, powers can also be determinate or indeterminate with respect to their directionality, being directed at both general types of manifestation and specific token manifestations (Martin 2007, p. 59; Molnar 2003, p. 64).

To fill out the story to include consciousness, we have to consider properties *qua* qualities. *Qua* qualities, properties of objects can be arranged in such a way as to be experienced as collections by systems with the power to apprehend qualities. On the account I am assuming, the apprehension of qualities would be the outcome of a causal process involving manifestations of properties *qua* powers (which are *directed* at those manifestations). The experience of a quality would be an outcome at which some of the constitutive powers of a cognitive system are directed. In what follows, I assume that a cognitive system’s unified conscious experience is owing to the system exhibiting an appropriate level of integration in its information processing that is owing to how that system’s properties *qua* powerful qualities are arranged and interacting with one another.

2.2. God

As indicated above, I assume a pantheistic metaphysic of the divine. I assume that an ontological commitment of pantheism is ontological naturalism. By “ontological naturalism” I mean the following.

(OntNat) A theory T is ontologically naturalistic if and only if T does not countenance the existence of any entities that are not constituents of the universe.

If pantheism is the metaphysics of the divine on which God is identical with the totality of all existents and the only existents are constituents of the physical universe, then we get the following definition of “pantheism” that I am assuming.

Pantheism = *df.* God is identical with the totality of existents constitutive of the universe.

This definition allows us to have a clear way of distinguishing pantheism from versions of panentheism.⁷

I assume that if pantheism is going to be an interesting theory of the divine, then it should provide a metaphysic of the divine that amounts to more than the bare assertion

that “nature is divine”. Thus, following a tradition that goes back at least to Spinoza (assuming it is accurate to describe Spinoza as a pantheist and not a panentheist), I assume that the universe is a mind. Therefore, I assume that pantheism is committed to a version of cosmopsychism. In particular, I assume that God’s identity with the universe is with a system with the sort of integrated computational profile sufficient for us to represent it accurately as a conscious mind (see [Buckareff 2019, 2022b](#) for more). Ergo, the kind of unity the universe must exhibit for pantheism to be true is *cognitive unity*:

(CU) For any system *S*, *S* exhibits cognitive unity if and only if (1) *S* can be described as a functionally integrated information processor; (2) the processing of information by *S*, for reasons of *S*, is directed at producing outputs that may be either an intentional state in *S* or some purposive behavior of *S*; (3) the various states of *S* at any time can be individuated by their functional role in *S*; and (4) at least some of the different states and processes of *S qua* system must be phenomenally conscious. ([Buckareff 2022b](#), p. 18)

Any putative version of pantheism that rejects cosmopsychism and does not offer an alternative account of what sort of unity the universe would exhibit that is sufficient to describe it as divine is perhaps better described as *panultimism* (see [Buckareff 2022b](#), pp. 19–22).

Regarding divine attributes, as mentioned earlier, I will primarily be concerned with one, namely, God’s epistemic powers. I assume that, on a pantheistic conception of God, God is omnispatiotemporal. Thus, God’s cognitive activity includes the processing of information at all spacetime points. Assuming OntNat, this implies that God knows all that can be known. Hence, God is omniscient. I assume that divine omniscience is not just the power to know all information. If God is omniscient, then God has the power to know things in various ways. This includes being able to have knowledge *de se* of the contents of each person’s mind, knowing what it is like to be the subject of various experiences (see [Buckareff 2012, 2018](#); cf. [Zagzebski 2008](#)). Therefore, omniscience implies omnisubjectivity.

2.3. Time and Temporal Passage

I will be assuming that the spatiotemporal system that is the universe is a four-dimensional “block”. Times are real, just as locations in space are real. There is no single moment that is *the* present. “Now” is similar to “here”. As D. C. Williams noted, “There is no more a single rolling Now than there is a single rolling Here along a spatial line. . . .” ([Williams 2018](#), p. 168). Occurrences are ordered by unchanging temporal relations of being earlier than, later than, or simultaneous with each other ([Miller 2013](#), p. 346). Therefore, the block universe theory implies a commitment to an eternalist metaphysics of time, which we can take to be committed to two claims: one is ontological and the other is semantic.

Eternalist Ontological Thesis (EOT): Past, present, and future times and events exist. (*ibid.*, p. 347)

Eternalist Semantic Thesis (EST): “Present” is an indexical like “here”, picking out the location of use.

While we experience temporal change, robust temporal passage is an illusion if we live in a block universe and eternalism is true. That temporal passage of some sort is real is not in question here. Tim Maudlin offers the following about temporal passage.

The passage of time is an intrinsic asymmetry in the temporal structure of the world, an asymmetry that has no spatial counterpart. It is the asymmetry that grounds the distinction between sequences which run from past to future and sequences which run from future to past. ([Maudlin 2007](#), p. 108)

What Maudlin identifies is a minimal commitment of all parties to the debates over temporal passage in the metaphysics of time.

Debates over temporal passage are best framed in terms of whether temporal passage is anemic or robust. If temporal passage is merely anemic, then temporal passage merely involves anemic change. Bradford Skow offers the following schema for *anemic change*.⁸

(AC) Something is changing if and only if (i) it is currently one way, and (ii) it was (not long ago) some other, incompatible way. (Skow 2015, p. 23)

For instance, as I type these words, I am standing at my desk in my home office. Less than one minute ago, I was sitting. The kind of change from sitting less than a minute ago to standing at the time I started typing would constitute anemic change. Nothing about anemic change requires that there be a metaphysically complete statement describing the totality state of affairs that is the universe that is true now but was false a minute ago.

Contrast anemic change with *robust change*, which is required for robust passage.

(RC) Something is changing if and only if there is some metaphysically complete sentence *S* about it such that (i) *S* is true (absolutely), and (ii) *S* was (not long ago) false. (ibid., p. 26)

We have robust change when I go from sitting to standing if it is true that I am standing, and it is not just true relative to the time at which I am standing and false relative to the time at which I was seated. Rather, the state of affairs of my standing simply did not exist anywhen else when I was seated. A new, novel state of affairs came to be in the universe when I stood up. What is not present is not equally real, unlike what is not here where I am in space. Manhattan is still 100 km south of here, where I am typing. However, my being seated a few minutes ago is no longer real. The universe, if there were robust temporal change, would be full of novelty. With what was the case no longer having any being to speak of, and what will be the case not lying temporally ahead of us.

Summing up, the block universe theory commits us to eternalism. Eternalism is incompatible with there being robust change in the universe. Thus, robust temporal passage is not a genuine feature of the universe. That said, I assume that our experiences of the passage of time involve representations of robust temporal passage. Therefore, the phenomenology of our conscious experiences of temporal passage involves representing a dynamic world characterized by robust change. If we live in a block universe and, hence, eternalism is true, then our phenomenally conscious experiences of temporal passage misrepresent the actual qualities of the world.

3. An Argument: Pantheism, Omnisubjectivity, and the Phenomenology of Temporal Passage

By “God” in the remainder of this article, I should be understood as referring to the conception of God endorsed by pantheism as characterized in Section 2.2, above. From the assumptions articulated in Section 2, the following line of reasoning seems warranted.

1. God is omniscient
2. If God is omniscient, then God knows what it is like for us to experience robust temporal passage
3. If God knows what it is like to experience robust temporal passage, then God does not have a unified experience of the spatiotemporal continuum
4. But, God does have a unified experience of the spatiotemporal continuum
5. Therefore, God is not omniscient.

Recall that premise (1) is warranted by assumptions about omnispaciotemporality and the assumption of ontological naturalism. Premise (2) is true if omniscience entails omnisubjectivity, which is justified by the observation that if God is omniscient, God not only has the power to know everything, but God has the power to know things in every way they can be known. Premise (3) expresses a tension in the divine mind if God has the power of omnisubjectivity. It seems that God would lack a unified experience of the spatiotemporal continuum. Premise (4) rests on the assumption that God would have a unified experience of the spatiotemporal continuum. Premise (4) reflects an assumption about properly functioning cognitive systems and their conscious experiences. Specifically,

the assumption that is operative is that their conscious experiences will be unified. In addition, if God has a unified experience of the spatiotemporal continuum, then it will turn out that God is not omniscient, given that God would lack omnisubjectivity. This is the case because God's conscious experience of the cosmos would be a phenomenological tangle of experiencing temporal passage and its absence.

The premise that those who deny the conclusion must target is premise (3). We need to consider whether there is any pantheistic conception of God on which God can experience both robust temporal passage while also having a unified experience of the manifold. To that task I now turn.

4. Personal Pantheism versus Non-Personal Pantheism

I suggest that distinguishing two general versions of pantheism will prove most useful for determining whether God can have a unified experience of the manifold while having experiences of robust temporal passage. The distinction is that between personal and non-personal pantheism. On both, God is assumed to be identical with the universe and the universe is assumed to exhibit the sort of cognitive unity exhibited by a mind. The difference between the two is over whether God as characterized by pantheism can be truthfully represented as a person.

A quick note is in order about the relationship between "personal" and "person", especially since some philosophers of religion have argued that God is a personal non-person (see, for instance, (Hewitt 2019)). I will assume without argument that any distinction that may be drawn between God's being a *person* versus a *personal being* does not track anything metaphysically deep (see Page 2019 for a critique of the notion of God as a personal non-person offered by some traditional theists who identify as Thomists). Thus, I assume that if a conception of God is of a personal being, then it is a conception of God on which God is understood as being a person.

The watershed difference between personal and non-personal pantheism is fixed by how their proponents answer the question of whether God has a distinctive *robust first-person perspective*. I take it that a necessary condition for one to have a *robust first-person perspective* is that one must have the power to consciously conceive of oneself as oneself. This includes differentiating one's experiences as one's own and those of another as uniquely theirs (Baker 2013, p. 135). Further capacities required for personhood I take it are associated with one's possessing powers characteristic of having a cognitive life and being an agent. Thus, the following provisional schema for "person" should suffice for my purposes here (Buckareff 2022b, p. 56).

S is a person if and only if (i) S has the capacity for having a robust first-person perspective, (ii) S has the capacity to evaluate and respond to reasons (both theoretical and practical), and (iii) S has the capacity for exercising agency in pursuit of goals represented in plans.

I will not worry about (ii) and (iii) here. I will only focus on (i) and how God as characterized by pantheism could satisfy (i). But, notice that to make good on whether a tenable version of personal pantheism can be offered will rest not only on satisfying (i) but also (ii) and (iii). However, given my concerns in this article, I will take for granted that if we have a pantheistic conception of God on which (i) is satisfied, that conception will also satisfy (ii) and (iii). An account and defense of how a pantheistic conception of God might satisfy (ii) and (iii) is a task I plan on taking up elsewhere.

Non-personal pantheism presents us with a conception of the divine mind on which there is no distinctive robust first-person perspective manifested by God. That is, *there is no self-other distinction*. The divine mind consists of phenomenally undifferentiated conscious experiences. God's conscious experience would be of the whole that is the block universe. If God did have the attribute of omnisubjectivity, then there would be a tension here owing to, on the one hand, the cosmic mind's constitutive cognitive systems experiencing robust temporal passage while, on the other hand, the whole that is God would have an omnitemporal perspective that would not include the experience of temporal

passage. Assuming God has a unified conscious experience of the entire block, non-personal pantheism falls prey to the argument offered above. So, on non-personal pantheism, God cannot be omniscient if omniscience entails omnisubjectivity.

Personal pantheism fares better. There is a self-other distinction between God and the minds that are subsystems in the divine. The divine first-person perspective is robust, individuating experiences of the divine mind *qua* whole cognitive system from those of the discrete cognitive (sub)systems that compose the divine mind. The proponent of personal pantheism can reject premise (3) of the argument, preserving omnisubjectivity. How this can be achieved will require an examination of a personal pantheist model of God. To that task I now turn.

5. How Personal Pantheism Preserves Omnisubjectivity

There are few personal pantheist proposals that have been offered by analytic philosophers of religion.⁹ I will present a personal pantheist conception of God that builds on a model of God first offered by Peter Forrest (2007, 2016a, and 2016b) which he christened the *Swiss Cheese Thesis* (the pantheistic version he labels “qualified personal pantheism” (Forrest 2016a)). But, I will only use Forrest’s account as a starting point for sketching a pantheistic metaphysic of the divine to which I am not certain Forrest would sign on.¹⁰

The central commitment of the Swiss Cheese Thesis is the following: Conscious creatures with a capacity for responding to reasons and free agency are metaphysical holes in God. “What is required [. . .] is that the whole universe supports many subsystems, each with a holistic character, while leaving the remainder of the universe with its holistic character” (Forrest 2007, p. 122). The initial statement of this model of God was non-pantheistic, being a form of Qualified Pantheism. On this version, the holes that are subsystems in God are ontologically distinct from God. Forrest writes that, “creating non-divine persons requires not merely a self-sustaining universe, but a temporary contraction of divine consciousness” (ibid., p. 28). He writes further that, “morally responsible creatures (. . .) organisms over which God has chosen to have no power. This requires that there be a certain lack of unity between these sentient creatures and the rest of the universe” (ibid., p. 121).

More recently, Forrest has updated the Swiss Cheese Thesis, rendering it a version of pantheism. He has offered one version in print and has offered an update of the account in correspondence. Initially, Forrest took God to be identical with the universe in its entirety with the exception of the holes (Forrest 2016b, p. 22). However, he now takes every substance to be part of God, “but not every entity, because the free decisions of creatures and associated mental states are the ‘holes’” (qtd. in Buckareff 2022b, p. 53). Regarding the nature of the holes, he elaborates:

I now hold that where there are two or more agents with *prima facie* power over a region, the one that has the greater unity [in that region] has the greater power in that region. This results in the paradoxical power of creatures, because we have greater unity than God in the region of our brain-states represented to us as a body-image. (correspondence qtd. in Buckareff 2022b, p. 53)

Qua holes in the divine, we are not ontologically other. The same stuff comprises the divine person and the persons that are subsystems in the divine mind. We are *functional holes* in the divine mind. Forrest has not developed the account. What follows is my own personal pantheist model of God inspired by Forrest’s remarks about the status of the “holes” in God that are conscious subsystems.

Recall that I am assuming a realist ontology of causal powers on which the powers of objects are directed at various interactions with a variety of potential reciprocal manifestation partners. The outcomes of the interaction of constellations of the powers of objects include states of affairs that involve composite objects that exhibit structural and functional integration. Turning to apply this to the holes in the divine, the powers constitutive of any given individual non-cosmic mind may be more tightly integrated and relatively autonomous in that location vis-à-vis the rest of the larger system of which it

can be described as a subsystem. Thus, the system that is a conscious agent enjoys greater unity in that location than God *qua* *übersystem* in that location. The consciousness and cognitive processing that goes on within such organisms would be discrete processes and experiences from one another and from the larger divine mind (even if their processing and outputs figure in cosmic-level cognitive processing).

How does this help the personal pantheist? Discrete subsystems whose operation is relatively autonomous vis-à-vis the larger system of which they are a part can be individuated. These subsystems are the loci of experiences of temporal passage. The larger system that is the divine mind can have both a unified experience that represents the state of the whole that is the four-dimensional block while also having the capacity to have conscious experiences with metarepresentational content of the representational contents of the conscious experiences of the subsystems that are “holes” in the divine. A quick turn back to Forrest’s own personal pantheism may help us get a clearer picture.

In his first statement of personal pantheism, Forrest (2016b) argued that, given that the universe is the divine body (with which God is identical), God is aware of the happenings in the universe by proprioception. If we endorse the updated version of his personal pantheism, we can regard the cognitive processing within the “holes” as object-level cognition at which divine metacognition is directed. Divine metacognition about the cognitive processing within discrete subsystems (the “holes”) that are part of the larger cognitive system that is the divine mind would have first-personal representational content. God would, thus, have knowledge *de se* of the contents of our minds. This would allow us to preserve omnisubjectivity while preserving the unitary perspective of divine global consciousness for the following reasons.

On this sort of account, we can model the representational content of divine conscious experiences involving proprioceptive cognition as a map of the entire four-dimensional block, with the experience of the cosmic mind being unified. Importantly, this unified experience would lack the feeling of temporal passage. God’s metarepresentations of the representational contents of the conscious experiences of each subsystem as a center of consciousness (each “hole”) at each moment are individuated from the overall proprioceptive experience of the divine mind. On this model, the divine has a unified proprioceptive experience of the whole while also being capable of taking a metacognitive first-personal stance vis-à-vis the discrete subsystems that comprise it, having knowledge *de se* of the contents of the mental states of the subsystems (the “holes”) including their experience of temporal passage at each moment.

The mechanisms responsible for the two types of experiences—proprioceptive and metacognitive—would be constituted by discrete cognitive systems constituted by capacities involving the activation of constellations of powers directed at different types of interactions. The proprioceptive system is directed at cognitive processing that would be characterized by a unified conscious experience of the entirety of the four-dimensional block. The metacognitive system is directed at metacognitive processing that represents the conscious experiences of discrete subsystems that are proper parts of the divine mind.

Regarding proprioceptive cognitive processing, the entire causal web of interacting objects and their powers can be described as information-processing on a cosmic scale. William Bauer has recently articulated and argued for what he has christened the “Informational Thesis” about powers, which “claims that powers carry information for their potential manifestations. More specifically, powers carry representational, yet nonpropositional, map-like information geared toward their potential manifestations” (Bauer 2022, p. 141). Quoting Bauer about how a powers ontology can provide the ontological basis for an account of information transmission should help readers grasp what I have in mind.

Physical information provides an opportunity for [. . .] causal effects. Two billiard balls on a table represent a certain information state, with specifiable differences based on billiard ball location, mass, and so on. These information states with their attendant differences partially generate the possibility of one billiard ball causing the other to move. So, physical information supports causal

production. Turning to the connection between causation and powers, where and when powers are at work, causation occurs. In defense of this premise, causation arguably requires the manifestation of powers. If effects are the product of manifesting powers [. . .], then causality depends on the action of powers. Where there is a causal effect, there is the manifestation of a power. Therefore, causation metaphysically links information and powers: where and when powers are at work, information transmission occurs. (Bauer 2022, p. 145)

Additionally, the directionality of powers (whether manifesting or not) can be viewed as the source of the information about how powers will manifest which is transmitted in causal processes (see Bauer 2022, p. 146ff; N. Williams 2019, p. 92ff).

The ontological framework I have assumed provides further resources. Recall that I have assumed an account of properties on which they are not only powers but are also qualities. There is something it is like for powers to manifest. I assume that these causal processes involving powerful qualities would together be constitutive of a divine conscious experience that is a mapping of the entire system that is the physical universe with its rich array of qualities. What occurs in miniature in conscious systems, like humans and other animals, would occur on the cosmic scale in God *qua* cosmic mind. In both systems like us and in the *übersystem* that is the divine mind, conscious experience is unified, exhibiting structure and integration that, I assume, is delivered by the properties of constitutive objects *qua* powers. It is *qua* powerful qualities that are causally integrated in various ways that they are a certain way and not another. The complete details of this account of consciousness cannot be spelled out here.¹¹ In brief, the idea is that there would be a phenomenal character to the whole that would be a unified map of the causal interactions between the properties of objects whose manifestations would deliver the content of God's experience of the whole that is the block universe with which God is identical.

Now consider the metacognitive representations by the cosmic mind of the temporal experiences of subsystems. On my model, the constitutive powers of subsystems that give rise to experiences of temporal passage would be manifested in such a way that their conscious outcomes (which are, themselves, powers) are phenomenally indexed to a specific moment of time. The constitutive powers of the divine capacity for metacognition would be directed at being activated when partnered with the constitutive phenomenal powers of various minds' experience of temporal passage for each moment. The outcome is a divine experience of each subsystem's temporal experiences from moment to moment in their location. My preferred way to model the activity of the metacognitive system involves understanding both the metacognitive powers and the powers constitutive of the conscious experiences of temporal passage of the subsystems as weakly metaphysically emergent in the sense articulated by Jessica Wilson.

Weak Emergence: What it is for token feature *S* to be Weakly emergent from token feature *P* on a given occasion is for it to be the case, on that occasion, (i) that *S* coterminally materially depends on *P*, and (ii) that *S* has a non-empty proper subset of the token powers had by *P*. (Wilson 2021, p. 72)

We can now consider how this would work with respect to a region of spacetime that is a conscious hole in the divine.

Consider a region of spacetime where a conscious subsystem of the cosmic mind is having an experience of temporal passage. There is a non-empty proper subset of activated powers (*qua* powerful qualities) of that spatiotemporal location that constitutes that experience. The activated powers are constitutive of the discrete experience of temporal passage of that subsystem. They would be the outcomes of the subsystem's cognitive powers manifesting in response to changes in the subsystem and in the objects in its environment that are themselves the manifestations of powers.

The powers constitutive of the temporal experience of a subsystem would partner with reciprocal manifestation partners that are themselves a non-empty proper subset of the powers of the larger system that is the cosmic mind. These powers of the cosmic mind would be an integrated collection in a region of/moment in spacetime that is a proper

part of the divine experience of proprioceptive consciousness where a given conscious subsystem is having a discrete temporal experience. (They would, in fact, be the constitutive powers of each subsystem's capacity for metacognition active in that region of spacetime that constitutes a stage in that subsystem's existence *qua* four-dimensional object. Thus, they are nothing over and above spatiotemporal stages in the history of brain regions (in mammals, like us) that monitor object-level experiences that deliver knowledge *de se* about what one is experiencing.)

The activation of the relevant powers of the cosmic mind *qua* übersystem manifested in this location would not themselves be constitutive of experiences of temporal passage in that region in spacetime. Rather, they would be reciprocal manifestation partners with the phenomenal powers whose manifestations are constitutive of experiences of temporal passage. The outcome of the activation of the powers constitutive of proprioception in the region in question would be pleiotropic, contributing both to the unified proprioceptive experience of the divine mind while also contributing to the metacognitive experience of temporal passage experienced by discrete conscious subsystems in the divine mind. The outcome of the übersystem's powers and the phenomenal powers constitutive of a subsystem's experience of temporal passage interacting would be what delivers the metacognitive processing in that region that is also the divine mind's experience of temporal passage. In brief, the powers constitutive of your experience of temporal passage from one moment to another would pair with the powers constitutive of divine proprioceptive consciousness that are in that region to deliver knowledge *de se* of conscious experience of temporal passage.

On my account, divine consciousness of time would involve two discrete perspectives. Divine proprioceptive conscious experience would be directed at the entire four-dimensional block *AND* there would be the varied feelings of temporal passage had by the minds that are holes in the divine from moment to moment (if you would like, God's attending to the experiences of creatures from moment to moment is *like* a moving spotlight on this picture—more on this, below).

6. Objections

In the interest of clarifying my account, I will consider three objections. The first is based on a misunderstanding of the model I have sketched here. The second is a somewhat more substantive objection related to worries about whether the account on offer assumes a different metaphysic of time from eternalism. The final objection is the most worrisome as it relates to how fine-grained divine experiences of temporal passage may be.

Objection 1: My detractor may worry that God's having the sort of cognitive powers I have ascribed to God would result in a divine phenomenology that is still a phenomenological mess of undifferentiated experiences that are inconsistent with one another. This worry is misplaced.

God's conscious experiences are not limited to having a single experience that involves the feeling of temporal passage and its absence. There are two types of cognitive processes—one is proprioceptive and the other is metacognitive. These are *discrete* processes whose outputs are phenomenologically different. One involves a unified experience of the space-time continuum in its entirety, without anything even remotely like robust passage. The other involves the experience of temporal passage had by multiple subsystems. Cognitive systems like us cannot know what it would be like to be such a cognitive system. But, that does not mean that such a system is metaphysically impossible. This problem is not unique. The conscious experiences of other animals very different from humans can seem quite alien to us. Just consider the conscious experiences of cephalopods, such as octopuses, who have more neurons in their tentacles than their brains and taste objects as they touch them or the experience of navigating the world by sonar, like a bat (Nagel 1974).

Objection 2: Someone may argue that the metaphysic of time we get on the position I am defending winds up not actually being eternalism. They may argue that what we have on this picture is a version of the moving spotlight theory. As the divine

metacognitive experience moves from representing robust temporal change from moment to moment, the moment that is represented in the divine conscious experience would be a privileged present.

Perhaps this would count as a version of the moving spotlight theory if God's experiences of robust temporal passage were *accurate* representations of the way the world is (or if God's attending to experiences of temporal passage somehow made a moment in time the privileged present). But that a moment is experienced as uniquely present is a misrepresentation that we experience that is represented in the divine mind via metacognitive reflection. The proprioceptive experiences of the divine mind would correct for the metacognitive misrepresentations of the universe as exhibiting robust change. So given that the experience of robust temporal passage fails to accurately represent the way the world is, such change is not a feature of the universe. Hence, the account of divine experience of robust temporal passage is not committed to a moving spotlight theory or any other view on which robust temporal passage is real in some sense.

Objection 3: The final objection I will consider is the one that is the most troubling for the account I am offering here.¹² My interlocutor may worry that the notion of a "moment of time" is rather vague. If we individuate moments in a manner that is too coarse-grained, then we run the risk of individuating experiences in such a way that discrete experiences are conflated. On the other hand, if we individuate moments in a way that is too fine-grained, then we run the opposite risk of losing the phenomenal forest for the trees, if you will. Thus, if the moments to which discrete temporal experiences are indexed are a millisecond or something even shorter (e.g., a Planck time unit, which is 10^{-44} of a second), then we would clearly fail to capture anything like our experience of temporal change.

Importantly, when we talk about the phenomenology of temporal passage, we are talking about how things appear to us. *Ex hypothesi*, we are misrepresenting how the world actually is in our experiences. What we represent in our experiences are changes in what has been christened the *specious present*. I assume here that the span of the specious present will be what we represent in our working memory as the duration between changes. Notice that what constitutes a "moment" can shift depending upon what one is experiencing. Vagueness is characteristic of the temporal boundaries of the moments that are constitutive of our experience of temporal passage. There are no clear, sharp boundaries. William James expressed this point well:

[T]he practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of compositions of our perception of time is a *duration*, with a bow and a stern, as it were—a rearward- and a forward-looking end. It is only as parts of this *duration-block* that the relation of *succession* of one end to the other is perceived. We do not first feel one end and then feel the other after it, and from the perception of the succession infer an interval of time between, but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it. The experience is from the outset a synthetic datum, not a simple one; and to sensible perception its elements are inseparable, although attention looking back may easily decompose the experience, and distinguish its beginning from its end. (James 1918, pp. 609–10)

The relevant temporal intervals to which we may index the duration of any moment of the specious present can vary. What is important is that these experiences exhibit a unity that allows us to distinguish them one from the other. One way we may measure this (at least, in those whose capacity for visual perception is intact) is in terms of the length of time it takes for a visual signal to be transmitted from the retina to the primary visual cortex and result in an integrated visual experience. Experiments on non-human primates show that signal latencies from the retina to V5, the middle-temporal visual area of the visual cortex, are ~25–30 milliseconds, but the integration of neural activity in V5 takes ~50–125 milliseconds (Piper 2019, pp. 5–6). V5 realizes experiences of visual motion. The total time to integrate information involving feedforward and feedback signals from V5 to V1 (the primary visual

cortex) on one model of apparent motion is ~235 milliseconds (ibid., p. 8). I cannot discuss the neurophysiology of the visual dimension of experiences of temporal passage in any detail here. However, suffice it to say that these data provide us with some parameters for what qualifies as a moment for my purposes.

I will assume that the relevant notion of a moment would be the amount of time it takes to integrate any new neural information that is constitutive of the phenomenology of change in sensory experiences. The phenomenology of the specious present will not neatly map onto this processing. But the divine experience of temporal passage would be constituted by the changes in information being integrated, giving rise to either an ongoing experience of the specious present or shift to a new moment that is indexed as being present in an agent's phenomenology. Thus, for my purposes here, the transition from each moment to moment may be ~235 milliseconds. This is not arbitrary. The phenomenal powers constitutive of the visual experiences would be realized by the relevant neural processes mentioned above. Notice, importantly, that a unified experience of the specious present and the change to another moment may be much longer, lasting seconds, even. However, each such experience will involve the manifestations of multiple powerful qualities that are collectively constitutive of our unified experience of the specious present and the passage to another moment. It would be these powerful qualities with which the divine power for metacognition would be interacting to give rise to the divine experience of temporal passage.

Notice that the correct response to the worry being raised by my interlocutor is one that depends upon empirical findings. Future work may result in an adjustment of the parameters of what we might usefully pick out as a phenomenological *moment*. Moreover, I have only discussed visual processing here. A full account would need to discuss the time it takes to integrate information in other sensory modalities and for all of this information to be integrated into a multisensory conscious experience of temporal passage. That said, I think we have good reason to be confident that there is a fact of the matter and it will pick out the time it takes for organisms like us to integrate sensory information constitutive of our experiences of the specious present.

7. Conclusions

Assuming I have successfully responded to the objections in the previous section, I believe we have *pro tanto* reasons for denying premise (3) of the argument presented above: "If God knows what it is like to experience robust temporal passage, then God does not have a unified experience of the spatiotemporal continuum." In particular, absent further argument from a potential interlocutor, the proponent of the version of personal pantheism I have presented here does not need to worry about the threat posed by our experiences of robust temporal passage for divine omniscience. Hence, personal pantheism appears to enjoy an advantage over non-personal pantheism, since non-personal pantheism lacks the metaphysical resources to respond to the worry I have presented. That said, whether the balance of reasons finally favors personal pantheism over non-personal pantheism, and, for that matter, any version of pantheism over any other alternatives, is an open question.

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Notes

- ¹ See (Zagzebski 2008) for a defense of this assumption.
- ² For a defense of properties as immanent/*in rebus* universals, see (Armstrong 1978, 1989, 1997). Representative trope-theoretic accounts are offered in (Campbell 1981, 1990; Heil 2003, 2012; Martin 2007; Molnar 2003; D. Williams 1953). There are important differences between Campbell and Williams, on the one hand, and Heil, Martin, and Molnar, on the other. Specifically, Campbell and Williams assume a one-category ontology with objects being bundles of tropes. Heil, Martin, and Molnar include irreducible objects in their ontologies, with tropes as modes or ways objects are. Given the two-category ontology being assumed in this paper, if I were to assume trope-theory, the view endorsed would be closer to the views of Heil, Martin, and Molnar.
- ³ For defenses of this view, see (Heil 2003, 2012; Ingthorsson 2013; Jacobs 2011; Martin 2007; Mumford 1998; N. Williams 2019).
- ⁴ For more on the relation between powers and disposition-ascriptions, see (Buckareff 2022a).
- ⁵ For more on this sort of view of powers in causal processes, see (Buckareff 2017; Chakravartty 2005; Corry 2019; Heil 2012; Marmodoro 2017; Molnar 2003; Mumford and Anjum 2011).
- ⁶ Martin and Pfeifer (1986) argue that many standard accounts of intentionality fail to distinguish intentional mental properties from allegedly non-intentional dispositional physical properties. See also (Borghini 2009; Heil 2003, 2012, 2016; Martin 2007; Molnar 2003, chp. 3; Place 1996).
- ⁷ See (Buckareff 2022b) for discussion of pantheism and how to distinguish it from other accounts of God and God's relationship to the universe, such as panentheism and theistic internalism.
- ⁸ Skow has the following schemas as numbered. I have changed them to the initials for "anemic change" and "robust change".
- ⁹ See (Forrest 2016b; Jantzen 1978, 1984; Lancaster-Thomas 2020). While they do not label their versions of pantheism as versions of personal pantheism, I take (Bauer 2019; Pfeifer 2016) to also be presenting what is best described as personal pantheist conceptions of God.
- ¹⁰ Forrest (2004) rejects eternalism, having defended a very unique version of a growing block metaphysic of time. However, I am not asserting that any theory of time is correct here. Rather, I am solely interested in whether any version of pantheism can preserve omniscience IF eternalism is true. So I am not concerned about whether Forrest would approve of the line of inquiry taken up in this article. Where I expect he will part company with me is with respect to how I fill in the account.
- ¹¹ The model of conscious processing of information I find most tenable is one that is delivered by combining integrated information theory with a metaphysics of properties as powerful qualities. See (Tononi and Koch 2015; Owen 2019).
- ¹² This objection was raised by Gorazd Andrejč.

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