

SPINOZA’S MODEL OF GOD: PANTHEISM OR PANENTHEISM?

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Abstract: The philosophical God of Spinoza is branded as a pantheistic God so often that, regarding at least Western philosophy and philosophical commentaries, Spinozism seems to be practically synonymous with pantheism. Since the times of German idealism, there have also been attempts at a panentheistic reading, which are still alive to this day. The article analyses both theological models in their core claims to adequately qualify Spinoza’s theological system while considering the established levels of philosophical-theological interpretation. By identifying systemic pantheism and essentialist panentheism in his system, it is argued that both accounts or readings of Spinoza’s theory might be correct in their own way, provided that the models behind them are correctly applied to their respective levels of thought.

Keywords: Baruch Spinoza; substance-mode metaphysics; philosophical theology; pantheism; panentheism; essentialism

Introduction

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Culp 2020), panentheism² offers an increasingly popular ‘alternative’ to both classical theism and pantheism. However, the general discussion suggests that its distinctiveness as a theological position is not yet fully established. Some authors (see, e.g., Peters 2013; Bracken 2014) view it as a ‘mediating position’ between theism and pantheism in the sense that it preserves God’s transcendence while identifying Him with the world in a pantheistic way. On the other hand, some authors (see, e.g., Göcke 2013b; Mullins 2016) find no relevant demarcations of panentheism from pantheism. It seems that every panentheistic debate must inevitably slide into the pantheism-panentheism difference. These two theological models undoubtedly share some similarities, and I believe that these discussions should be encouraged. I find addressing the natural human need for the divine in a philosophical way very beneficial not only intellectually but also educationally, as by discussing these questions, we might be able to prevent them – should they ever arise within the individual mind – from falling into the ‘wrong hands’ of ideology and dogmatism or disinterested conformity of thought. While there are many possible approaches to these questions, the natural tendency of many thinkers, including myself, follows what must be an intuitive experience of divine unity and the interconnectedness of all that there is,³ and

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² The term ‘panentheism’ was introduced by German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause in 1869 (see Göcke 2013a).

³ Thomas Kisser (2011, 294) speaks of this unity with the world as of the “oldest structure of metaphysics“, the unity of *genetivus subjectivus* and *genetivus objectivus*.

the pantheistic-panentheistic theological perspective might be an attempt to articulate this tendency.

To consider Spinoza, the ‘God-intoxicated man’, as one of the greatest proponents and defenders of such metaphysical and/or theological unity is probably an understatement in relation to his importance for the theological thought of Western pantheism-panentheism. His tireless striving for an adequate definition of God and our place within was indeed a lens-grinding process at which he was extraordinarily skilled – a process aimed at establishing and perfecting a chosen perspective. Every Western pantheist or panentheist would benefit from confronting their thought with Spinoza’s logical explication of a system of this character, which brings us to the question of the exact nature of Spinoza’s ‘pantheistic-panentheistic’ theology. Most commentators interpret his theological account as pantheistic, but there are also strong voices in favour of panentheism⁴ and the debate is still open. I too would like to contribute to it by suggesting a dual-perspective analytical method based on distinguishing two fundamental model components of a theological theory, specifically through the perspectives and definitions of Spinoza’s system: the systemic model of God and the relational model of God. I argue that in a solid philosophical-theological theory, both components should be properly laid out, as neither of them is replaceable by the other. With the former, we seek to *model the divine* and such a model is thus a theoretical model of God explicated within a conceptual system. With the latter, we seek to establish a God-world connexion by *modelling a possible relation between the divine and the non-divine*, which also means that this model must draw its conclusions from what the former (model of God) permits. Through these two perspectives, I believe that it is possible for a theory to be both pantheistic and panentheistic, which is, as I try to prove, also the case with Spinoza.

The pantheistic model

The easiness of judgment branding Spinoza as a pantheist naturally leads one to the question: What exactly is it about his theory that inspires such intuitive conclusions? In other words, what makes this thinker seemingly a pantheist? First, it must be clarified *what* pantheism is. Judging from the notion itself, it seems to me that the first and foremost condition of pantheism would be its ‘*theos*’ part: every pantheistic system is a theistic system, that is, a concept of the divine must be present. Quite contrary to how it may seem, this is not an obvious claim – Spinoza himself has been accused of pantheism *and* atheism simultaneously, which I find absurd. Not only does pantheism accept the divine; it is actually *constructed* as a definition of the divine. This brings us to the second part of the notion, the ‘*pan*’ or ‘all’. In my understanding, pantheism identifies the divine with ‘all’, as it defines the divine as ‘all’ and ‘all’ as divine. There would certainly be objections to such an account: Michael P. Levine (1994), for example, argues that “[...] pantheism has never been a simple identification of the world with God” (Levine 1994, 27–28) and claims that the simplest definition of pantheism would be “everything is divine” (Levine 1994, 46). For me, the formula ‘everything is divine’ falls into the identification account along with the formula ‘the world is God’ or vice versa. It is an expression of the identity of the concept of the divine with the ‘world’ or ‘everything’ that we perceive or conceive within our experience and which we fundamentally – or initially

⁴ To name some of those who openly identify Spinoza as a panentheist: Arne Naess (*Einstein, Spinoza, and God*, 1983), Tania Norell (*A Comprehension of Spinoza’s God*, 2015), Richard Mather (*Judaism, panentheism and Spinoza’s intellectual love of God*, 2017), or Yitzhak Y. Melamed in his most recent works (e.g., *Cohen, Spinoza and the nature of pantheism*, 2018b). Philip Clayton famously stated that Spinoza’s pantheism, “[...] when worked out systematically in Western philosophy, has invariably turned into *panentheism*” (Clayton 2000, 389). John W. Cooper (*Panentheism*, 2014) and Benedikt Paul Göcke (*The Panentheism of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause*, 2018) both assume that Spinoza “might be” a panentheist. Richard Mason (*The God of Spinoza*, 1997) denies Spinoza’s pantheism but proposes immanentism instead of panentheism as an alternative.

– do not consider divine. Another definition of pantheism, laid down by Yitzhak Y. Melamed, holds that “all things are in God” (Melamed 2018a, 3). However, this definition is much more problematic, as it builds upon a small feature that comes out of nowhere: the ‘in’, which, following the logic of the notion and considering current discussions, should not be involved until speaking of panentheism (more on that later). Similarly, Steven Nadler (2010, 243–244) proposes two distinct models of pantheism: ‘reductive pantheism’, where God is identical with everything that exists; and ‘immanentist pantheism’, which asserts that God is distinct from the world and yet is within everything. I believe that this ‘immanentist’ account should be revised from the perspective of panentheism along with Melamed, as it contains the ‘in’ moment. But aside from that, it also contains another interesting moment that should be acknowledged when reflecting on models of God such as pantheism: the distinction moment. Is there or can there be a type of ontological distinction between ‘*theos*’ and ‘*pan*’ in pantheism?

Because I adhere to Benedikt Paul Göcke’s (2013b) differentiation between classical theism stating that everything is ‘outside of’ God, pantheism stating that everything is ‘identical with’ God, and panentheism stating that everything is ‘in’ God, I do not think an ontological distinction is possible. Only two of these three main branches of theological models are actually models of God (classical theism and pantheism), and the difference between them is based precisely on the presence or absence of an ontological distinction. The model of God of classical theism is based on the principle of *difference from everything* (that is, non-divine), which results in an ontologically distinct, transcendental being. Conversely, the pantheistic model of God is based on the principle of *identity with everything*, resulting in the concept of a being that is both everything and divine. The ontological distinction would simply violate this claim, but perhaps the distinction does not need to be ontological; it may be conceptual. If we think of the divine and the world, or everything, as two originally distinct concepts or ideas and use the notion of pantheism to grasp the understanding of them as one concept or one idea, i.e., the idea that ‘everything is divine’, then no violation takes place. However, the important fact is that both concepts share some common ontological ground, e.g., substance or existence; and that both concepts are conceptually distinct yet ontologically congruous at the same time.

Melamed (2013; 2018a) offers two pantheistic models of such conceptual distinctiveness-yet-sameness: ‘whole-part pantheism’ and ‘substance-mode pantheism’, where the former considers all things as part of God as a whole, while in the latter all things are modes of God as substance. Their main difference is the question of ontological prioritisation: whole-part pantheism states the ontological priority of parts over the whole, while substance-mode pantheism states the ontological priority of substance. I find the idea of whole-part pantheism confusing, though – it seemingly states that the parts (of the world) are the basis of existence and so they should be divine themselves. What is the point of deifying the whole if its existence is dependent on its very parts? It is understandable that substance-mode pantheism is considerably more solid in the logic of its own position: the substance is the basis of existence, and its modes simply share the same existence. The basis of existence is divine; therefore, the modes participate in divine existence. Melamed ascribes substance-mode pantheism to Spinoza, which seems accurate at first sight since the substance-mode relation is undeniably the conceptual core of Spinoza’s metaphysical system. However, it is not the core of his *theological* system. The definitive explication of the substance-mode relation does not involve any definite characteristics of God; it simply designates that the substance has modes that must be of substance and therefore depend on it. This is merely an explication of the substance-mode conceptual logic, not a theological or theistic statement.

Spinoza’s systemic model of God

It should be remembered that Spinoza's solid definition of the *theos* of his system is built on something else: "By God I understand an *absolutely infinite* being, that is, substance consisting of *infinite* attributes, each of which expresses eternal and *infinite* essence" (E1def6; emphasis added).⁵ Hence, the definition of God is built completely upon *infinity* and God Himself is identified as an "absolutely infinite being (*ens absolute infinitum*)". And while God is also a substance, the definition of substance differs from the definition of God: the substance is merely 'that (*id*)' which is self-conceived (E1def3), God is 'being (*ens*)' that could be defined as substance but is also significantly more than that.⁶ Sadly, Spinoza's substance metaphysics has often been misidentified as his philosophical theology, resulting in an image of a somehow 'empty' divine substance that is but modifying itself into the world. Here I side with Errol E. Harris (1995) who also criticises this tendency and points out that it ignores the true image of God that Spinoza was trying to 'paint' by his definition of God as a "concrete and complete wholeness", as he puts it (Harris 1995, 24). Another unfortunate and certainly inadequate tendency of many interpretations is to make Spinoza's theism somehow 'naturalistic' by trying to prove how he 'naturalised God' based on the interpretative doctrine of *Deus sive Natura*, which Spinoza himself loathed and objected against.⁷ Moreover, there is also a tendency or interpretative strain to emphasise the *causa sui* aspect of God in thought that focuses on building the 'deterministic God'. My main objection against such accounts is that the concepts of *causa sui*, substance, nature, and God are not merely aspects of one definition; they do have distinctly different definitions and thus need to be treated accordingly. Theological and theistic accounts should build upon the definition of the divine, i.e., the definition of God, which Spinoza himself had carefully laid out and which defines the first and only *ens* in his system.⁸

The definition or concept of *ens absolute infinitum* involves all other fundamental metaphysical definitions or concepts of Spinoza's system, and it is this 'super-idea' that he identifies with the divine. By using this theistic technique, he built the whole system *upon* God right from the start and ensured that the system is one of divine infinity – truly *everything* in the system is (or necessarily must be) God. This is a form of systemic pantheism which would surely result from any monistic substance metaphysics based on divine substance. But even though the whole system is a system of God, it is not claimed that everything in the system is God *conceptually*; any chosen concept of the system would otherwise be identical to the concept of God, which is absurd. We also simply state with this claim that *everything in the system* is God, which is certainly not *everything* as in the '*pan*' part of the notion of pantheism. The notion itself thus

⁵ Throughout the study I will address the quoted and referenced passages of *Ethics* in the form of standard abbreviations used in commentaries: E(-thics, indicates part of the book), cor(-ollary), p(-roposition, in the said part of the book), pf (proof), schol(-ium). All referenced passages come from the English translation by Samuel Shirley (Spinoza 2002a).

⁶ God is also self-conceived (E1def3), necessarily existent (E1p11), one (E1p14), and everything that is can neither be nor be conceived without Him (E1p15), as He is the immanent cause of all things (E1p18).

⁷ As he expressed in his letter to Henry Oldenburg in 1675: "[...] as to the view of certain people that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* rests on the identification of God with Nature (the latter of which they understand a kind of mass or corporeal matter) they are quite mistaken" (Spinoza 2002c, 943).

⁸ It needs to be noted here that some scholars (e.g., Nadler 2010) argue that Spinoza's use of theistic terminology was only for nominal purposes, or that it was a tactical step to enhance the penetrability of his atheistic philosophy. Other scholars (e.g., Melamed 2012) believe his use of such terminology resulted mostly from the influence of Jewish theological thought on young Spinoza. Ze'ev Levy (1987, 189–190) points out regarding this matter that Spinoza's concept of God, even though not being the personal God of the Bible, is metaphysically identical to the "traditional Jewish concept of God" as explicated in medieval Jewish philosophical theology: a self-caused, infinite and eternal being, the ultimate source of everything. There is no doubt that Spinoza was familiar with these philosophical doctrines and adopted many of his concepts and metaphysical views directly from Maimonides and other influential Jewish philosophers or theologians. I believe, then, that his choice of terminology should be respected, and that when he spoke of God, he *really* meant God (*theos*) as defined in the first part of *Ethics* (*De Deo*).

determines us to assume the existence of something other than God, which must not be God *by definition*; or else pantheism would simply be theism. This, in my view, forces us to articulate the core conceptual logic (or order) of Spinoza's systemic exposition of the concept of God *as God*, that is, neither substance (substance-mode) nor *causa sui* (causality), which should allow us to articulate the characteristics of that which is not divine by definition.

If God is an absolutely infinite being and the system is one of infinity, then the conceptual logic must be produced from the definition of infinity. Spinoza's account of infinity is grounded in the principle of ontological and conceptual priority of the infinite over the finite, resulting in a rich and heterogeneous concept of the infinite in contrast to a homogeneous concept of the finite. He recognises two fundamental 'species' of infinity: absolute infinity and infinity in its kind (*in suo genere*) (E1def6exp). The self-conceived, necessarily existent (E1p11), absolutely infinite being is (according to the principle of priority) ontologically prior to every other conception or mode of being. However, immediate conceptions or modes of being that come from this absolute infinity must also be infinite, as Spinoza proposes through the concept of infinite modes (see E1p16; E1p21–23). In his letter to G. H. Schuller (1675), he specifies that the infinite modes immediately following from God's essence are infinite intellect and motion-and-rest, but also explains that there is a second kind of infinite modes following from God's essence through a certain infinite modification of an attribute. These modifications we supposedly perceive as the "face of the whole universe (*facies totius universi*)" (Spinoza 2002c, p. 919; letter 64).⁹ It is not until this level of infinity that the finite comes to be conceived: as that which constitutes the face of the whole universe, i.e., the infinity of finites.

Finiteness is defined by being bounded or limited by something other which is also bounded or limited within the same attribute (E1def2). That means the finite must also be bounded or limited by the attribute and in the end also by the essence of God, which attributes express. Thus, the conceptual basis of the finite (its boundedness) is infinity, whether it may be an infinite attribute or its infinite modification – and, reversely, the conceptual consequence of the infinite is the finite. The finite thus inheres in the infinite, and the infinite involves the finite; neither one can be conceptualised without the other. As I understand it, this infinite-finite dynamic is the core conceptual logic of Spinoza's exposition of God, similarly to the substance-mode conceptual logic being the metaphysical core of his substance monism. Rearticulated from a philosophical-theological perspective, Spinoza's substance-mode monism is infinite-finite pantheism.

The pantheistic model

Pantheism – when considered as I proposed, that is, as a theological model that identifies God with the conceptual system itself – works quite nicely as a systemic model. But, since it is a model or an explication of God's conceptual identity, we can base no relational claims regarding the divine and non-divine upon it. From this perspective, we, the (perceivably) non-divine, simply *are* God and thus, a pantheistic model cannot ever be a relational one. Indeed, classical theism works not only as a systemic model (of transcendent God and His creation) but also as a relational one, as there are many possibilities for modelling the relation between transcendent God and the immediately perceived world. However, if classical theism employs a strong non-identity principle in its systemic core, then the relational articulation will only be permitted in the form of some 'external' relation between God and the world. The moment of transcendent creation has been established as a starting point, which makes the God-

⁹ I do not account for God's attributes here, as they do not follow from God's essence but rather express it (according to E1def6).

world relation completely dependent upon God in every way (existence is given by God, salvation is offered by Him, etc.).

What about relational models where this relation is ‘internal’ rather than ‘external’? I believe the answer is simply panentheism itself; I firmly see it as having been conceptualised as a relational model of God, that is, as an attempt to formulate an ‘intimate’ sort of relation or connexion between God and that which is non-divine. As I mentioned in the Introduction, many authors view panentheism as a position where God is “both transcendent and immanent” (Artson 2013, 20) or as a mediating position between classical theism and pantheism of some sort, which may be accurate to a great extent. At some places where classical theism fails, e.g., ascribing objective theological values to the world, pantheism not only succeeds but exceeds: everything is of the same value, as everything is God. However, this is not in accord with some of our basic moral intuitions, for example, that living things are of greater value than that which is non-living. A panentheistic relational model might offer a solution to this problem by proposing that while all things are ‘in’ God, some things are ‘in’ God ‘more’ than others because they ‘inhabit’ more of His ‘space’. We may call this, along with Göcke (2016), the ‘spatial’ interpretation of the panentheistic ‘in’, of which there are many possible options for which Göcke provided a detailed analysis: the spatial or temporal interpretation, the substantive interpretation, the process-theological interpretation, etc.

In his paper, Göcke concludes that the basis of ‘in’ can generally be regarded in two ways: as proposing the need to model an external relation with respect to God and the world because their ontological relationship involves an ontological distinction or as proposing that „[...] everything belongs to the nature of God Himself” (Göcke 2016, 5). As stated, I view the ontological distinction and the subsequent need for external relation modelling as a characteristic of classical theism, but the latter – the ‘belonging’ to the nature, or essence, of God – I consider to be a purely panentheistic doctrine. It seems to be true that there must be a type of distinction present in the articulation of the relational model, whether it is ‘external’ or ‘internal’, again ruling out pantheism as an identification account. Nevertheless, the distinction does not need to be a strict God-world distinction, as is the core claim of classical theism. A very specific distinction could be established by the concept of God’s essence: the distinction of God-God’s essence, which is ‘internal’ and thus produces a multidimensional relational model without violating the systemic pantheism of everything being God. It is not an ‘extension’ of pantheism, as pantheism cannot articulate this distinction, but it must be allowed by a pantheistic system. I would like to demonstrate this on Spinoza’s theory. As the essence of something is its idea, concept, or definition in Spinoza’s system, the essence of God is not God Himself, the infinite being. It is the *definition* of God as something that we conceive, conceptualise, conceptually work with, etc. This means that when one attempts to conceptualise God or His relation to the world in any way, one necessarily forms the definition of God. It is only this definition that is conceivable of Him, and at the same time this definition, or essence, defines everything that is. Richard Mason considers this Spinoza’s doctrine “an orthodox form of what we now call essentialism” (Mason 2016, 32).

Spinoza’s form of essentialism differs greatly from the theistic essentialism of one of his greatest influences, Maimonides, and constitutes a major point of departure for their theologies. For Maimonides, the human mind is incapable of recognising God’s essence, His innermost truth, and so it remains a transcendent, mystical element of God (Maimonides 1963, 137–150; see also Pines 1963). On the other hand, Spinoza argues it is the essence that is epistemologically approachable by the intellect, and therefore it is possible to have an adequate idea of it: by conceiving a being whose essence is conceivable “only as existing” (E1def1). In Maimonides’ theology, the essence of God, as something of God that is not related to the world,

does not strictly separate God from the world, so it is not an ontological distinction. Rather, it is a conceptual and ontological unit by itself, for which there cannot be a place within the relation between God and the world. Spinoza's thought and account turn this idea around: the essence of God establishes the supposed God-world relation, while absolutely infinite God cannot be grasped or bounded by any cognition.

Spinoza's relational model of God

It is through His essence, then, that God and the world come together. What are the logical dynamics behind this relation, though? As I argued in the paper, the substance-mode conceptual dynamics establishes metaphysics, whereas the infinite-finite dynamics establishes systemic theology. But what about the dynamics of the relational model? I believe that the answer lies within Spinoza's account of the causality of God, although not within the *causa sui*, but the *causa immanens* account. God is both a self-causing cause and an immanent cause, which means that 'God is the cause of things that are in Him' (E1p18), that is, all things that are (E1p15). However, the most complex account of the *causa immanens* doctrine was not laid out in the *Ethics* but in the *Short Treatise*, where Spinoza claims that God "[...] is an immanent, and not a transient cause, since all that He produces is within Himself, and not outside Him because there is nothing outside Him" (Spinoza 2002b, 50). In another place, he likens the immanence of God to the immanence of the intellect, or understanding, by stating that the immanent cause "[...] by no means produces anything outside itself, as is exemplified by the understanding (*verstand, intellectus*), which is the cause of its ideas. And that is why I called the understanding (insofar as, or because, its ideas depend on it) a *cause*; and on the other hand, since it consists of its ideas, a *whole*: so also *God is both an immanent Cause with reference to his works or creatures and also a whole [...]*" (Spinoza 2002b, 47).¹⁰

In my view, the most important moment of this account is that God is an immanent cause 'in reference to his works' as well as a cause of itself regarding Himself. Clearly, the *causa sui* account cannot in any way participate in modelling a possible relation between the divine and the non-divine, as it simply states the self-causality of the divine, a pantheistic systemic feature. But the *causa immanens* account clearly states that God is the cause of the 'things' that are in Him, which is a panentheistic claim and surely a relational characteristic, for the existence of non-divine 'things' of which God is the cause is established. But how exactly do these 'things' depend on God within an immanent causal relationship? In my opinion, the strict formula for this dependency does not state that 'all things depend on God', but, as Spinoza puts it, "all things depend on the *power* of God" (E1p33schol2; emphasis added). God's power, according to Spinoza, is nothing but His essence since "from the necessity of God's essence it follows that God is self-caused and the cause of all things. Therefore, God's power, whereby He and all things are and act, is His very essence" (E1p34pf). Again, it is the essence or definition of God that comes into relation with 'things', and the particular relation that is conceived in this way is immanent causation.

As Mason notes in his account of Spinoza's 'orthodox' essentialism, the essence of a thing cannot be conceived without it and vice versa: "[...] if B is conceived through A then A must be the cause or explanation of B (A and B will involve each other)" (Mason 2016, 32). This is not a factual or practical causality; it is one of a logical kind, and that is precisely, at least in my understanding of it, what an immanent causation is: an expression of logical involvement. When we say that God is the immanent cause of all things in the sense that all things depend on the essence of God, we state that the definition of God involves all things or that all things are logically 'produced' from the definition of God. Mason (2016, 33) correctly points out that

¹⁰ Emphasized by B.S.

such expression of the relation is somehow temporal and asymmetric: the definition of God involves man, but the definition of man does not involve God. Melamed (2018a) considers this asymmetry a distinctive characteristic of panentheism when contrasted to pantheism, which, according to him, asserts a symmetrical inherence or dependence between God and things. Surely, Spinoza holds that the essence of God does not pertain to the essence of man (E2p10), but he also adds that the essence of man is “something that is in God, and which can neither be nor be conceived without God, i.e., an affection or mode which expresses the nature of God in a definite and determinate way” (E2p10pf2). But as we already examined, the definite and determinate way of being (as the finite) is a necessary consequence of the definition of *ens absolute infinitum*; in other words, particular things are modes “[...] in which the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way” (E1p25cor). Finally, for Spinoza, “whatever exists expresses God’s nature or essence in a definite and determinate way” (E1p36pf). The infinite and the finite are distinct yet involved by definitions because *ens absolute infinitum* must be defined in terms of both: the infinite eternal attributes (and their infinite modes) and the finite temporal modes. I see this as neither symmetrical nor asymmetrical dependence – the dependence is not even explicated in this account; it simply follows from the principle of priority of the infinite. What I see is an intimate bond of the essential or definitory kinship of all things and their definitions based on their involvement in the definition of God. Everything is related in terms of the only cause of their existence: to be a definite and determinate expression of God’s definition.

The relational model of Spinoza’s God is one of essentialist panentheism: the relational dynamics between the divine and the (conceptually) non-divine rests on essentialism and essentialist immanent causation. The basic panentheistic formula of such an outlook can be something along the lines of: ‘*The definition of God entails everything; therefore, everything is in God*’. The relational basis, clarified in the first part of the formula, must be God’s essence, not God Himself. However, the second part clarifies that the definition of God is supposed to be the knowledge of God Himself. As the definition of a thing is also its *scientia* or knowledge, we can only know that we are in God through this basis of knowledge. I believe that such careful formulation may actually be able to truly capture the *essence* of what it tries to establish as a philosophical-theological and theistic position. In the case of Spinoza, the basic formula may be saturated with the definitory content of his concept of the divine, and thus a complete expression of his essentialist panentheism would be: ‘*The definition of a self-conceived, necessarily existent, absolutely infinite being entails the infinity of its conceptual modifications, both infinite and finite; therefore, everything is in God*’.

Spinoza’s essentialist panentheism is a relational model of God based on conceptual relations (involvements) between definitions or essences. The conceptuality of the model might make us believe that it is an abstract, somehow ‘distant’ image of the God-world relationship, but I think the opposite is true. The conceptuality of the model, at least in Spinoza’s theory, is also the basis of intensive religious experience, as the concept or idea is neither an abstract ‘image’ nor a notion or a word (cf. E2p43schol) but rather a dynamic, ‘living’ object of the most organic epistemological process that takes place within the human mind – its intuition. Through the concept of *scientia intuitiva*, an immediate knowledge that corresponds to the dynamics of the mind’s intellect (or understanding), Spinoza articulates this relation also from the point of view of a ‘thing’ and claims that within the panentheistic experience, “we feel and experience that we are eternal” (E5p23schol). Being *innately* divine needs to be experienced as much as it needs to be known. It is not surprising, then, that Spinoza in part concludes his theory with a somewhat controversial claim that the human mind cannot be completely destroyed along with the body, but “something of it remains, which is eternal” (E5p23). Although the mind is immanently defined and caused by God’s definition, it is also defined or bounded in part by

other bounded things. But the more it understands God's essence and the more it sees (by intuition) that and how all is defined in Him, the greater part of it is defined by Him. From this perspective, being in the definition of God while knowing it at the same time is as close to knowing – and being – God as a non-God (human being) can get.

Two models

Pantheism and panentheism are satisfactorily distinct theological models that simply address two different conceptual domains. Therefore, their main difference is not the presence or absence of transcendence but the fact that they do not model the same thing or relation. For this reason, I do not think these models of God are commensurable or even 'competing' in some way.¹¹ Pantheism is a theoretical model of God as explicated in a conceptual system where everything is divine. Panentheism, on the other hand, is a relational model of God that models a specific 'internal' (ontological or conceptual) relation between God and everything in the system. As for the common triad of theistic positions, i.e., classical theism, pantheism, and panentheism, I consider classical theism and pantheism to be models of God, while the relational model of God may be that of classical theism or panentheism. It remains to be examined, but falls beyond the scope of this paper, whether the relational model of any of the said systemic models may be articulated as either panentheism or classical theism. It seems to me, though, that systemic classical theism may be articulated as both relational classical theism and panentheism (e.g., Teilhard de Chardin), while systemic pantheism may be articulated as relational panentheism only. However, if the goal is simply to sufficiently establish a pantheistic identity, a pantheistic model does not need its relational form.

Spinoza's theology offers a systemic pantheistic and relational panentheistic model of God: the former is a system constructed on the definition of God as *ens absolute infinitum*, while the latter establishes relational theology by exploring definitory relations (immanent causations) within the said system. This way a very complex theological system is built – a system of absolute infinity involving all that is infinite and finite, with all beings and concepts being in the definition of God while still being defined as themselves and also by other definitions (things). Due to this conceptual richness and distinctiveness, it is possible to conceptualise (and experience) the innate kinship of everything in the divine while still considering ourselves as distinct, real, concrete individuals that are, by their very own definition, neither divine nor the world. The principal logic of Spinoza's metaphysical system, the substance-mode relation, is completely established in the first part of *Ethics*, but the 'final' panentheistic logic of his theistic (and ethical) system is not completed until the end of the work: "[...] our mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this again by another, and so on *ad infinitum*, with the result that they all together constitute the eternal and infinite intellect of God" (E5p40schol).

The greatest effort of panentheism regarding the idea of the identity of the divine is probably the expression and appreciation of the essential self-relativity of the divine which human beings, like everything else, can experience in their own way. In a true understanding of the world (and God) we not only see God's definition through "the eyes of the mind" (E5p23schol), but we also actively participate in it – through the world. A world created by a completely transcendent God cannot be understood in terms of Him or His definition. We cannot logically deduce the character of such God from the world, and we also cannot logically deduce the character of the world from such God, and this involves the desired moral state of the world as well. Such moral theology undoubtedly produces questionable conceptual and ethical

¹¹ In case that the reader thinks otherwise and would be interested in such possibilities of competition between various models of God, I recommend Jeremy R. Hustwit's study (Hustwit 2013).

‘freedom’, resulting in the need for clear coordinates of life that would be ‘sent from above’. Many things and concepts may be ‘sent from above’: such God can tell us to love, hate, kill, or practise mercy and charity. If not for a type of ‘revelation’, there would be no logical way to determine which of these should be preferred. But in Spinoza’s (pantheistic-panentheistic) systemic and relational model of God, the truth reveals itself both in its definition and in the world. It is self-evident and self-explanatory and there is no need to sanctify it, as it is already eternally divine. Probably all pantheistic and panentheistic models end in such theistic, epistemological, and ethical cosmism, and in my view, this gives them a great advantage over the frequent acosmism of classical theism. From this perspective, Spinoza could undoubtedly be considered a masterfully skilled ‘cosmic’ philosopher and theologian with the nature of thought that is much needed in our age.

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