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## PREFACE

The project at hand grew out of my earlier work on multiverse cosmologies, which concluded on a somewhat frustrated note regarding the so-called public conversation between science and religion. In fact, I came to realize, the ongoing debate over the existence of the multiverse provides a clear picture of the grim state of this conversation. Despite the decades of scholarship illuminating the historical identity, persistent entanglement, and productive crossings of the regimes we now call “science” and “religion,” the default assumption among scientists, theists, and their audiences remains that these categories are self-identical and starkly opposed.

The “conversation,” then, amounts either to replacing a given thing called “religion” with another given thing called “science”; to rejecting the latter by appealing to a particularly uninteresting form of the former; to supplementing one of them with a strong dose of the other; or, God help us, to “reconciling” them—a task that almost always amounts to orthodox theology’s contorting itself around any given scientific discovery so as to hold open an increasingly small space for itself without appearing too backward. As it turns out, we can see all of these strategies at work in the positing, defense, and critique of the multiverse—that hypothetical compendium of an infinite number of universes apart from our own.

The question to which the multiverse provides an answer is why the universe seems so finely tuned. Why, physicists ask, do gravity, the cosmological constant, the nuclear forces, and the mass of the electron all happen to have the values they have—especially when it seems that any other values would have prevented the emergence of stars, planets, organic life, and in some cases, the universe itself? What these

physicists fear—and with good reason, considering this particular theological strategy’s stubborn refusal to die—is the perennial classical theistic answer to this question. The scientist asks: why is the universe so perfect? And the theist predictably responds: because an intelligent, benevolent, anthropomorphic Creator outside the universe set the controls just right, launching the universe on a course “he” knew would produce beings to resemble and worship him.

Strictly speaking, such theological concerns cannot be said to have generated the idea of the multiverse in the first place. Nevertheless, the reason an increasing number of theoretical physicists find it so compelling is that the multiverse provides a metaphysical solution that finally rivals the undead Creator. After all, if there is just one universe, then it is very difficult to explain how the cosmos manages to be so bio-friendly without appealing to some kind of force beyond it. If, however, there are an infinite number of universes, all taking on different parameters throughout infinite time, then once in a while, one of them is bound to turn out right, and we just happen to be in one of those. In short, the infinite multiverse is the only answer big enough to stand up to the infinite God of classical theism, with his omni-attributes and his ex nihilo creative powers.

(Preface is incomplete. [Continue reading Preface here](#))

## INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER WITH PANTHEISM

*This is the most monstrous hypothesis that could be imagined, the most absurd, and the most diametrically opposed to the most evident notions of our mind.* —Pierre Bayle, Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections

### MONSTROSITY

On the brink of the eighteenth century, Pierre Bayle published his *Dictionnaire historique et culturelle* (1697, second edition 1702)—an eclectic, rambling compendium whose footnotes comically outweigh its main text and whose essays illuminate the lives and works of biblical figures, monarchs, and an exceedingly strange smattering of philosophers. Known for its thoroughgoing skepticism, its trenchant critique of Roman Catholic authoritarianism, its “lewd anecdotes, moral musings,” and defense of religious and political tolerance, the *Dictionnaire* quickly became “the philosophical best seller of the eighteenth century,” influencing every classic Enlightenment thinker from Diderot and Voltaire to Berkeley and Hume to Jefferson and Melville.<sup>1</sup>

Bayle’s tone throughout the *Dictionnaire* is strident and uncompromising. He seeks to undermine nearly every positive metaphysical position he considers, following them Socratically, and with a heavy dose of crankiness, until they collapse under their own weight. Even for the acclimated reader, however, it can be unsettling, four volumes in, to stumble upon Bayle’s unmeasured screed against Baruch Spinoza. Calling Spinoza a “Jew by birth, and afterwards a deserter from Judaism, and lastly an atheist,” Bayle does not even take the time to set up the arguments he plainly despises.<sup>2</sup> Such arguments, to Bayle’s mind, need no careful treatment, their flaws being “so obvious that no balanced mind could ever be unaware of them.”<sup>3</sup> Even the most cursory consideration, he insists, will reveal that Spinoza’s teaching “surpasses all the

monstrosities and chimerical disorders of the craziest people who were ever put away in lunatic asylums.”<sup>4</sup>

What is this surpassing monstrosity, this chimerical lunacy? Bayle just says it once, as if dwelling on it any longer might make it contagious. Hiding it in a footnote, in a subordinate clause, he mentions that the insanity at hand is Spinoza’s identification of thought and extension.<sup>5</sup> Thought and extension, often colloquialized as mind and body, were for René Descartes two distinct substances, meaning that each of them was self-sufficient, inhering in no greater thing.<sup>6</sup> Reading Descartes against himself, Spinoza insists that thought and extension are merely two attributes of the same substance, which he calls “God, or Nature” (Deus sive natura).<sup>7</sup>

Here, then, is our monstrosity: according to Spinoza, God and Nature are equivalent terms. As he phrases it (hastily, as if hoping no one will notice): “the power of Nature is the divine power and virtue, and the divine power is the very essence of God. But I prefer to pass this by for the present.”<sup>8</sup> Bayle lets him do no such thing, horrified that if the power of Nature is the divine power and the divine power is the essence of God, then by the transitive principle, “the power of Nature” is “the very essence of God.” The universe we are in—and which, in turn, is in us—is what we mean when we say the word “God”; conversely, “God” is nothing other than the creative work of creation itself. To be sure, the position is unexpected, unorthodox—even heretical. But why does Bayle keep calling it monstrous? In his lectures on abnormality, Michel Foucault explains:

The monster is essentially a mixture. It is a mixture of two realms, the animal and the human ... of two species ... of two individuals ... of two sexes ... of life and death.... Finally, it is a mixture of forms.... the transgression of natural limits, the transgression of classifications, of the table, and of the law as table: this is actually what is involved in monstrosity.<sup>9</sup>

By “the table, and the law as table,” Foucault has in mind the whole chart of oppositions that Aristotle ascribes to Pythagoras,<sup>10</sup> and that Western philosophy keeps extending and expanding; namely, the “table” that opposes mind to body, human to animal, male to female, the unchanging to the changing, the rational to the irrational, the spiritual to the material, perfection to imperfection, light to darkness, activity to passivity, etc. As deconstructive thinkers have been pointing out for decades, the first of each of these terms maintains its historical privilege by denigrating and repudiating the second, which turns out to be its condition of possibility. And strikingly, the first set of terms includes all the characteristics that Western metaphysics has traditionally associated with God, while the second set includes the characteristics associated with the world, or creation, or nature. God is said to be anthropomorphic, unchanging, rational, and masculine while the world is coded as animal-vegetal, changeable, irrational, and feminine.

When Spinoza tells us that God is the world, then, he is mixing up traits that any sane philosophy would keep separate, transgressing the law of the table. This is what Bayle means when he repeatedly calls Spinoza’s philosophy “monstrous”; what kind of divinity could ever be material? After all, Bayle reminds us, matter is “the vilest of all beings ... the theater of all sorts of changes, the battleground of contrary charges, the subject of

all corruptions and all generations, in a word, the being whose nature is most incompatible with the immutability of God.”<sup>11</sup> By mixing the spiritual and the material, Spinoza therefore produces “the most monstrous hypothesis that could be imagined, the most absurd, and the most diametrically opposed to the most evident notions of our mind.”<sup>12</sup>

Again, Bayle tends to be a cantankerous writer. But his essay on Spinoza is a particularly egregious compendium of unsubstantiated name-calling. In addition to the repeated charges of monstrosity, Bayle dubs Spinoza’s teachings “absurd,” “horrible,” and “vile”; his ethics “an execrable abomination,” his metaphysics “poppycock,” and his Theological-Political Treatise a “pernicious and detestable book.”<sup>13</sup> Such insults are hardly limited to Bayle; a contemporary detractor wrote that the Treatise had been “forged in Hell by a renegade Jew and the Devil.”<sup>14</sup> And the source of this abomination, the professed identity of spirit and matter, God and nature, is the position that yet another anti-Spinozist named Jacques de la Faye will derisively name pantheism.<sup>15</sup>

Etymologically, “pantheism” names the identification of pan, or “all,” with theos, or “God,” but from there, the term shifts wildly depending on how one defines the “all” that God “is.” What Benjamin Lazier calls pantheism’s “referential promiscuity” is moreover a function of its being initially and more commonly used as a polemical term than as one of positive identification.<sup>16</sup> Simply put, there are more voices saying, “you’re a pantheist and that’s absurd” than, “my doctrine is pantheist and this is what that means.” Casually, the term “pantheism” tends to connote personal or communal reverence for “nature”: that amorphous terrain overseen in Greek mythology by the goat-god Pan. Literarily—and often in the form of Pan himself—pantheism erupts throughout Renaissance, pastoral, Romantic, and Victorian poetry, most notably in the works of Milton, Jonson, Spenser, Goethe, Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, Whitman, and Barrett Browning.<sup>17</sup> Philosophically, however, pantheism is little more than a limit case—the position nearly everyone wants to avoid, regardless of theoretical orientation.<sup>18</sup> For theists, atheists, rationalists, empiricists, and idealists alike, “pantheism” has been from the beginning the school to which one simply does not adhere.

As it turns out, then, Bayle’s vilification represents a fairly standard—if uncommonly verbose—instance of what Ninian Smart calls “the horror of pantheism” in Western thought.<sup>19</sup> This horror has been so pervasive that “pantheism” has not developed into a coherent system, or even a clear concept. For the most part, it remains a bad word and a tool of automatic rhetorical dismissal.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, in one of his numerous meditations on Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze reflects on the scores of philosophers who are “constantly threatened by the accusation of immanentism and pantheism, and constantly taking care to avoid, above all else, such an accusation.”<sup>21</sup> Such philosophers have included even such “all” thinkers as Hegel, Schelling, and Schleiermacher, and today include the most left-leaning of liberationists; for instance, James Cone carefully distances black theology from any “pantheistic implications,” Sallie McFague maintains that her ecotheological “body of God” is “neither idolatry nor pantheism,” and Yvonne Gebara insists that ecofeminism’s immanent divinity not be read pantheistically.<sup>22</sup> Instead, they affirm along with process theologians the delicately balanced doctrine of panentheism according to which, as Philip Clayton explains, “the world is in God, but God is also

more than the world.”<sup>23</sup> To be sure, there are numerous reasons one might opt for panentheism rather than pantheism; panentheists might hold an a priori commitment to the ontological distinction between God and the world, or they might worry that pantheism’s identity forecloses difference, or both of these at once. As such, panentheists call upon the “en” to ensure the separation between God and world that enables their relation. What is striking, I am trying to suggest, is not the rejection of pantheism per se, but rather the haste with which it is rejected. Such haste becomes understandable when one considers that the cost of association with pantheism is often the sort of reckless, incensed invective we find in Bayle’s Dictionnaire; as Grace Jantzen attests, “if a proposal is seen as pantheistic or leading to pantheistic consequences, that is deemed sufficient reason to repudiate it, often with considerable vitriol.”<sup>24</sup>

Of course, Bayle was not the first to repudiate a pantheistic proposal with vitriol. Four decades earlier, Spinoza had been excommunicated from his Jewish community in Amsterdam for his “monstrous deeds”; specifically, for the crime of teaching “that God has a body”—namely, the body of the world itself.<sup>25</sup> Having heretically conflated divinity with materiality, Spinoza was expelled bodily from the synagogue with “ ‘the anathema with which Joshua anathematized Jericho,’ ” to wit:

Cursed be he by day, and cursed be he by night, cursed be he when he lieth down, and cursed be he when he riseth up; cursed be he when he goeth out and cursed be he when he cometh in; the Lord will not pardon him; the wrath and fury of the Lord will be kindled against this man ... and the Lord will destroy his name from under the heavens; and, to his undoing, the Lord will cut him off from all the tribes of Israel.<sup>26</sup>

In keeping with this divine genealogical rupture, the elders of Spinoza’s Congregation Talmud Torah furthermore imposed a social quarantine: “We ordain that no one may communicate with him verbally or in writing, nor show him any favour ... nor be within four cubits of him, nor read anything composed or written by him.”<sup>27</sup>

Granted, identifying God with a material creation is a highly unorthodox move. As we have already noted, the God of classical theism is said to be eternal, unchanging, simple, infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient: in short, everything the world is not. Conversely, the theistic world is thought to be object, not subject; passive, not active; created, not creator—and the pantheistic God-world collapses, or at least entangles, these distinctions. But there are all sorts of heresies, none of which seems to fuel the degree of horror perennially provoked by Spinoza’s Deus sive natura. One is therefore compelled to ask, what is so awful about pantheism? What is it that prompts the council’s multidimensional anathema (cursed be he by day, by night; when he’s up, down, in, and out); that cuts the pantheist off from all relation, as if to prevent infection; and that constitutes not just an error, but an unforgivable one?<sup>28</sup> Whence stems the horror religiosus that not only excommunicates Spinoza, but in the hands of Christian hierarchs condemns John Scotus Eriugena, executes the followers of Almaric of Bena, burns Giordano Bruno at the stake, incinerates Marguerite Porete, suspects even Jonathan Edwards of heresy, and would have obliterated Meister Eckhart if he hadn’t died first?<sup>29</sup> What is the matter with pantheism?

It might help to address this particular question with its obverse; namely, **why does the position in question keep arising, such that it needs to be so repeatedly denounced?**

The very frequency and tenor of anti-pantheistic proclamations suggests there might be something alluring about this abominable position; in short, there would be no need to reject it so constantly, and so irritably, if it weren't so strangely compelling. In the mid-nineteenth century, for example, a slew of treatises were written to combat the raging pantheism allegedly devouring the American literary landscape—and each of these treatises exhibits a kind of revolted fascination with the heresy in question.<sup>30</sup>

One particularly vilifying treatise is the work of Nathaniel Smith Richardson, an Anglican divine in a transcendental-Spiritualist New England. Over the course of a spirited and even panicked defense of Christian orthodoxy, Richardson calls pantheism a misguided, dangerous, anti-intellectual, and even “appalling movement.”<sup>31</sup> The notion that God is not only in, but identical to, the natural world is to Richardson's mind the multiparental offspring of cheap German idealism, an increasingly democratized Puritanism, atheist biblical criticism, and bad poetry, all of which threaten to destroy the moral fabric of the nation. **At the same time, even Richardson can see why pantheism has swept up the young and unchurched: “there is a generosity about it,” he writes, “and a kindness, that is captivating.”<sup>32</sup> The kindly generosity of pantheism, of course, is its attribution of godliness to all things—its coloring the whole world divine “as if it bore in its hand the wand of an enchanter.... It is a gorgeous vision,” the anti-pantheist admits, “and no wonder that souls craving for rest and finding none, should gladly yield themselves to its bewitching power.”<sup>33</sup>**

One might note the sexual metaphors of this “enchancing,” “bewitching,” and “gorgeous” power, and indeed, in other works of this time period, pantheism is similarly rendered as temptation, or seduction. Thus the Reverend Morgan Dix of Trinity Church, Manhattan, warns that men lacking in sufficient education “may have been tempted, seduced, tainted, poisoned by [pantheism] ... unawares”; Alexis De Tocqueville fears that pantheism ranks among those philosophies “most likely to entice the human mind in democratic ages”; and Herman Melville's Ishmael confesses while meditating on the “mysterious, divine Pacific” that, “lifted by these eternal swells, you needs must own the seductive God, bowing your head to Pan.”<sup>34</sup> Melville himself evidently struggled with such pantheist seductions; as American literary scholar Richard Hardack has unveiled, his letters reveal both an attraction to “the all feeling” and a revulsion from it.<sup>35</sup> Writing to Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example, Melville judges Goethe's injunction to “live in the all” to be “nonsense,” and at the same time admits that while “there is an immense deal of flummery in Goethe, [there is also] in proportion to my own contact with him, a monstrous deal of it in me.”<sup>36</sup> And there is that word again, this time describing the feeling the monster stirs up. The simultaneous attraction and repulsion that pantheism provokes thus becomes its own sort of monstrosity: a chimerical affect prompted by a chimerical subject-object.

## SEDUCTION

In her feminist decoding of Plato's Cave, Luce Irigaray reminds us of the raging ambivalence that Western philosophy, like the Freudian subject, sustains toward its feminized origins.<sup>37</sup> Like the Oedipal child, the Western tradition aims to make its way from the dark, maternal womb space to the father's blinding light—from paganism to

monotheism, from the cave to the sky, from the dirt to the ideas. The mother, along with the wife who stands in for her, thus becomes a complex site of disgust and desire, of repudiation and nostalgia as the Oedipal man, like the whole phallogocentric order, simultaneously commands and rejects everything associated with her. A testimony to the steady reduplication of this violent ambivalence, we find a similar structure at work in orientalist and primitivist discourse. In such renderings, Western scholars and colonial officials both glorify and vilify a simultaneously seductive and repulsive racial other—rendered in consistently dark, primitive, and feminine terms.<sup>38</sup> And indeed, something of the dark, primitive, and feminine fuels the revoltingly attractive power of pantheism.

In his reading of American transcendentalism, Richard Hardack argues that the transcendental movement emerged as a white, romantic appropriation of Native American “animism” on the one hand and African possession traditions on the other. In Emerson and Melville, Hardack shows, the landscape that becomes divine becomes in the same breath primitive, feminine, and racialized—specifically, black.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Paul Outka demonstrates the persistent haunting of this literature by American Indian genocide on the one hand and West African slavery on the other.<sup>40</sup> For Outka, the transcendental sublime, which shatters the male subject in his overawed encounter with the landscape, is a white enactment of racial trauma from the perspective of privilege and safety.<sup>41</sup> Most likely because it was too close to see, however, this particular heritage tends not to be explicitly avowed in nineteenth-century accounts of the scope and history of pantheism.<sup>42</sup> Rather, the pantheist lineage is routed through another feminized and racialized other: “the Orient.”<sup>43</sup>

Reverend Richardson’s above-cited anti-pantheist treatise begins by proclaiming, “Pantheism is a child of the mysterious East.”<sup>44</sup> As evidence, Richardson imagines the “dim and fragrant grove” of an ancient Indian sage, whose reverie produced the hazy notion that “even dark and earth-born masses are suffused with the divine expression of the one animating spirit.”<sup>45</sup> Thanks to its radical egalitarianism, he admits, pantheism is a “captivating philosophy.”<sup>46</sup> The problem is that it threatens to keep captivating, advancing its “appalling movement” such that “Pantheism in Europe and the West is destined to become the correlative of Buddhism in the East.”<sup>47</sup> Such widespread pantheist seduction, Richardson insists, can only be counteracted by the “plain, distinct, and dogmatic teaching of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word.”<sup>48</sup> It must be made known, in other words, that God appeared in the form of a single man; not all of humanity—and much less the whole animal-vegetable-mineral world.

What panics Richardson about the advance of pantheism is not, however, the simple demise of Christendom. Rather, what he seems to fear above all is a collective, racialized unmaning: pantheism, he predicts, will continue to seduce “rosy,” Western men into passivity and inertia, until they become like the “earth-born” “Indian sage”—always mentioned in the past tense—who allegedly dreamed his life away in womanly passivity, “in that inactive contemplation which he considered the highest of all states.”<sup>49</sup> From this dark, fantastic inertia, Richardson imagines, all things appeared to be engulfed in divinity and all distinctions vanished—most disturbingly, “the distinction between right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and evil.”<sup>50</sup> As we saw in Bayle, then, Richardson’s own horror *pantheismus* amounts to a revulsion at blurred distinctions and crossed boundaries: of East and West, passivity and activity, femininity and masculinity,

darkness and light, immorality and morality. In this vein, Richardson concludes his treatise by lamenting the plan to expand the Parisian Pantheon into a “Pantheistic temple” by expanding its collection to the Eastern world. He shudders to imagine its pristine halls crowded with such horrors as “Brahmin Cow,” “Persian Griffin,” and “Chaldean Sphynx”—all monstrous mixtures of divinity and animality.<sup>51</sup> By inviting an ungodly swarm of Eastern, chimerical divinities into the anthropomorphic heart of Christian Europe, such a beastly temple would invariably accelerate the “spreading evil” of pantheism, taking the Christian appearance of God in one man and disseminating it indiscriminately out to the whole world.<sup>52</sup>

At the other end of the same orientalist scale, we find British philosopher Constance Plumptre’s initially anonymous, two volume *General Sketch of the History of Pantheism* (1878), which celebrates precisely the pantheist consummation of Christianity that Richardson fears. Seeking to ground a fully rational, European religion, Plumptre disavows both polytheistic Greece and Semitic Palestine, looking instead to the more “refined and cultured” East.<sup>53</sup> Relying on Max Müller’s linguistic-religious history, Plumptre argues that the “true ancestors of our race” are the Aryans, whose Vedic texts felicitously exhibit “pantheism ... in its full growth and maturity.”<sup>54</sup> By means of a highly selective reading of highly selective translations, Plumptre touts the superiority of Vedic oneness and interiority over Greek multiplicity and externality, which she deems the products of a “barbarous and savage” race.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, she hopes the retrieval of Europe’s “true” origins will rectify its misguided present, purifying a heathenized Christianity into the monistic, Aryan pantheism she also attributes to Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>56</sup>

Although this glowing representation of allegedly Eastern pantheists might seem a radical departure from Richardson’s denunciations, we nevertheless find in Plumptre’s portrayal the same traits, simply transvalued. First, Plumptre reserves her praise for the light-skinned, monistic Brahmins, ridiculing the primitive polytheism of the darker castes.<sup>57</sup> Second, just like her anti-pantheist counterpart, Plumptre attributes a quiet passivity to the “Hindoos” who, she insists, “may be regarded as a religious, contemplative, and philosophical race, far more than an active, warlike, or historical race.”<sup>58</sup> And although Plumptre praises these qualities, rather than ridiculing them as effeminate inaction, her representation underhandedly reaffirms Western dominance over the East. For as Richard King has argued, these sorts of depoliticized representations of Indian religion served to justify British colonial rule: the people of India are not interested in governing, the reasoning goes, so the British might as well do it for them.<sup>59</sup> Finally, Plumptre assures her reader, as pure and sublime as the “doctrine of the Vedas” might have been, “the doctrine of Christ”—carefully divested of its Jewish origins—“was far purer and more sublime” than anything the subcontinent has produced.<sup>60</sup> As in the anti-pantheist literature, then, Plumptre’s fascinated adoption of the “mystical” East eventually reaffirms the Christian West’s spiritual and political superiority over it.

To be sure, it is no surprise to find such fascinations with a feminized “Orient” in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, as the British crown struggled to gain imperial control over an unruly India (whose inhabitants British scholars kept wishfully charging with apolitical quietism).<sup>61</sup> But nearly two centuries earlier, Bayle himself had opened his

anti-pantheist tract with what is becoming a familiar Orientalizing move, likening Spinoza's alleged atheism to "the theology of a Chinese sect."<sup>62</sup> Bayle calls the sect "Foe Kiao," a rendition of the modern Mandarin fo jiao, or "the teaching of the Buddha," and attributes to it a "quietism"—even a "beatific inaction"—in the face of a universal "nothingness."<sup>63</sup> It is at this stage that Bayle grants his lone concession to the loathsome Spinoza, whose single substance is at least "not ... so absurd" as that of Bayle's (bizarrely rendered) Chinese Buddhists.<sup>64</sup> After all, Spinoza's Deus sive natura "always acts, always thinks," whereas the "Chinese" generating principle is an allegedly inert, passive vacuum. And there is nothing more inconceivable than an inactive absolute:

If it is monstrous to maintain that plants, animals, men are really the same thing and to base this on the claim that all particular beings are not distinct from their principle, it is still more monstrous to assert that this principle has no thought, no power, no virtue. This is nevertheless what these philosophers say. They make the sovereign perfection of that principle consist in inaction and absolute rest.<sup>65</sup>

Again, at least Spinoza did not go quite this far. But he was close enough that perhaps, thinks Bayle, he ought to have been a Chinese philosopher.<sup>66</sup> Respectable Western thought rests, along with allegedly common sense, on the principle of noncontradiction; and in this light, Spinoza's active-passive Deus sive natura can only be seen as an untrammelled absurdity ... or as a foreign invasion. In short, then, the pantheist monstrosity portends the demise of the West itself, collapsing its most central distinctions, seducing it into passive inaction, and perverting its genealogy with decidedly non-Western roots.

## PROJECTIONS

For the feminist philosopher of religion Grace Jantzen, pantheism's total unsettling of Western thought was precisely its liberating promise. Beginning in the late 1990s, Jantzen began to attribute all the oppressive dualisms structuring Western philosophy to the binary opposition between a disembodied God and "the physical universe."<sup>67</sup> As she reminds us, the ontological distinction between God and creation does not merely separate the two terms; rather, it establishes the absolute supremacy of the former over the latter. In turn, this logic of mastery secures the rule of everything associated with this God over everything associated with the material world. Again, then, spirit, masculinity, reason, light, and humanity become unconditionally privileged over matter, femininity, passion, darkness, and animal-vegetal-minerality.<sup>68</sup>

Admittedly, this is a well-rehearsed set of hierarchies, which feminist thinkers of both secular and sacred varieties have struggled for decades to dismantle. As far as Jantzen is concerned, however, the only way to collapse this oppressive structure is to go for its root, which is to say the opposition between God and the world. "If pantheism were seriously to be entertained," she ventures, "the whole Western symbolic ... would be brought into question. Pantheism rejects the split between spirit and matter, light and darkness, and the rest; it thereby also rejects the hierarchies based on these splits."<sup>69</sup> While affirming the spirit of this critique, one might take issue with the absolute priority Jantzen gives to the God/world opposition, which other feminist thinkers have exposed

as the product of perennial racisms and shape-shifting patriarchies.<sup>70</sup> It is more likely the fiercely guarded anthropological categories of male and female, light and dark that subtend the theological division between God and world, rather than the other way around. That having been said, once these associations are in place, it is impossible to say which might claim historical or conceptual priority over the others. It might therefore be more helpful to see all these vectors of power as rhizomatically entangled than as arboreally rooted:<sup>71</sup> in such a field, the integrity or destruction of each would depend upon the integrity or destruction of the others. And for Jantzen, the position that promises to unearth the whole thicket of oppressions is pantheism. Therefore, she suggests, feminist philosophy of religion—and feminism tout court—ought to be pantheist.

Understandably, many feminisms—along with queer, critical race, post-and de-colonial theories—want nothing to do with any sort of theism at all, having had more than enough of the patriarchal White Guy in the Sky. From Jantzen's perspective, however, the modern critical circumvention of theology ends up leaving God intact as a concept, and the concept of God goes on to reaffirm the very disembodiment, omnipotence, light-supremacy and anthropomorphism such theories seek to dismantle. Insofar as concepts encode and reinforce sociopolitical norms, Jantzen is careful to explain that she is not working from a "realist" stance; rather, she is working at the level of the symbolic. When Jantzen affirms pantheism, for example, she is not saying that God is the universe or that the universe is divine; rather, she is trying to recode "divinity" as a concept. Whether or not an "entity" called God "exists," she is aiming discursively to align Godness with the vibrant multiplicity of the material world itself.

In this sense, Jantzen suggests, pantheism is a far more radical position than atheism, which ends up reinscribing the concept of the God it doesn't believe in. However staunchly they may oppose theism, atheists ironically agree to the terms of the theistic claim—namely that if there were a God, "he" would be anthropomorphic, masculine, all-powerful, and immaterial. These same characteristics constitute the grounds for the theist's affirmation and the atheist's rejection of "him." Whether under the regime of theism or atheism, then, "the concept of the divine" remains the same; whether existent or nonexistent, such a God "serves to valorize disembodied power and rationality."<sup>72</sup> And of course, the concept of the divine is the most powerful concept we have, enshrining disembodied power and rationality—which map onto maleness and white European-ness—as our highest values.

For the sake of our threatened planet, in the face of our waning biodiversity, and in solidarity with those living and nonliving beings whom the Father-aligned continue to master, colonize, denigrate, and destroy, Jantzen suggests that feminist philosophers begin deliberately to project a pantheist God—a God who is the universe in all its material multiplicity. In her words, "if we took for granted that divinity—that which is most to be respected and valued—means mutuality, bodiliness, diversity, and materiality, then whether or not we believed that such a concept of God was instantiated ... the implications for our thought and lives would be incalculable."<sup>73</sup> Such implications notwithstanding, there has not been a widespread—or even a small-scale—turn toward pantheism among feminist, queer, anti-racist, post- and de-colonial, or ecologically oriented philosophers and theologians. Even though Jantzen's work continues to be

widely circulated and taught, no one has taken up her call to a pantheist projection.<sup>74</sup> Rather, pantheism continues to serve as a limit-position—marking the boundary of philosophical respectability—for thinkers of nearly every school and political persuasion. And the present work aims to understand why this is the case.

## OBJECTIONS

### Godlessness

The stated oppositions to pantheism are numerous, and often perplexingly opposed to one another. “Pantheists” are variously charged with materialism and anti-materialism, irrationality and excessive rationality; fanaticism and coldness, idealism and mechanism—whatever the author’s position may be, the pantheist rhetorically incarnates its extreme opposite. The thickest complex of conflicting accusations, however, accumulates around Bayle’s first charge against Spinoza, namely, that he is an atheist. At first, this may seem a baffling, even incoherent, claim; as Novalis famously intoned, Spinoza is a “God-intoxicated man” (ein gottrunkener Mensch).<sup>75</sup> Everywhere he looks, Spinoza sees the essence and existence of God; thus Goethe reminds us that “Spinoza does not have to prove the existence of God; existence is God.”<sup>76</sup> So if Spinoza’s God is all things, then how can this same God be no thing? How does the pan- flip over into an a-?

There are two major lines of thinking that produce the conclusion that pantheism is actually atheism, an accusation as old as the term itself.<sup>77</sup> The first is theological, beginning and ending with the insistence that an impersonal, nonanthropic, immanent God would be no God at all. Thus, Reverend Dix laments that with the pantheist onslaught,

as we comprehend the sacred term, there is left no God. A substance, impersonal, there is; but we cannot imagine that unintelligible, unreasoning, unthinking, unloving state of impotence as our Father, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, our Friend. The God in whom we have believed is gone.<sup>78</sup>

Whether or not it is fair to attribute all of these qualities to the pantheistic deity (“impotence” in particular seems an extension of the orientalist rendering of the passive, feminine, anti-intellectual nonindividual who allegedly dreamed up such visions in the first place), Dix is right to suggest that a God who is the world would certainly not be anthropomorphic. As “world,” such a God would moreover be material, multiple, malleable, and limited—attributes that cannot possibly apply to the God of classical theism. For the theist, then, to see God everywhere is to see “him” nowhere; this is to say, the word “or” simply cannot conjoin the terms “God” and “Nature.”

The second road from pantheism to atheism is more philosophical than theological. With Schopenhauer, it reasons that calling the world “divine” does not add anything to the concept of “world.”<sup>79</sup> A universe-as-God is materially and functionally equivalent to a universe-without-God; hence Schopenhauer’s declaration that pantheism is merely “a euphemism for atheism.”<sup>80</sup> If the world is all there is, then it would be more honest just to call it “world” than to dress it up with divinity; as Nancy Frankenberry concludes, “by

assimilating God to Nature ... [pantheists] raise the suspicion that one of the two of them is semantically superfluous.”<sup>81</sup>

### Worldlessness

From the foregoing objections, we might think we know which term is superfluous: God. The pantheist world is self-sufficient, auto-creative, and as such, effectively atheistic. Yet a slew of other critiques level precisely the opposite charge: that by swallowing “all things” into God, pantheism eliminates not God, but the world. The adjective Hegel uses to describe this Spinozist effect is “acosmic”: if all agents are essentially God, then God is the only agent, and the cosmos as such is gone.<sup>82</sup> “There is therefore no such thing as finite reality,” he writes; “according to Spinoza what is, is God, and God alone. Therefore the allegations of those who accuse Spinoza of atheism are the direct opposite of the truth; with him there is too much God.”<sup>83</sup> Spinoza’s alleged “acosmism” deepens the aforementioned attribution of pantheism to the “East”; as Western authors understood it—largely thanks to Hegel<sup>84</sup>—the Vedanta teaches that insofar as “Brahma alone exists,” the world itself is “mere illusion.”<sup>85</sup> The charge of acosmism also explains the bizarre accusation that even Calvinism amounts to pantheism; as the Unitarian preacher William Ellery Channing argues, the doctrine of predestination, like pantheism, “robs [human] minds of self-determining force, of original activity” and “makes them passive recipients of the Universal force.”<sup>86</sup> It is in this sense that Goethe can say that “when others ... rebuke [Spinoza] with atheism, I prefer to cherish him as theissimus [most theistic].”<sup>87</sup> If the world itself is divine, then God is all there is.

For interlocutors less admiring than Goethe, however, Spinoza’s acosmic all-God amounts to a denial of human freedom. As Leo Strauss worries, the world-as-God lacks the autonomy to do anything without God, or at least without “the threat of divine intervention.”<sup>88</sup> Conversely, we find Christian authors worrying that, far from denying human freedom, pantheism grants humanity too much of it, allowing them to do whatever they would like in the absence of a divine overlord and in the presence of an indwelling Spirit.<sup>89</sup> Humans, in effect, drain the freedom out of God and claim it for themselves; as Rudolf Bultmann worries, when God is seen in “nature and natural forces ... it is only man that is deified.”<sup>90</sup> Meanwhile, divine freedom in itself is evacuated; after all, if God is creation, then God has no freedom not to create—or, for that matter, to act contrary to the laws of nature.<sup>91</sup> Thus Marin Mersenne condemns Giordano Bruno, executed two and a half decades earlier, for the crime “of reducing God to the rank of a natural and necessary agent.”<sup>92</sup> In sum, these tortuous and conflicting accusations amount to a remarkably plodding hydraulics: if God is the world, then there is no God; if the world is God, then there is no world; if God acts in humans, then humans can’t act; if humans are free, then God is unfree. And once again, we see the anti-pantheist hang on at all costs to the principle of noncontradiction the pantheist so flagrantly violates. It is simply not possible, charges the theist, for these terms to co-inhere. Clutching his “law of the table,” he proclaims any scheme that refuses to line up into two columns “monstrous.”

### The “Problem of Evil”

Of all the pantheist’s conflated binaries, the most commonly cited is the difference between good and evil. Given his wholly good God, the theist is perennially concerned

to account for “the problem of evil,” which is to say, the presence of suffering in a benevolent creator’s creation. The pantheist, says the theist, exacerbates this problem beyond the bounds of reason, because her purportedly God-drenched world is filled with all manner of senseless violence. God becomes in the pantheist register not only responsible for evil, but coextensive with it; if everything is divine, the thinking goes, then war, disease, slavery, and hatred are not only condoned by God—they are, in some sense, God. In the face of torture, Schopenhauer argues, at least the theist can defend divine benevolence by appealing to divine inscrutability. The pantheist, on the other hand, has no excuse; the identity of his divinity with a murderous world means that, “the creating God himself is the endlessly tortured [one] who on this small earth alone dies once every second and does so of his own free will, which is absurd.”<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Bayle ridicules the notion that within the Spinozist world-view, the sentence “the Germans have killed ten thousand Turks,” actually means “‘God modified into Germans has killed God modified into ten thousand Turks.’”<sup>94</sup> And C. S. Lewis snipes that in response to the pantheist notion that “a cancer and a slum ... also is God,” the only properly Christian reply is, “‘don’t talk damned nonsense.’”<sup>95</sup>

As it unfolds, and especially in chapter 4, the present study will address these charges at greater length. For the moment, however, we should note that although a hypothetical pantheist would be just as outraged by the presence of suffering in the world as any theist, she would not view it as a philosophical puzzle, or as grounds for some extended theodicy. Suffering is always a practical problem, calling for a practical response. But “evil” only becomes a theoretical problem—something to be explained or explained away—if one holds an a priori commitment to self-evident categories of “good” and “evil” in the first place, to an all-powerful and anthropomorphically “good” creator in the second place, and to an anthropocentric creation—whose felicity is the creator’s central concern—in the third. There are numerous cosmologies that do not operate under these premises, and so effectively have no “problem of evil.” Evil is not a theoretical problem for Native American or Black diasporic trickster narratives, for instance, or for Aboriginal Australian stories of the Dreaming; rather, these accounts attribute to the weavers of the world the same mix of traits that we find in the world, offering thereby a way of finding possibilities in the midst of perennial dangers.<sup>96</sup> As Sylvia Marcos explains,

The duality that pervades the Mesoamerican concept of the universe included both the positive and negative aspects of nature, the creative as well as the destructive, the nurturing and the annihilating forces.... There is no sentimentality in their perception of the earth. Earth is a great nourishing deity and an unpredictable, fearsome monster: in all cases, it is necessary to move about the earth with care.<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, evil is a practical but not a theoretical problem for pantheism, which rejects the anthropomorphic-creator-plus-anthropocentric-creation that asks, for example, “why does God let bad things happen to good people?” In the same breath, pantheism rejects the whole table of hierarchical binaries that would anchor “good” and “evil” as stable referents. Along with her reluctant Nietzschean allies, then, the hypothetical pantheist might ask what it is that has given rise to our impulse to call certain acts, people, and practices “good” or “evil” to begin with.<sup>98</sup> And in the absence of a transcendent source

of value, she would have to ask what in any given situation contributes to the flourishing of creatures, what destroys it, and how best to intervene. But there would be no assurance ahead of time as to what counts as good or evil, right or wrong, worthy of care or subject to destruction.

The real difference between theism and pantheism with respect to “evil” is therefore not that the former rejects it while the latter condones it, or that the former “takes it seriously” while the latter ignores it in the face of mountains and rainbows. Rather, the difference is that the pantheist rejects the cosmic bifurcations that stem from the opposition between God and world and then regulate theistic ethics from a supposedly transcendent standpoint. And from this perspective, we see that the turmoil over the problem of evil, like every other anti-pantheist assertion, boils down to a longing for unchanging, binary difference. In all its various guises, the anti-pantheist complaint amounts—to borrow a term from Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig—to a charge of Gleichmacherei, or making everything the same.<sup>99</sup> In Dix’s words, “all boundary lines are swept away, all differences disappear, all life, all thought, all reason are struck and heaped and mashed together in one monstrous lump ... one appalling chaos.”<sup>100</sup> And the theist is left calling for order.

### The Problem of Difference

One such voice is that of systematic theologian Colin Gunton, who distills all the major objections to pantheism into a common concern for “difference.” Reflecting on the manifold ills of pantheism, he writes,

for there to be freedom, there must be space. In terms of the relation between God and the universe, this entails an ontological otherness between God and the world.... Atheism and ... materialism are in effect identical with pantheism, for all of them swallow up the many into the one, and so turn the many into mere functions of the one.<sup>101</sup>

Succinctly put, the argument is that if there is no difference between God and the world, there can be no difference at all. And if there is no difference, then none of the parties involved is sufficiently autonomous to be “free.” So, if in our varied political commitments we want to affirm things like freedom, difference, diversity, and multiplicity, Gunton suggests, we’d better hang onto the ontological distinction between God and creation. Otherwise, everything melts, in the words of D. H. Lawrence, into an “awful pudding of One Identity.”<sup>102</sup>

At this point, however, one might ask whether the only available options are a two-column hierarchy on the one hand and an awful pudding on the other. One might even go so far as to ask whether the theistic “two” is really so different from the puddingish one in the first place. After all, the metaphysical framework that stems from God-versus-world—opposing in turn form and matter, male and female, eternity and time, colonizer and colonized, good and evil, etc.—does not establish the second as genuinely different from the first, so much as a derivation, deviation, and/or bad copy of it. One might think here of Judith Butler’s analysis of lesbianism as a purported imitation of heterosexuality,

or of Homi Bhabha's "colonial mimicry," which produces non-Europeans as "almost the same [as their colonizers], but not quite."<sup>103</sup> The oppositional logic of classical metaphysics does not, then, give us two; it actually gives us one, and a falling-short of that one.<sup>104</sup> Nor, to part ways with Gunton, does this binary scheme secure the "freedom" of both terms; rather, it secures the freedom of the historically dominant term at the expense of its subjugated other.<sup>105</sup> And so the real concern over pantheism is not the collapse of some abstract notion of "difference"; rather, it is the collapse of one particularly insistent and damaging way of configuring difference—one that gathers each instance of "difference" into a static category, forever held in place by an oppositional overlord.

We have already detected an anxiety over racial and gender insubordination woven through nineteenth-century projections of dark, Eastern pantheists. In these texts, a feminized passivity marks the dreamlike Indian sage, who in his erotic reverie attributes divinity even to dark and earthbound things. In more contemporary repudiations, these racialized projections go underground, as authors focus on the (more natural? less contentious?) category of gender. Although Jantzen does not explicitly name the persistently racialized nature of this shift, her work turns boldly on the insight that "the fear of pantheism bespeaks a perceived if unconscious threat to the masculinist symbolic of the West."<sup>106</sup> Jantzen detects such panicked masculinity in the surprisingly recurrent language of pantheism's "swallowing," "consuming," and "assimilating" all otherwise "free" beings into some dark abyss—as Hegel ridiculed it, "the night in which all cows are black"<sup>107</sup>—an abyss, moreover, whose racial characteristics Jantzen seems both to notice and not notice. As she puts it,

from a psychoanalytic perspective, one could speculate about what dread of the (m)other and the maternal womb lurks just below the surface of this fear of pantheism; what exactly is the abyss, this horror of great undifferentiated darkness into which at all costs "we" must not be sucked?<sup>108</sup>

Jantzen is thinking primarily of figures like Hegel, Schlegel, and Kierkegaard, but this fear of being pantheistically swallowed by a dark, maternal monster can be found even in the lesser-known writings of the nineteenth century.

Reverend Dix, for example, says of pantheism that "the whole system is one vast dream, one shapeless sea of gloom and woe, without light, without life, cold, remorseless, devouring—an abyss in which all honest conviction is engulfed, all manly belief buried."<sup>109</sup> By summoning this dark, shapeless, unmanly sea, Dix is calling to mind the waters of Genesis 1, the primordial "deep," or *tehom* that precedes creation.<sup>110</sup> Now in Genesis, a disembodied male voice speaks over this darksome deep to bring forth light, and life, and planets and stars. But pantheism eliminates the disembodied creator, leaving us with the abyss that buries manliness alive—the womb that becomes tomb. Revolted, Dix narrates the pantheist cosmogony:

The mass so indescribable, so incomprehensible, was agitated from within by an equally indescribable and incomprehensible motion.... The great belly of blackness and unconscious horror, rumbled as it were,

and the abyss, for it seems no better, was in labor and would bring forth.

At the risk of pointing out the obvious, Dix's cosmogonic nightmare is that the world might have come into being in the same manner as cats, or donkeys, or humans. For millennia, the cosmological triumph of masculinist monotheism has been its insistence that, while things in the world emerge from the bodies of mothers, the world itself emerges from a bodiless Father. By rejecting an extra-cosmic deity, then, pantheism delivers us back to—and out of—what Dix characterizes in this passage as a black, maternal, irrational abyss.

This sort of racialized gender-panic is not limited to the Victorian literature; one finds it in more recent rejections of pantheism, as well. For example, evangelical theologian William Lane Craig defends the ontological distinction against pantheism (and its dangerously close cousin, panentheism) with the following illustration:

In marriage the antithesis of two persons is aufgehoben as husband and wife come together in a deep unity even as their distinctness as persons is preserved. In the same way, the opposition between infinite and finite, God and world, is aufgehoben in that God is intimately related to the world in various ways even as the ontological distinctness between God and the world is preserved.<sup>111</sup>

The problem with pantheism, for Craig, is that its demolition of the ontological distinction between God and world is analogous to a demolition of the sexual distinction between man and woman. Unsurprisingly, the first of these terms is aligned with infinity and God, while the second gets finitude and world. Reaffirming this alignment, Craig explains that God “embraces ... his creatures ... just as a husband embraces his wife.”<sup>112</sup> So we'd better hang onto the ontological distinction—otherwise anyone might embrace anyone else, and who knows what *unaufgehoben*able differences might emerge.

We find a similar fear alarmingly enacted in a critical diatribe that D. H. Lawrence launches against Walt Whitman. Recoiling from Whitman's egotistical, pantheist mass—his ecstatic enfolding of atoms and bicycles and choruses and steam trains, of workers and America and “quadrupeds and birds”<sup>113</sup>—Lawrence lambastes “all that fake exuberance. All those lists of things boiled in one pudding-cloth! No no! I don't want all those things inside me, thank you.”<sup>114</sup> Even for the notoriously lascivious Lawrence, Whitman has made himself too porous, too penetrable, too queer: “a pipe open at both ends, so everything runs through.”<sup>115</sup> Men, women, Brooklyn, bees—Whitman's pantheism makes him the feminine recipient of all of them—including, Lawrence bristles, “an Esquimo in a kyak ... little and yellow and greasy.”<sup>116</sup>

At the same time as it is universally invaded, Lawrence suggests, Whitman's soul is also infinitely dispersed; the outside-in is turned inside-out. Thus he imagines “Walt” promiscuously scattered into “the dark limbs of negroes ... the vagina of the prostitute.”<sup>117</sup> At this point it seems important to point out that Lawrence's revulsion at Whitman's pantheism is not the product of some commitment to theological orthodoxy. Nor does it stem from an adherence to self-proclaimed philosophical rigor. Rather, such loathing is both prompted and encapsulated by the racial and sexual intermingling it seems necessarily to entail. Whitman is a monster, mixing activity and passivity,

creation and reception, and race, sex, gender, species, and class into what Lawrence calls an enormous, snowball-like One,<sup>118</sup> but which frankly looks more like a queer multitude. In fact, the monstrous and the queer perform similar categorical disruptions.<sup>119</sup>

Half a century after Lawrence, Evangelical-turned-Roman Catholic theologian Stephen H. Webb rejects pantheism on more subtly racialized, but similarly gendered ground. In his defense of global capitalism as the economic vehicle for a truly global Christianity, Webb rejects the planetary viability of a pantheist “sacred earth” cosmology. “Judaism, Islam, and Christianity,” he cautions, “are unlikely to dismantle their notions of divine transcendence in order to embrace an earth goddess.”<sup>120</sup> In this declaration, at the risk of pointing out the obvious, Webb is linking the demise of divine transcendence to the emergence of divine femininity. This femininity is furthermore tied to the earth—the mother is matter, and dark matter, at that—and as such, the earth is theistically reduced to “resources” for human (read: male and white) development.<sup>121</sup> Finally, this dark and earthly femininity is tinged with the mild sexuality of an “embrace” that sounds strikingly like Craig’s hetero-marital sublation. Meanwhile, at the other end of the theological spectrum, we find even the apocalyptic horseman Richard Dawkins deriding pantheism as a “sexed-up atheism.”<sup>122</sup>

Recalling, then, the “temptations” and “seductions” decried in anti-pantheist treatises, it seems that wherever one stands, pantheism is not only “absurd,” but also dark, feminized, and dangerously enticing. What each of these authors presents as the “monstrosity” of pantheism—the thing that inspires such panic—amounts to a complicated hybridity of divinity, femininity, darkness, materiality, animality, and sex: undesirable (which is to say, all too desirable) to theists and atheists alike. And this, I would suggest, is the real matter with pantheism: it threatens the Western symbolic not just with a (m)other-womb, but with a wider and more complex range of queer monstrosities: with parts combined that ought to be kept separate and boundaries crossed that ought to be maintained.

Of course, it all depends on what you mean by pantheism.

## INDEFINITIONS

1. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines pantheism as the two-pronged assertion “that everything that exists constitutes a unity and that this all-inclusive unity is divine.”<sup>123</sup>
2. The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines pantheism as “the view that Deity and Cosmos are identical.”<sup>124</sup>

Although these definitions can certainly be rendered compatible, the two are hardly equivalent, and in fact tend toward vastly different ontologies. The first hinges the pantheist position on unity, attributing a supervening oneness to the things of this world and to the divinity that unifies them. The second anchors pantheism not in oneness but in immanence, claiming a this-worldliness for the divinity it cosmicizes. Again, it would be possible to affirm both of these definitions simultaneously; one could say, for example, that “God” is the unified sum of the material universe, and thereby secure unity and immanence at the same time. But one could also affirm the former while

rejecting the latter, locating the unity of all things in a spiritual, otherworldly realm and thereby denying the reality or importance of the material universe (as Hegel claims is the case with Spinoza). Conversely, one could affirm the latter definition while rejecting the former, claiming that the material universe is divine but that “it” is not a unity. Ultimately, the difference seems to boil down to an etymological duplicity in this theism’s pan: does “all” mean “the All,” or does it mean “all things”? **Is pantheism’s cosmic divinity one, or is it many?**

These two different meanings of “pan” map onto a distinction William James makes in *A Pluralistic Universe* between “monistic” and “pluralistic” pantheisms.<sup>125</sup> Having dismissed orthodox Christianity as incoherent and childish— even “savage”—and materialism as mechanistic and “cynical,” James praises pantheism as providing “the only opinions quite worthy of arresting our attention” (29–30).<sup>126</sup> Yet not all pantheisms are the same; the category, James suggests, “breaks into two subspecies, of which the one is more monistic, the other more pluralistic in form” (31). For the monist, James explains, the world is one “tremendous unity,” in which “everything is present to everything else in one vast instantaneous co-implicated completeness” (37, 322; emphasis in original). For the pluralist, by contrast, the things of the world are “in some respects connected, [and] in other respects independent, so that they are not members of one all-inclusive individual fact” (55). Monism tell us that everything is connected to everything else, whereas pluralism affirms that connections come and go—that “a bit of reality when actively engaged in one of these relations is not by that very fact engaged in all the other relations simultaneously” (322–23). Monism is the “philosophy of the absolute,” of idealism and “the all-form,” whereas pluralism opts for empiricism and “the each-form,” thinking that “there may ultimately never be an all-form at all” (34).

Of course, James is a pragmatist, so he knows he cannot say which of these visions is ultimately “true,” or if it even makes sense to speak that way.<sup>127</sup> But James sides with pluralism for a host of ethical, political, and psychological reasons: if we affirm a messy plurality rather than a perfect totality, then “evil” calls for a practical response rather than a speculative explanation; differences of opinion are signs of health rather than pathology; and our everyday experiences amount to “intimacy” with the universe itself.<sup>128</sup> This attunement to intimacy provokes James’s most novel critique of the monist tradition: presumably, he argues, the pantheist locates the divine in and as the world in order to commune with it. But the monistic “all-form” bears none of the characteristics of the disjointed, imperfect, and changeable world we actually experience. It contains the so-called essence of things, and as such has no imperfections, no traits subject to development or decay. “It can’t be ignorant,” James begins. “It can’t be patient, for it has to wait for nothing, having everything at once in its possession. It can’t be surprised; it can’t be guilty” (39). In short, the monistic world-as-divine bears none of the characteristics of the only world we ever experience—with its desires and mistakes, its passions and pains, its kasha and Kanye—to such an extent that this type of pantheist places himself even farther from God than the ordinary theist does, hovering above the world he allegedly divinizes.<sup>129</sup>

Arguably, the most politically expedient problem with monism—a problem that James allows us to deduce but does not address directly—is that it effaces the real distinctions among the multifarious constituents of the God-world. **While such indifference might**

seem at first blush to promise something like equality, it most often ends up installing an unexamined set of European categories (including “oneness” itself) as its “universal” attributes and then arranging the rest of the world in a stark, racialized hierarchy beneath them. We find one particularly representative illustration in the work of the nineteenth-century naturalist Ernst Haeckel, a tireless advocate of pantheistic “monism” as the great reconciler of religion and modern science. Haeckel’s “Monistic religion” or “religion of Nature” will be grounded, he explains, in “the monistic conviction of the unity ... of mind and body, of force and matter, of God and Universe.”<sup>130</sup> Enabled by the novel and seemingly “natural” insights of evolutionary biology, however, Haeckel’s “monistic conviction” is disturbingly reinforced by an attendant and intensifying scientific racism.<sup>131</sup>

Writing just a few decades after Darwin, Haeckel secures his monism by denying the traditional distinctions between animal, vegetable, mineral, and human life-forms. Nevertheless, in a move not uncommon among his contemporaries, Haeckel goes on to arrange his all-is-one universe into a graduated ontic continuum. As he explains the evolutionary trajectory, the significant beings of the world develop from “birds and mammals” to “the ‘ape-man,’ ” and then to “primitive peoples,” the “low civilisation[s],” and finally “the more highly civilised nations.”<sup>132</sup> This “progression,” he furthermore explains, can be mapped onto a theological journey from pluralism through dualism to monism, “developing” racially from animists and fetishists through pluralists, monotheistic dualists, and ultimately scientific monists.<sup>133</sup> Far from asserting the value of all the beings whose oneness it proclaims, then, monism ironically secures a radical, racialized inequality. Precisely because it denies any qualitative differences, it ends up arranging beings quantitatively, on a single scale that makes its way from the inanimate to the European.

Less through political or ontological conviction than pragmatic preference, James unsettles this racialized hierarchy by choosing to reject the Germanic monism raging around him in favor of a more modest, pantheistic pluralism. Such manyness makes of the universe what he calls a multiverse, by which term he means to designate a loosely coherent, evolving and devolving chain of complex connections that is never quite all-in-all, and so never lumped into a single snowball or arranged into static ranks. Slipping into German to poke fun at the One, James explains that, “The type of [multiversal] union, it is true, is different here from the monistic type of all-einheit. It is not a universal co-implication, or integration of all things durcheinander. It is what I call the strung-along type, the type of continuity, contiguity, or concatenation” (325).<sup>134</sup>

Inasmuch as James is elucidating monism and pluralism only as “subspecies” of pantheism, and inasmuch as pantheism is the position that James, unlike almost any other self-proclaimed philosopher, actually professes, one would expect his vision of divinity to resemble—or indeed, amount to—his vision of cosmology. It is therefore disappointing to find his vision of the former fall so bafflingly short of his vision of the latter. Even as James’s “world” amounts to a rich, multiversal plurality of concatenations and stringings-along, his “god” ends up a single, disembodied, anthropomorphic, male agent: a limited force that works alongside other limited forces in the multiverse.<sup>135</sup> Frustratingly, James does not give us the pluralistic pantheism he announces, his diminished, humanoid divinity clashing bizarrely with the complex, entangled vibrancy of

the material world—the very world with which James’s own pluralist pantheism would ostensibly identify “God.”

## NAVIGATION

The present study aims to explore the possibility James opens and then closes: to ask what a “pluralist pantheism” might, in fact, be. The task is not a straightforward one; as we have already begun to see, the object of constant denigration is the monistic “all-form” (“The universe,” laughs Lawrence, “in short, adds up to ONE. ONE. I. Which is Walt.”),<sup>136</sup> and this polemical literature is the venue in which “pantheism” most clearly takes conceptual shape. If it is the case, as Philip Clayton suggests, that “no philosophically adequate form of pantheism has been developed in Western philosophy,”<sup>137</sup> then the absence is even more striking in the case of pluralist pantheism—if there even is such a thing. The position will therefore have to come together piecemeal, patchworkily, monstrously arising from the depths of the barely said and unsaid in a wide range of literatures. Far from dreaming up such a position *ex nihilo*, then, this study seeks to show it is already in subtle formation: first, in self-professed pantheisms that present themselves as monistic (at each turn, James writes, “something like a pluralism breaks out”);<sup>138</sup> second, in historical philosophies that tend to ignore, sidestep, or actively dismiss the category of “pantheism”; third, in scientific discourses that tend to ignore or actively dismiss “religion” and “theology”—especially general relativity, quantum mechanics, nonlinear biologies, and multiverse cosmologies; and fourth, in the burgeoning, ever-multiplying para-scientific theories these discourses have inspired.

Such para-scientific theories can be loosely assembled under the category of theories of immanence, or of post- or nonhuman studies, and include such formations as ecofeminisms, “new” materialisms, new animisms, animal studies, vegetal studies, assemblage and actor-network theories, speculative realism, complexity theory, and nonlinear science studies. In their loosely collective, “strung-along” effort to decenter “the human,” these modes of immanent analysis open the possibility of something like a pluralist pantheism—or, to mobilize the plurality, “pantheologies.” They do so, first, by dislodging agency and creativity from humanity (theism’s perennial “image of God”) and second, by locating agency and creativity in matter itself. Viewed through the manifold lenses of such studies, the “world” with which the pantheist would identify God is neither inert and passive, as classical theism would have it, nor total and unchanging, as the monist would have it. Rather, “world” names an open, relational, and self-exceeding concatenation of systems that are themselves open, relational, and self-exceeding.

“At any moment,” Jane Bennett writes, “what is at work . . . is an animal-vegetable-mineral sonority cluster.”<sup>139</sup> Such (monstrous) clustering is at work whether we are speaking about cells, bacteria, the “human” genome, water, air, a cloned sheep, or a “collapsed” wave function: each of them is composed of a mutating band of others. If, with Karen Barad, we add discursivity into the mix,<sup>140</sup> then our multiple-universe becomes an un-totalizable and shape-shifting hybrid of narrative-theoretical-material assemblages that are neither reducible to, nor constitutive of, “oneness.” And this multiply unified, multiply divided, constantly evolving multiplicity is what the pantheologies in question would call divine. As such, they will look very little like their monistic counterpart, which, to be honest, is easier to find in the philosophical forest.

Depending on one's starting point, "pantheism" divinizes either a messy multiplicity or a smoothed-out whole, and this particular expedition is foraging for the mess.

Beginning from immanence rather than unity, the exploration at hand will define "pantheism" minimally as the identification of divinity with the material world. Each of the chapters that follow will focus on one of the four major terms of this definition: pan (all), hyle (matter), cosmos (world), and theos (God). Pantheologically speaking, of course, these are all equivalent terms, but they have distinct, if interdetermined, genealogies that this study will examine in turn. For better or worse, the passage from one of these terms to another will be mediated and interrupted by the promiscuous goat-god Pan, who will appear in short, animal-material-vegetal bursts of divinity to keep things monstrous and queer. He will do so even, perhaps especially, in the face of the Christian tradition that tries variously to demonize, romanticize, devour, and assimilate him.

In order to begin its pantheological conjuring, chapter 1 ("Pan") will dive more deeply into the questions of number, identity, and difference. When a hypothetical pantheist affirms that "God is all," what does she mean by "all," and for that matter, what does she mean by "is"? Does "all" denote a seamless unity of existence—whether by virtue of an invisibly shared essence or an enormous sum? Or does it rather refer to "all things" in their shifting plurality—in their different differences from, relations to, and constitutions of one another? What are the stakes of affirming the pantheist one versus its many, and what in either case does it mean to identify God (or anything else) with it?

This chapter will address these questions by evaluating the charges of acosmism and indifference leveled against Spinoza. We will focus in particular on Hegel's accusation that Spinoza's *Deus sive natura* swallows "all that we know as the world" into an "abyss of the one identity" (*Abgrund der einen Identität*)<sup>141</sup>—a conclusion Hegel reached by filtering his reading of the "Oriental" Jew through his limited and romanticized understanding of Hindu cosmology. Revealing the allegedly world-denying monisms of "Spinoza" and "India" to be Orientalizing byproducts of one another, the chapter proceeds to revisit Spinoza's doctrine of substance with an ear toward the concrete, the particular, and the multiple. By reading Spinoza both with and against himself, and alongside his admirer Friedrich Nietzsche, it will argue that, far from transcending or even preceding the embodied "modes" that express it, Spinoza's substance is in fact constituted by them. As such, *Deus sive natura* is irreducibly many in its oneness, and irresistibly embodied. The "all" that God-or-nature "is" therefore amounts to a dynamic holography: an infinitely perspectival dynamism that unsettles not only the static singularity of substance, but also its eternal determinism, by virtue of the materiality of the modes.

Chapter 2 ("Hyle") will inquire into the meaning of this materiality. Beginning from Bayle's proclamation that matter is "the being whose nature is most incompatible with the immutability of God,"<sup>142</sup> this chapter will ask what matter has historically meant, why Western thought has so obsessively removed divinity from it, and how this anti-materialism has gone on to shape the modern scientific imagination. It will simultaneously locate particularly vibrant exceptions to this materiophobic trend in the Ionian, Stoic, and Epicurean schools, which produce a generative materiality that arguably finds its culmination in Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). In a body of work that

eventually gets him burned at the stake, Bruno deconstructs the Aristotelian privilege of (male) form over (female) matter by configuring the latter as the active, animate, enspirited, and ultimately divine origin of the former.

This particular Brunian maneuver finds a powerful resurgence in the recent post- and nonhumanist transvaluations of materiality that insist on matter's agency, intra-activity, and creativity in the face of mechanistic scientific orthodoxy—transvaluations that have been particularly inspired by microbiologist Lynn Margulis's nonlinear principles of autopoiesis and symbiogenesis. Bruno's heretical materiality also finds unexpected resonances with those "animist" cosmologies derided by colonial anthropologists as primitive, feminine, childish, and incapable of making distinctions. Linking this charge to the perennial anti-pantheist cry of dark, abyssal undifferentiation, this chapter finds in "new animist" accounts of indigenous cosmologies an enlivening of matter that takes Spinoza's and Bruno's insights even further than their authors will go—whether willingly or in spite of themselves. Especially when crossed with nonlinear and new materialist thought, these new animisms produce a pan-animate materiality that amounts to a (largely unintentional) transubstantiation of divinity as multiply, relationally, and irreducibly incarnate—perhaps even pantheological.

Chapter 3 ("Cosmos") will ask what we mean by "world" and what it means to associate God with it. Historically, the pantheist "reduction" of God to world has seemed insulting and absurd; the world, after all, is finite, passive, and given—the theater of just-there-ness, whereas God is the source of infinite activity and newness. But what if the world is both more or less than we have thought it to be? What if, far from sitting there self-identically, "world" designates an open, evolving, and interpoietic multiplicity of open, evolving, and interpoietic multiplicities? What would it mean to identify all of that as the source and end of all things, which at the end of the day "is what everybody means by 'God' "?<sup>143</sup>

In order to address these questions, this chapter will first track the rise and fall of the deterministic, "clockwork universe" of the seventeenth century, according to which the world is a lifeless set of interlocking machines set in motion by an exclusively agential, extra-cosmic creator. Contemporary reductionist biologies, cosmologies, and neurosciences retain this deterministic mechanism even as they abandon the God who historically secured it, transferring his chief functions to the allegedly timeless and universal laws of nature. Under the global reign of Western capitalism, this vision of a passive, exploitable, and inanimate cosmos has had disastrous racial, gendered, and ecological consequences. It is therefore not only pantheologically instructive but politically expedient to turn to those reanimations of the cosmos both within and beyond the natural sciences, and to track the variously panicked responses they have provoked.

Exemplary in this regard is the ongoing controversy over James Lovelock's and Lynn Margulis's "Gaia hypothesis," which attributes an immanent, nontotalized, and symbiotic creative-destructiveness to the world itself. Amplified by climate change sciences, multiverse cosmologies, speculative realisms, new materialisms, philosophies of science, and the intraspecies creativity of Amerindian cosmogonies, Gaia's "intrusion" allows us to glimpse multiscalar re-worldings amid what Eduardo Vivieros de Castro and Déborah Danowski have called "the ends of the world."<sup>144</sup> Even in the face of

genocidal erasure, forced migration, and escalating ecological disaster, interdependent throngs of micro-agencies make and unmake worlds as irreducibly multiple, hybrid, and perspectival, giving us some sense of what a pantheology might mean by “God.”

Finally, chapter 4 (“Theos”) will take stock of the monster the previous chapters have made of divinity. Summoning this theo-cosmic, materio-spiritual many-one, how might pantheological thinking respond to the charges that “pantheism” so often faces of determinism, moral relativism, and atheism? Of all these anti-pantheist accusations, this last one is perhaps the most deeply entrenched: Bayle levels it against Spinoza in the first sentence of his essay; de la Faye builds it into the term “pantheism” the moment he coins it; and over two centuries later, a slew of primarily Christian Americans will revive the charge in collective outrage over Albert Einstein’s “cosmic religious feeling.”<sup>145</sup> The study at hand will therefore find in this outrage a twentieth-century bookend to the Spinoza crisis, reviving as it does nearly all the familiar charges against pantheism and bringing us toward a more contemporary vision of the monstrosity in question.

Although Einstein will provide a helpful path toward it, however, he will stop well short of the pantheological, retaining as he does an unerring faith in a “rational,” deterministic cosmos that maintains absolute distinctions between subjects and objects, causes and effects, and truth and perspective. It was this faith that drove Einstein, over the course of decades, to seek an alternative to quantum mechanics, which asserts the bottomless entanglement of observer and observed, experimental apparatus and measured phenomenon. In the course of recounting the “Great Debate” between Einstein and Bohr, this chapter will mobilize Einstein against himself to dislodge his single, unified, and absolute reality. As we will see, Einstein’s metaphysics is at total odds with his physics—especially with the special and general theories of relativity that undermined Newtonian space and time and installed perspective at the heart of any account of the world. Reading this relational perspectivism back into Einstein’s theology, we will finally be able to ask what “God” might a look like in a pantheological key. What becomes of divinity as it emerges by means of the ever-growing assemblage of symbiogenesis, animist cosmogonies, Gaia, Amerindian perspectivism, and now relativity and quantum mechanics?

By glimpsing this becoming-divinity in the fictional works of Alice Walker and Octavia Butler, we will ultimately redirect the so-called problem of evil into more productive, practical questions. Rather than asking how an omnipotent and benevolent God could let suffering into “his” creation, we will ask how the ongoing de- and re-worldings of an immanent divinity might condition the possibility of survival, transformation, responsibility, and ethical discernment. Finally, we will ask, if the vibrantly material, complexly emergent, indeterminate, and intra-constituted multiverse can be affirmed pantheologically as the creative source and end of all things, then why not just call this source and end “world(s)”? What difference does it make to call such worldings divine?

Admittedly, it may make no difference at all. To the extent that it is possible to maintain such distinctions, the present work aims for conceptual (re)construction rather than theological apologetics. As such, its hope is not to defend pantheological thinking against this or that rival, much less to win converts, but rather to see what such thinking might look like. To give an ancient-modern heresy a chance to have its say before it gets laughed off the stage—or even to grant it a different reception.

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