

# TRUE IMAGININGS: INTEGRATING PANENTHEISM AND A PERSONAL VIEW OF GOD

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**Abstract.** The perhaps most challenging problem for a pantheistic paradigm in Christian god-talk consists in integrating the trait of personhood in the monistic horizon of this approach. A very helpful way to this goal seems to be the concept of imagination. Its logic of an “as if” represents a modified variation of Kant’s idea of the postulates of reason. Reflections of Jürgen Werbick, Douglas Hedley, and Volker Gerhardt substantiate the philosophical and theological capabilities of this solution which also include a sensibility for the ontological commitments included in the pantheistic approach.

## I. PROBLEMS

The model of a *Great Unified Theory* (GUT) has been under discussion in particle physics for some time. It refers to the integration of three of the four fundamental forces of the universe: electromagnetism, strong interaction and weak interaction. If it were also possible to integrate the fourth fundamental force, gravity, including the theory of relativity, into this model, the so-called *Theory of Everything* (TOE) would be the result, GUT being a kind of intermediate stage on the way to TOE. There is quite a controversy about the various formulations of this model. However, if it could be developed in a consistent and stable way, several hitherto aporetic problems in cosmology could be solved.<sup>1</sup>

I have mentioned this cosmological paradigm because the general discourse in philosophy is strikingly similar, especially in the field of the philosophical and theological question of God. This model originates in the high cultures of Egypt long before the beginnings of occidental philosophy. It re-emerges in traditions

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1 cf. Klaus Müller, „Gott — größer als der Monotheismus?“, in *Persönlich und alles zugleich*, ed. Frank Meier-Hamidi (Pustet, 2010), 10–20.

of the Far East, and pervades nearly all the strata of the Bible, exerting decisive influence upon the philosophies and theologies of the Pre-Socratics, the Attic classics, the Church Fathers and countless scholastics. It suffuses Renaissance philosophy, notably Nicolas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno. Starting, as is frequently overlooked,<sup>2</sup> with Kant it may well be the key theme of modern philosophies, notably those of the great Idealists Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Hölderlin as well as those of the forgotten theologians and philosophers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (such as the British idealists Bradley and McTaggart) up to the process philosophies of the likes of Alfred N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. And this very pattern of thought is also key to the philosophies of a Teilhard de Chardin or a Karl Rahner.<sup>3</sup> Finally, it re-emerges with the greatest vigour in the integrative philosophy of a Timothy L.S. Sprigge, which can well be seen as a summa of this philosophical-theological paradigm<sup>4</sup> (this list of names does not purport to be exhaustive in any way).<sup>5</sup> This current of thought is called “panentheism”, a term coined by Karl Christian Friedrich Krause, a pupil of Fichte. Topical debates about panpsychism<sup>6</sup> support the plausibility of panentheism. Like the parallel in particle metaphysics, this philosophical-theological GUT or even TOE is so attractive because it is able to integrate apparently contradictory concepts and perspectives of enquiry. This is particularly true of a consistent integration of the philosophical and theological (especially biblical-Christian) question of God which tend to be separated by a gap in nearly all treatises on the subject. In many a traditional dogmatic manual the treatise *De deo uno* was in fact dealt with at the beginning, and the treatise *De deo trino* at the end. Philosophy and theology could hardly be separated more strongly in the centre of a theological mode of thought which, notoriously, prided itself upon its affinity to philosophy. As against this somewhat schizoid structural severing, we may benefit from a quick look at possible solutions offered by panentheism.

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2 cf. Klaus Müller, *Streit um Gott: Politik, Poetik und Philosophie im Ringen um das wahre Gottesbild* (Pustet, 2006), 186–195.

3 cf. Klaus Müller, „God in World and We in God: Panentheistic Speculation in the Early Karl Rahner”, in: *God in the Iconic Imagination: Spiritual Sensation in Platonism and Modern Theology and Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chr. Hengstermann, [Forthcoming].

4 cf. Timothy L. S. Sprigge, *The God of Metaphysics*, (OUP, 2006).

5 Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers speak of God* (Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1953).

6 cf. Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla, *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives* (OUP, 2017).

## II. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

There are six problems which constitute stumbling blocks for theism but which panentheism can address.

- (a) The first tenet is one of onto-semantics, as it were. There are philosophically sound reasons to identify that which is denoted by the term God with the absolute.<sup>7</sup> However, if God is absolute, i.e. literally separated from everything else, there cannot be anything real besides or outside him, since this would undermine his absoluteness. He would then be bound or “solute” to that other than himself. Hence, if there is indeed something real that is not God, this reality must exist only in God and as a self-differentiation of the absolute.<sup>8</sup> One can only evade the force of this argument by following Nietzsche and dismiss the very concept of God as an illusion due only to the grammar of our language. However, in so doing, one would also suppose reason to be full of sources of deception of which it is itself unable to give an account.
- (b) Besides this general onto-sematic tenet, I find five particular focal points to literally make the espousal of panentheism mandatory: the question of cosmology, i.e. how can we, judging from our current knowledge about the coming-to-be and structure of the universe, talk of a personal creator? There are some  $10^{11}$  Milky Ways whose existence we have been able to establish on empirical grounds. What, then, does “creator” or “creation from nothing” mean here? What does “person” mean unless this notion is to stand for a wholly different reality from the one which we usually designate by this word, unless, that is, it is pure equivocation? The insistence on a crypto-fideistic nominalism of a radicalised Scotism leads to a self-referential theology of exclusion at best.

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7 cf. Josef Schmidt, *Philosophische Theologie* (Kohlhammer, 2003), 141. — Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis* (Mohr, 1967). Jan Rohls, *Theologie und Metaphysik* (Gütersloh, 1987).

8 cf. Klaus Müller, Article „Das Absolute“ In *Neues Handbuch der Philosophischen Grundbegriffe. Band 1, Absicht — Gemeinwohl* (Freiburg i. Br., 2011), 12–24.

- (c) We encounter this downright insoluble complex of neurology—in a mirror-inverted fashion, as it were—in the microscopic realm. How can phenomena like consciousness, let alone self-consciousness and freedom—if they exist, which many doubt—, emerge out of the interaction of probably some  $10^{15}$  neurones and their synapses as well as the biochemical-electrical processes occurring between them? And what does a source or ground have to look like from which such a phenomenon can possibly arise in the first place? It cannot by any means be a person in large, as it were, one with its own consciousness and volition. Such a person would only be a repetition of the explanation problem which this thought was originally meant to solve.
- (d) There is a direct theological foundation to the third focal point of our overall question regarding an intellectually justifiable use of God's name, namely the question of theodicy. How can God and the fact of evil and suffering both of human beings and other creatures be reconciled? The question already afflicted ancient thinkers since Lactantius<sup>9</sup> and has been the “rock of atheism” ever since, as the poet Georg Büchner put it in a classic formulation.<sup>10</sup> It will continue to be even that as long as a tear of grief and pain flows from the eye of only one hurt human being or only one abused child.
- (e) There is another genuinely theological motif which we need to address, and which reveals the resolution of the aporiai of traditional theological tenets quite palpably. In gender theories, there is a critique of traditional notions of God, notably those in monotheistic religion, as predominantly masculine. Its language therapy is meant to counter the problematic social consequences of this way of speaking about God by means of a feminization of semantics, thereby frequently ending up in the opposite extreme. However, this whole problem evaporates in a pantheistic perspective in which, as is necessarily implied by pantheism, literally-construed conceptions of personhood are overcome. Pantheism instead leads us beyond gender differences altogether.

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9 cf. Lucius C. F. Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, c. 13,20f.

10 cf. Georg Büchner, „Dantons Tod“. In *Kritische Studienausgabe des Originals mit Quellen, Aufsätzen und Materialien*, ed. Peter von Becker (Syndikat, 1985), Act three, first scene.

- (f) And there is still another aspect that tends to be overlooked quite easily. At core, however, it is an obvious one and a matter of course. Strictly speaking, the soul, in Platonic parlance, can only know what is akin to itself and shares its nature. Thus, we would not know anything real as such, not even knowing what the word truth meant if not everything existent had an inner spiritual dimension. More precisely, everything that is must be embraced and encompassed by the one spiritual reality which we call God, the universe or the absolute. This very old idea is being rediscovered right now by authors like Wolfgang Welsch, the most prominent of postmodernists of German language, in a startling fashion. Welsch is convinced that only in this way can we overcome the inconsistency of a fundamental antagonism between world and man.<sup>11</sup>

Undoubtedly, then, the overall merits of panentheism are quite impressive. However, the proponents of this paradigm appear to be unable to evade the key question which is raised by its critics almost instantaneously: where is there room for God's personhood which, they say, is absolutely essential to the three great monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam? We cannot object to this. However, we can develop certain ideas which are apt to reformulate this postulate of the personal within the logic of a panentheistic paradigm. We shall approach this issue from several angles in the following step.

### III. ON THE LOGIC OF THE "AS IF" OR: HOW IMAGININGS CAN BE TRUE

In my view, the pivot of such a retrieval of the personal dimension in a panentheistic view of God lies in the concept of the imagination and, hence, in a concept of the aesthetic. Incidentally, it is not an accident that aesthetics swiftly rose to be the lead discipline of modern philosophy in the vein of the Kantian critiques and the Idealists.<sup>12</sup> It was perceived as the place in which one could find the common root of theoretical and practical reason. Likewise, it is, as it were, a point where immanence and transcendence meet.

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11 cf. Wolfgang Welsch, *Mensch und Welt* (Beck, 2012), especially 61.

12 cf. Klaus Müller, *Glauben — Fragen — Denken. Bd. II: Weisen der Weltbeziehung* (Aschendorff, 2008), 553–560.

This starting point is in fact far from new. I share it with several authors who make use of it in various ways. A first author to whom I refer is one who does so from an emphatically systematic-theological perspective, even though he evinces certain reservations and certain scepticism about the paradigm of pantheism. The systematic theologian Jürgen Werbick uses the concept of the imagination in the context of the theistic notion of God. He assumes that the will of God, which, he claims, constitutes God's personhood solely by itself, is a good will, identifying it with God's perfection and adding verbatim: "The personalism of the Bible imagines *this* perfection."<sup>13</sup>

However, in his hermeneutics, he also emphasizes a biblical realism, mediated by the concept of testimony. He adds a philosophical foundation to the latter by virtue of the key metaphor of "appreciation" and its manifold implications of intersubjective challenge and recognition:

The metaphor of appreciation adds the relationship of finite subjectivity to the absolute which remains disregarded in the concept of self-differentiation [of the absolute in the sense of pantheism; K.M.]. It relativizes the human and overly-human speech about an absolute ground into which all things are brought forth and in which they consist, making use of the *intuition* [emph.; K.M.] of an absolute counterpart in whom the challenge to self-immanence in self-transcendence occurs and a horizon of personal appreciation in participation and communication is opened up.<sup>14</sup>

Provided the epistemic character of the imaginative and intuitive is given sufficient weight, as it certainly is in Jürgen Werbick's detailed reflections upon interpersonal metaphors,<sup>15</sup> I can gladly concur with these ideas. The contentious issues is, then, encapsulated in, or even restricted to, the question on which side the reasoning is more "human and overly-human", whether in the field of "appreciation" or that of a "self-differentiation" of the absolute within the logic of a doctrine of all-oneness and pantheism.

This seemingly abstract question becomes quite concrete and tangible in what Jürgen Werbick says about the topic in his book on the *Lord's Prayer*. In his reflections on the third entreaty ("Thy will be done"), he tackles this head-

13 Jürgen Werbick, *Vater unser: Theologische Meditationen zur Einführung ins Christsein* (Freiburg i. Br., 2011), 113. — cf. „Einbildungskraft“ in: Jürgen Werbick, *Transzendental denken in einer hermeneutischen Diskurslandschaft. Notizen zu Klaus Müllers Denkprojekt* In: Saskia Wendel, Thomas Schärtl, *Gott — Selbst — Bewusstsein* (Regensburg: Pustet), 7–26. Here: 23.

14 Werbick, „Transzendental denken“, 17.

15 cf. Werbick, „Transzendental denken“, 24f.

on.<sup>16</sup> Excitingly, right from the start, he expressly confronts this entreaty of the Lord's Prayer regarding the doing of God's will on earth and in heaven with an "Egyptian" paradigm, i.e. one of all-oneness. He juxtaposes a God who acts here and now, but whose action is frequently missed here, with the notion of "the founding of the earthly and temporal in the heavenly and eternal."<sup>17</sup> Jürgen Werbick is far from brushing aside any difficulties. Instead, he wonders whether this might in fact be a God who just wants to subject his creatures to his sovereign will.<sup>18</sup> Nor is this suspicion, which quite a few biblical passages certainly evoke, alleviated by the fact that he supposes this will, which alone constitutes God's personhood,<sup>19</sup> to be a good will. This is the tendency of his interpretation of this entreaty.<sup>20</sup> However, what is the basis of this supposition? If it is true that, as we have quoted, the Bible's personalism is a product of the imagination, the question remains legitimate whether this notion of a personal God of good will might not be a variety of the naturalistic fallacy, arguing from the ought to the being of something. And of course it is true:

We know only the story of *this* life in which benevolence and suspicion are intertwined. And we likewise know the passionate longing that it should not always be like this. We know experiences in which it did not remain like this, in which, instead, love and not suspicion led the whole of reality into an encounter in which the heaven opened itself on our earth.<sup>21</sup>

All of this is certainly true. However, we know the opposite as well. There are those disconcerting experiences which always conjure up the question of theodicy again, and which cannot be calmed by the notion of a divine will. If we consider this aporia, is the notion of "[...] an absolute that is hypervolitional because it is infinitely perfect in itself [...]"<sup>22</sup> really as absurd as classical theism makes it appear? We may also take into account a tendency of thought like the one in panentheism according to which the finite, fallible and marginal little human being (cf. Ps 8) "is not made to vanish as an aspect of an apersonal universal and all-encompassing process."<sup>23</sup>

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16 cf. Werbick, *Vater unser*, 103–129.

17 *Ibid.*, 104. cf. 110.

18 cf. *ibid.*, 104.

19 cf. *ibid.*, 108.

20 cf. *ibid.*, 110, 112–114, 120.

21 *Ibid.*, 124.

22 *Ibid.*, 113.

23 *Ibid.*, 114.

On the contrary, everything proceeding from the absolute carries, as it were, the signature of the sovereignty of its origin, as it becomes temporal in the autonomy and freedom of finite and contingent entities. What I miss in the logic of the notion of appreciation is an answer to the questions forced upon us by the inconsistencies of classical theism. These inconsistencies find their expression in a more or less equivocal use of the concept of personhood, which are frequently hidden in the black box of the concept of creation, especially of *creatio ex nihilo*. On the final pages of his *Theory of Science*, Jürgen Werbick makes quite some concessions to me. Taking the theology of the Trinity and the topic of creation as starting points, he raises the question:

In what sense, however, does God an ‘other’, something external into which he can and wants to communicate himself in love? Has he not always been everything? Here human *imagination* [emph.; K.M.] reaches its limits. One may perhaps still be entitled to say that God *wants* to have something external and communicated himself into it. He wants those to whom he can communicate himself, human beings who can be his ‘image’ [inverted commas; K.M.] [...] One may perhaps go on to say that God does not need this external reality. He does not need it to express himself within himself and in a Trinitarian fashion as the love which he is by his essence. [...] The very words show that they, like all the basic concepts of the theology of the Trinity, may be ‘apposite’. However, those who make use of them, hardly know *how* they are apposite and what they might mean in the infinite [...].<sup>24</sup>

Yes, indeed, one would like to comment. It is a Hen kai Pan that is very close to the outer limits of equivocation in that furthest-reaching analogy based upon those resources of the imagination which are gained from the inversion of the relationships of its images. The notion of man being created in the divine image, in some certain way, finds its analogue in the image of a God in the human image. All of this can be accommodated within the tradition of a panentheism which is aware of differences and which, ultimately, views the whole of the cosmos and the life of the subjects in it as a self-differentiation of the absolute. In fact, Werbick himself confirms this in a concluding draft of a theology of the Trinity in these very words, as he writes:

However, the difference of God vis-à-vis our finite thinking about God does not mean a ‘less’, but an ‘infinitely more’. No matter what or who God is: He will surprise us by an “infinitely more”, rather than a regrettable “less”. Thus, thought thinks itself towards its limit in order, hopefully, to open itself to

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24 Jürgen Werbick, *Einführung in die theologische Wissenschaftslehre* (Herder, 2010), 352.



‘learned hope’ (*docta spes*) of this more which it traces in its thinking, that ‘about which nothing greater can be thought.’<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it becomes undeniable that our thought is moving in an area close to its very limits.<sup>26</sup> This is also what Paul Tillich says who writes: “God is not person. Neither is he less than a person, however.”<sup>27</sup>

However, the notion of the imagination, which is so central for Werbick, may even furnish thoughts at these limits with a communicable profile. In turn, detailed descriptions of the imaginative process itself can only be given in metaphors and similes.

In his voluminous trilogy, the British philosopher of religion Douglas Hedley has provided a comprehensive exposition of this very profile.<sup>28</sup> This trilogy aims to provide a vast panorama of myth, literature, poetry, music, art and philosophy and thereby prove that all human speech about God is, by its very nature, rooted in an archetypal pool of the imagination, a strictly basic *a priori* evidenced in material concreteness. It is not an accident that sources from Romanticism are at the fore. Hedley is especially indebted to Samuel Coleridge and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, who also influenced one another.<sup>29</sup> Taking these two witnesses as his starting point, Hedley voices his conviction that:

On a crass Romantic view, imagination is a royal road to reality, a specially privileged faculty of aesthetic vision. Imagination, on this view, is the highest form of knowledge,<sup>30</sup>

whose power consists in uniting the infinite and the finite.<sup>31</sup> He views the imagination as a bridgehead to that archetypal pool by which we may articulate

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25 cf. Werbick, *Wissenschaftslehre*, 37., cf. 353. Womit sich erneut das Diktum Th. W. Adornos bestätigt, dass jedes Philosophieren, das wirklich ein solches ist, schlussendlich in den Bannkreis des ontologischen Arguments eintritt. Vgl. Adorno, Theodor W., *Negative Dialektik* (Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 6), Darmstadt: 1998, 378.

26 cf. Werbick, *Wissenschaftslehre*, 352.

27 Paul Tillich, *Systematische Theologie* (de Gruyter, 1984), 283.

28 cf. Douglas Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination* (Clark, 2008). — Douglas Hedley, *Sacrifice Imagined: Violence, Atonement and the Sacred* (Continuum, 2011). — Douglas Hedley, *The Iconic Imagination* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

29 cf. Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 115–124.

30 Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 56.

31 cf. Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 106.

something like revelation in the first place. The still unspent power of Christianity as a condensation core of occidental culture, Hedley avers,

lies in its capacity to address with the imagination, through symbols and narrative, those archetypical aspects of human experience which lie beyond the merely instrumental, and indeed are often beneath consciousness.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, however, Hedley, despite this dimension of the subconscious (in the sense of Jung), is deeply indebted to Coleridge for the theory of subjectivity informing his account of the unfolding of the imagination:

Coleridge defines imagination as the ‘repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM’: the human imagination as repetition is a reflection or *mirror* of the infinite, and it is often fired by the intimation of transcendence in the experience of beauty and the holy. To see with the eye of imagination is to grasp truth, even if its reality is obscure or invisible to empirical perception.<sup>33</sup>

It is against this backdrop that Hedley, in the epilogue to the concluding volume of his trilogy, offers what might be seen as a dense description of the “imagination“:

The imagination in its deepest sense is the mediating power of the intellectual world in the physical cosmos and the presence of the transcendent ideal in the world of senses. Belief in God is neither a purely intellectual exercise nor is it a brute given of human awareness. The idea of God in our account is rather mediated through the human imagination, somewhat akin to the imagination of other minds or moral facts.<sup>34</sup>

We can invoke a great many poets and artists as witnesses to this notion of the imagination. I shall restrict myself to two particularly memorable voices. The painter Franz Marc, who died very young in World War I, and who is now the expressionist figurehead of the Munich Lenbach House, wrote in 1914:

The longing for the indivisible being, for the liberation from the phantasms of our ephemeral life is the basic mood of all art. It is its great aim to dissolve the whole system of our partial emotions, to show an unearthly being living beyond everything else, to shatter the mirror so that we can see this being. [...]

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32 Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 126.

33 Hedley, *The Iconic Imagination*, 76–77.

34 Hedley, *The Iconic Imagination*, 259.

No enlargement of the life of the imagination is sufficient in width or immensity, nor can we assume great enough distances if we want to escape from the mad and selfish narrowness of this pathetic life and participate in the kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

The second voice is that of Reiner Kunze, a dissident from the former Eastern Germany who, to borrow an expression from Hegel, put his times into thought in beautiful poetry. He writes:

The poetic image is the ‘creative device which God inadvertently left in his creatures’ (Ortega y Gasset). It is part of the basic instruments of man by which he reassures himself of himself and the world.[...]

The poetic idea and the poetic image emerging from it are connections which are both charming because they are ‘far superior to conscious combinations in subtlety and range’ and which unsettle because they abrogate certainties which help us to orientate ourselves in the world.[...]

We are willing to accept absurdity to gain being.”<sup>36</sup>

It is hardly possible to give a more complex depiction of the phenomenon of the imagination.

Hedley’s plea for Romanticism follows logically from the above-mentioned primordially of aesthetics, as it is expressed in Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* and, emblematically summarizing post-Kantian thought, in the *Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism*. Incidentally, this also applies to one of the few, if not indeed the only, early idealist of catholic denomination, the inventor of pastoral theology who went on to become the bishop of Regensburg, Johann Michael Sailer. In his writings, on priest training and homiletics he points out in one place:

Your sermon must move the heart [...]: Not only must you, in your sermon, move the people’s reason and imagination, but, above all, their heart as well. And not only must you move their heart, but also make them change themselves from the very bottom of their heart. [...].<sup>37</sup>

And in Sailer, too, the preacher himself is drawn into a learning process in the course of such emotional relationships as he forges with his audience:

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35 Wilfried F. Schoeller, *Franz Marc: Eine Biographie* (Carl Hanser, 2016), 264–265.

36 Reiner Kunze, *Das weiße Gedicht: Essays* (S. Fischer, 1989), 58–60.

37 Johann Michael Sailer, „Neue Beiträge zur Bildung der Geistlichen“, in *Sämtliche Werke* 19, ed. Joseph Widmer (Seidel, 1839), 65–66.

This very thing has led some preachers astray: the people, they say, must not always be children. We must make the child a man. Hence, we must educate them towards concepts by means of concepts. Ah, you want to educate the people towards concepts by means of concepts? My dear friends, you cannot do this by means of concepts alone! Tell me: what do the people do with their passionate longing for sight and feeling in order to live from concepts? Show me the child that became man only by means of concepts. Does the concept alone make one a man?<sup>38</sup>

In my view, Hedley is completely right in saying in the very first volume of his trilogy straightforwardly that „Psychologically or morally, the imagination is a necessary route to reality.“<sup>39</sup>

I think the first phrase could easily be omitted. We then have to deal with the exiting topic of how imaginings may lead to reality or, put differently, how fictions can be true.

The philosopher Volker Gerhardt has written something extremely illuminating on this very topic in his book *Der Sinn des Sinns*,<sup>40</sup> doing so with special regard to the personal theistic notion of God. It is frequently said that the use of prepositions tells us a great deal about a speaker's metaphysics. Something similar can be said about the use of the modes of the verb in which a speaker's epistemology is expressed. This rule results in an illuminating discovery in Gerhardt's treatise: in central places which deal with the transition from the divine to a personal God, the author makes use of the subjunctive. As early as the introduction, he says that the whole of reality should be addressed „as if [emph.; K.M.] it were a *person*.“<sup>41</sup> Later on, he points out that it can be understood as an expression of raising a claim to himself „if he addresses the whole as if it were facing him *as a unity* — like his *kindred*.“<sup>42</sup> A religious person is allowed „to accept the universal as if it turned

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38 Sailer, „Neue Beiträge zur Bildung der Geistlichen“, 69. — Vgl. dazu ausführlicher: Klaus Müller, „Kongeniales zwischen Johann Michael Sailers Homiletik und der Philosophie des Frühidealismus“, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Bistums Regensburg*. Bd. 50., ed. Paul Mai and Karl Hausberger (Verlag des Vereins für Regensburger Bistumsgeschichte 2016), 17–27. Zu Sailer als Frühidealisten insgesamt cf. Margit Wasmaier-Sailer, *Das Verhältnis von Moral und Religion bei Johann Michael Sailer und Immanuel Kant* (Pustet, 2018).

39 Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, 39.

40 Volker Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns* (Beck, 2015).

41 Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 27.

42 Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 217.

to him so that he can address the whole like a person.”<sup>43</sup> This leads Gerhardt to this finale:

And once someone takes another little step forward and dares to lay claim to himself as a person in the organizing centre of his own reason, he will soon realize that he finds this easier under the adverse conditions of the world if he believes that that which forms itself into a person in himself is present in the whole as well [...]

Not only will he trust himself as person then, but he will likewise trust the whole of the world *as if the latter approached* [emph. K.M.] him like his own better self. If he succeeds in doing so, he believes in God.<sup>44</sup>

Volker Gerhardt, thereby, contributes to a debate which began with Kant, and which intensified at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century thanks above all to Hans Vaihinger’s book *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*.<sup>45</sup> It has been given such a succinct formulation in Dieter Henrich that it has gained the highest pertinence both in cultural sciences and in theology: can fictions be true and, if they can, how?<sup>46</sup> This is nothing but a modified formulation of the Kantian doctrine of postulates, albeit one that could hardly be more exciting.<sup>47</sup>

Kant’s own contemporaries were uncertain about the philosopher from Königsberg’s conclusion that the highest concepts of reason — God, freedom and the whole of the world — had, for the sake of the latter’s own consistency, to be assumed necessarily without our being able to gain any theoretical knowledge about them. Hence, there were necessary assumptions to which the expression “as if” had to be added. In the context of these concepts of wholeness, Kant himself, in fact, expressly spoke of “fiction” or “poetry”. And this raises the question whether these ideas may have to be treated as “[...] inevi-

43 Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 288.

44 Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 314. — Cf. Klaus Müller, „Der ‚Panentheistic Turn‘ nimmt Fahrt auf: Überlegungen zur Transformation des Theismus in Volker Gerhardts philosophischer Theologie *Der Sinn des Sinns*“, in *Gott und Sinn: Im interdisziplinären Gespräch mit Volker Gerhardt*, ed. Michael Kühnlein (Nomos, 2016), 79–89.

45 Hans Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (Felix Meiner, 1918).

46 Cf. Müller, *Streit um Gott*, 226–229. — cf. (with special focus: Thomas Mann: Josephs-Romane) Klaus Müller, „Zum Rationalitätskonzept der Fundamentaltheologie: Analytische Rationalität und Letztbegründung aus der Theorie der Subjektivität“, in *Wozu Fundamentaltheologie? Zur Grundlegung der Theologie im Anspruch von Glaube und Vernunft*, ed. Josef Meyer zu Schlochtern (F. Schöningh, 2010), 289–306.

47 cf. Gerhardt, *Der Sinn des Sinns*, 274.

table and, simultaneously, life-giving fictions, which have a *raison d'être* only as such<sup>48</sup> Or should we follow Fichte and others in assuming that convictions of such crucial importance for our lives, which, moreover, unify all our others into one, must be considered true despite such misgivings? Incidentally, Kant himself was convinced that something that must be considered unreal does not, therefore, also have to be considered incapable of truth at all, as in fact his doctrine of the postulates shows.

This gives rise to the fact that even someone who generally refrains from answers to those questions situated at the boundaries of our knowledge may be asked from which life, for her or him, such an idea as that of freedom arises “[...] what it would mean to *lead* a life according to it.”<sup>49</sup>

The life arising from this idea knows, by its consciousness, about itself and, by irreducible implication, about its reality. Such an idea is something in which everything impelling a conscious life is gathered and collected. Hence, it is so deeply embedded in it as a mode of its own existence that this idea, in a certain fashion, participates in its own irreducibility *and*, concomitantly, the implied degree of the reality of the I's knowledge about itself. In fact, this comes close to John's Searle's description of the notion of freedom:

The refusal to take a free decision works only if I suppose that the freedom to refuse exists. If one refuses to make use of one's free will, this makes only sense if one has expressed one's own free will in this very refusal. [...] We cannot explain our life anymore if we have to give up the supposition of freedom.<sup>50</sup>

In this case, however, a subject obliged to enlightenment may dare to harbour the thought that this imagined thing called “freedom”, this fiction, is not only a function conceived for a certain purpose. Rather, it is a concluding thought in which a constitution of reality occurs between that which exists and is true and that which is assumed to be true for the sake of its truth and reality. Hence, the thinking subject and the object thought, at their very core, are intertwined and belong together and, therefore, both have the predicate “true”.

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48 Dieter Henrich, *Versuch über Kunst und Leben: Subjektivität — Weltverstehen — Kunst*. (Edition Akzente, 2001), 60.

49 Dieter Henrich, *Bewußtest Leben: Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Subjektivität und Metaphysik* (Reclam, 1999) 43.

50 John R. Searle, „Wie frei sind wir wirklich?“ (Interview), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* 12, March 23, 2008, 30.

Of course, we have not thereby secretly usurped a metaphysical, let alone a religious insight:

Such a connection to truth into which a conscious life inserts itself as such can only be established if it finally understands and newly conceives the synthesis of all its life's tendencies which it first must bring about on its own, and experience as its own, as an occurrence of which all its own actions are part.<sup>51</sup>

Or, in other words, fictions (in the sense described above) can only be judged true within a holistic mode of thought, i.e. one which eventually unifies all theoretical and practical epistemic tasks and therefore all modes of knowledge in one whole of understanding.<sup>52</sup> This whole must be conceived as a processual complex of reality of which the subject believes itself one element. If such thoughts of a whole, i.e. of a metaphysics, is not ruled out from the beginning in such a project, but remains open to the notion of a last ground, subjecting itself to reason's critical guidance at these limits, then it is advisable to follow Henrich and choose the path towards a monist ontology of all-oneness. Everything real, in its reality and individuality, is to be conceived as being part of a self-differentiating unity. In this case, the development of this fiction will have led the subject into the truth that it is part of the all-oneness of reality, and is, therefore, true. The punch line of this ontology would be the fact that all of this becomes visible only in the light of the self-reflection of an irreducible process of reason.

If one follows Gerhardt's preceding reflections, the notion of a personal God is legitimized on the basis of the power of the imagination in the face of the whole of reality. Henrich's thoughts buttress this connection ontologically. Thereby, the personal dimension is also integrated into panentheism. In this way, this mindset contrives to capture the whole of reality, the absolute and the finite, God and world, in and from one essential unity, doing it in such a fashion that the difference between both is expressed very clearly and that they both continue to be part of this unity. This, in turn, suggests the idea that the concrete religions are all imaginations or images and illustrations of this very core of all notions of the divine. Moreover, the monotheisms achieved this feat on the basis of the resources of the self-experience of the human per-

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51 Henrich, *Bewußtes Leben*, 148.

52 cf. Henrich, *Bewußtes Leben*, 61–62.

son in its wholeness, as it faces the whole of reality. And perhaps we may say that Christianity with its core message of the incarnation of the Logos stands out in a special way because it thereby literally translates the divine into the matter of the world, thereby also drawing the latter into the absolute in the process.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, one can certainly say that, from a Christian vantage point, the predicate of God's personhood must, as it were, be forced through the Christological eye of the needle. However, it thereby wins such a concrete, if not indeed downright univocal sense which the notion of personal theism in Islam with its radical *theologia negativa* can never attain to. As to Jewish and rabbinic traditions, this applies only partially if Peter Schäfer's research are apposite that there is in the later strata of the Tenach and, subsequently, in rabbinic thought a "divine or half-divine figure besides God".<sup>54</sup> This figure never becomes human (as in Christianity). However, as an angel or man elevated to divine honours it does possess human traits. Indeed, in the tradition of Enoch raised to God, which has biblical roots (cf. Gen. 5:21–24), this figure, which is later called "Metatron", is given the name "JHWH ha-quatan",<sup>55</sup> i.e. "Little/Young God", by God, in rabbinical interpretations. It is possible that Christianity, in its struggle about a doctrine of the Trinity, drew upon this Jewish-rabbinical binitarianism. However confusing, the sources adduced by Schäfer point to an imaginative inclusion of the personal dimension in the discourse about God.

Inasmuch as this inclusion of the personal dimension in panentheism, conceived along such a theory of the imagination and fiction capable of truth, is essentially linked to the dimension of self-conscious subjectivity, the suggested outline of a metaphysical construction may be further buttressed by transcendental logic.

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53 cf. Klaus Müller, „All-Einheit christlich: Eine kleine Provokation mit Folgen“, in *Eigenschaften Gottes: Ein Gespräch zwischen systematischer Theologie und analytischer Philosophie*, ed. Thomas Marschler and Thomas Schärfl (Aschendorff, 2015), 101–122.

54 Peter Schäfer, *Zwei Götter im Himmel: Gottesvorstellungen in der jüdischen Antike* (Aschendorff, 2017), 153.

55 Schäfer, *Zwei Götter im Himmel*, 121.



#### IV. IMAGINATIVE ANAMNESIS

The attempt at such a foundation in transcendental logic which I find to be the most precise has been undertaken by Eric Voegelin. In his encyclopaedic survey of the intellectual architectonics of high religions he came to the conviction

that a metaphysics which interprets the world's transcendence system as an immanent process of a divine substance is the only sensible systematic philosophy. At least it attempts to interpret the order of the world which is transcendent to consciousness in an 'intelligible' language. Every other metaphysics with a different ontological foundations only adds to the impossibility of understanding transcendence in an immanent way the absurdity of interpreting it in 'unintelligible' language, i.e. one that is not accessible 'from within' the experience of processes of consciousness.<sup>56</sup>

I shall try to give a tentative translation. When the attempt to talk about the transcendent is undertaken, this is only possible by using a language "from within", i.e. one from the pool of the subjective and one that is taken from the intellect's self-knowledge. As I have briefly said before, this is in fact an originally Platonic argument. Or, in theological language, man can, because of the very fact that he is God's image, become a source of a discourse about God which is both imaginative and in his image. This very language is also apt to develop a semantics of systematic theology which manages to hold together personal theism and all-oneness. Simultaneously, it would be a mode of thought very suitable to Roman Catholicism if the latter is willing sufficiently to fulfil the philosophical obligations connected to such an enterprise, i.e. one of an "et et" or "both and".<sup>57</sup>

Such a theology has, at least since Spinoza and Kant and the idealistic synthesis of both philosophical perspectives,<sup>58</sup> accepted the challenge to conceive

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56 Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: Zur Theorie der Geschichte und Politik* (Piper, 1966). 50–51.

57 Klaus Müller, „Plädoyer für das Prinzip des ‚Sowohl - als auch‘“, in *Die Gewalt des einen Gottes. Die Monotheismusdebatte zwischen Jan Assmann, Micha Brumlik, Rolf Schieder, Peter Sloterdijk und anderen*, ed. Rolf Schieder (Univ. Press, 2014), 175–195 — Jan Assmann, *Totale Religion: Ursprünge und Formen puritanischer Verschärfung* (Picus Verlag, 2016), 158–174.

58 cf. Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2003), 73–81.

of God in such a way that he “is both personal and all things at the same time”,<sup>59</sup> a challenge which cannot be avoided anymore if I may use an expression of Peter Strasser which sounds as though it had been taken from Schelling: “God is the single thing that is all things”,<sup>60</sup> he says in one place in his *Philosophy of Revelation*. Schelling himself did not succeed in solving the problem connected to this expression in his project of the *Ages of the World* on which he worked for several decades. Neither did those who came after him, not even the most ambitious ones, who joined forces under the sobriquet of “Speculative Theism”. Hermann Lotze thought that the reason for this failure lay in the fact that in these projects the “... the system of Freedom [...] was transformed into a dualism more openly than its supporters were willing to concede.”<sup>61</sup>

This very fact is the misery of all contemporary proponents of a theology of difference who are willing to accept any costs, however high, only to open up a chasm between God and the world — allegedly for the sake of God’s divinity. I find their nominalism and voluntarism, usually bought at the price of a weird strategy in theodicy — cold and alienating. Both are reflected in the self-referentiality of the respective debates. If I am right, the alternative which I sought to present here might turn out to be a fresh source of the transformation of an intellectually legitimate discourse about God by a panentheistic mode of thought against the backdrop of a culture of global knowledge and science.

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59 Peter Strasser, *Der Gott aller Menschen: Eine philosophische Grenzüberschreitung* (Styria, 2002), 191. cf. Dieter Henrich, „Eine philosophische Begründung für die Rede von Gott in der Moderne? Sechzehn Thesen“, in *Die Gottrede von Juden und Christen unter den Herausforderungen der säkularen Welt. Symposium des Gesprächskreises „Juden und Christen“ beim Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken am 22./23. November 1995 in der Katholischen Akademie Berlin*, ed. Dieter Henrich (Lit, 1997), 10–20. here 19.

60 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung. Buch I*, 8, (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), 174.

61 Hermann Lotze, *Metaphysik* (Weidmann, 1841), 322.

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