# THE AWE-SOME ARGUMENT FOR PANTHEISM

T. Ryan Byerly
University of Sheffield

**Abstract.** Many pantheists have claimed that their view of the divine is motivated by a kind of spiritual experience. In this paper, I articulate a novel argument, inspired by recent work on moral exemplarism, that gives voice to this kind of motivation for pantheism. The argument is based on two claims about the emotion of awe, each of which is defended primarily via critical engagement with empirical research on the emotion. I also illustrate how this pathway to pantheism offers pantheists distinctive resources for responding to persistent objections to their view, and how it might lead to more exotic views incorporating pantheistic elements.

Many pantheists have noted that to a significant extent their view of the divine is motivated by a kind of spiritual experience (see, e.g., the references in Levine 1994, ch.2). The cosmos just seems to be divine to them, we might say. In this paper, I articulate a novel argument that gives voice to this kind of motivation for pantheism. The argument is based on the emotion of awe, and draws inspiration from recent work on the emotion of admiration conducted by advocates of moral exemplarism. The basic idea is that awe functions in the spiritual domain in the way that, according to these authors, admiration functions in the moral domain; but, given that it does, there is a plausible route to affirming pantheism. The argument is bolstered to a significant extent through critical engagement with empirical research on awe.

I set out this argument in further detail in Section I, identifying some considerations in its favor and explaining how it might prove attractive to certain audiences. I then show in Section II how this approach to justifying pantheism offers the pantheist distinctive resources for responding to three historically influential objections to pantheism. In the concluding Section III, I discuss three further questions about the argument that serve to highlight interesting ways in which the considerations here adduced in favor of pan-

PP. 1–21
DOI: 10.24204/EJPR.V11I2.2968
AUTHOR: T.R.BYERLY@SHEFFIELD.AC.UK

theism could lead to more exotic versions of pantheism or even to views that resist easy classification as pantheistic or not pantheistic.

## I. THE AWE-SOME ARGUMENT FOR PANTHEISM

The novel argument for pantheism I will develop is based on two claims about the emotion of awe. One claim pertains to the function of awe, while the other pertains to the proper objects of awe.

The argument's claim about the function of awe is based on the idea that awe functions in the spiritual domain in the way that admiration does in the moral domain, according to recent advocates of moral exemplarism — Linda Zagzebski (2017), in particular.[1] According to Zagzebski, the emotion of admiration is a fallible guide to the moral domain. Moral features, such as the *good life*, *virtues*, or *obligatory actions* can be defined ostensively via direct reference to those for whom admiration survives critical scrutiny. The good life is a life lived by an admirable person, virtues are traits of character we admire in admirable people, and obligatory acts are acts that an admirable person demands of herself and others. Defining these moral features in this way does not reveal the content of the relevant moral concepts, but instead facilitates identification of these features in the real world, which can then itself enable empirical study of their underlying nature. Admiration leads us to exemplars, and by studying these exemplars empirically we can understand what the nature of the good life, virtue, or obligatory action is.

According to my argument, the emotion of awe functions in similar fashion as a fallible guide to the spiritual domain — a domain commonly characterized as transcendent or spiritually ultimate or divine. The *divine* can be defined ostensively as that for which awe survives critical scrutiny, and the *spiritual life* can be defined as that life that exhibits proper responsiveness to the *divine*. As with exemplarism, the awe-based approach to the divine doesn't in providing these definitions seek to identify the content of the relevant concepts, but rather seeks to identify a procedure for discovering their

1 The idea here is not that moral exemplarism must be true in order for what I claim regarding the function of awe to be true, or vice versa. Rather, moral exemplarism provides a useful heuristic for approaching what I claim regarding the function of awe; and, to the extent that the former has attracted much scholarly attention, we might anticipate similar scholarly interest in the latter.

nature. According to the awe-based approach to the divine, following the emotion of awe can lead us to detect divine things, the underlying nature of which we can then seek to understand.

The second claim of the argument regards the proper objects of awe. It affirms that the cosmos is the most proper object of awe. The cosmos is that object for which our awe would most survive critical scrutiny under idealization. If we were to imagine a perfecting of our emotional sensitivity of awe through time comparable to the sort of idealization of science often discussed in the philosophy of science literature (e.g., Putnam 1981), the second claim of my argument maintains that idealized awe of this sort would hone in on the cosmos as its most fitting object.

Putting these two claims together, we can state what I will call the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Functional Claim | That which most continues to elicit awe under critical scrutiny is most divine. |
| Objectual Claim | The cosmos is that which most continues to elicit awe under critical scrutiny. |
| Conclusion | So, the cosmos is most divine. |

I treat this argument as an argument for pantheism, because the conclusion of the argument is an affirmation of pantheism as this view is commonly understood. At least, it is an affirmation of pantheism as long as in being the *most* divine the cosmos is also *very* divine. Notably, the conclusion is compatible with the idea (affirmed by some pantheists) that sub-parts of the cosmos are also divine, albeit less so than the cosmos itself. Also notable is the fact that the conclusion does not rule out the existence of a creator of the cosmos (also an idea affirmed by some pantheists), even one of the sort regarded as divine by the Abrahamic faiths — an observation to which I will return below, especially in Section III. In the remainder of this Section, I will adduce some considerations in favor of the Functional Claim and the Objectual Claim of this argument, and offer some comments regarding the sorts of audiences for whom the argument might exercise persuasive force.

First, consider the Functional Claim. At least four lines of evidence can be cited in favor of this claim. First, practitioners of very different spiritualities have in fact claimed that awe functions in this way. For example, Abraham Heschel, a Jewish theist, says that "Awe rather than faith is the cardinal at-

titude of the religious Jew. … In Judaism, *yirat hashem*, the awe of God, or *yirat shamayim*, the awe of heaven, is almost equivalent to the word 'religion'" (1955: 77). Howard Wettstein, a philosopher attracted to a form of naturalist spirituality, proposes that "where there is awe, there is holiness. It is as if awe were a faculty for discerning the holy" (2012: 33-4). On both accounts, awe is the primary emotion that first enables contact between a person and God, or that which is most spiritually ultimate. To the extent that these authors and other spiritual practitioners who would agree with them are to be trusted as authorities regarding the origins of the spiritual life, their affirmations provide some evidence in favor of the Functional Claim about awe.

Second, there is experimental evidence linking experiences of awe and religious commitment. Psychological research has revealed that people who experience awe-inducing stimuli such as videos of natural beauty report higher levels of spirituality (Saroglou, Buxant, and Tilquin 2008) and belief in transcendent realities (Valdesolo and Graham 2014) than people who experience stimuli that do not tend to induce awe. This evidence would be explained well if part of the function of awe was to put experients in contact with the spiritually ultimate, as per the Functional Claim.

Third, scholars who have been involved in cross-cultural studies of diverse religions have found that awe is a persistent marker of the origin of religion. For example, Peterson and Seligman, after conducting their research on cross-cultural strengths of transcendence, reported the following:

> The preceding analyses could be taken to show that awe is the proper response to seeing any manifestation of God, God's power, or God's goodness, revealed in any aspect of creation, be it a landscape, a thunderstorm, a cathedral, or a virtuous person. However, the reverse causal path is just as plausible: People have an innate tendency to be moved by beauty and excellence, and whenever these profound and ineffable feelings are triggered, people attribute the cause to the presence of God. This analysis would suggest that it is the very existence of the human capacity for appreciation that generates religions across human societies. Many of the accoutrements of religion (music, architecture, ritual, stories about saints) can then be seen as attempts to amplify these feelings of awe-filled appreciation. (2004: 542-3)

Awe is that emotion by virtue of which people the world over feel connected to the divine; if the feeling is trustworthy when subjected to critical scrutiny, then the Functional Claim follows.

Finally, some support for the Functional Claim can be identified in failures of non-spiritual accounts of the function of awe. Instructive here is the work of Helen De Cruz and Johan De Smedt on the impact that the cognitive science of aesthetics should have on our assessment of the natural theological argument from beauty. The latter argument maintains that the universal human propensity to experience awe in the face of beautiful stimuli of widely different types is best explained via appeal to an aesthetically sensitive deity who can be encountered via experiencing beauty. De Cruz and De Smedt (2014) argue that the failure of purely naturalistic, non-spiritual accounts of the human propensity for awe lends some support to this argument. For example, the purely naturalistic biophilia hypothesis (Wilson 1984), which maintains that the function of human awe was to motivate early humans to remain in natural environments suitable for their survival, does not adequately explain why natural environments so *in*hospitable for human survival are also among the best represented objects of awe. Likewise, Keltner's and Haidt's (2003) highly influential proposal that awe was primordially a response to displays of social dominance and functioned to maintain social hierarchies is difficult to square with the evidence that awe's "most important elicitor" (147) is non-social, natural beauty. In the face of the inadequacies of non-spiritual accounts of the function of awe, De Cruz and De Smedt write, "There is at present no satisfactory naturalistic explanation for why humans value natural beauty that does not conform to their evolved tastes. Hence, the proponent of the aesthetic argument can hold that God is currently the best explanation for this sense of beauty. . . . our tendency to seek beauty can be explained as a quest for God" (154).

Now, when De Cruz and De Smedt here appeal to "God," they are intending to appeal to a God of the traditional theistic sort — one who is the creator of rather than identical to the cosmos. They maintain that the failure of purely naturalistic, non-spiritual accounts of awe lends some credence to the idea that part of the function of awe is to put human beings into contact with *this* sort of God. Still, to the extent that their argument is successful, it should also lend support to the more general hypothesis invoked here, that the function of awe is to put human beings into contact with the *divine*, where the notion of divinity is not (yet) further specified, whether in the direction of traditional theism or another direction. Put differently, awe experiences signal the satisfaction of a need; the unavailability of a purely naturalistic,

non-spiritual account of what this need is lends credence to the idea that the need is instead a spiritual one — a need for connection to, experience of the divine. If this is true, it provides confirmation of the Functional Claim of the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism.

Before moving on to the Objectual Claim, we might pause to note the kind of audiences for whom the Functional Claim might have appeal. On the basis of the considerations adduced above, we might expect the Functional Claim to have appeal for at least some theists, some naturalists attracted to a naturalistic spiritual life, and, of course, those who are antecedently attracted to pantheism. To a lesser extent, it may prove attractive to naturalists not antecedently attracted to a spiritual life, who find the evidence adduced in favor of the claim persuasive.

Move then to the Objectual Claim — that the most fitting object of awe is the cosmos. The primary route to affirming this claim is to proceed by identifying the qualities exhibited by objects for which our awe most survives critical scrutiny, and then noting that the cosmos exhibits these qualities *par excellence*. Since it does, we can conclude that idealized awe would take the cosmos as its most proper object. This style of argument by its nature is always subject to further empirical testing. My proposal here is that an argument of this kind can be made that is attractive from the standpoint of existing conceptual and empirical research on awe; further empirical work could certainly further support it or impugn it.

Specifically, my proposal is that objects for which awe most survives critical scrutiny have the following two features. First, they exhibit complex functioning in the production of a valuable end. The end needn't be an overall valuable one — one whose total good-making features outweigh its total bad-making features. But, it must exhibit good-making features, and it is in virtue of the good-making features that the object properly elicits awe. I will call this feature *apparently directed complexity*. Second, proper objects of awe are in-principle producible objects the production of which outstrips the experient's productive capacities. The most fitting objects of awe are strictly speaking creatable, though for them to remain objects of awe their creation must outstrip the experient's current powers of creation. I will call this feature *beyondness*.

The claim that the most fitting objects of awe exhibit apparently directed complexity and beyondness receives considerable confirmation when examined in light of existing conceptual and empirical work on awe. Current empiri-

cal research strongly confirms the claim that proper objects of awe exhibit complex functioning. The dominant contemporary empirical model of awe conceives of awe as one of several "epistemic" emotions, the function of which is defined via its relation to knowledge and understanding (Valdesolo, Shtulman, and Baron 2017). Researchers have found that awe is "elicited by perceptually or conceptually complex, information-rich stimuli" (Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 2007: 947) and that experiencing awe is correlated with the activation of reward- and motivation-related brain areas sensitive to aspects of experience carrying significant information (Vartanian and Goel 2004). Experiencing awe is correlated with the perception of patterns (Valdosolo and Graham 2014) and the "motivation to find order and explanation" (Valdesolo, Park, and Gottlieb 2016: 1), whether from a scientific or religious source.

The empirical literature on awe not only provides reason to think that proper awe-elicitors exhibit complexity, but it provides reason to think that they exhibit this complexity in the production of a *valuable* end. First, the fact that experiences of awe often engender a search for specifically *agentic* explanations (Valdesolo and Graham 2014) corroborates the proposal that ideal awe-elicitors will exhibit complex functioning toward a valuable end, given modest assumptions about the exercise of agency. Second, while some researchers have wished to remain open to the idea that awe experiences can have negative stimuli (e.g. Keltner and Haidt 2003, Roberts 2003), reported awe-elicitors are in fact overwhelmingly interpreted as positive. Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman write regarding their work on elicitors of awe that "One striking feature of the awe-eliciting events described by participants is that all were interpreted as positive" (2007: 950). An attractive explanation of why this is so is that awe-elicitors exhibit apparently directed complexity of the kind described — complex functioning productive of an end that has salient valuable features, even if it is not overall better that the end obtained. In order to induce awe, there must be something about the experience that the experient interprets as positive. Kristján Kristjánsson appears to share this view: "I doubt that experiences of awe can be entirely negative" (2017: 133). To appropriate an idea from Keltner and Haidt (2003), I would suggest that, rather than concluding that awe-elicitors can be interpreted as entirely negative, what instead occurs is that awe experiences can be "flavored" by accompanying experiences, including the experience of fear. The complexity of some awe-elicitors, such as Roberts's (2003) example of an atom bomb, involves the exercise of immense transformative

power. Such transformative power is itself naturally interpreted as positive, though of course the destruction caused by this power is just as naturally interpreted as overall negative and fear-inducing. My proposal is that to the extent that such elicitors are proper elicitors of awe, it is because of their positive elements. The proposal that proper awe-elicitors exhibit apparently directed complexity thus receives considerable confirmation from contemporary conceptual and empirical research.

Likewise with the proposal that the most proper awe-elicitors are in-principle producible objects the production of which outstrips the productive capacities of the experient. Start with the second part of this feature — that the objects of awe outstrip the productive capacities of the experient. This idea is widely endorsed, though language referencing productive capacities is not always used. It is very common for accounts of awe to reference some way in which the awe-elicitor is perceived to be *beyond* the experient. For example, Kristjánsson writes that "The *object* of awe is captured by the cognition that the subject is experiencing or has experienced an instantiation of a truly great ideal that is mystifying or even ineffable in transcending ordinary human experiences" (2017: 132). The perception of the awe-elicitor as in some sense beyond the experient can help explain why it is common for experients of awe to report that their experience made them feel small or insignificant (Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 2007: 953).

When pressed for further details regarding in what precise way the proper awe-elicitor is *beyond* the subject, scholars have produced a variety of answers none of which is particularly compelling. Kristjánsson, as we saw above, appeals to the idea that the elicitor is beyond *ordinary* human experience. But this conflicts with the idea, voiced by others, that humans can and should be in awe of many ordinary experiences (cf. Wettstein 2012). These experiences might include childbirth, for example — something that has been used as a prime example in the empirical study of awe (e.g., Van Cappellen and Saroglou 2012). In the empirical literature, the standard account of that in virtue of which the awe-elicitor is beyond the subject is that it is not understood by him — it does not conform to his existing paradigms for making sense of the world. Valdesolo, Shtulman, and Baron write, "Awe is triggered by an unexpected event, like surprise, and involves the salience of a gap in knowledge and a desire to acquire more information, like curiosity and wonder, but it also entails an inability to assimilate information into existing

mental structures and a resulting need for accommodation" (2017: 3). But this proposal suffers from two serious problems. First, as Krisjánsson (2017) points out, it is perfectly legitimate — even common — for people to continue experiencing awe for a phenomenon after appropriately accommodating for phenomena of that type. In these cases, the awe-elicitors needn't be beyond their experients in terms of the experients' understanding or lack of accommodation for them. Second, if the function of awe were to motivate accommodation in the way voiced in the quotation from Valdesolo and colleagues, then it would not make sense for experients of awe to report that they characteristically desire for the awe experience to *continue*. Instead, they would report wishing for it to end — wishing, in particular, for their perceived need for accommodation (part of what it is to be in awe, on this view) to end. But wishing for the awe experience to continue is precisely what awe experients consistently report (Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 2007: 953).

So the sense in which proper awe-elicitors are beyond their experients is neither in virtue of being outside the realm of ordinary human experience nor in being beyond the experient's understanding. An attractive alternative is the one identified above: the sense in which objects of awe remain beyond a subject, even if understood by the subject and even if part of ordinary human experience, is that they are beyond the subject's productive capacities. The subject might appropriately think of them, "I would never have thought to make things that way, even if I had the ability and opportunity!" One interesting feature of this proposal is that it generates empirically testable predictions — for example, that elicitors of awe will cease eliciting awe if they become producible by the experient. For example, an artist in training once awed by his teacher's creations will no longer be awed by them when he attains the skill to reliably produce such himself. He might remain in awe that human beings have evolved to have such capacities in the first place — but here his awe takes a different object from the creations themselves.

Before turning to the first part of the beyondness feature, it is worth remarking that the defense thus far offered is compatible with a certain evolutionary story about the primordial function of awe (recall Keltner's and Haidt's alternative story about the primordial function of awe discussed above). According to this story, the primordial function of awe was to reward with positive affect experiences of producible objects that outstripped the experient's current productive capacities. These experiences would have much

the effect highlighted in the contemporary psychological literature with respect to generating learning. They would render early hominids more open toward encountering new, complex objects that could aid in their survival. Such a stance could help explain the prevalence of tool-use in hominids when contrasted with other primates (cf. De Cruz and De Smedt 2014: 67). Given the Functional Claim of the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism, this epistemic function is not the *only* function of awe — at least not in its contemporary expressions. But, it may nonetheless have been an important function of the emotion, and it may continue to be. It may have been that early on awe attached to more easily producible objects than it does now, but as human capacities for production advanced the remit of awe also advanced, until awe as we now know it can be directed toward any in-principle producible object, including the cosmos.

This last remark leads us finally to the first part of the beyondness feature — that proper objects of awe are in-principle producible. As just suggested, some of awe's objects are in fact producible and even produced by other human beings (as in the case of works of art or sophisticated tools). Others of awe's objects are not typically produced by human beings, but could be produced through concerted effort. This could even be true of incredible landscapes. In the limiting cases, proper objects of awe may only be producible by a superior intelligence rather than by human beings. This may be the case with the cosmos as a whole.

The hypothesis that proper objects of awe are in-principle producible fits well with data regarding elicitors of awe. The significant majority of reported awe-elicitors are either human works of art or accomplishment or natural phenomena (Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 2007) — each of which coheres with the present feature. On the other hand, some authors give the impression that other persons, including divine persons, are proper objects of awe. Thus, for example, Robert Roberts writes, "You can properly be in awe before God" (2003: 269), having in mind a God of the traditional theistic sort (cf. also Wettstein 2012). Given that such a God is supposed to *not* be in-principle producible, this may seem to furnish a counterexample to the proposed feature of awe. But, I doubt the counterexample has much force. Among potential objects of awe, other persons — even divine persons — occupy a precarious position. Kristjánsson writes, "Reverence for a person (human or divine) is sometimes described as 'awe,' but I find that an infelicitous

extension" (2017: 132, n.2). Indeed, when people report awe that is directed toward another person, they tend either to focus on the other's accomplishment, or on some kind of significant transition that person (and others) went through (see again Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 2007). The focus tends to be then either on something the other person does or on some process in which the other is involved — each of which is producible. The same can be applied to awe of a God of the traditional theistic sort. When awe is properly directed toward such a God, it is directed toward this God's work rather than toward this God *simpliciter*. Recall the earlier quotation from Peterson and Seligman, now with some added italics: "awe is the proper response to seeing any *manifestation* of God, God's power, or God's goodness, revealed in any *aspect of creation*, be it a landscape, a thunderstorm, a cathedral, or a virtuous person." When we most properly stand in awe before a theistic God, we do so by experiencing awe for this God's productive efforts.

There is considerable support, then, for the idea that proper objects of awe are in-principle producible objects that are beyond the experient's productive powers, and that exhibit complex functioning in the production of a valuable end. What remains is to show that the cosmos exemplifies these features *par excellence*; it is the most comprehensive entity that exhibits both apparently directed complexity and beyondness, and as such is the object for which awe will most survive critical scrutiny in idealized conditions. Establishing this claim, I take it, is somewhat less difficult than establishing the preceding claims about the nature of awe. After all, it is precisely this way of thinking about the cosmos that motivates the contemporary fine-tuning argument. According to this argument, if the fundamental constants and laws of the universe had been only slightly different, the universe would not have been life-permitting (Manson 2009). The universe as a whole then involves a vastly complex process governed by certain defining parameters that enable the whole to exhibit the positive feature of permitting goods of life. Whether or not we agree ultimately with the conclusion of the fine-tuning argument that this apparently directed complexity indeed calls for the direction of an intelligent designer, the premise alone — which tends to be accepted by both sides in the debate — is enough to confirm what is at issue in completing the present argument for the Objectual Claim of the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism. The universe as we know it most thoroughly exemplifies those features toward which proper awe is sensitive; it is in-principle producible,

vastly beyond the productive powers of experients of awe, and involves incredibly complex functioning in the production of a valuable end.

I doubt there are very serious limitations regarding the sort of audiences likely to find my contentions in defense of the Objectual Claim attractive. Thus, the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism as a whole should be appealing to the audiences already identified in discussion of the Functional Claim: namely, many already attracted to pantheism, some theists, some naturalists inclined toward a spiritual life, and perhaps even some naturalists not so inclined.

## II. RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS TO PANTHEISM

The Awe-some Argument for Pantheism offers more than just an isolated argument for pantheism. It offers a route to pantheism that provides pantheists with distinctive resources for defending their position against objections. In this section, I will briefly address how taking the route to pantheism provided by the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism allows the pantheist to deftly handle three persistent objections to pantheism: the problem of personality, the problem of unity, and the problem of evil.

The problem of personality maintains that pantheistic conceptions of the divine are inadequate for theological discourse because they are committed to an impersonal divinity. Being divine, according to this objection, requires being personal. Nothing impersonal, such as the cosmos, could be divine. The objection is often wielded against pantheism by traditional theists: "traditional theism has regularly opposed pantheism on the grounds that it tends to be impersonal," writes William Mander (2016). Sometimes the objection is generated by appealing to properties the divine must have beyond the property of personhood — such as worship-worthiness (Leftow 2016) — where these properties themselves entail that the divine must be personal.

Of course, not all pantheists will be worried by this sort of objection. In particular, some pantheists *do* attribute personality to the cosmos, and even worship-worthiness (e.g., Forrest 2016). An advocate of the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism is as welcome to pursue these alternatives as other pantheists. But the point I wish to make here is that the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism makes more viable an alternative response that *doesn't* require attributing personality to the cosmos. This is because, given this argument, *divinity* is defined ostensively as that which most continues to elicit awe. Whether the

divine so defined must be personal or worship-worthy is an empirical question, not something to be decided from the armchair. When we do the empirical work, as proposed in the previous section, we do not find that personality is a good candidate for features of the divine defined in this way. Products of persons, rather than persons, tend to be among awe's most proper objects.

Turn then to the problem of unity. This persistent objection to pantheism maintains that the cosmos is not sufficiently unified or singular to be divine. It is a diversity of many things, not a single thing. It isn't even properly an "it." Michael Levine (1994, ch.1) claims that, by definition, pantheism involves the view that all that there is forms a unity, and he maintains that it is among the central problems of pantheism to explicate just what sort of unity this is. Some pantheists have fulfilled this ambition by endorsing views of the cosmos that are often perceived by others as metaphysically extravagant, such as Spinoza's view that the cosmos as a whole is the only substance, and that what seem to us to be substances within the cosmos are simply modes of the cosmos. Certainly, these ways of specifying pantheism are not unavailable to advocates of the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism. But, again the point I wish to stress at present is that this Argument makes available for pantheists a way of engaging with the problem of unity that does not require specifying pantheism in this way.

To see why, return to what was said in the previous section on behalf of viewing the cosmos as the most proper object of awe and hence the most divine. What makes the cosmos the most proper object of awe is that it exhibits apparently directed complexity and beyondness *par excellence*. It is primarily the feature of apparently directed complexity that accounts for in what way the cosmos is unified on this account. It is unified by having laws and constants that govern the functioning of all of its components, and do so in such a way as to make the whole life-permitting. The sort of unity required for the cosmos to be divine is just this sort of unity, and needn't be more given the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism. Since this sort of unity is often ascribed to the universe independently of any kind of pantheistic or other spiritual commitment, it is a sort of unity that is likely to be viewed less objectionably by critics of pantheism. Notably, it has been a unity of much this that kind has in fact been the predominant view of pantheists historically (Levine 1994: 40). The Awe-some Argument for Pantheism in this way offers the pantheist a way of explicating her notion of divinity where it doesn't require an account

of the unity of the cosmos that is likely to be viewed suspiciously by her critics.

Turn finally to the problem of evil. The problem of evil for pantheists amounts to the difficulty of explaining how it could be that there is evil at all in the cosmos, if the cosmos is itself divine. As Mander puts it, "it is challenged that if God includes everything and God is perfect or good, then everything which exists ought to be perfect or good; a conclusion which seems wholly counter to our common experience that much in the world is very far from being so" (2016). Mander points out that one route pantheists have taken in response to this difficulty is to argue that apparent evils are merely apparent. *Sub specia aeternitatis* all there is in the cosmos is indeed good, and the objection is answered. Again, my contention here is that the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism offers another way out.

As with the problem of personality, the problem of evil for pantheism relies upon a conception of God that needn't be accepted by the pantheist who reaches pantheism via the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism. It relies upon a conception of God as perfect or good. But, whether God is perfect or good, given the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism, is something that must await empirical investigation of the objects of awe. When we investigate proper objects of awe, we do not find that they are perfect. So, the version of the problem of evil for pantheism based on this claim about the divine needn't move travelers on this route to pantheism. We *do* learn something about the goodness of the divine via attending to proper objects of awe, however. We learn that proper objects of awe exhibit complex functioning in the promotion of a good end. So, there must be *something* good about the cosmos if it is to be divine. Yet, the demand of goodness required is still much less than is needed to make the problem of evil for pantheists very worrisome. For, as we saw above, proper objects of awe can certainly have negative features. They may not even need to be all-things-considered valuable. Thus, the mere existence of evils within the cosmos is no threat to pantheism reached via this route.

There may be other versions of the problem of evil that still have some force against this version of pantheism. In particular, we might ask whether the evils of the cosmos (or comparable evils) are required in order for the cosmos to exhibit the complex functioning it does in the production of the valuable ends it does — if, in particular, the evils of the cosmos are required for the cosmos to sustain goods of living beings. The question is worth asking

since it may be that if the cosmos does not require the sorts of evils that exist in it in order to exhibit the features of properly awesome objects, then what is really most properly awesome is not the cosmos itself, but the cosmos *minus* these features. I say that this *may be* so, because whether it is so is to be determined empirically by whether our awe is in fact sensitive to these nuances. I leave it as an open question here whether this is how idealized awe operates.

If this is indeed how idealized awe operates, then there is a version of the problem of evil for pantheism of the kind advocated in this paper that retains some force. But there are two reasons to think that the force it possesses is not all that forceful. First, for pantheists of the kind in view here, evils of the kind that occur in the cosmos must at most be necessary for the cosmos to exhibit complex functioning in the production of a *good* end. By contrast, it is typically maintained that traditional theists must claim that the evils of the cosmos are required for the cosmos to exhibit *outweighingly valuable* goods — goods that outweigh in value the evils in question. Thus, the version of the problem of evil that perhaps retains force against pantheists of the sort in view here is a less demanding version of the problem than that which has force against traditional theists. Second, suppose that it turned out that evils of the sort that occur in the cosmos are not required for the cosmos to exhibit the complex functioning it does in producing life-permitting goods. This shouldn't lead to a complete abandonment of pantheism, but to a refinement of it. Those attracted to the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism shouldn't claim that there is no most divine thing; they should just claim that the most divine thing is not the cosmos as a whole, but the cosmos as a whole with some holes — holes at the sites of the relevant evils. Pantheism with holes — albeit at different sites — has in fact been defended by others, notably Peter Forrest (2007). So such a view is not without precedent.

Historically, the problems of personality, unity, and evil have exercised considerable force against pantheists. While there are various ways pantheists can respond to these problems, the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism offers distinctive resources which pantheists can employ to eliminate them or reduce their force, and this is an additional reason for the argument to be given a hearing.

## III. QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

I conclude this paper by exploring three critical questions about the Awesome Argument for Pantheism that help illustrate various ways in which the basic view sketched here can be developed in different, more detailed directions. These include more exotic versions of pantheism as well as views that resist easy categorization as pantheistic or not pantheistic.

The first question is, *What if the cosmos is a multiverse?* Throughout this paper, I have used the term cosmos without defining it. In using the term, I have primarily been conceiving of the cosmos as the universe — our universe. But it has become increasingly popular to think of the cosmos as not just a single universe, but a multiverse — a plurality of universes (see Kraay 2014). There are various competing conceptions of what such a multiverse would be like. And some authors have defended pantheistic or panentheistic views of one or another kind of multiverse (e.g., Nagasawa 2014). I'll briefly consider here what implications there would be for the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism if the cosmos is one or another kind of multiverse.

Two important questions for our purposes regarding multiverse theories are the following. First, in what way, if at all, are the universes within the multiverse connected? Second, to what extent do the other universes within the multiverse resemble our own universe, specifically with respect to having constants and laws that enable them to sustain life?

It is common for advocates of multiverse theories to claim that universes within the multiverse are spatiotemporally isolated, and indeed causally isolated (e.g., Turner 2003, Kraay 2010). There is no interaction between them, and if they are without a creator they share no common causes or effects. If this is how we conceive of the multiverse, then I think it is less likely that the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism will enable us to reach a pantheistic conclusion regarding the multiverse. The reason is that, if the universes within the multiverse are isolated in this way, then it is difficult to see how the whole could exhibit the sort of complex functioning that is a hallmark of awe-elicitors. Our own universe exhibits the requisite complex functioning via the causal interactions of its components, and it is difficult to imagine that complex functioning in the production of a valuable end can be achieved without this.

Other multiverse theories permit interaction between the universes within the multiverse. Some theories allow, for example, for universes to generate fur-

ther universes — even in such a way as to pass down heritable traits (cf. Smolin 1997, Draper 2004). Other theories appeal to a creator of the multiverse, who unites all of the universes within the multiverse at least by creating each one (e.g., O'Connor 2008, Kraay 2010, Turner 2003). These theories are more likely to allow larger parts of the multiverse, if not the whole, to be divine, given the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism. For, much as processes of biological evolution can properly give rise to awe, processes of universe evolution could; and much as an ordered natural landscape can properly give rise to awe, an ordering of universes could. So, whether the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism retains its persuasive force on the assumption that the cosmos is a multiverse depends in part on what kind of multiverse we have, and in particular on whether the universes within the multiverse are causally isolated.

The implications of the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism are also influenced by the intrinsic characteristics of the universes within the multiverse. On some multiverse theories, very many — even infinitely many — possible universes exist, with vastly different constants and laws, with only very few universes able to sustain life (e.g., Smolin 1997). On other theories, only universes with intrinsic features making them relevantly similar to our own in value exist (e.g., Kraay 2010). These intrinsic features of universes within the multiverse will have implications for the extent to which individual universes are proper objects of awe, regardless of whether the multiverse as a whole is. It could be, for instance, that the multiverse as a whole is not a proper object of awe, but that many or all universes within it are, leading to a kind of polytheistic pantheism (cf. Forrest 2016, Leslie 2014).

Move to a second question. Several times now I have mentioned the possibility of a creator of the divine cosmos, whether that cosmos is a single universe or a multiverse. It is time to face head-on the question: *What if there is a creator of the cosmos?* It might seem that a pantheist motivated by the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism is put in an awkward position if there is such a creator. For, such a pantheist would presumably maintain that the cosmos is the most divine thing, and yet this most divine thing has a creator. To complicate matters slightly, we might even imagine that the creator is the sort of God envisioned in the Abrahamic faiths, a God viewed by many as a proper object of worship. On such a view, pantheism is hardly a robust alternative to traditional theism; it is some kind of variant of it.

My response to these observations is to bite the bullet, so to speak, insofar as there is any bullet to bite. It is true that pantheism is sometimes presented as an alternative to traditional theism (e.g., Levine 1994). But, it is also common for pantheism of some form to be combined with traditional theistic commitments. For example, Peter Forrest combines a pantheistic conception of the universe as God's body with traditional theism. He writes, "The romantic nature religion of poets (Wordsworth, or in a more Christian way Gerard Manley Hopkins) is quite compatible . . . with the Abrahamic tradition. The divine narrative identity can give such nature worship emotionally engaging detail" (2016: 35). While I haven't addressed worship of the cosmos in this paper, the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism does provide a similar way to combine traditional theistic commitments with at least a *divinization* of the cosmos.

True enough, this combination of views does raise a perplexing question — namely, how could it be that the cosmos, rather than the perfect being who creates the cosmos, is most divine? But this question seems to me a fecund opportunity for reflection and ingenuity, rather than an stunting obstacle to theoretical exploration. One way of approaching the question, for example, is to view the creator's creations as expressions, even effusions, of the creator. They are the only way whereby that creator is ever encountered. There is, on such a view, nothing else to encounter that is any more divine than the cosmos. It is in this sense that the cosmos is most fully divine. We may properly view it as an intriguing feature to the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism that it is a route to pantheism that invites (though doesn't demand) speculation of this sort.

The final question I will address overlaps with the previous. The question is: *What if the most proper object of awe is more than the cosmos?* The question perhaps arises most naturally when we observe that many of the proper objects of awe are processes that involve the exercise of agency. For example, when I am awed by a magnificent artistic performance, I am awed not only by the physical movements of the artist and their effects, but by the exercises of creative intellect deployed in this endeavor. This total complex, including the exercises of creative intellect, is a fitting object of awe: it is an in-principle producible object that outstrips my own productive capacities, and the whole exhibits complex functioning in the production of a valuable end. Suppose now that we shift attention to awe for the cosmos, and that we are tempted to view the cosmos as the result of a process exhibiting similar

agency — perhaps the agency of the sort of God identified in the Abrahamic faiths. If awe in the two cases is to be parallel, then it is tempting to think that the proper object of awe in this latter case will be more than the cosmos as this is naturally understood. It will include the exhibitions of creative intellect undertaken by the Abrahamic God in the production of the cosmos, as well as the cosmos itself. These exhibitions of intellect are themselves in-principle producible, but it is certainly unnatural to think of them as elements of the cosmos itself. In this case, the kind of view generated by the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism is perhaps ultimately best classified as pan*en*theistic. On this view, the cosmos is a part of the most divine thing, which also includes exhibitions of agency on the part of the Abrahamic God — though not the Abrahamic God itself.

This section has explored three questions which highlight ways in which the Awe-some Argument for Pantheism can be further developed to yield more exotic versions of pantheism or even views that resist easy classification as pantheistic or not pantheistic. We have seen, in particular, that the Awe-some Argument may provide a route to multiverse pantheism, polytheistic pantheism, pantheism that incorporates elements of traditional theism, and even panentheism. In this way, the Awe-some Argument proves not only to have potential as a novel motivator of traditional pantheism, but to motivate exploration of a variety of unusual and intriguing approaches to the divine.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

De Cruz, Helen, and Johan De Smedt. 2014. *A Natural History of Natural Theology: The Cognitive Science of Theology and Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Draper, Paul. 2004. "Cosmic Fine-Tuning and Terrestrial Suffering: Parallel Problems for Naturalism and Theism". *American Philosophical Quarterly* 41: 311-321.

Forrest, Peter. 2016. "The Personal Pantheist Conception of God". In *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the* Divine, edited by Andrei Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, 21-40. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Heschel, Abraham. 1955. *God in Search of Man*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Keltner, Dacher, and Jonathan Haidt. 2003. "Approaching Awe: A Moral, Spiritual, and Aesthetic Emotion". *Cognition and Emotion* 17, no 2: 297-314. doi:10.1080/02699930302297.

Kraay, Klaas. 2010. "Theism, Possible Worlds, and the Multiverse". *Philosophical Studies* 147: 355-68. doi:10.1007/s11098-008-9289-y.

—. 2014. "Introduction". In *God and the Multiverse: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives*, edited by Klaas Kraay, 1-24. London: Routledge.

Kristjánsson, Kristján. 2017. "Awe: An Aristotelian Analysis of a non-Aristotelian Virtuous Emotion". *Philosophia* 45: 125-42. doi:10.1007/s11406-016-9741-8.

Leftow, Brian. 2016. "Naturalistic Pantheism". In *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, edited by Andrei Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, 64-90. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Leslie, John. 2014. "God and Many Universes". In *God and the Multiverse: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives*, edited by Klaas Kraay, 192-210. London: Routledge.

Levine, Michael. 1994. *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Conception of Deity*. London: Routledge.

Mander, William. 2016. "Pantheism". *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pantheism/.

Manson, Neil. 2009. "The Fine-Tuning Argument". *Philosophy Compass* 4, no 1: 271-86. doi:10.1111/j.1747-9991.2008.00188.x.

Nagasawa, Yujin. 2014. "Multiverse Pantheism". In *God and the Multiverse: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives*, edited by Klaas Kraay, 177-191. London: Routledge.

O'Connor, Timothy. 2008. *Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Peterson, Christopher, and Martin Seligman. 2004. *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Putnam, Hilary. 1981. *Reason, Truth, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Roberts, Robert. 2003. *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Saroglou, Vassilis, Coralie Buxant, and Jonathan Tilquin. 2008. "Positive Emotions as Leading to Religion and Spirituality". *Journal of Positive Psychology* 3, no 3: 165-73. doi:10.1080/17439760801998737.

Shiota, Michelle, Dacher Keltner, and Amanda Mossman. 2007. "The Nature of Awe: Elicotors, Appraisals, and Effects on Self-Concept". *Cognition and Emotion* 21, no 5: 944-63. doi:10.1080/02699930600923668.

Smolin, Lee. 1997. *The Life of the Cosmos*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Turner, Donald. 2003. "The Many-Uiverses Solution to the Problem of Evil". In *The existence of God*, edited by Richard Gale and Alexander Pruss, 1-17. Farnham: Ashgate.

Valdesolo, Piercarlo, and Jesse Graham. 2014. "Awe, Uncertainty, and Agency Detection". *Psychological Science* 25, no 1: 170-8.

Valdesolo, Piercarlo, Jun Park, and Sarah Gottlieb. 2016. "Awe and Scientific Explanation". *Emotion.* Advance online publication. doi:10.1037/emo0000213.

Valdesolo, Piercarlo, Andrew Shtulman, and Andrew Baron. 2017. "Science is Awe-Some: The Emotional Antecedents of Science Learning". *Emotion Review* 9, no 3: 1-7. doi:10.1177/1754073916673212.

Van Cappellen, Patty and Vassilis Saroglou. 2012. "Awe Activates Religious and Spiritual Feelings and Behavioral Intentions". *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 4, no 3: 223-36. doi:10.1037/a0025986.

Vartanian, Oshin, and Vinod Goel. 2004. "Emotion Pathways in the Brain Mediate Aesthetic Experience". *Bulletin of Psychology and the Arts* 5, no 1: 37-42.

Wettstein, Howard. 2012. *The Significance of Religious Experience*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Wilson, Edward. 1984. *Biophilia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.

Zagzebski, Linda. 2017. *Exemplarist Moral Theory*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.