

# On overcoming the culture-nature divide: a panpsychist proposal

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## On Overcoming the Culture-Nature Divide: A Panpsychist Proposal

### Abstract

Within the recently published volumes, *Knowing Creation* and *Christ and the Created Order*, several authors argue that the theological category of creation can help contemporary society overcome the modern, and ecologically harmful, bifurcation between nature and culture. This paper supplements this important argument by showing how theological panpsychism, an ontology inspired by current debates within analytic philosophy of mind, can help theologians articulate a metaphysically robust and Trinitarian doctrine of creation.

**Keywords:** Creation, Panpsychism, Nature, Culture, Environment.

### Introduction

The recent twin volumes *Knowing Creation* and *Christ and the Created Order* edited by Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas H. McCall bring scholars from biblical studies, theology, philosophy and natural science, together to discuss how investigation into the external world might be considered under the matrix of ‘creation’, over which Jesus Christ is Lord. One argument that emerges as a red thread throughout these volumes, and is representative of a wider trend within contemporary research on the doctrine of creation, is that ‘creation’ should be considered a category that supersedes, or reunites, any nature-vs.-culture bifurcation. Creation is made through Christ in whom all things, natural and cultural, hold together (Col 1:15-17). The first section of this paper will unpack how the categories of ‘nature’, ‘culture’ and ‘creation’ are defined within this argument. It is seen that, within a broadly Aristotelian tradition, the paradigm of ‘creation’ presupposes that ‘culture’ is always already located and subsumed within ‘nature’, but not *vice versa*. The resulting theology of creation requires that the world be interpreted, heard, and encountered as pregnant with purpose and meaning. It is not the intention of this paper to critique this argument, but to follow its implications and use philosophy of mind to facilitate a robust articulation of this encultured natural world.

The environmental devastation that the division between nature and culture has wrought demands that theologians seriously consider any tools from other disciplines which help support the identification of the world as creation. One such tool can be found in theories within philosophy of mind that seek to overcome parallel bifurcations between matter and mind, and even between monism and dualism. Although not the only such philosophy considered in these volumes, panpsychism is one such theory. Panpsychism has been undergoing a revival of

attention within analytic philosophy of mind in the last few decades and it is the argument of this paper that a theologically rich version of panpsychism provides the best ontological platform for overcoming the nature/culture divide. The second section of this paper summarises what is meant by panpsychism and argues for the possibility of a ‘theological panpsychism’, which is different from its naturalistic, pantheist, panentheistic, and Process alternatives. The third section then completes the argument by showing how theological panpsychism facilitates a doctrine of creation that holds nature and culture together by undergirding a cultic and perichoretic vision of the psychophysical world. This paper concludes that theologians, such as those within *Knowing Creation* and *Christ and the Created Order*, who wish to employ the doctrine of creation as an antidote to the destructive nature/culture bifurcation in Western modernity should be open to receiving aid from theological panpsychism.

### **The Encultural Nature of Creation**

One contemporary theologian who has championed the idea that creation unites nature and culture is Simon Oliver, whose opening chapter of *Knowing Creation* is my launching pad. Oliver articulates creation *ex nihilo* as a doctrine that is best understood with, if not tied to, an Aristotelian powers-ontology. It is only in conjunction with the aid of Aristotelian metaphysics, for Oliver, that the full benefit of the concept of ‘creation’ as uniting nature and culture can be seen. According to Aristotle, ‘nature’ refers to those things that have ‘a nature’, that is that have “an intrinsic principle of change towards the actualisation of fulfilment of that nature”.<sup>1</sup> On this view, the definition of ‘nature’ is fundamentally purpose-driven and empowered from within. ‘Culture’, by contrast, is the world of artifice that can only mimic the purposefulness of nature as natural creators, such as human beings, impose purpose and meaning from without. What we have here is a fundamental difference between the types of things God creates, which we call ‘nature’, and the types of things humanity can make, which we call ‘culture’. It is because human-made ‘culture’ is a subset of God-made ‘nature’ that both nature and culture participate in and are subsumed under the more fundamental category of ‘creation’, which Oliver defines as the primordial giftedness of all things.

Oliver, Christoph Schwöbel, Robert C. Koons, and William M.R. Simpson all agree that with the fall of Aristotelian scholasticism and the rise of corpuscular mechanism in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, the philosophy underpinning the doctrine of creation was lost. For

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Oliver, “Every Good and Perfect Gift is from Above: Creation *Ex Nihilo* before Nature and Culture,” in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 27.

Oliver, this loss is primarily located in the reversal of the Aristotelian priority of nature over culture, such that Christian theology became unable to bind both within the overarching category of creation. This reversal is captured in the interpretation of nature as a clockwork mechanism, mimicking an artefact of human culture. Schwöbel also decries the metaphor of nature as a clockwork machine that is known through quantitative measurements of noncommunicative forces because it has displaced the metaphor of ‘the book of nature’ whose “natural signs” (to use C. Stephan Evan’s term) requires the book of Scripture and the practices of the church as hermeneutical keys.<sup>2</sup> As James K.A. Smith argues, it is when we falsely identify science with ‘nature’, rather than as a cultural institution or set of cultural practices, that our academies become overrun with the scientism and naturalism that are opposed to theology; and so, again, ‘creation’ is forgotten.<sup>3</sup>

At the heart of the reversal in priority is the split of mind from matter, such that nature becomes the raw material for human culture, empty of purpose and meaning in and of itself, silently waiting to be moulded by some external mind, human or divine. As Norman Wirzba writes the separation between body and soul, “extends to a separation between nature and culture, which in turn underwrites a separation between creatures and their places.”<sup>4</sup> He goes on to argue that this priority of culture in opposition to nature has had the effect in theology of “locating and confining Christ’s work in the human realm”, thus forgetting Jesus’ role as Creator.<sup>5</sup>

A number of authors point to how this reversal and rupture between nature and culture, as well as the material and the mental, has precipitated humanity’s exploitation of the environment. In addition, Oliver points out that this bifurcation persists even in our well-intended responses to lessen the environmental crisis, which vacillate between submitting to romantic notions of ‘pure nature’ and extending our cultural control to save the environment.<sup>6</sup> The solution, Oliver argues, is to return to the category of ‘creation’, and emphasise the primordial and unilateral gift from the Father. Creation is not a gift given to humanity, as if we stood apart from ‘nature’ receiving a

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<sup>2</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, “We Are All God’s Vocabulary: The Idea of Creation as a Speech-Act of the Trinitarian God and Its Significance for the Dialogue between Theology and Sciences,” in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 53-54. Stephan C. Evans, “Are We Hardwired to Believe in God? Natural Signs for God, Evolution, and the *Sensus Divinitatis*,” in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 195-204. James K.A. Smith, “Our Chalcedonian Moment: Christological Imagination for Scientific Challenges,” in *Christ and the Created Order: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 192-93.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, “Our Chalcedonian Moment,” 185-87.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Wirzba, “Creation through Christ,” in *Christ and the Created Order: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 46.

<sup>5</sup> Wirzba, “Creation through Christ,” 47.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver, “Every Good,” 30. Cf. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 257-67.

material object to use and play with. Creation is a gift that establishes the being and existence even of the recipient, which includes humanity, in such a way that creatures are able to receive further gifts; creation is “a gift of a gift to a gift.”<sup>7</sup> Creation is a gift that keeps on receiving. Therefore, Oliver goes on to say, for creation to be fundamentally itself, creatures must respond in thanks and praise.<sup>8</sup> Creation as a unilateral gift, then, opens up the possibility of a reciprocal Creator-creature conversation.

The portrayal of reciprocity between Creator and creature as a form of communication is a major theme for several authors. Christoph Schwöbel’s chapter reflects upon the ability of the cultural metaphors we use to characterise ‘nature’ to “act on us” and “change the way things are for us and how we are to relate to them”.<sup>9</sup> From here Schwöbel describes ‘creation’ as God’s “speech-act”, a metaphor that holds cultural *meaning* and natural *being* together, and demands hermeneutical interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Creation is the “address of the Creator,” Schwöbel argues citing Ps 19:1-4, that simultaneously “invests creation with the capacity to respond to God in praise.”<sup>11</sup> As Susan Grove Eastman writes, this gift “proceeds from the desire of the giver, not the capacities of ‘fittingness’ of the receivers.”<sup>12</sup> The divine presence and speech-act is a gift that creates an I-Thou conversation, such that “not only human beings but the whole of creation” *speaks* God’s glory such that, “nothing is without language (1 Cor. 14:10b).”<sup>13</sup> This is revealed, Schwöbel continues, in the very materiality of creation as the Word becomes a material body and binds the Spirit’s activity to that material body, “negating all dualisms between mind and matter, Spirit and flesh”.<sup>14</sup>

The use of creaturely ‘speech’ to negate the dualisms of culture-nature, mind-matter, human-nonhuman, is perhaps most fully explored by Mark Harris in his chapter on the “woefully-neglected” Scriptural references to the voices of the nonhuman, even inanimate, features of

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<sup>7</sup> Oliver, “Every Good,” 31.

<sup>8</sup> Oliver, “Every Good,” 40.

<sup>9</sup> Schwöbel, “We Are All,” 48-49.

<sup>10</sup> Schwöbel “We Are All,” 51, 57.

<sup>11</sup> Schwöbel “We Are All,” 50.

<sup>12</sup> Susan Grove Eastman, “Knowing and Being Known: Interpersonal Cognition and the Knowledge of God in Paul’s Letters,” in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 164.

<sup>13</sup> Schwöbel, “We Are All,” 51. Eastman, “Knowing and Being Known,” 169. cf. Paul K. Moser, “Convictional Knowledge, Science, and the Spirit of Christ,” in *Christ and the Created Order: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 207. The need for human beings to recognise “the ‘thou-ness’ in all beings,” is a central part of eco-feminist theologies of creation also. See, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 87. Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How we should love nature* (London: SCM Press, 1997), 1ff.

<sup>14</sup> Schwöbel, “We Are All,” 62.

nature.<sup>15</sup> Since these references are mostly found in Hebrew poetry the reader might be tempted to dismiss such passages as “poetic fancy”.<sup>16</sup> Harris, however, warns against this “hasty anthropocentrism”, which is underpinned by the “massive inconsistency of treating nature naturalistically but not humans.”<sup>17</sup> This, again, reveals the tendency to bifurcate the natural and the cultural, which is to be resisted. Now, *of course*, the Scriptural passages that attribute speech to the nonhuman world employ poetic personification and metaphor but, as Schwöbel unpacks, such use of language is not meaningless, without referent, or without implications for our knowing and acting in the world. Instead, the use of metaphor may point “to a reality embodied in the physical world, one that contemporary Western minds are not usually trained to comprehend.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Harris highlights that the Psalmist articulates this very problem of metaphorical realism in Ps 19:1-4:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world (NRSV).

We should neither suppose that the Psalmist, then, was expecting to audibly hear a literal human voice echo throughout the starry sky, nor should we then dismiss these passages as not telling us something important about how the author understands the ontology and purpose of creation.<sup>19</sup> For despite having neither voice nor words, the author still insists that nonhuman, inanimate nature praises God.

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Harris, “‘The Trees of the Field Shall Clap Their Hands’ (Isaiah 55:12): What Does It Mean to Say That a Tree Praises God?,” in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 288.

<sup>16</sup> Harris, “‘The Trees’,” 291-92.

<sup>17</sup> Harris “‘The Tree’,” 304.

<sup>18</sup> Howard N. Wallace, “‘*Jubilare Deo omnis terra*’: God and Earth in Psalm 65,” in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, ed. Norman C. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 63.

<sup>19</sup> For a classic text on this question see Terrene E. Fretheim, “Nature’s Praise of God in the Psalms,” *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987): 16-30. More discussions can be found in Richard Bauckham, “Joining Nature’s Praise of God,” *Ecotology* 7 (2002): 45-59; Dominic Coad, “Creation’s praise of God: A proposal for a theology of the non-human creation,” *Theology* (May/June 2009): 181-189; and Rachel Muers. “The Holy Spirit, the voices of nature and environmental prophecy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67 (2014): 323-339.

## Theological Panpsychism

Thus far, I have reconstructed the argument from across these two volumes that the concept of ‘creation’, as primordial gift and a divine speech-act that creates the possibility for reciprocity, holds the categories ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ together, by viewing the natural world as intrinsically encultured. Within these volumes panpsychism receives occasional attention. In addition to Mark Harris’s more explicit consideration of a panpsychist interpretation of Scripture, Marilyn McCord Adams notes and welcomes the turn of prominent philosophers away from materialism to panpsychism, and there some discussion of the neighbouring (but not identical) position of animism in Norman Wirzba’s chapter.<sup>20</sup> But what is panpsychism, and should theologians seriously be considering it as part of the doctrine of creation? The following section will define panpsychism, demarcate it from neighbouring positions in philosophy of mind, and defensively show its neutrality with regards to philosophy of religion.

‘Panpsychism’, is a compound word that can be translated to mean that everything (pan) is mental (psyche), which is not identical to the claims of animism, vitalism or idealism. A popular definition amongst contemporary panpsychists is that “mentality is fundamental and ubiquitous in the natural world”.<sup>21</sup> To say that mentality is *fundamental* is to say that it can neither be explained nor reduced to anything non-mental. It is this fundamentality claim that differentiates panpsychism from physicalism and emergentism, both of which claim that physicality alone is fundamental to reality. One route to panpsychism, common amongst contemporary analytic philosophers, is to become incredulous to the possibility of mentality reducing into or emerging out of that which is entirely non-mental. Instead, it is argued, the potential or ingredients for such emergence or combination, must be found within the basic structures of reality.<sup>22</sup> Thus, most definitions of panpsychism presuppose the existence of the material world and merely add mentality to this physicalist picture; “the view that the basic physical constituents of the universe

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<sup>20</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, “Sanctifying Matter,” in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 172, n.4. Wirzba, “Creation through Christ”, 48. A similar welcome for further engagement between the panpsychism of Galen Strawson and the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, has been made in Janet Soskice, “Why *Creation ex nihilo* for Theology Today?,” in *Creation ex nihilo: Origin, Development, Contemporary Challenges*, eds. Gary A. Anderson and Markus Bockmuehl (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2018), 50-51.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Goff, William Seager & Sean Allen-Hermanson, “Panpsychism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia* (Winter 2017), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/panpsychism/>.

<sup>22</sup> As panpsychist philosopher Sam Coleman characterises this argument (sometimes known as The Genetic Argument) for panpsychism, “there must be some secret properties of matter with a direct connection to consciousness, such that when you put matter together in the right way, as a brain (and perhaps a body too), you get a conscious being.” Sam Coleman, “The Evolution of Nagel’s Panpsychism,” *Klesis* 41 (2018) :185.

have mental properties”, or “physical nature is composed of individuals, each of which is to some degree sentient . . . [has] experience, or in a broad sense, consciousness.”<sup>23</sup>

What is often overlooked in contemporary philosophical literature is that, if one were only to define panpsychism as the claim that mentality is fundamental, then panpsychism would not yet been demarcated from traditional substance dualism or hylomorphism, both of which also state that mentality can neither be explained nor reduced to anything non-mental. Both traditional substance dualists and hylomorphists tend to be theists because the explanation for the mentality of organisms is most often that God directly bestows mentality, as either souls or forms, to the appropriate organism such that to have this particular type of soul or form is fundamental and essential to the organism in question. As Robert C. Koons in *Knowing Creation* writes, for a hylomorphist “there are metaphysically fundamental entities at multiple levels of scale.”<sup>24</sup> By contrast, panpsychists typically hold to fundamental monism; the principle that there is only one fundamental level of reality. This precludes explanations which posit that God creates fundamental phenomena, like minds, *ex nihilo* after the initial *ex nihilo* act of creation. This is not because God is considered unable to construct the world in this piecemeal fashion, since a panpsychist can hold that God’s original and once-and-for-all act of creation was out of nothing and so secure the freedom and omnipotence of God absolutely. Instead, it is the principle of fundamental monism, which is a principle regarding creation and not one that limits God, that precludes multiple origins for fundamental phenomena. Fundamental monism is, when viewed theologically, a way of claiming that when God created the universe, God created all the fundamental features of the universe at once. And thus, if mentality is fundamental for a panpsychist, it is also likely to be ubiquitous. Panpsychism then is best considered a form of neutral monism, or property dualism, or possibly a ‘unified substance dualism’, whereby the material and mental are always found together and cannot be separated.

How can physicality and mentality be so unified? To modern neo-Cartesian definitions of ‘mental’ and ‘physical’, panpsychism seems counterintuitive, perhaps even contradictory. Yet, as Galen Strawson points out, “we have *no* good reason to think that we know anything about the physical that gives us any reason to find any problem in the idea that mental phenomena are physical phenomena.”<sup>25</sup> This is not because the mind can be reduced to the functional

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Nagel, *Moral Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 181. Timothy L.S. Sprigge, “Panpsychism,” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Taylor and Francis: 1998), <<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/panpsychism/v-1>>.

<sup>24</sup> Robert C. Koons, “Knowing Nature: Aristotle, God and the Quantum,” in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas H. McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 220.

<sup>25</sup> Galen Strawson, *Real Materialism and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 20, 39.



interaction of physical parts, but because even the physical – properly understood – cannot be exhaustively described by physics.<sup>26</sup> This is something theologians have been arguing for a long time, and is a core part of the central argument discussed in this paper, that nature is encultured, filled with meaning and purpose, and, therefore, best known when it is known as creation.

Within this broad definition of panpsychism there are many specific versions. Panpsychist theories can be found throughout Western philosophy since the pre-Hellenistic period as well as in the lively debate currently going on within analytic philosophy of mind.<sup>27</sup> The differences between the specific versions of panpsychism currently debated can be distilled into three pivotal questions. All panpsychists must choose an answer to each question, and the combination of answers one elects determines the variety of panpsychism that a philosopher can be said to hold. These questions are: (1) What sought of mentality is it that is posited as fundamental? (2) Where is the fundamental level of reality? (3) What type of relation holds between fundamental mentality and the type of mentality enjoyed by humanity? This paper does not have the space to explore the resulting variations of panpsychism but will discuss the first two of these pivotal questions in order to outline important features of, what I call, theological panpsychism.<sup>28</sup>

In answer to the first question it is important to note that no contemporary panpsychist (and a very few historical panpsychists) posit self-consciousness, rationality, emotion, free-will or other complex mentality functions that humans enjoy as fundamental. Instead, responses to this question can be placed in three categories; subject panpsychists, panexperientialists, and panprotopsychists. Subject panpsychism hold that there are basic subjects with raw experiences at the fundamental level; that is a first-person perspective such that there is something it is like to

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<sup>26</sup> Whilst the experiential properties of mentality can be known (not perfectly, but) directly and immediately such that we have a secure intuitive grasp on their reality and nature, the non-experiential properties of matter are a step removed from our experience (since, they are by definition, non-experiential). In light of this asymmetry, humanity employs the physical sciences to describe the world in largely mathematical and quantifiable terms and this has produced great predictive and instrumental success. However, we have no good reason for thinking that such a description is exhaustive of the nature of matter, indeed given the difficulty of understanding the mental on such a reductionist framework we have compelling reason for thinking that physics is capturing only a part of reality. Moreover, even the discoveries of physics themselves, particularly since the rise of quantum mechanics in the early twentieth-century, point towards a view of the world that is not made up of solid, inert, grainy particles, but is a swirl of forces, energy, fields and “an ethereally radiant vibrancy.” When philosophers complain that the mind could not arise out of the brain, “being a hunk of matter in space,” or just “soggy grey matter,” it is not merely the reduction of the mind that is at stake, but the unjustified reduction of matter. Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999), 115. Susan Greenfield, BBC 21 June 1997. cf. Strawson, *Real Materialism*, 42ff.

<sup>27</sup> For a historical survey, see David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005) and contemporary overview, see Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla, *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> For a more thorough exposition of panpsychism see, Joanna Leidenhag, “Deploying Panpsychism for the Demarcation of Panentheism,” in *Panentheism and Panpsychism: Philosophy of Religion Meets Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Godehard Brüntrup, Benedikt Paul Göcke, Ludwig Jaskolla. Paderborn (Germany: Mentis Verlag, forthcoming).

be an electron (or some other fundamental entity). Panexperientialists are typically Process philosophers who also posit the same qualitative raw experience, sometimes with additional capacities such as spontaneity, but without a subject to enjoy these experiences. Lastly, panprotopsychists argue that there are no phenomenal properties (subjects or experiences), but only that which is necessary for phenomenal properties to later emerge, perhaps qualities or intentional states.<sup>29</sup>

Since I am unsure what it means for experiences to exist without subjects, and since proto-phenomenal properties are a fairly mysterious category that is not clearly any more fit as a substrate of consciousness than the typical emergentist's physical substrate, subject panpsychists appear to me to be in the least-worst position. Although this subjectivity is more basic than can really be imagined or articulated, what subject panpsychism additionally offers is a basic interiority to all things. The Interiority Argument for panpsychism is one of the oldest, and it states that mentality is part of the indwelling powers that form the quiddity of things and structure causation throughout the universe. That is, panpsychism is tied to an Aristotelian powers view of causation.

Due to the commitment of fundamental monism, the second question can only have two answers. The fundamental level of reality is either at the micro- or the macro-level; that is, either the basic building-blocks of reality are fundamental and all is built from them, or the universe as a whole should be taken as fundamental and all else is an aspect or part of it. The latter view, known as cosmopsychism, is a position with an increasing number of adherents, and yet it is still safe to say that the majority of panpsychists assume the former, that the basic building-blocks of reality are what is to be thought of as fundamental. This presupposition arises out of, as David Chalmers writes, a desire not only to “take consciousness seriously”, but also to “take science seriously”.<sup>30</sup> Thomas Nagel's panpsychism may also be characterised as resulting from a commitment to both mental realism and scientific credibility, particularly a desire to find an explanation of consciousness that fits within a general – but not materialist neo-Darwinian – theory of evolution.<sup>31</sup> As Rowan Williams writes, “human intelligence itself is grounded in the long continues of animate life and its evolution, not something parachuted in to the created

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<sup>29</sup> Sam Coleman, “Panpsychism and Neutral Monism: How to Make Up One's Mind,” in *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 249-282 and Karl Pfeifer, “Pantheism and panpsychism,” in *Alternative Conceptions of God: Essays on the metaphysics of the divine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 41-49.

<sup>30</sup> David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search for a Fundamental Theory of Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), xii-xiii.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

order”.<sup>32</sup> Chalmers’ argument runs that if consciousness is “a scientific subject matter”, then although it “is not open to investigation by the usual methods”, it can still be explained by the usual scientific structure; namely, “a few fundamental entities connected by fundamental laws.”<sup>33</sup> As such, there need be “nothing particularly spiritual or mystical” about fundamental *phenomenal* entities and *psychophysical* laws.<sup>34</sup> In keeping with this concern about creeping spirituality, Chalmers used to refer to his position as “naturalistic dualism”.<sup>35</sup>

Far from threatening Christian theology, I suggest that Chalmers’ naturalisation of panpsychism, as a kind of ‘dualism all the way down’, is an important step in constructing theological panpsychism. This is because Chalmers’ description of consciousness as a purely natural, or created, phenomenon provides an important buffer against mischaracterisations of the soul as ‘divine’, a little piece of God, or autonomously immortal.<sup>36</sup> If consciousness were a divinely transcendent phenomenon or slice of uncreated light, then any realist philosophy of mind would slide towards emergent theism, panentheism, pantheism, or polytheism. Consciousness, in Christian theology, must remain a created phenomenon of creaturely minds that, in keeping with the principle of *creatio ex nihilo*, neither emanates from God nor collectively constitutes a divine mind or world-soul. By arguing for fundamental consciousness as “just another natural phenomenon”, Chalmers points the way forward for a Christian panpsychism to posit creaturely or created finite minds throughout the universe as fundamental and possibly ubiquitous, without implying that these minds are identical to God or in any way constitutive of divinity.

This is not to say that panpsychism *should* be combined with metaphysical or methodological naturalism. As a position that is realist about mentality, I am not sure that ‘naturalistic panpsychism’ is, in fact, a tenable position; at least not on any defensible definition of naturalism I am yet to come across. Yet, Chalmers’ argument illustrates that panpsychism does not entail any specific doctrine of God. This is particularly important for this paper, since panpsychism has

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<sup>32</sup> Rowan Williams, *Christ The Heart of Creation*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 223.

<sup>33</sup> David J. Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Hard Problem of Consciousness,” in *Explaining Consciousness: The Hard Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20; Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, xiv. Chalmers makes the comparison to James Clerk Maxwell’s idea that electromagnetic forces had to be taken as fundamental, as well as positing new laws governing these forces, in order to explain the apparently spooky effect of electric and magnetic phenomena. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 127. Thomas Nagel makes a very similar case for the scientific status for panpsychism when he writes, “Major scientific advances often require the creation of new concepts, postulating unobservable elements of reality that are needed to explain how natural regularities that initially appear accidental are in fact necessary.” Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 42. For more on panpsychism and the science-religion dialogue, see Joanna Leidenhag, “The Revival of Panpsychism and its Relevance for the Science-Religion Dialogue,” *Theology & Science* 17, n.10 (2019): 90-106.

<sup>34</sup> Chalmers, “Facing Up,” 20.

<sup>35</sup> Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 128.

<sup>36</sup> Skrbina, for example, writes that panpsychism is incompatible with monotheistic religion because, “In all monotheistic Western religions, humans alone possess a *divine and immortal soul*.” David Skrbina, “Panpsychism in history: An overview,” in *Mind That Abides*, ed. David Skrbina (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009), 1.

historical associations with pantheism, panentheism, and Process theism.<sup>37</sup> Yet, as should be clear by now and contrary to these three historical associations, it is perfectly possible for a panpsychist to hold to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and posit an absolute divide between Creator and uncreated, whilst holding that no such strict divide exists between the material and the mental aspects of creation. Theological panpsychism, then, imagines a creation not only as gift, but as a gift filled with mentality, and so with meaning, value, and purpose down to its most basic fundamental structures; creation as a gift that can keep on receiving the presence of God.

### **Towards a Panpsychist Creation**

So far, I have introduced panpsychism, and argued for its compatibility with the traditional monotheisms of the Abrahamic faiths and the *ex nihilo* doctrine. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is essential for a view of creation that overcomes the bifurcation between nature and culture, but it leaves unanswered the question as to what type of creation God has, in fact, created out of nothing. By uniting mind and matter, panpsychism goes a long way towards providing an ontological underpinning to ‘creation’ as a matrix that unifies nature and culture. The following section develops this theological panpsychism by exploring a more explicitly Trinitarian doctrine of creation. In so doing, this section completes the argument of this paper that panpsychism should be an ontology that contemporary theologians see as a potential ally.

Above, Simon Oliver’s chapter in *Knowing Creation* was used to explain how the category of creation might nullify the modern bifurcation between nature and culture. Oliver’s argument relied on an Aristotelian powers-ontology, whereby God creates *ex nihilo* creatures who have a nature such that the world is full of intrinsic powers, including the power for humans to construct a variety of amazing cultures and cultural artefacts. God creates being in general as well as the intrinsic powers with which particular beings practice meaning-making activities. In this doctrine of creation, culture is located within the natural, such that nature always already contains elements of culture. This power-based ontology is found not only in hylomorphism, but also in panpsychism where psyche forms the basis for interiority and powers, not only for humanity but for all creatures. Not only is panpsychism equally accommodating to a powers-ontology as hylomorphism, but it has the additional benefit of locating intrinsic powers alongside a fundamental receptivity. This is not only the reception of being, but the reception of God’s presence as an experiential phenomenon, and with this divine address and divine presence, the

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<sup>37</sup> See, Joanna Leidenhag, “Building God’s Mind? A Study on the Relationship between Panpsychism and Panentheism,” *Sophia: International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-018-0688-z> and Leidenhag, “Deploying Panpsychism”.

reception of meaning. Such an ontology provides a strong basis for concepts such as a God who “nudges” creation in certain evolutionary directions and a view of divine action that “cannot help being personal because God essentially acts through intellect and will.”<sup>38</sup>

When Schwöbel writes that God invests “not only humans beings but the whole of creation” with the capacity to experience the divine presence and respond to God in praise, this can be taken with the same metaphorical realism that the Hebrew poets employed throughout the Psalms and the prophets, and which can be found in Luke 19:40 and Rom 8:19-22.<sup>39</sup> Whilst non-human creatures may not speak in audio or in sentences, they may still praise and proclaim, lament and groan, and respond to the command and call to worship. Modern Western sensibilities will likely find this too far-fetched, but as Eastman warned in the case of human beings, the fittingness of the receivers is conditioned by nothing but the desire of God for relationship with creatures, and I am arguing this applies to all creation.

Not only does panpsychism facilitate purpose within creation, as the intrinsic teleology within all things that Oliver speaks of, but it may aid theologians in articulating a Christian vision of the purpose of creation *in toto*; to receive the divine presence. This is something discussed in both John H. Walton’s chapter on Genesis and Marilyn McCord Adams’ two chapters on God’s sanctification and solidarity with creation. Walton argues that to an ancient audience, Genesis 1 would have had nothing to do with material origins, but would have been read as God’s “mission statement for the cosmos . . . that it would become sacred space by virtue of his presence here dwelling in relationship to his people.”<sup>40</sup> The creation is not by itself sacred, but God’s “presence creates sacred space.”<sup>41</sup> As priests in this temple, and with Jesus as the great high priest of all creation, humanity’s role is to call all creatures to praise God.<sup>42</sup>

As McCord Adams notes, these cultic categories with which Genesis describes creation “presuppose personal agency and purposive action.”<sup>43</sup> Whilst she speaks of God’s sanctifying

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<sup>38</sup> McCord Adams, “Sanctifying Matter,” 174, 177.

<sup>39</sup> David Horrell and Dominic Coad, “‘The stones would cry out’ Luke 19:40: a Lukan contribution to a hermeneutics of creation’s praise,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64 (2011): 29-44; Brendan Byrne, “An Ecological Reading of Romans 8:19-20: Problems and Possibilities,” in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives*, eds. David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 83-93; Cheryl Hunt, David G. Horrell and Christopher Southgate, “An Environmental Mantra?: Ecological Interest in Romans 8.19-23 and a Modest Proposal for its Narrative Interpretation,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 59, n.2 (2008): 546-79.

<sup>40</sup> John H. Walton, “Origins In Genesis: Claims of an Ancient Text in Modern Scientific World,” in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, eds. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 114.

<sup>41</sup> Walton, “Origins In Genesis,” 115.

<sup>42</sup> McCord Adams, “Sanctifying Matter,” 177.

<sup>43</sup> McCord Adams, “Sanctifying Matter,” 176.

presence as part of God’s omnipresent concurrence, she also speaks of this sanctification and solidarity with material creation as to do with the perichoretic structure of persons, both in the Trinity and material persons.<sup>44</sup> “God’s overarching purpose”, she writes, “is to sanctify matter, to make it holy first and foremost by indwelling material persons.”<sup>45</sup> Persons, Adams suggests, are created not only for intersubjective relationship with each other and with God, but for a more radically perichoretic overlapping at their functional core. The very serious possibility that panpsychism raises is that the psycho-materiality that undergirds this personhood is not an all-or-nothing category that humanity alone has access to but comes in degrees and is found throughout creation. Perhaps the interconnected psycho-materiality of our bodies, of all the organisms that live in and through our bodies, and the chemical composition that holds traces of galactic magnitude, all speak to this perichoretic notion of personhood. On panpsychism, God’s sanctifying omnipresence might manifest not only in causal concurrence, but dwell experientially in all corners of the universe. It is through such relationships, where God is closer to all things than they are to themselves (since most do not have self-awareness or self-consciousness), that we can then speak of the Spirit’s sanctifying omnipresence in every subject that fills the cosmos. This is not to point to a discrete place where God can be found, nor is it to posit consciousness as a necessary mediating substance between Creator and creation; the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* affirmed in this paper precludes either of these ideas. Instead, theological panpsychism offers a way to articulate how God may be ‘in and beyond’ the whole of creation, immaterial and material, cultural and natural.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has considered a common argument in the contemporary doctrine of creation, represented throughout the two volumes *Knowing Creation* and *Christ and the Created Order*, namely, the argument that the doctrine of creation, unites the (modern and devastating) bifurcation between ‘nature’ – my which we mean the material world available for investigation by the natural sciences – and ‘culture’ – by which we mean the meaning-making acts and artefacts investigated by the human and social sciences or the arts. The doctrine of creation it is argued concerns the actualisation of a world that is made with intrinsic powers for continuing reception and response, such that this world has a nature that is always and already encultured. This paper extended this vision of creation by adding to it an ontology called ‘theological panpsychism’, that

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<sup>44</sup> McCord Adams, “Sanctifying Matter,” 175.

<sup>45</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams “For Better for Worse Solidarity,” in *Christ and the Created Order: Perspectives for Theology, Philosophy, and Science*, ed. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas H. McCall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 173.

<sup>46</sup> This was a favourite phrase of Erich Przywara, favoured by Williams, *Christ the Heart*, 223-4 and Kathryn Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), 130.

argues that God included mentality in the fundamental features of the cosmos in the first act of creation. The mentality within fundamental entities is a kind of interior power and receptivity, which this paper argued provides an ontological underpinning for God not only to empower as a primary cause, but for Jesus to enter into a better-or-worse relationship with, and for the Spirit to be present within, all of creation. Theological panpsychism does not entail this Trinitarian doctrine of creation, but it provides invaluable metaphysical resources for theologians to articulate this vision of the created order and contribute to reconciliation between humanity and the non-human world.