

Part 3:

COSMOS AND HISTORY

Divine Immanence in the Panentheistic Cosmology of Arthur Peacock

Igor Gudyma

Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, Professor, Mariupol State University (Cherkasy, Ukraine)
E-mail: igorgudyma67@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6053-216X>

Gudyma, Igor (2023) Divine Immanence in the Panentheistic Cosmology of Arthur Peacock. *Philosophy and Cosmology*, Volume 30, 97-104. <https://doi.org/10.29202/phil-cosm/30/9>

This brief article examines the features of the panentheistic cosmology of the Protestant theologian Arthur Peacock, with particular attention to the conceptualization of divine immanence in his theological system. In addition, it reveals the organic connection between the categories of “faith” and “miracle” in Protestant theology, and shows the place and role of a miracle in the theological constructions of panentheism. All main conceptualizations of the philosopher and theologian Arthur Peacock are reduced to the so-called “panentheism formula”, according to which God is immanent in the universe, truly omnipresent, but his Being is not entirely reduced to natural, God is greater than nature and his Being surpasses nature. Having laid down the initial principles of his panentheistic cosmology, Peacock deductively deduces all the further key provisions of his concept, namely: the doctrine of the nature of the relationship between God and the world, the question of a miracle as a personal manifestation of the divine, etc. In the author’s worldview, the world acts as an arena and an instrument for achieving God of large-scale cosmic goals. However, in the ideas about the interaction of God with the world, the theologian also singles out the symbolic aspect, the main content of which is the initiative of God to reveal his Personality and demonstrate to man his divine nature. In other words, we are talking about the relationship of God with the individual and the human community, which reflects the creative essence of God and presupposes the existence of events that reveal important religious truths. In general, it should be recognized that the theorists of panentheism, including Arthur Peacock himself, made a significant contribution to the dialogue between religion and science, which was noted by

© Gudyma, Igor, 2023

researchers. However, wishing to preserve the intellectual respectability of their conceptualizations, the ideologists of panentheism bypass or extremely carefully and extremely correctly touch on individual complex problems of theology, the features of divine immanence, incl. and the question of miracle. All cases of the relationship between God and man, including the most extraordinary and super-intense experience of interpersonal communication, can, in their opinion, be more convincingly described in ordinary terms within the framework of their model of “downward influence” on the world, mediated by the components of this world.

Keywords: panentheism, theology, God, faith, science, miracle

Received: 7 July 2022 / Accepted: 17 August 2022 / Published: 5 February 2023

Introduction

Formulation of the problem. In modern public consciousness, one can clearly see signs of understanding that the picture of the world offered by science runs counter to the content of religious faith, or at least does not coincide with it. Such a situation actualizes the already acute questions of religion: whether and to what extent reasoning about God is justified, whether there is a correlation between theological concepts, categories, concepts and ideas with the existing state of reality. These and similar related questions concerning the status of theological terminology are indicative in terms of reflections on the internal nature of religion and its ability to reflect and interpret reality. On the other hand, the increased interest of philosophy in recent decades with traditional religious and theological issues has exposed the unconvincing assertions about the complete meaninglessness of the “question about God”, the facts of religious experience, which were formulated at the time of evaluating religion from the standpoint of logical positivism. Among these general metaphysical problems associated with the doctrine of God, a number of issues of particular value to theology, which improves the criteria of reasonableness, validity and evidence, as a response to the powerful challenges of the secularized world, are noteworthy, namely: the doctrine of the nature of the relationship between God and the world, the question of a miracle as a personal manifestation of the divine, etc.

Any philosophical and theological judgments about God, no matter how they are established, will certainly refer to the question of the presence of God in reality created by him, the ways of his self-disclosure in the world, and in the human heart. They acquire a special significance in light of the provisions of modern science, which significantly changes the nature and status of the corresponding theological reasoning. Philosophical and theological knowledge of God, in its theoretical interpretations of the means through which God expresses the nature of his plans for man and the world, proceeds from certain well-established ideas about the nature of God and his specific relationship with the world. In a variety of approaches to the issue of the relationship between the divine and the earthly, the following main types of its understanding are distinguished: theism, deism, pantheism and panentheism.

Particular attention in the modern intellectual climate is attracted by the theology of panentheism, whose representatives are trying to find new convincing and demonstrative conceptual resources for modeling the interaction of God with the world. *In this case, certain aspects of the work of one of the most gifted modern representatives of panentheism, Arthur Peacock, will be considered.* Peacock was and, even after his death, remains a prominent figure among academically minded scientists, a specialist in the field of physical biochemistry.

By the will of fate, having connected himself with theology, he devoted himself entirely to the issues of the connection between science and religion, the study of the specifics, role and place of theology in the age of science (Peacocke, 2004a; 2004b; 1993).

Presenting main material

It should be noted that the issues of divine immanence, and manifestations of God's participation in the destinies of the universe, are correlative to the specific doctrine of God, individual elements of which determine specific statements about the miraculous. On the other hand, the doctrine of a miracle is representative of the plan for establishing judgments about the nature of God, his relation to creation, etc. Peacock tries to establish what lies behind judgments about divine immanence, whether a miracle is a genuine act of faith or whether its originality and uniqueness are revealed exclusively in the plane of interpretation of faith. There are good reasons to believe that the desire to clarify the mode of reality of a miracle is extremely important for the theologian. Like every experienced theologian who builds his original religious and theological system, Peacock is well aware that by avoiding the "question of a miracle," each author runs the risk of seeing his work as incomplete and fragmentary, where, moreover, there are no separate significant internal connections.

The main and initial principle of Peacock's conceptualizations, which organically connects and synthesizes all other elements into a coherent and harmonious theoretical complex, is the so-called "panentheism formula". According to its content, the entire universe is permeated with the Being of God, so that every element of the universe exists in God, but the Being of God is greater than the universe and is not limited by it. God is recognized as absolute reality in his transcendence and relative reality in his ability to be omnipresent in the world, its processes, events and phenomena. The theoretical basis of Peacock's concept is also based on a number of basic ideas thematized in the provisions on divine being and becoming.

Traditionally, theologians (including the theologians of panentheism) make a distinction between the essence of God, what he is (his "being"), on the one hand, and his active aspect, that is, what he does (his "becoming"), with another. Such a distinction, according to the theologians themselves, is very arbitrary, if only because when formulating judgments about the essence of God, we inevitably turn to his manifestations in the visible, phenomenal world, proceed from how we understand his impact on the universe. However, the recognition of the causal connection between God and the world, which makes it possible to enrich static theology with dynamic metaphors, makes it possible for theology to infer the conclusion from the nature of the world to the essence of God. Thus, the position on the cognizability of the world gives grounds for recognizing the rationality of God; the sequence and orderliness of the processes of the universe indicates God's adherence to established laws, and the continuity of these processes indicates the constant immanent creative presence of God in the world. The researcher Willem B. Dree said very well about this way of thinking: "If God's presence is the starting point, the divine reality is somehow "showing through" in our ordinary reality. A religion along this line could be called mystical; the aim is to establish contact with that divine reality. It suggests the possibility of an inductive apologetic argument from science to theology" (Beginning with the end, 1999: 237).

In addition, an integral component of the speculative constructions of the ideologists of panentheism, developing its initial theoretical premises, is the concept of vulnerability voluntarily imposed on itself by God and the concept of His kenotic (self-limiting) nature. God, having made possible the openness of creation to various development options, voluntarily limited his omnipotence and kenotically outlined his omniscience in the name of

the true freedom of creation. Self-limitation in relation to the omnipotence of God, according to theologians, may mean that in the world created by God, there are spaces where he deliberately does not use his omnipotence (in particular, in relation to the free will of man); the same sign applied to omniscience may indicate that in the world at certain moments the existence of systems is possible, whose state in the future is unknown even to God, since they are fundamentally unknowable.

The natural inability of a person to comprehend a phenomenon from the point of view of its generative cause leads theists to postulate the activity of God in unpredictable situations, for the theological legitimization of the concepts of the presence and activity of God, a miracle. Hence, this idea is designed to fill the existing epistemic gap. However, such theological constructions turn out to be completely unacceptable for adherents of pantheism, which is especially evident in the work of Peacock. The use of the idea of the “God of white spots”, in his opinion, is always threatened by time, with the passage of which God is gradually being replaced by the development of science, this is first. And secondly, modeling the picture of the world, where God acts in situations that are unpredictable for humanity, does not fundamentally differ from traditional monarchical models of divine actions, where God, interacting with the world, “intervenes” in a rigidly determined order, ideas about which have developed thanks to the provisions of Newton’s physics. The dissimilarity between these two concepts of divine actions remote in time, and the cultural atmosphere turns out to be only in the interpretation of the degree of manifestation of the consequences of actions: God’s creativity in unpredictable situations would always be unobvious for a person, while God’s intervention in the cause-and-effect chains of a strictly determined world (the monarchical model) would certainly reveal itself in certain events, in a miracle that would violate the established laws of the universe.

Assessing the teaching of Christianity about divine immanence, about the presence of God in the realm of creation, it should be said that this teaching is extremely difficult to understand, difficult to argue, and in some places even completely paradoxical. Researchers of Arthur Peacock’s work drew attention to this: “The Christian understanding of divine presence in the world is complicated and paradoxical” (Brodrick, 2012: 12). However, in this regard, especially in terms of the doctrine of divine immanence, pantheism is more promising and looks to the future of theology. And this is despite the fact that some provisions of pantheism still require an additional evidence base, a broader argumentation. And here, in overcoming important problems of Christian theology, special merit belongs to two prominent theologians, Arthur Peacock and Jurgen Moltmann. This is also obvious to scholars of pantheism: “Particularly with its suggestion that God is present in the world and in every part of it, pantheism seems more promising, and, at least in the form presented by Peacocke and Moltmann, appears capable of surmounting these problems. Yet pantheism encounters problems of its own” (Attfield, 2019: 167).

The very idea of God’s intervention as a way to accomplish a miracle is questioned by pantheist theorists. According to them, God more convincingly proves his commitment to the world by maintaining the laws laid down in his (the world’s) foundation, rather than by interfering in the same initiated chains of cause-and-effect relationships. The idea of intervention, according to Peacock, leads us to the need to imagine God, who acts in a relatively deistic way, i.e. in a sense, staying outside the universe created by him and from time to time returning to it to realize his plans. In addition, the theologian argues, the position of God as the guarantor of rationality and order is blurred by the idea that God himself can revise previously made decisions and act logically inconsistently in relation to the

world and man, invading the laws laid down by him at the foundations of the universe. The comprehension of the eternal moral question – if unexpected interventions of God do take place, then why does he not interfere in earthly affairs to prevent catastrophes and dramas of human existence – makes the theses about God's intervention very doubtful. And finally, the immanence of God, which manifests itself in the form of a general unceasing activity to preserve the unchanging order established in time immemorial, annihilates the need for any special acts of God associated with the need to violate the laws established by him.

The ideas of the invasion of God, which, according to popular belief, were a legacy of the domination of the mechanistic cultural paradigm, at one time performed an important function of protecting theism from deistic ideas about God, who does not interfere in the development of the universe. The theoretical justification and substantiation of the idea of the continuous and varied influence of God on the way he established were intended to affirm God in all the fullness and integrity of his creative possibilities, which were catastrophically narrowed down by representatives of deism, belittling the role of God in nature. A common place for theologians is the opinion that a God who does not carry out direct creative acts and powerful miraculous deeds, a God who does not enter into direct contact with a person and does not bring to his attention a unique Revelation, loses contact with man.

And yet, the intervention of God in the order created by him and miracles cause a very cautious attitude among the ideologists of panentheism. They doubtfully refer to the classical theistic models of God's interaction with the world, where the idea of special divine actions dominates, directing, and even unexpectedly changing events, as a result of which such events stand out in everyday life. Particularly vulnerable, in their opinion, is the idea of the "mechanisms" of such an impact, of the point of concentration of God's efforts, since the focus of his attention to the world in a special providence and a miracle, according to theists, is focused on causal chains. However, modern science, offering a picture of the world supposedly closed to external causal intrusions, creates difficulties for theists in explaining how God can realize his special providence without invading his own created sequences of events, subordinating them to his new plans.

Peacocke, constantly creatively supporting the dialogue of science and theology, does not oppose them to any images. Despite the fact that a number of modern thinkers draw a pronounced divide between these ways of comprehending the world (Barbour, 2003). Here Peacocke, like every academically minded scientist, pays tribute to scientific knowledge, his knowledge of objectivity, consistency, and evidence, but, meanwhile, he recognizes that levels of the adequate are also inherent in religion (Peacocke, 2004a: 37-38). Moreover, in later periods of his work, Peacocke increasingly emphasizes the indispensable need for a dialogue between faith and knowledge, religion and science (Peacocke, 2004b: 174). And even what researchers pay attention to, seeks to isolate in religion the signs of objectivity inherent in science: "Arthur Peacocke discusses various similarities (as well as dissimilarities) between science and religion, but is much more adamant that religion/theology must be brought into the scientific fold" (Pietersen, 2014: 2159).

Thus, the modern scientific picture of the world suggests that the causal relationships of the world order are closed to the intrusion of external causal agents. The nomological structure of the universe proposed by modern science, which is expressed in its most fundamental laws, is inconsistent with the postulation of external forced causality. This is a rather serious challenge to current theistic cosmology, which is pointed out by a contemporary author, professor at the University of Pittsburgh, Adolf Grünbaum, in his discussion with the famous Orthodox theologian Richard Swinburne: "It is precisely this rootedness of the laws of nature

in the very fabric of the universe, which makes them ontologically inseparable from its fabric, that adds to the burden of proof assumed by the traditional theist who claims to explain the nomic structure of the world by what God, as a causal agent, willed or had the intention that she be exactly the way she is” (Grünbaum, 2004: 587).

Arthur Peacock recognizes the attractiveness of the picture of the world, where theoretically, God can call to life a new reality, canceling the laws and connections created by him. However, Peacock develops, as it seems to him, a more acceptable, in the modern intellectual climate, picture of God’s world government. According to Peacock, God should be presented as the absolute basis and source of regularity and, at the same time, as a great and original improviser, in whose power is chance. Establishing only for him a driven harmony between necessity and chance, God takes risks in his creativity when resorting to something new. The physical world performs an instrumental function in relation to God, since it acts for God as a means of realizing deep transcendental goals. God holistically (universally) influences the world as a system of systems, moreover, through the influence of the world system on its individual elements, God achieves the desired results that meet his plans. The principle of personal participation is an integral component of the theological model of the “God-world” relationship that Peacock proposes. In his opinion, God enters into a relationship with a person by communicating with him through the elements of the world (for example, through religious experience), filling individual events with special meaning. In the model of such an ontological connection between God and the world system, the possibility of specific, unexpected actions of God in the world is not directly denied, although the probabilistic rational basis of relations is substantiated, where God influences the general state of the system holistically, without intrusion and violation of the laws inherent in the system. The fundamental possibility of special divine actions (miracles) that would help the world and humanity to get out of crisis situations is not completely denied here, however, the specific understanding of God, who achieves the realization of his plans in other effective ways, pushes this kind of God’s providential concern for the universe to the periphery of his divine activity.

Critics of pantheism see the reason for its popularity in the meticulous development by representatives of pantheism of an acceptable way to comprehend the actions of God in the world. However, these thinkers nevertheless note that individual authors have not achieved noticeable success in this field because of the main obstacle – the conceptual position laid as a cornerstone in the basis of pantheism leads in the end to the following unacceptable consequences – or God is too sensitive to changes in history, or the world is extremely dependent on divine manipulations. With regard to Arthur Peacock as a thinker, theologian, straightforward and rather sharp criticisms were made regarding the excessive rationality of his concept and, at the same time, the pronounced anemic nature of his theology, the insufficiency of his appeal to the Christian religious tradition, and his unwillingness to rely on the richness of Revelation – “Peacocke’s scientific-rationalist sentiment overshadows his theology, which seems bleak and anemic in comparison to theologies more affirmative of traditional doctrines” (Engel, 2008: 44).

However, religion and its intellectual expression, theology, cannot completely abandon the idea of a miracle. The idea of a miracle is the most important element of the religious worldview. A miracle is a visible expression of God’s omnipotence. God who does not work miracles, according to the well-known expression of Epicurus, is weak and insignificant. Rather, therefore, a direct discussion of the likelihood of miracles is accompanied by a number of reservations in Peacock’s theorizing. First, our identifications of events as

“miraculous” depend, according to the author, on the peculiarities of our understanding of historical facts. The latter is entirely due to the initial principles for evaluating events that are commonly regarded as miraculous. At the same time, as it seems to the theologian, God, in the realization of his global transcendental intentions, would be forced to remove from himself the voluntary restrictions of omnipotence, imposed by him earlier. Trying to get out of essentially tautological explanations, the author is forced to admit that it is difficult to name events that fully satisfy all the signs of the concept of “miracle”, although this possibility should not be completely discarded.

Peacock’s earlier conceptualizations of the “God-world” relationship concerned the model of the “instrumental” type of such interaction, the model in which the world acts as an instrument for God to achieve large-scale cosmic goals. However, in the ideas about the interaction of God with the world, the theologian further also singles out the symbolic aspect, the main content of which is the initiative of God to reveal his Personality and demonstrate to man his divine nature. In other words, we are talking about the relationship of God with the individual and the human community, which reflects the creative essence of God and presupposes the existence of events that reveal important religious truths. In general, this kind of interaction between God and the universe is presented by Peacock as a kind of downward influence of God on the world, mediated by various components of the world. Such contacts between God and man become possible, according to the theologian’s explanations, through a mediated religious experience in which individual components of everyday life are endowed by God with a special meaning and meaning that is different from others. In essence, this kind of interaction can be considered, Peacock argues, as interpersonal communication, the driving mechanism of which is the initiative of God to enter information descending from him – God to man (Peacocke A. R., 1993: 59).

Here again, the theologians of panentheism face an important theological problem – whether God, being the omnipotent Creator of all things, can deprive himself of any restrictions with which he previously regulated his relations with the world order. In other words, can we assume the existence of a number of initiatives of God through which direct communication between God and man would be carried out, bypassing natural means (components of the world)? And do we need to recognize that a person has such a level in the structure of his personality, which would have the ability to enter into direct contact with God, without using any traditional mediating tools? In this case is clear too, the theologian’s reluctance to recognize the possibility of God’s miraculous acts, i.e. special, completely different ways of God’s contacts with human consciousness.

Conclusions

In general, it should be recognized that the theorists of panentheism, including Arthur Peacock himself, made a significant contribution to the dialogue between religion and science, which was noted by researchers. However, wishing to preserve the intellectual respectability of their conceptualizations, the ideologists of panentheism bypass or extremely carefully and extremely correctly touch on individual complex problems of theology, the features of divine immanence, incl. and the question of miracles. All cases of the relationship between God and man, including the most extraordinary and super-intense experience of interpersonal communication, can, in their opinion, be more convincingly described in ordinary terms within the framework of their model of “downward influence” on the world, mediated by the components of this world. In general, the attempt to intellectualize the relationship “God – the world”, undertaken by them, inevitably led to the demystification of the miracle, the loss

of its authentic, proper religious content. If in the well-known formula of the divine presence, a miracle – “incredibly, impossible, but a fact” to remove their essential characteristics – incomprehensibility, surprise and, at the same time, the actual factual content, then having overcome the limit of the essential in relation to a miracle, we will not talk about a miracle, but something else.

References

- Attfield, R. (2019) Panentheisms, Creation and Evil. *Open Theology*, No 5, 166-181.
- Barbour, I. (2003) Science and Religion, Models and Relations. *N.R. Howell and J.W. Van Huyssteen, eds.: Encyclopedia of science and religion*. New York: Macmillan Reference.
- Beginning with the end. God, Science, and Wolfhart Pannenberg* (1999) Edited by Carol Rausch Albright and Joel Haugen Open Court Chicago and La Salle, Illinois.
- Contingency, Time, and the Theological Ambiguity of Science. Willem B. Dree. March 26, 1999, 217-247.
- Brodrick, R. (2012) *From Divine Action to Divine Presence: The Next Step in an Integrated Cosmology of Science and Theology*. *Lumen et Vita*. Vol. 2, 1-15.
- Engel, T. W. (2008) *Speaking of God in an Age of Science*. REL-3901: Masteroppgave studieretning i teologi Institutt for religionsvitenskap Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet Universitetet i Tromsø.
- Grünbaum, A. (2004) The Poverty of Theistic Cosmology. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 55 (4): 561-614.
- Herman J. Pietersen. Professor, University of Limpopo (2014) Science and Religion in Meta-Perspective – Part II. Turfloop Campus 0727, Republic of South Africa. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol 5. No 20. September 2014. 2151-2163.
- Peacocke, A.R. (2004a) *Creation and the world of science: The re-shaping of belief*, 2nd paperback edition ed., original publication: 1979. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peacocke, A.R. (2004b) *Evolution, the disguised friend of faith?* Selected essays Philadelphia; London: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Peacocke, A.R. (1993) *Theology for a scientific age: being and becoming – natural, divine, and human*. 1st Fortress Press ed., original publication: 1990. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.