Pantheism: The Exploration of the Concept of God

What is the best concept of God? There are many concepts of God ranging from the monotheistic ideas of the Abrahamic religions to the polytheistic concepts of Hinduism and beyond. People argue over which concept of God is the best. Some religions do not have a direct concept of God, but rather an understanding of an ultimate power such as in Taoism and Buddhism. Every religion has its own concept of a power, God, or Gods that somehow affects or relates to our world. There are many religious texts exemplifying encounters with God, enlightenment, or a supreme power. It is not impossible - in fact, it seems highly plausible - that each religious encounter, regardless of the religion, is an encounter with the same entity, rather than only one religion having such happenstances. One perception of God is the pluralistic concept of Pantheism. Pantheism is the idea that God is all things; all things are God. This belief encompasses all religions and provides an understanding that allows religions to unite, despite the differences between them. It supports the belief of God’s necessary existence. The best concept of God is a pantheistic one because it unifies all religions, as well as science, and supports the existence of God. In this paper, I will explain the pantheistic concept of God, how this concept exemplifies God better than other conceptions including necessary existence, and explore different arguments sometimes posed against pantheism.
Pantheism, or religious pluralism, is the idea that God is all things, sometimes referred to as “the Real.” Reality is God and God is reality. Everything we experience in life is, in a manner of speaking, God. Everything is a representation of the ultimate power we tend to refer to as God. Because God is all things, each religion has some aspect of the actuality of God; however, there is no one correct religion. They all encompass different parts of the truth behind God. For example, Christianity perceives God as a single, almighty being. In contrast, Buddhism has the bodiless Ultimate. While neither interpretation of God is incorrect, neither is absolute. Both provide a way for individuals to relate to the ultimate power of the world, be their belief in a supreme being that controls the world, or a power linking everything through interpenetration. Pantheism allows people to relate to God in the way that is most understandable for the individual. Nevertheless, even if all religions come together as one, the complete existence of God remains incomprehensible and unknowable. Every religion is accurate in some way and, while none comprehends the entirety of God’s existence, they each provide an insight into the reality of God. God is beyond human understanding, so humans can only relate to God with the abilities they have developed since birth. Because someone raised in the Christian faith has a relation to God that is different from one raised in the Buddhist faith; they relate to God in different ways. Regardless, neither is relating to a false god. Moreover, the pantheistic concept of God supports the belief in God’s existence simply within itself. St. Anselm asserts the definition of God as “that than which no greater can be conceived.” Our conceptions are real, in the abstract sense, thus, our conceptions are God. Everything we conceive is God, so regardless if we have a conception that seems greater than God, the conception, too, is God. Therefore, God is

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2 Hick, 450
3 Hick, 453
greater than that which we can conceive. Furthermore, if one remains unconvinced by the pantheistic approach to Anselm’s argument, we know reality to exist. Holding the belief that God is reality shows, then, that God exists. God would only not exist if reality did not exist. Therefore, God must exist. Hence, pantheism is the best concept of God.

One argument against the pantheistic concept of God is that this concept is entirely arbitrary. Because everything is God, nothing is. Pantheism is simply a negation of God. The argument asserts that there can be no God because there is nothing distinguishable or discernable about God. In fact, one might go so far as to claim that pantheism is the same as atheism. A response to this claim is that it is not arbitrary to assume that God is everything and everything is God. God must be everything because without God everything would be nothing, only then creating an arbitrary existence. Additionally, it is not arbitrary to assume everything is God because there is a unity within everything that enables an existence of a higher power, which, in this interpretation, is God. Moreover, the argument that pantheism is atheism is a fallacious argument because atheism asserts that there is no God, and thus there is no unity among reality. Pantheism, however, argues for the exact opposite in that everything is unified and everything is connected. Pantheism is the concept that God is everything, therefore there must be a belief of God, whereas atheism is the idea that there is no God. Furthermore, atheism still requires a concept of God to deny the existence of God. One may argue that if God exists, God cannot be reality because we cannot be certain our reality is real. We may simply be brains in vats believing that our reality is real, yet in truth, reality is much different. Thus, pantheism does not hold unless it is an atheistic view of God. Consequently, the necessity of our existence as we perceive it is irrelevant. As long as there is a reality, there is a God. Therefore, it does not imply that pantheism must be an atheistic belief. One can be an atheist while holding a pantheistic
concept of God, however a pantheistic concept of God is not the belief there is no God. This would be the same as saying the Christian concept of God is an atheist concept of God because it is arbitrary. The sense of the two words are utterly unrelated. Someone can have a Christian concept of God and be an atheist, but it is, again, not a necessity for the Christian concept of God to be an atheist a concept. Similarly, pantheism has the same relation to atheism as the Christian concept of God.

One may argue, as Peter van Inwagen does in “Non Est Hick,” one religion can use the idea of pantheism to show that one’s religion is the best religion, and so one’s religion has the most accurate interpretation of God. This would negate the idea that God is all things, but instead would support the concept of God in one’s religion, in van Inwagen’s article he speaks of Christianity this way. By asserting that pantheism is, in fact, a way to show the superiority of another religion, pantheism is understood as something different from what it is. Pantheism does not single out one religion as the ultimate religion, or the religion that has the best concert of God, but rather it incorporates all religions in the concept of God because all religions have aspects that are equally legitimate about God. Every religion has had some scriptures or holy texts describing encounters with the divine or God. In this way, all religions have a way for people to relate to God. This does not mean that one religion has the proper way to relate, but rather all religions provide understanding of the almighty so people are able to relate to God in the way that provides the best understanding for themselves. Pantheism assumes that all religions are equally justifiable. The differences between the religions is due to the way each encounters God. Because each religion encounters God in a different manner, each has different rituals, texts, and understandings. This does not mean that the religions are false, but simply that they

have different points of view of the same things. For example, if one were to hold up a book in front of a class of thirty people, each person would have a different opinion and representation in their mind of the book. This is because each person has a different reference point, so none is wrong, but all are different. By using each person’s point of view, it is possible to get an understanding of the image of the book, however, the exact description cannot be entirely identified. Pantheism, much the same, unites the beliefs of God from all religions to provide an understanding of God, despite not being able to provide an entire description. Furthermore, if one were to argue pantheism supports the view of a specific religion, then one does not understand pantheism, and thus the argument is invalidated. Assuming pantheism supports a Christian understanding of God asserts that of the Christian concept of God is the best concept of God, rather than the pantheistic concept of God. This is merely a misunderstanding of the concept of pantheism and does not denounce the pantheistic concept of God.

Another argument against pantheism is the idea that science implies all religions are false, because there is no natural or scientific way to understand God. People often thing science is an atheistic pursuit under the assumption that there is no God, merely facts. Society views science as a provider of truth and God is not measurable through science; thus, God is not something factual or real. This suggests that God neither is a part of reality, nor is reality God. The two are separate, unrelated concepts. Hick explains, “The naturalistic response is to see all [religions as false]” rather than all having some grounds of truth.\(^5\) Naturalism supposes that all that is real, and all that is knowable, is purely scientific and factual. God is not a factual being. In this way, all religions’ concepts of an ultimate power are clearly false because they have no grounds in science. Pantheism, however, is the idea that reality is God. Science is the study of

\(^{5}\) Hick, 450
reality. Naturalists believe that reality exist and science allows for the study of our surroundings. Therefore, under the pantheistic concept of God, science is simply another version of theology that is tackling the physical existence of God. Pantheism shows that naturalism cannot assert God does not exist because reality is God and naturalists believe in measureable reality. Like all religions, science will not provide an entire understanding of God, but that does not make the belief in pantheism irrelevant or unrealistic. In fact, it strengthens the concept because it incorporates both religion and science, which have often been a matter of argument.

Pantheism provides an understanding and a concept of God that unites all religions and science under one system of belief. Different forms of encounters accounts for the differences between religions. Pantheism incorporates science, too, because science is simply another version of theology, studying the physical aspect of God as reality. Pantheism is not arbitrary because it insists the existence of God. Pantheism does not depend on our existence, but it depends on an existence. As long as one thing exists, God exists. Pantheism does not suggest that any one religion is the best religion, but rather the compilation of all religions can give some understanding of the power that is all things. Lastly, science does not determined that there is no God as is often suggested because pantheism states that all things are God. Thus, because science is the study of all physical thing, science is the study of God. So, science does not state that God does not exist. Therefore, the best concept of God is a pantheistic one.