


Article

Environmental Ethics and the Cambridge Platonist Henry More

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Abstract: Christian environmental ethics have always navigated the thin line between the Scylla of pantheism and the Charybdis of deism. On the one hand, removing God from the world avoids pantheism but can inadvertently render the divine a distant, absentee father who cares little about what we do with the environment. On the other hand, if we bring the Creator too close to creation, we may begin to blur the distinction between them, fringing on pantheism. While making nature divine might at first seem to heighten the environmental desecration of the earth by making it a literal de-sacralizing of the sacred, this may be only a surface-level reading (or, at least, only true of very carefully nuanced versions of pantheism). For the pantheist, God would not just be the trees but the machines that log them; God would not just be the polar bears but the carbon dioxide that is evicting them. God would be no more present in that which is desecrated than in that which does the desecration (e.g., God would be one with the pesticides, bulldozers, and factory smoke). By making God everything, it becomes difficult to call any person, act, legislation, or event godless. This paper offers Henry More's view of divine space as a constructive, Platonic Christian middle way between these two extremes, charting a God who is spatially present to nature without being pantheistically reducible to it, in the same way that space is intimately close to the objects within it while nonetheless remaining distinct from them. The bulk of the paper counters potential opponents to this proposal, specifically defending Morean space from the charge that it would break down the Creator–creature distinction and/or cave to the environmental Scylla of pantheism.

Keywords: Henry More; divine space; Christian Platonism; Cambridge Platonism; environmentalism; pantheism



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1. The Problem

The Christian Platonic tradition has often become an easy scapegoat upon whom to pin the tale of Western world-weariness, disembodiment, and ‘hatred of the earth’. While Christian Platonist scholars have already begun to dissemble this narrative,¹ this paper argues for an additional and unsuspected environmental ally in the theory of divine space espoused by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More. For More, space was divine (or, at least, an extension of the divine), sharing over 20 attributes with God,² including infinity, absoluteness, incomprehensibility, necessity, and, most crucially here, omnipresence. Space is, by definition, everywhere, for it is precisely that which constitutes every possible ‘where’ or location. Indeed, we cannot go anywhere except by going in and through space. More, thus, postulated what he considered a more thoroughly literal omnipresence of God *with* nature and matter in contrast to the more analogous and abstracted omnipresence of the scholastics. While the Spirit of Nature in the Cambridge Platonists has already been mined for its environmental implications, we will here explore similar possibilities for divine space, using it to constructively reconceptualize the ethical relationship between God and the environment.³ Although the author of this paper does not necessarily hold More's view, this paper will, nonetheless, explore the interesting possibilities, conversations, and resources that divine space could open up for an environmentally engaged Christian Platonism.

Environmental theology has always had to navigate the thin line between the Scylla of pantheism and the Charybdis of deism. On the one hand, removing God from the

world avoids pantheism but can inadvertently render the divine a distant, absentee father who cares little about what we do with the environment, for it is not his home but ours. Now, in More's earlier correspondence with Descartes (1648–1649), he argues that spiritual substances must be extended (i.e., truly extended outward in height, width, and depth), or else God is not present with his extended creation—a divine absence More calls 'nullibism'.⁴ Descartes retorts that omnipresence does not mean God literally occupies all places, but rather that God's power extends to all places:

there is no extension of substance in God, in angels or in our minds, but only one of power . . . I believe that God is everywhere in respect of his power, whereas he has no relation to space whatsoever in respect of his essence (Hengstermann 2019).

Omnipresence is not an extended presence in all places but God's ability to know what is going on in any place and ability to act in any place. While this distinction between action and actor is not terribly medieval,⁵ part of Descartes' account is, nonetheless, built upon the long-standing tradition growing out of Anselm and Aquinas (see *Monologium* chs. 20, 22 and *Proslogium* chs. 13; *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 3 d. 68 and *Summa Theologiae* I. q. 8), where God is present but not in the same way as material objects. Variations on this position remain one of if not *the* primary account of omnipresence today (Inman 2017, p. 4). Wierenga (Wierenga and American Catholic Philosophical Association 1988; Taliaferro et al. 2010), Leftow (Leftow 1988), and Taliaferro (Taliaferro 1994; Taliaferro et al. 1997) hold basic reinterpretations of the model, while Hartshorne (Hartshorne 1941) and Swinburne (Swinburne 1993) have expanded it further, arguing that if God knows and controls all things in the world, then, in some sense, the world constitutes God's body (in the same way that the human mind has knowledge of and control over its own body). Stump has also offered her own rendition of the classic view, albeit one supplemented by a notion of shared attention and personal presence (Stump 2013; Stump and Weithman 2008).

Now, the primary reason Descartes—as well as many medieval and contemporary authors—wished to avoid making God present in a truly extended sense is the fear that this would break down the qualitative divide between the Creator and creature. However, More is concerned that if there really is such a substantial chasm between extended and unextended entities, then how can God truly be present in the world at all? As More wrote to Descartes,

I cannot but suspect that by the power of God you want to understand an effect transferred into matter. However, if you understand it this way, I cannot see how that should not equally come to naught. For there is no other way for this effect to be transferred than by the divine power touching matter and matter receiving it; in other words, by some real mode united to the matter and, therefore, extended (Hengstermann 2019, p. 35).

Although it is a tad anachronistic to put it this way, More is essentially worried that the problem of Cartesian dualism between mind and matter simply reoccurs here between the divine mind and its extended creation. While Descartes is open to the sort of *bare extension* that analogous accounts require, he is not open to the literal or *true extension* that seems to describe our everyday phenomenon of entities that are present with us in height, width, and depth. More wonders how Descartes can bring together unextended and truly extended entities without at least a momentary overlap of some kind, fearing that if God cannot be truly extended, then God and the extended world are substantially distinct, so neither can be present to the other. While we do not have room here to launch a full critique of unextended (or, rather, not *truly extended*) versions of omnipresence and their rich historical and contemporary articulations, we can gesture toward such critiques by others in the field, which indicate that objections similar to More's continue to be made and updated today. For example, James Gordon has argued that,

recent treatments of . . . omnipresence in philosophy and theology fail to give a compelling account of what it means for God to be present in, with, at, or to specific persons or places . . . the non-occupation accounts of Wierenga, Leftow,

and Stump fall short. Their fatal flaw is that they cannot account for the spatiality of God's presence (Gordon 2018).

Likewise, Nicholas Everitt writes that,

Omnipresence is standardly construed by both the medievals and moderns in a surprising way. It does not consist in permanent occupancy of the whole of space, but instead is explained in terms of God's knowledge and power. . . . Theists are of course free to define the terms they use in whatever way they see fit. But if this is how omnipresence is interpreted, one might well think that it would be clearer to say straightforwardly that God is not omnipresent at all . . . (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 2010).

Similarly, Luco J. van den Brom asks how "spaceless contact with spatial objects" is possible, suggesting that "the assumption that God is totally present everywhere in a spaceless mode does not appear to be meaningful at all" (van den Brom 2010). Now, many would surely protest this characterization of the classical view of omnipresence, with recent authors rushing to defend the genuinely spatial presence of God in classical accounts (Inman 2017; Pasnau 2011). Yet our goal here will not be primarily to prove that there is a problem but to defend More's possible solution to it. Thus, we can tentatively say that—regardless of whether it is an inescapable problem or not—there are some scholars who believe traditional accounts of divine omnipresence have not allowed God to be sufficiently and spatially near enough to creation. This avoids the specter of pantheism but—arguably—at the cost of severing God from the environment.

On the other hand, if we bring the Creator too near to creation, we may begin to blur the distinction between them, fringing on pantheism. This would be problematic, and not only for doctrinal reasons. While making nature divine might at first seem to heighten the environmental desecration of the earth by making it a literal de-sacralizing of the sacred, this may be only a surface-level reading (or, at least, only true of very carefully nuanced versions of pantheism). For, according to pantheism, God would not only be the trees but the machines that log them; God would not only be the polar bears but the carbon dioxide that is evicting them. God would be no more present in that which is desecrated than in that which does the desecration. By making God everything, it becomes difficult to call any person, act, legislation, or event godless. The pantheistic God would not only be the sun and the flowers but also the atoms of the bullet, the hand of the abuser, and the walls and pipes of the gas chamber. The Star Wars universe (to enlist a popular and fantastical analogy, though one that has a real-life correlate in Manichaeism) struggles with a similar problem, for in making the Force one with both good and evil, it becomes increasingly difficult for its scriptwriters to articulate why the light side of the Force is still morally higher than the dark. Indeed, how can some things be sacred and others be desecrations when all is divine?⁶ Thus, many renditions of pantheism (though not necessarily *all*, for that broader claim is beyond our purview here)⁷ fail to provide the moral hierarchy required to actually condemn the ravaging of the earth (for God is both ravager and ravaged).

2. More's Answer

Morean space provides potential resources to chart a middle course between these two extremes.⁸ For if space is an extension of the divine, then God is truly present everywhere, for God literally is every space, every location, every 'where'. The issue of the environment being abandoned by an absent, deistic father is thereby avoided. Yet, while God would be close *to us*, God would not be identical *with us*, just as space is distinct from the objects occupying it while remaining intimately close to those objects:

I have always been prone to think this [i.e., space] . . . to be a more obscure shadow or adumbration, or to be a more general and confused apprehension of the *Divine Amplitude* . . . For this will be necessarily, though all Matter were annihilated out of the World. Nay indeed this is antecedent to all Matter, forasmuch as no Matter nor any Being else can be conceived to be but in this . . . *Lord thou hast been our*

dwelling-place in all generations. Before the Mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the Earth or the World: even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God. (More 1668).

For More, God is connected to space, and space is distinct from material creation, existing forever and always before matter. This, thus, avoids the opposite peril of pantheism, providing a renewed way forward for religious environmentalism. Indeed, what if God was *literally* and intimately present in, with, and as the space in which nature flowers? What if the highly polluted sky of Houston, Texas, was reconceived no longer as secular air but as desecrated breaths flowing through the cosmic lungs of the God its inhabitants claim to worship? What if our earth, bodies, and eco-systems were housed not amidst dead matter or a nihilistic abyss but within divine space as a mother's womb? What if oppressors of the earth had to do their actions in and through divine space, rendering their desecration all the starker to themselves and the watching world? What if the logger had to literally strike through God to fell the Brazilian rosewood? In other words, what if we took the mobster's unwillingness to sin in a church and expanded it to the entire spatial universe? Divine space could, thus, provide fresh ethical resources for approaching the environmental crisis from a Christian Platonic perspective, amplifying the desecration of the oppressor while bringing the divine presence closer to the oppressed (both human and environmental).

However, such a literal omnipresence has often been avoided or deemed heretical, for spatializing God seemed to break down the Creator-creature distinction so crucial to Christian orthodoxy and to its form/matter equivalent in Platonism. Can this line actually be walked; not only walked but done so without stepping on the orthodox toes of the Christian Platonic tradition in which it stands? In other words, can More's God be authentically Christian, Platonic, and close to nature all at once? More certainly believed so. His project begins precisely as a retort to Descartes' divorce between material and spiritual substance. He believed that by defining extension as matter itself, Descartes prevented God from being present in the extended material universe. Thus, in his early correspondence with Descartes, More proposes instead to distinguish between materiality and extension:

... the definition which you give of matter or body is far broader than is warranted. For God also seems to be an extended substance ... Hence, extension is apparently coterminous with the absolute essence of things, although the latter may differ according to the differences between the essences themselves. I view God as being extended in his own way on account of his *omnipresence*, occupying as he does the whole fabric of the world and each of its particles in an intimate fashion. How else could he impress motion upon matter, which, as you yourself concede, he did at some point and which he does to this day, unless he touches, or had at least at some point touched, the matter of the universe from close up? He could not have done so at any time had he not been present everywhere and occupied every single place. Hence, God is extended and expanded in his own way, and therefore is an extended substance ... For this reason, "extended substance" is broader than "body". (Hengstermann 2019)

Descartes defined true extension as inherently material, creating a dualism of substance between truly extended matter and unextended (or barely extended) mind. More believed this relegated spiritual substances to some ethereal, unextended, *non-location*, undermining any sense in which the divine was truly present *in* the world. However, by broadening extension beyond matter, More was trying to allow for the possibility that there could be immaterial extensions, bridging the qualitative chasm between matter and mind, for both are truly extended. Thus, instead of defining matter as extension, More now defined matter as impenetrability:⁹

this reveals another property of matter or body which we could call "impenetrability": one body cannot penetrate or be penetrated by another body. From that, the difference between the divine and the corporeal nature becomes quite clear:

the former is able to penetrate the latter, while the latter cannot penetrate itself (Hengstermann 2019, p. 8).

One can picture a ghost that is extended in height and width and, yet, is still penetrable—e.g., it can walk through walls. Yet, material things are impenetrable, pushing back against the borders of each other—e.g., an incoming bird crunches against a closed window. As such, extension can be conceived indifferently to materiality and immateriality, for both the immaterial ghost and the material bird are extended in height, width, and depth. If extension and matter can be conceived separately, then—at least within the cognitive Cartesian framework More is posing his argument within—they must be conceptually distinct. One need not forfeit the extended world to materiality, as Descartes did when he reduced all extension to matter. Rather, one can conceive of true extension as consistent with both materiality and immateriality. This allows God to be truly present throughout the extended universe without becoming material, setting the stage for More's bolder proposal of divine space.

While More developed his notion of divine space in his later years, it is a natural unfolding of the immaterial extension that he developed in his earlier correspondence with Descartes. Space is the ultimate vindication of immaterial extension, for space is not impenetrable like a material object; you can run and leap through space without meeting resistance. Yet, space is also tangibly real, for there is more of it extended between us and the moon than there is between opposite walls of a room. Space is not some speculative theology but is immediately present as that in which we daily *live and move and have our being* (a verse More specifically references; More 1668, p. 107. Acts 17:28). While one may have never seen a ghost, everyone exists in and moves through space; it is all around us, extended in height, width, and depth, yet without providing resistance to our movement in the way that a material entity would. Therefore, if space were in some sense divine, this would allow God to be truly present everywhere, for there is nowhere one can go without going through space.

As such, More's God is close to nature and the environment, as literally extended and present as matter itself. Yet, this divinity remains, nonetheless, distinct from created matter, for, in contrast to Descartes, extension is broader than materiality. This is crucial to More as a Christian and as a Platonist. He vehemently rejected Spinoza precisely for "confusing the divine nature with the nature of created things". (More and Jacob 1991). He mocks pantheism for making God one with the world of material objects:

Since, therefore, stones, lead, dung, an ass, a toad, a louse and all things of that sort are individual things, it is necessary that they be modes of the attributes of God and their expressions in a certain and determinate manner. Moreover, since besides substance and modes there is nothing, and modes cannot be without substance, it is clear that the substance of God is the substance of stones, lead, dung, an ass, a toad, and a louse, and those extended things modes of divine extension and those thoughts modes of divine thought, so that the God of Spinoza thinks in an ass as an ass, in a toad as a toad, in a louse as a louse, and indeed in a stone, lead and dung as stone, lead and dung (Hengstermann 2019, p. 95).

Thus, More's divine space seeks to chart a middle way between Spinoza's pantheism and the Cartesian divorce of spirit and matter, potentially offering us a theological resource for our contemporary environmental crisis. Whether More's intended middle way actually achieves its aim and avoids what it critiques will now be addressed.

3. Countering Potential Defeaters

Our environmental harnessing of divine space faces a number of potential defeaters, primarily concerned with whether divine space can actually sidestep pantheism in the way More intended. Specifically, (1) is the modern scientific modeling of spacetime immaterial in a way that plausibly avoids pantheism? (2) Even if space is immaterial, is it not still part of the created order (e.g., in the same way that immaterial angels are part of the created order) such that the divinization of space is itself a form of pantheism? (3) Does

making God spatial render him circumscribed like a spatial or material object? (4) If space is composed of creaturely parts and material regions, how is this consistent with an immaterial, uncreated, simple God? Each of these objections has a long history of debate and literature attached to it, so our response will not provide a comprehensive or definitive answer but rather an outlining vision of how a Morean approach might provide fruitful resources for approaching these questions in the future. Additionally, while many of the ideas employed here can also be found scattered throughout various journal publications as well as different chapters of my forthcoming book, *Space God*, my intention is for this article to serve as a unifying thread tying them all together in one place while providing a narrower vision of how such a defense could supplement a Christian Platonic environmental ethic.

(1) *Is the modern scientific modeling of spacetime immaterial in a way that plausibly avoids pantheism?* There are numerous potential responses one might give to this question. First, we can enlist a broader metaphysical space in which physical or immanent spacetime is housed and/or expanding. All the observations of an immanentized spacetime would, thus, be scientifically accurate yet simply transcended by a divine space that is on a categorically different plane than creaturely spacetime. While Einstein showed that the mathematics of spacetime can be explained without need for a higher spatial frame in which they occur, this is not quite the same thing as disproving such a frame. Scientists may not need a metaphysical space in order to explain the *physics* of spacetime; nonetheless, there may still be compelling *metaphysical* reasons for holding to such a belief. As Lucas writes:

It is often said that relativity refuted Newton. But it is a misleading oversimplification. There is no straight opposition between relativity theories and Newtonian, absolute, theories... Theologically (and not only theologically) speaking we may assign a preferred frame of reference . . . which is at rest. . . *Only there is no physical reason why we should.* (Lucas 1973)¹⁰

Indeed, only the remnants of an outdated positivism could totally dismiss the possibility of immaterial absolutes lingering behind our experience of relative material phenomena. While relativity cannot locate an objective frame, this does not mean that there is none, especially from the point of view of an omniscient God (Lucas 1973, p. 71). These verificationist epistemological principles underlying the metaphysical correlates of relativity were steadily abandoned in the latter half of the twentieth century and should never have dictated terms to theology—whose object is not empirical, at least not in the usual sense—to begin with.¹¹ As Craig writes:

Despite the triumph of Einstein’s Special Theory, contemporary physics has burst the old wineskins of positivism and verificationism as metaphysical elements have increasingly entered the mainstream of modern physical discussions. Therefore, as we enter a new century of scientific exploration, freed from the blinders of positivism, the time is ripe for a reassessment of the metaphysical question of the existence of absolute time and space (Craig 2001a).¹²

Even if the physicist’s calculations do not require a broader, metaphysical space in which spacetime expands, this does not entail that such a space does not exist. Special and general relativity can provide accurate physical descriptions within a broader reality that, nonetheless, transcends and encompasses them both. We can concede that spacetime is immanent and creaturely while still postulating a divine and/or metaphysical space that transcends it.

However, we need not pass the ball to metaphysics so hastily, for there may be a plausible defense of a transcendent spatial frame from within physics itself. The cosmic spacetime ‘block’ of general relativity may make space and time relative to each other, but taken together as a unit, they could remain absolute in reference to everything else. Separate measurements of space or time from within the manifold may be relative to one’s inertial frame, but the spacetime block itself is absolute. In this sense, contemporary physics has, in the words of J. Alberto Coffa, bequeathed an “underlying, unrelativized spacetime manifold that is no less absolute than Newton’s space” (Coffa and Wessels 1993). One

could then reframe the divine as the absolute and unified reality that manifests as and is ontologically deeper than space and time considered in and of themselves. Bringing time into the divine would actually play well with More's views, for he made similar arguments for divine time as for divine space and often seemed to combine them.¹³ In this sense, cosmic spacetime could offer a higher, absolute frame that might transcend the creaturely ravages of space and time viewed separately on their own.

A third response to the problem could perhaps come from the Neo-Lorentzian interpretation of relativity, which admits the facts of STR yet suggests that there is an alternative explanation that can equally account for those facts (DeWeese 2017, p. 68; Koperski 2015, p. 124). Hendrik Lorentz, whose Lorentz transformations undergirded Einstein's Special Theory, suggested that it is our measuring devices rather than the reality they measure that are being warped. Time and space do not contort; our measures of them do. The contorting of our measuring devices accounts for the observations and confirmations of relativity, admitting the evidence while allowing for an essentially classical ontology of space and time to remain intact. As farfetched as this may seem, some consider it less farfetched than completely abandoning our common-sense notions of time and space. Extraordinary claims apparently require extraordinary evidence, and as long as it is possible for our measurements rather than spatial and temporal reality itself to be relativized, then perhaps we should go with that simpler option rather than the truly extraordinary one. William Lane Craig has recently championed this Neo-Lorentzian position in defense of his view on God's relationship to time.¹⁴ It has also garnered additional support from unexpected places, such as Bell's Theorem, which seems to suggest a need for absolute simultaneity. If entangled particles can simultaneously reveal opposite spins, this suggests that simultaneity remains intact on the quantum level and that, perhaps, any resolution of the macro/micro divide between relativity and quantum mechanics may also resurrect some sense of the old absolutes. Indeed, Bell himself (Davies and Brown 1993, pp. 49–50), and later Karl Popper,¹⁵ suggested that if such spooky action really is operating at a distance, this might require a return to a Neo-Lorentzian interpretation (Craig 2001a). In this case, the immanence of spacetime could be overcome by the resurrected transcendence of the classical model.

A fourth tact one might take is to simply adopt an antirealist approach to relativity, accepting the pragmatic value of the special and general theory without granting it ontological purchase (a tactic often employed by philosophically literate scientists, admitting that their theories are useful but not necessarily indicative of any sort of noumenal *thing-in-itself*). Padgett and Koperski take such an approach, which Hart summarizes as follows:

Padgett considers the spatio-temporal view a conflation of what is logical with what is physical. Koperski argues similarly, stating that STR's treatment of all points in time as real is an idealization. He gives multiple examples of how these mathematical idealizations are utilized in science. For instance, every point of a swinging pendulum can be mapped mathematically. However, the pendulum is in only one of these states at a given moment. A further advantage to the antirealist perspective is that it removes the contradiction between GTR and particle physics. (Hart 2017)

It is, thus, possible to admit the facts of STR while providing a variety of alternative and empirically equivalent explanations for those facts, allowing for an essentially classical model of space and time to remain intact and transcendent in a way not often considered possible post-Einstein. While this paper will definitively not commit to any one of these four defenses taken individually (indeed, I have my own criticisms of them), it will argue that they cumulatively make a case for a plausibly transcendent space that need not be thought of as creaturely or pictured as material in the same way as contemporary spacetime has tended to be.

(2) *Even if space is immaterial, is it not still part of the created order (e.g., in the same way that immaterial angels are part of the created order), such that the divinization of space is itself a form of pantheism?* If we really are talking about a metaphysical space (of the kind described above),

then such a space would seem to be an invisible and immaterial entity, so it is unclear why it would automatically need to be classified as part of creation. While created angels may have these attributes, God also seems to have them, so there is no immediately obvious reason why space must be immaterial and created rather than immaterial and divine. Further, as More argued in Cartesian fashion, space is conceptually distinct from material creation such that we can conceive the former without the latter.¹⁶ One can imagine creating or destroying materials within space but not creating or destroying the space in which those materials exist. One can imagine the earth being spun, the waters separated, and the heavens speckled with stars, but they cannot imagine space itself being born (for what would it be born into if not itself already ready and waiting to catch it)? Space can, thus, be conceived by the mind distinct from material creation, suggesting—at least cognitively and phenomenologically—that they are not the same conceptual thing.

Consistent with this more philosophical analysis, Genesis never actually suggests that space itself was created, only that material objects were created. Now, it has become commonplace—especially since Lemaître—to refer to creation as the beginning of space and time, and this does seem to have a natural resonance with *בְּרֵאשִׁית* (“In the beginning”). Yet it is an extrapolation to assume that the “beginning” in Genesis is the beginning of time itself rather than the beginning of material creation (or the giving of form to raw matter), and it is yet a further extrapolation to assume that the beginning of space is inherently connected to the beginning of time (indeed, it would be deeply anachronistic to project modern *spacetime* on to an ancient Hebrew mindset). Thus, while this obviously requires further development exegetically and theologically, it seems that there is no automatic or *prima facie* violation of scripture involved in redefining creation as the matter within space rather than space itself. Indeed, William Lane Craig argues that something similar is possible with creation and time, for mental events in the divine mind could involve time prior to creation (although this possibility is obviously distinct from Craig’s broader view of divine timelessness sans creation).

(3) *Does making God spatial render him circumscribed like a spatial object?* Hudson summarizes this as the *problem of containment*: “. . . if to occupy a region is to be contained by it, how can something that is essentially free of the constraints that bind all creaturely things occupy a region?” Hudson responds to his own question in the negative: “My own view of the matter is that anything that occupies a region is a material object . . .”. (Hudson 2009, pp. 199–216; Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 2002, p. 40). Yet, More’s proposal is not that God fills or occupies space but rather that God *is* space. God is not the most widespread entity *within* space—such as, for example, the cosmic microwave background radiation—but instead, his immensity *constitutes* space. As Oakes writes, divine space,

in not in tension with the classical view that God is aspatial. Consider: to be spatial is to be enclosed by space. [Yet] if God’s Omnipresence is just what constitutes space, God could hardly be interior to space; obviously, God could not be an occupant of that which His Omnipresence constitutes (Oakes 2006).

Now, if one wants to maintain that ‘being spatial’ merely implies having anything to do with space at all, then, of course, divine space is ‘spatial’ in that sense. However, if to be spatial is to be *in* or *enclosed* by space in the problematic creaturely sense that we are concerned with here, then space is the only thing in the extended world that is not spatial, for space is not enclosed but rather does the enclosing. As More argues, space is “uncircumscribed”. (More 1995, p. 58). Space is the only truly extended reality that is not *in* space. Thus, this avoids any sense in which God could be declared to be like a spatial or material object within the world. In fact, far from being on the defensive here, one could retort that, perhaps, only a God of space could be truly extended *with* the world without becoming spatialized as an object *within* it.

(4) *If space is composed of creaturely parts and material regions, how is this consistent with an immaterial, uncreated, simple God?* In other words, if God is space, this would require God to have distinct parts, for space has separable regions and is inhabited by separable elements that exist within those separate regions. As Leibniz wrote in his correspondence

with Clarke, “since space consists of parts, it is not a thing that can belong to God”. (Leibniz et al. 2000, p. 14). God—at least within the Judeo-Christian tradition in which More was working—is supposed to be simple in contrast to creation, which has material parts. Hence, the connection of this issue to pantheism. While divine simplicity can be defined in a myriad of ways—such as temporal, property, or spatial simplicity¹⁷—we will focus primarily here on spatial simplicity, i.e., that God does not have physical or distinct parts outside of parts. This may in fact be the more difficult version of simplicity for divine space to address, for even those who reject property simplicity tend to still embrace that God is without spatially distinct parts.¹⁸ Now, Henry More is difficult to parse on this question, for he vacillated away from a more traditional holism in his later works. Yet, even the later More only consented that divine space would be conceptually partible in the mind, not actually divisible in reality.¹⁹ This helpfully distinguishes the issue into two pieces: (4a) the conceptual divisibility of space in the mind and (4b) the actual divisibility of space in reality.

(4a) Even if the mind does conceive of space as having conceptually distinct parts, this complexity would still not necessarily be inherent to space itself, for this same issue reappears whenever a complex mind contemplates a simple God. This issue is the common struggle of any theology that attempts to wed diverse traits, such as beauty, truth, goodness, omnipotence, or omniscience (etc.), into one simple entity, perceiving as many that which is held together only in the divine mystery. As More himself wrote, “The object of our mind which we say to be internal space is only a slight and diluted, and general, shadow (umbra) representing the nature of the *uninterrupted* divine presence under the obscure light of our intellect. . .” (More 1995)

Additionally, as we pointed out earlier, More argued that we can imagine space without objects. Now, space conceived on its own—without the distinctions that objects provide—seems to remain utterly indistinct, unified, and identical to itself, so much so that Leibniz claimed it was conceptually indiscernible:

Space is something absolutely uniform, and without the things placed in it, one point of space absolutely does not differ in any respect whatsoever from another point of space . . . they are absolutely indiscernible . . . [the parts of] space without things has nothing by which it may be distinguished. (Leibniz et al. 2000)²⁰

While Leibniz used this within a broader argument against divine space (and there is a rich history of this discussion that is beyond our purview here), we can turn his observation on its head, ironically enlisting it to show how space presents itself to the mind as deeply self-identical and unified. For without material markers (“without things”) to designate the difference between spaces, there is nothing left to distinguish one place from another, so there are no conceptual distinctions left in space. If we can picture space on its own without any material objects existing to demarcate its regions, then this suggests that space, *qua space*, is conceptually one. Just as More could conceive of an extension that is penetrable and, thereby, show that extension and impenetrable matter are not conceptually synonymous, so too can we conceive of a space that is not demarcated by distinguishable objects, showing that space and distinguishable parts are not conceptually synonymous. Space, imagined on its own, has no distinctions or parts within it. Distinctions are, thus, not inherent to our thought of space itself but to the secondary objects we introduce into that space, for we can imagine a space that is not differentiated by objects. In the same way that Bergson distinguished between the measures of time and duration itself, we can arguably distinguish in our minds between the measures of space and the mental phenomenon of space itself. Even if one simply pictures a grid of lines to measure and distinguish spaces, the grid itself is something secondary added on top of space and so is an attempt to provide a material or objective measure for something that is conceptually prior to such measures.

Now, Bergson also argued that duration in itself is not divided into quantitative parts, but it is only through the spatialization of time (i.e., through imagining a timeline that can be separated into distinct spatial regions of past, present, and future) that we conceive of our passage through time as quantitatively divisible. One might here turn this argument

on its head, arguing that it is only the temporalization of space that causes space to seem parted, while the phenomenon of space itself eludes distinctions. Two possible ways of arguing this seem to present themselves. First, one only ever stares directly at one region of space at a time. A second or millisecond later, our eyes then flit about to other regions, juxtaposing the two regions of space, thereby distinguishing its parts. Yet, this ‘flitting’ occurs in time and is separated by seconds/milliseconds.²¹ Thus, it is only by temporalizing our view of space that we break it up into distinct slices. Temporality introduces distinct regions into space. Second, if one follows a popular line of mereology or Heideggerian being-in-the-world, one could argue that spatial regions are phenomenologically processed first as wholes and only later dissected into constituent parts. Of course, this “later” is a temporal process in which time’s scalpel reveals or produces parts. Thus, while it would require further development elsewhere, one might be able to argue that *space qua space* is a unified entity, and it is only the temporalization of spatiality that causes disunity. As soon as one attempts to measure space, they undertake the attempt in time, losing sight of space itself.

Now, the presentation of these two phenomena is clear: The mind presents space to us as one and objects within it as distinct. It is only the relation of these two mental phenomena—i.e., how the manyness of matter can exist within the unity of space—that is problematic. The mind clearly presents space as a unity but does not bother to explain how this allows for distinct objects to be imagined or located within it. Yet, the coherence of this relation is a problem for ontology and metaphysics (which we will address in 4b), not a rejection of the datum of the mind itself. The mind portrays space as one, even if we have no idea how this can be the case (in a way ironically similar to how Descartes argued that mind and matter were substantially distinct in thought, even if this did not explain how they could relate).

(4b) The ontological question (which we deferred from 4a) remains of *how* complex objects can exist within different regions of space without space itself having distinct parts (even if they are not actually divisible). There are a few possible solutions to this question, which, taken cumulatively, provide a decent foundation upon which to defend the non-complex and, thus, non-creaturely nature of divine space. First, as More’s successor Clarke wrote,

... infinite space is one, absolutely and essentially indivisible, and to suppose it parted is a contradiction in terms, because there must be space in the partition itself, which is to suppose it parted and yet not parted at the same time (Leibniz et al. 2000).

The space between parts is simply more space, so space is the one thing that cannot be parted like everything else, for the thing that is meant to divide it is just more of the same. Space parts other things without itself being parted, suggesting that an asymmetrical relation can exist between the simplicity of space and the complexity of material objects. Space is not only indivisible but is one of the means by which other things are divided; the manyness of matter is seen in contrast to the oneness of space that constitutes the gaps that help distinguish material parts. Space itself is not parted, yet its presence constitutes the gaps (between contiguous entities) and distances (between non-contiguous entities) that help shape the distinctions between material parts. Matter does not divide space; rather, space divides matter. While this may not apply to the sort of formal distinctions between, for example, an apple and the color red (i.e., parts that are not distinguished by separations in space), it would certainly apply to material parts, such as an apple and its tree, which are separable into different locations in space and are, thereby, distinct. While space is present in the apple as much as outside of it (and so *is not* broken up by the apple), the apple can be plucked from its tree or sliced into separate pieces (and so *is* broken up by space). Of course, this is not only true of everyday parts on the macro level but, arguably, also on the micro level as well, for the space between distinct molecules and atoms prevents my body or the universe from collapsing into a singularity. One might retort to this that two subatomic entities could conceivably exist perfectly touching each other without any spatial gaps,

so space is not the only basis for parting. Yet, we need not argue that space is the only possible way to distinguish parts but that it is merely one of the ways to do so. One might also retort that parts might actually be able to overlap and interpenetrate, as was raised in recent discussions of bosons (Hawthorne and Uzquiano 2011); in which case, distinct physical parts are not necessarily always separated by space in the way I have described here. However, again, we are not arguing that space is the only way to distinguish physical parts. Furthermore, this interpenetration would argue our case in another direction, for, then, an overlapping complexity of matter could exist in a simple space, providing a precedent against mereological harmony, which could add legitimacy to our broader claim that a simple space can contain complex objects. Similar arguments against mereological harmony—e.g., interpenetration, multilocation, extended simples—might also provide relevant examples of a possible disparity between the complexity/simplicity of space and matter (even though this asymmetry is often going in the wrong direction, e.g., arguing that a simple object may be multi-located within a complexity of spaces). Thus, to sum up this wide-reaching point, we can say that spatial gaps do not only later reveal parts (e.g., when we cut the apple into slices) but also actually helped constitute them all along (e.g., these spatial gaps always existed between the finer particles of the apple and are only later revealed in the slicing). Space may have an asymmetrical relationship with matter, in which it affords divisibility to other things without itself being divided. Space divides the things that exist within it, yet the reverse does not necessarily hold. Far from spoiling divine simplicity, space may provide the doctrine with a renewed way forward, as space may be the one thing in the extended universe that precludes parting.

Yet, how is such an asymmetrical relationship possible? How is it possible for objects to exist in distinct regions without those spatial regions themselves having distinctions? These are difficult issues. However, one might note that the space being put forward here is a metaphysical space, and these are precisely the types of issues that arise whenever metaphysics and physics interact. Indeed, similarly intractable difficulties seem to arise when one inquires how, for example, a simple God could make a complex creation or have seemingly distinct attributes/actions, or how complex beings can participate in a simple Being, or how unified forms unite with complex matter, or how absolute goodness and beauty can manifest in diverse moral and aesthetic contexts, or how an eternal God can have tensed indexical knowledge or be present to distinct temporal events, etc. All but the most stubborn of theologians would admit a degree of analogy or mystery ultimately enters these equations.

Yet, according to some, such an appeal to mystery and analogy is precisely what divine space cannot make, for it places God and matter on the same, univocally extended plane (Leech 2013, p. 8; Funkenstein 1986, pp. 23–79). As a matter of history, this might be an accurate construal of More. However, in terms of constructive theology, could we not make space itself have an ontology that is only analogous to the material things that are contained within it? The fact that space has an immanent aspect need not render it ontologically univocal with matter, for analogy does not negate immanence but rather mystically weds it with transcendence. Space and material objects already have multiple discontinuities between them that suggest analogy rather than univocity, for space is not *in* the world in the same way that objects are *in* space, and material things are certainly not within space in the same way that they are within each other. For example, the way that Russian dolls exist within one another is not the same way that the Russian doll itself exists in space, for the material container is finite, bounded, and divided by the strata of dolls it contains, whereas space is infinite, unbounded, and exists continuously within the thing it contains as much as it exists outside of it. As More's successor, Samuel Clarke, wrote, in contrast to material containers, the container of "Space is not bounded by bodies but exists equally inside and outside bodies".

Thus, instead of saying that God's presence is only analogous to the presence of objects within space, we can instead say that objects exist within each other in a way that is only analogous to how they exist within space. While material objects that exist within other

material objects divide their spaces (e.g., like a cookie cutter divides the dough), we can say that objects do not exist within or divide space in the same manner but dwell within space in a way that is only analogical to how objects dwell within each other. Just as analogy mystically unites like and dislike qualities, space is *like* materiality enough to contain it yet *dislike* it enough to avoid being parted in the way material objects are parted by containing other materials things. Indeed, this container imagery of space always had a hint of the analogous about it to begin with, for the space *in which we live and move and have our being* is certainly not like a piece of Tupperware. Thus, formerly, a transcendent, metaphysical God became analogously present within a literal space without being divided by it. But now a literal matter exists analogously within a transcendent, metaphysical, ever-present space that is not divided but rather does the dividing. To turn a phrase, space is the undivided divider.²² Perhaps this is a contradiction, but even if so, analogy has often been seen precisely as a mystical wedding of contradictory opposites both by its opponents (e.g., Duns Scotus; *Ordinatio*, 1.3.) and its proponents (e.g., Catherine Pickstock; Pickstock 2005).

Additionally, this could resonate well with—or at least make as much sense as—the traditional Thomistic perspective. In such a view, the order of Being is from God to creation, while the order of knowing is from creation to God (e.g., *ST*, I, Q. pp. 12–13). I see perfections in diverse and distinct things (goodness, wisdom, strength, etc.). These things “have” these perfections. But if these perfections exist in themselves, they must receive them from something that has these properties immanently (i.e., is these perfections). Thus, God simply is what we all have. God is strength, wisdom, goodness, etc. In the same way, we know space through the diverse and distinct things that receive spatial dimensionality. The diversity of spatial objects helps us analogically grasp a deeper entity known as space. Thus, in the exact same way, I abstract from many distinct things that have spatiality to something that is space immanently and simply. Thus, the classical argument for why we can only predicate God analogically is arguably identical to why we can only predicate space analogically.²³ Spatial objects may be many, but space itself is one (e.g., just as goodness is one) and united simply with God’s other attributes (e.g., just as God’s goodness is transcendentally one with God’s wisdom, strength, etc.). The diversity of spatial objects would not negate the simplicity of divine space any more than the diversity of good acts negates the simplicity of divine goodness. Divine space need not have creaturely parts.

4. Conclusions

Christians have often tried to protect God by divorcing theology from nature. However, perhaps what we need is a God who protects nature from our abstract and distant theologies. Perhaps what our planet needs is a God who is closer to us and to the environment than we are to ourselves, a God *in whom we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28). Yet, as we have shown here, this spatial closeness need not lead to the specter of pantheism but may actually be the precise means by which we can allow God to be close to creation whilst still *avoiding* pantheism. On such a Morean account, God’s immanence need not make the divine ontologically one with the desecrators nor their tools of environmental oppression. Yet, precisely because God would constitute the space in which that environment exists, every violation of it would occur in and through divine space, heightening the desecration as if it were committed in a church or a holy place, as if God had thrust himself between oppressor and oppressed, saying (as he once essentially said): *over my dead body*. Morean space could thus potentially enable God to be a present parent who is deeply concerned with what goes on in the (green)house.

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Notes

- 1 Note this excellent recent volume, edited by two leading scholars in the Christian Platonist field ([Hampton and Hedley 2022](#)).
- 2 “For this infinite and immobile extension will be seen to be not something merely real (which we have noted in the last place) but something divine after we shall have enumerated those divine names or titles which suit it exactly, and with the greatest certainty make it not possible to be nothing, seeing that so many and such excellent attributes fit it. Of which kind are those which follow, which metaphysicians specifically attribute to First Being. Such as one, simple, immobile, eternal, complete, independent, existing from itself, subsisting by itself, incorruptible, necessary, immense, uncreated, uncircumscribed, incomprehensible, omnipresent, incorporeal, permeating and encompassing everything, Being by essence, Being by act, pure Act. There are not less than twenty titles by which the divine numen should be designated, which most aptly suit this infinite place which we have demonstrated to be in the universe; if we may omit that the same divine numen is called among Cabbalists מקום , that is, place. It would be an absolutely amazing thing, more than can be expressed, and a wonder, as it were, if all this would merely define nothing”. ([More 1995](#)).
- 3 A broader and non-environmentally charged exploration of More’s thesis is undertaken in my forthcoming book ([Lyonhart 2023](#)).
- 4 Some insist that extension and location are not synonyms, such that God can exist and be ‘somewhere’ without being extended ([Pasnau 2011](#)); ‘Mind and Extension (Descartes, Hobbes, More)’ in ([Lagerlund 2007](#)).
- 5 It is difficult to parse how close Descartes’ view is to the classic medieval account. As Pasnau notes: “The classic formulation is due to Aquinas, *Summa theol.* 1a 8.3. . . Aquinas holds that God is present everywhere both with respect to his power and with respect to his essence (1a 8.3c). This might seem to put him at odds with Descartes’s view, but that is not so clear, in light of the passage. . . in Descartes’s last letter to More: “it is certain that God’s essence must be present everywhere so that his power can exert itself there” (V 403)”. ([Lagerlund 2007](#)).
- 6 Pasnau draws out this helpful distinction between bare and true extension ([Pasnau 2011](#), p. 336).
- 7 Some attempt to sidestep these issues by coupling pantheism with privation, such that only the Good exists, offering a moral hierarchy from positive Being to evil non-being. While sufficiently nuanced versions of this ilk may perhaps survive unscathed, popular versions tend to slip into some of the same difficulties, negating the existence of any moral issues in the world at all and, thus, any environmental crisis to fix. For example, Paul Selig writes, “It was always illusion that you were separate from God. . . It was always illusion that there was war. . . always illusion that you were not loved by your fellow man. . . You are all perfect. . .” ([Selig 2010](#)). Likewise, Joel Goldsmith contends that, in reality, there is “no sinner to be reformed, no sick to heal, no poor to enrich”. ([Goldsmith 1956](#)). On a more academic level, some have put pantheism in conversation with the Christian environmental theologies of such thinkers as Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, Liberty Hyde Bailey, Thomas Berry, Catherine Keller, Mary Jane Rubenstein, and Laurel Kearns. However, there is inherently a lot of subjectivity and controversy surrounding which of these authors and their specific works truly classify as ‘pantheistic’ in the sense of seeing the God-world relation as one of identity and/or which truly classify as ‘Christian’.
- 8 Note that More existed centuries before our contemporary environmental crisis. While More provides resources that we can appropriate for today, one is not here claiming that More himself would be an ‘environmentalist’ in our modern sense.
- 9 While Descartes also believed matter was impenetrable (and stated this explicitly in his correspondence with More; see ([Hengstermann 2019](#), p. 18)) this was not its essential definition but one of its secondary traits. More inverts this, allowing impenetrability to be the defining feature of matter while making extension something it has but is not synonymous with.
- 10 Note that the ‘absoluteness’ here defended is not necessarily identical with the substantialist thesis of contemporary philosophy of science but provides an additional sense of absolute as providing a “preferred frame of reference”.
- 11 “. . . I see no reason why theists should be unduly concerned about departing from the spirit of a positivistic theory which takes no cognizance of God’s existence”. ([Craig 2001b](#), pp. 170–71). See also ([Swinburne 1983](#)).
- 12 “It may well be the case that Newton was right. . . there are no compelling reasons to prefer a spacetime ontology over a classical ontology of space and time..”. ([Craig 2001b](#), pp. 160, 186). Note that the argument of this entire section is borrowed heavily from Craig.
- 13 “Whence, as I said before, the *Idea* of God being such as it is, it will both justly and necessarily cast this ruder notion of *Space* upon that Infinite and Eternal Spirit which is God. Now there is the same reason for *Time* (by *Time* I mean *Duration*) as for *Space*. For we cannot imagine but that there has been such a continued *Duration* as could have no beginning nor interruption. And any one will say, it is non-sense that there should be such a necessary duration, when there is no reall Essence that must of it self thus be always, and for ever so endure. What or who is it then that this eternal, uninterrupted and never-fading duration must belong to? No Philosopher can answer more appositely then the holy Psalmist, *From everlasting to everlasting thou art God*. Wherefore I say that those unavoidable imaginations of the necessity of an *Infinite Space*, as they call it, and *Eternal duration*, are no proofs of a *Self-existent Matter*, but rather obscure sub-indications of the *necessary Existence* of God. There is also another way of answering this Objection, which is this; That this Imagination of *Space* is not the imagination of any real thing, but onely of the large and immense capacity of the potentiality of the *Matter*. . .” ([More 1655](#), pp. 229–30).

- 14 “Admitted on all sides to be empirically equivalent to the Einsteinian interpretation, the neo-Lorentzian interpretation is neither *ad hoc* nor more complicated than its rival. The physical effects it posits are no less real in the received version, only there they appear as axiomatic deductions lacking causal explanations. Indeed, its fecundity in opening the question about physical causes is an important advantage of the neo-Lorentzian interpretation. . . With little to commend spacetime realism over a neo-Lorentzian conception of space and time and with powerful objections lodged against it, we may conclude that there is no reason to adopt a spacetime interpretation of SR rather than a neo-Lorentzian approach to the problems of Relativity Theory”. (Craig 2001b, pp. 196, 194).
- 15 “It is only now, in the light of the new experiments stemming from Bell’s work, that the suggestion of replacing Einstein’s interpretation by Lorentz’s can be made. If there is action at a distance, then there is something like absolute space. If we now have theoretical reasons from quantum theory for introducing absolute simultaneity, then we would have to go back to Lorentz’s interpretation”. (Popper 1982, p. 29).
- 16 “. . . if after the removal of *corporeal Matter* out of the world, there will be still *Space* and *Distance* in which this very Matter, while it was there, was also conceived to lye, and this *distant Space* cannot but be something. . .” More (1655).
- 17 For a helpful outline of types of simplicity, see (Morris 2002, pp. 113–18).
- 18 E.g., John Feinberg writes, “So there appear to be problems with both the property view of simplicity and the property instance view. . . simplicity is not one of the divine attributes. This doesn’t mean that God has physical parts..”. (Feinberg 2006, p. 335).
- 19 More (1995). “That, however, anyone should add physical divisibility to this sort of extension, that indeed necessarily proceeds from the impotence of his own imagination . . .” (Ibid., p. 124).
- 20 Clarke himself notes this interesting nuance in Leibniz, summarizing him as saying, “The parts of time and space are allowed to be exactly alike in themselves, but not so when bodies exist in them”. In turn, Clarke’s own diagnosis is also that bodies are our sensible measure of divisions, which are not seen in space in itself or on their own. (Leibniz et al. 2000).
- 21 More’s successor, Samuel Clarke, says something a tad similar to this: “There is no such thing in reality as bounded space, but only we in our imagination fix our attention on what part or quantity we please of that which itself is always and necessarily unbounded”. Leibniz et al. (2000).
- 22 As More writes: “And when other beings are corrupted in it, it is, however, itself incorruptible”. More (1995). Or as Clarke states: “The parts of immensity (being totally of a different kind from corporeal, partable, seperable, divisible, movable parts, which are the ground of corruptibility) do no more hinder immensity from being essentially one than the parts of duration hinder eternity from being essentially one. God himself suffers no change at all by the variety and changebleness of things which live and move and have their being in him”. Leibniz et al. (2000).
- 23 Of course, the holenmerist (a term More himself coined) might laugh triumphantly at our retreat back to analogy. However, the primary issue with classical holenmerism is not necessarily that analogy is employed, but rather, that even upon employing it, the end result seems to bear little resemblance to any phenomenologically normal sense of the term ‘presence’. When one attempts to explain holenmerism (i.e., that immaterial entities are wholly replicated in every part of space) to the uninitiated, it seems to evoke nothing but a blank stare, for it resonates with little in our experience and bears even less resemblance to any of the things we usually define as ‘present’. In contrast, space has an intuitive, immediate, phenomenologically resonant sense of presence about it. We have dwelled within it all our lives. Space is the very thing this page exists within, that our eyes flit back and forth through as we read, and light travels between to make this moment of sight possible. If one simply pauses now to reach out their hand as if clawing for a loved one in the dark, they will intuitively sense the space their fingers run through like water. This analogous void may be mysterious; it may be distinct from how material objects exist, yet somehow, we all intuitively sense its presence. If God is space, then he is closer than the heavens, for space is as present between my toes as between the stars. With this said, one must admit we do not have sufficient space in this paper to properly address holenmerism and the classical view. Interested readers should turn to my book, Lyonhart (2023, particularly chapters 1–3, and 7), for a more thorough elaboration of these critiques along with More’s specific development regarding the theory.

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