1. Challenges Ahead

Some sociologists of religion have confronted us with the somewhat inconvenient truth that an increasing number of spiritually open but doctrinally unexclusive people in the Western world tend to believe that the idea of a nonpersonal transcendent being is way more plausible than the notion of a personal, active God. The rise in plausibility of apersonal concepts of the divine did – to my estimation – not get nurtured by New Age ideas only; it got also boosted through a (partly hazy, partly very conscious) adaptation of naturalistic metaphysical categories whose dominance demanded to carve out a new spot for the divine reality, unless one preferred to chose the straight direction towards atheism. If the concept of person is replaced ontologically by a concept of event or is described quasi-naturalistically through a-personal metaphors (i.e. “energy”, “light”, “presence of absolute consciousness”), a number of tremendous consequences for the model of the divine is to be expected.

Philosophically and theologically the question remains why, in the meantime, an apersonal concept of God seems to be more attractive and more plausible than what classical theism (within the traditions of the three great monotheistic religions) and personal theism (as the modern-day “offspring” of monotheistic convictions) have to offer. But it is also true that theological and philosophical concepts or debates don’t have to bow their head uncritically nor without reservation before (presumably) unsteady fashions in peoples’ mindsets and worldviews. So is it – from a merely systematic, philosophical, and theological point of view – really true that the concept of a personal God, as proposed by mainline Christianity and as a well-established element in Jewish or Muslim traditions, is in a situation of crisis? Although the answer to this question and its aligned diagnosis depend crucially on the concept of person one has, we may just have to acknowledge the fact that a number of contemporary voices present a list of problems the traditional concept of a personal God might have to face. This list is the result of essential debates about the doctrine of God in systematic theology as well as in philosophy of religion. Since this list will be presented in more detail as a lead-in element of the second section of my article, I am, for the time being, focusing on three items that seem to be the building blocks of an argument, which might promote non-standard concepts of the divine eventually:

(1) The philosophical and theological problems surrounding petitionary prayer and the framework of theodicy could serve as a strong basis to seriously
question the notion of a personal God. Throughout the last decades theological and philosophical debates have moved from the problem of theodicy to the problem of divine action. Although interventionist theories are common and widespread among those who still stick to personal theism, it seems to be less clear than ever whether the notion of God being an agent fits to our most basic cosmological and biological convictions. While quantum-theoretical analogies or models may have helped us to keep the naturalistic door open towards a reasonable idea of divine intervention we are, however, left with a puzzling question: How does the concept of deliberate and intentional divine action fit to those facts that force us to regard the development of the universe as a more or less un-governed process based only on what the laws of nature have set out as a framework. If creation has to be understood as the result of intended action and the effect of a sovereign, deliberating, foreknowing and superior rational divine agent, then such an idea is not compatible with the apparently undirected course of evolutionary development.

The problem of divine action arises in two interconnected versions: It presents itself as the difficulty to gain evidence and to build an ontological foundation for the idea of specific divine intervention. And it reveals itself as the problem of design and planning – as an obstacle for the idea of general divine action, which is expected to set out some sort of masterplan for the course of events in the universe. But if the notion of “plan”, “design” and “intention” is crucially bound to personal theism and if the scientific description of the course of events in our universe doesn’t justify to refer back to a divine plan or intention (let alone some sort of immediate divine intervention), personal theism might become a dead-end street.

(2) German theologian and philosopher Klaus Müller, among others, has advertised what in the English-speaking world is already well-known as the so-called ‘panentheistic turn’ in philosophical theology. This “initiative” is meant

5 To me it is not at all clear whether or not we should speak of a full-blooded “panentheistic” turn because this would presuppose that a considerable number, if not the majority of philosophers of religion and theologians are active supporters of this model of the ultimate. Since the current debates seem to be rather complex – including a considerable number of alternatives – I am more reluctant and prefer the phrase "panen-
to highlight the a-personal dimension of the divine and to question the strict transcendence of the deity in order to get out of what some see as a deadlock situation for classic theism as well as personal theism – cornered by naturalism on the one side and by the problem of theodicy on the other. A panentheistic concept of God is expected to come to our rescue in applying an interpretation of natural processes as the history of a complex inner-divine development, which presents God as an open and relational being in order to safeguard the rise of creaturely freedom right from the start. Moreover panentheism might also enable us to arrive at a different understanding of divine agency and presence.

A slightly increasing number of German philosophers of religion are willing to adapt process metaphysics and process theology, interpreting it as a road to panentheism – in order to make religious convictions, at least to a certain extent, compatible with contemporary naturalism. Some additional justification for doing this could be offered by a theory of consciousness and might also be supported by contemporary philosophy of mind: If one is willing to perceive consciousness as a primordial and basic natural phenomenon – by embracing, for instance, panpsychistic ideas as well – process metaphysics and process theology seem to be a preferable metaphysical option. But, of course, whoever considers a process-theological alternative to be the conceptual framework, which allows for the compatibility of theistic convictions and neo-Darwinism, has to distance herself from the mono-directional concept of a personal God.

(3) Additionally, within the area of contemporary philosophy of religion, prominent voices (like those of John Bishop and Ken Perszyk) remind us that the well-known (but, maybe, not so well understood) concept of an Omni-F-God, as invoked by classical theism and personal theism simultaneously, is as problematic in coming to terms with its conceptual implications as it is inconsistent or imperfect. For, if divine omnipotence is interpreted through the notion of power (conceptualized as supremacy of action), if divine knowledge is

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interpreted as ‘justified true belief’9 and divine grace as moral rationality or virtuousness, conceptual inconsistencies seem to become unavoidable once we confront these attributes with the basic elements of human self-understanding: i.e. with significant freedom and moral obligation.10 The ongoing and, to a certain extent, exhausting discussions concerning the compatibility of gratuitous evil with divine goodness, of human freedom with divine foreknowledge, and of divine relationality with divine aseity can provide enough material to prove this point.

However, the serious questions revolving around the intellectual viability of so-called classical theism must also make us wonder whether or not the following equation is true: Does classical theism really entail the notion of a personal God who is pictured as a conscious, wise, morally praiseworthy, and bodiless individual that has enormous powers and capacities at his disposal? I have called ‘personal theism’ the offspring of classical theism, but this is more or less just a surrogate term pointing at a deeper and somewhat unresolved problem: Is personal theism necessarily attached to or even implied by classical theism? Or do we have to regard them as rather separate forms of theism, which by coincidence may (or may not) reveal some areas of overlap? I will have to come back to this problem in the very last section of my introduction.

For the time being we certainly have to admit that a sober look at what some see as the high peak of classical theism might force us to take a step back from identifying classical theism with personal theism. Take St. Anselm’s Monologion, for instance: In his masterpiece of philosophical theology St. Anselm opens his treatise of the divine nature with the notion of God as the supreme Good and as the only ontologically self-sufficient substance. Attributes pointing towards personality and personhood seem to play a rather minor and subordinate role compared to what a metaphysics of spirit and a metaphysics of substance are implying in terms of categories that are suitable for the concept of God. However, to the medieval audience it was crystal clear that a substance displaying powers of intellect and will is a person. Comparable ideas can be found in Avicenna’s Metaphysics of the Healing. To him God is the most perfect one, the only necessary existent one. If necessary existence surpasses every quiddity God must not be conceived of in terms common individuality since

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there is not matter in God. Nevertheless, to Avicenna, God is pure intellect, since his apprehension of what can be known is not hindered by matter; this indicates also that God’s primary (if not exclusive) object of knowledge is God himself.

Still, a deeper look at the history of theology and philosophy could also reveal that a straightforward identification of classical theism with personal theism remains highly problematic, because, traditionally, God was rather conceived as the most perfect, all-encompassing and entirely immutable entity which is – based on this metaphysical description – beyond and above the boundaries and restrictions of personhood. Using the words of the classic medieval doctrine, God is a perfect, eternal and unchangeable ‘substance’. Clearly this short description of God’s ontological status contains unavoidably some breaking points, which become visible at the surface and threatening to conceptual consistency in case the metaphysical notion of God is combined with our idea of personality. Admittedly medieval theologians and philosophers were eager to underline that God, who is being in itself in the most perfect and unrestricted way, is also worthy of worship, devotion and love. But what medieval tradition had to say about divine knowledge, intention and will as well as what it said about divine agency and providence is not easily compatible with an everyday concept of person. For, how should we reconcile the idea that the primary object of God’s knowledge and will is the divine nature and that divine agency has to be conceptualized as one, eternal act while, on the contrary, the notion of personhood revolves around distinct stages of consciousness, around the prospect of having access to external objects or displaying a variety of intentions and emotions alongside distinct sequences of time?

Matters get even more complicated if we take into account what Christian doctrine always held to be true: God is not just a person but rather three relations (called persons) in one substance – making the notion of substance the primary ontological kind for representing a well-balanced concept of God.

But, of course within this controversy those voices have to be heard that explicitly11 or implicitly (take Richard Swinburne12 for instance) try to reinforce a personal, even ‘anthropic’ concept of God. Such strategies seem to be guided, however, by a variety of different motives that become more apparent as soon as we take a broader look at the theological and philosophical landscape surrounding the topic of this book: Primarily – especially in the area of theology – some prominent authors are willing to save and defend the concept of a personal God13 in order to stick to, what they’d call, everyday intuitions, which

13 So, for instance, Klaus von Stosch in his monograph on divine action and theodicy; cf. K. VON STOSCH, Gott – Macht – Geschichte [cf. fn. 2].
are imbedded in various religious convictions and which seem to be required to keep a number of theological concepts in business: Take for example the notion of a so-called 'history of salvation' which can hardly be interpreted in a realistic way without referring to a divine agent who offers himself as a partner in dialogue. Additionally, a number of liturgical rites or other religious phenomena that lie at the heart of religious practice cannot be regarded as meaningful (in a more or less realistic reading of the speech-acts involved) if we relinquish the idea of a personal God. The value of petitionary or intercessory prayer or the notion of moral responsibility, taken as obedience to divine commands, crucially depend on God’s being a person who keenly and deliberately relates himself to other persons.

Motives of the above-mentioned kind are nevertheless heavily entrenched in religious traditions that seem to serve as sometimes hidden premises of contemporary discussions. So it is not a surprise that we find entirely different points of departure alongside different Christian denominations: Theological and philosophical adherents of the Latin and medieval era or the British and German idealistic traditions seem to have less serious problems in overcoming a personal, anthropic concept of God. Catholic theologians as well as some (German and American) Lutheran theologians are among those who might be willing to appreciate and welcome a metaphysical story which sees God as the supreme substance, as the absolute, self-mediated spirit, or – in alliance with process theologies – the sum of all events that marks the layout of the events in the universe. Some contemporary Evangelical theologians (and philosophers), on the other hand, urge us to stick to a much stricter conception of a personal God for the reasons mentioned above. Underneath the differences between various different theological camps and denominational ties we might also uncover philosophical resources that could, nevertheless, help us in broadening the concept of God in order to overcome the constraints of too narrow a notion of divine personhood. Process metaphysics was one of the resources already mentioned. But, actually, there is much more to be said because there is much more to be redetected: It could be worthwhile to take a second look at G.W.F. Hegel and F.W.J. Schelling and, to put it more systematically, to those philosophical theologies that have influenced F.D.E. Schleiermacher in the 19th or Paul Tillich in the 20th century if we want to arrive at an agreeable revision of the concept of a personal God.

However, the main question that emerges from the inside of Christian traditions could be phrased like this: How can God still be conceived as ‘personally

relevant’ (a relevance that presupposes some equivalent to self-consciousness and to the capacity of deliberate intervention) if he – according to Hegel – is substance, subject and idea and the self-mediated process that intertwines and surpasses all three of these ontological phenomena?

This very short sidestep will bring us back to main street since Hegel’s puzzling perception of God being simultaneously and eventually a substance, a self and an idea leads us to wonder which ontological category God really belongs to (if a question of this sort is reasonable, anyhow). Most of us might be easily persuaded to agree that the larger parts of philosophical and theological tradition offer a straightforward answer: If anything God is a substance. But, unfortunately, that’s only one chapter of a more complex story. Following St. Anselm’s ontology of perfection, God resembles also a universal. Although this may sound paradoxical if not contradictory at first glance, God’s resembling a universal can be derived from St. Anselm’s view which holds that divine attributes are the role-models of attribution and that God does not simply have his attributes but is identical to them. Clearly, modern advocates of divine personhood – take Alvin Plantinga for instance – renounce St. Anselm’s perception of divine property-identity on the basis of an anticipated metaphysical nightmare: A God who is identical to his properties and who serves as the role-model and paradigm of content for any attribute-adscription looks like an abstract object, is as unattractive as an infinite number, and doesn’t deserve any worship at all, because nobody would seriously worship a metaphysical principle, a number or a paradigmatic content.16 Could this be one of the rare and surprising cases when some analytic philosophers of religion suddenly join forces with followers of the postmodern camp that are eager to steer us away from what Heideggerians used as a swearword: ‘onto-theology’?17

At the end of the day one may wonder what the actual role of philosophy might be in these debates. I’d like to propose an answer while dividing it into a (1) formal and a (2) material aspect: (1) Usually philosophers are very well trained in evaluating non-empirical theories. So it might be part of the philosopher’s job description to estimate which prize one has to pay for endorsing a non-personal notion of God based on the logical and metaphysical implications one has to deal with. (2) Part of the critical business of philosophy might be as well to uncover those religious convictions that guide contemporary philosophers of religion and theologians whenever they modify certain divine attributes or the concept of God as a whole. Still the mainstream of contemporary German philosophy seems to shy away from any form of religious conviction for the sake of neutrality; so to German academia it comes as a surprise that English speaking philosophers of religion are willing and eager to explore, moreover to

defend a *Christian* concept of God. Although there has been a tradition of Christian philosophy in Germany the contemporary context of doing philosophy seems to enforce neutrality as soon as it comes to denominational affiliations or preferences. On the other side, it is also apparent that neutrality of that sort can never be achieved since it remains highly artificial. Therefore, it might be reasonable not to keep religious convictions from entering the arena of public discourse but to openly discuss their impact on the philosophical business. To put it simply: Religious convictions can be seen as a legitimate source of knowledge addressed by philosophy, but of course they cannot replace a philosophical argument whenever philosophical justification is needed. In our present context the incompatibility of a certain concept of God with the doctrinal heritage of a specific religious denomination cannot be taken to count against the validity or dignity of a concept of God, which might be under discussion. But to claim that the argument from tradition does no good in the hands of philosophers would be equally careless; for philosophers usually are justified in turning to basic intuitions or common sense in order to weigh the viabilities of theoretical alternatives. It might be seen as a meta-question of this book whether or not religious convictions should play the role of basic intuitions and whether or not certain denominational traditions may serve as a surrogate of common sense.

But there is still more to the business of philosophy. Alongside philosophical traditions and siding with a majority of contemporary philosophers of religion we can ascertain that the concept of God essentially belongs to metaphysics and theoretical philosophy (whether or not one personally believes in the existence of God). God, so to speak, is an ultimate idea that comes to philosophy naturally as the idea of the ultimate – as the necessity of a conceptual interconnections meant to be the completion of a metaphysical architecture. If we agree that Aristotle had the genuine right to close his metaphysics of form with the notion of God as the form of all forms, then we have a role-model of how the concept of God enters the philosophical arena. Even Immanuel Kant would point out that the concept of God is something reason is ultimately concerned with for the sake of its own sanity. So, it is not only the case that philosophy borrows the concept of God from concrete religions and their culturally shaped traditions, but it is also true that the concept of God comes to the philosophical arena from within.

However, hinting at the philosophical birthplace of the concept of God could breed some tension between metaphysics and religion, and between philosophy and theology. Nevertheless, tensions of this sort may have a fruitful outcome. And it represents only one of the alternatives meant to deal with these tensions, if theology and philosophy decide to part ways based on the assumption that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (as well as Jesus’s God and the God of Muhammad) is *entirely* distinct from the God of the philosophers. Thanks to the
history of philosophy and theology we have other witnesses and classic resources providing us with alternative role models: The tensions between theology and philosophy can also be seen as necessary marital disputes of a happily married couple that got engaged partly based on love and mainly based on reason.

2. A Roadmap of Significantly Alternative Concepts of God

During the last couple of years, so-called 'New Atheism' put a number of topics back into focus that were related to decades-old discussions in Analytic Philosophy of Religion, but needed to be brought back to the context of more recent discussions. At the very peak of those issues, reintroduced by new atheism, is the question of how belief in a personal God can be reconciled with a neo-Darwinian theory of evolution and with the naturalistic metaphysics implied by that theory. To put it into the words we have already used: How can we reconcile the concept of a personal God with a so-called evolutionary worldview, which has the idea of un-aimed, non-intentional development as its constituent? In the light of these questions, some verdicts coming from the camp called 'New Atheism'\(^\text{18}\) can be interpreted as the outcome of a bewilderment that eventually originates from a way too anthropomorphic God – a concept of God that is still unknowingly roving around in the pews. Especially the problem of theodicy as well as the often-indicated connection between religion and violence continues to be the preferred point of departure for contemporary atheism.

To some philosophers and theologians the chances of responding adequately to these problems seem to be seriously weakened if we stick to the notorious concept of a personal God who displays changing intentions, decides deliberately, even arbitrarily to act (or not to act), commands things solely based on his will and, eventually, tells people exclusively how to treat our neighbors or our enemies. In the German-speaking world the challenges of new atheism have been picked up by Christian philosophers and philosophical theologians primarily.\(^\text{19}\) This is no coincidence – given the fact that some atheists have brought metaphysical clothes to rather naturalistic bones in building a scarecrow for religious convictions. But the recent business of dealing with atheism remains unfinished as long as we don’t get to the naturalistic heart of the matter


which is related to the question how a concept of God is reasonable, justifiable, and meaningful given that a broader version of naturalism is true.

If we take a look at the landscape of the before mentioned discussions and if we add some of the more sophisticated, outspoken and debatable remarks of contemporary atheism to the equation, our endeavor to justify the belief in God will result in a number of sub-topics we would have to address. These sub-topics shall be introduced as intricate questions the belief in a personal God has to answer:

1. Are we entitled to talk about an active, mindful, planning, and even interacting God who is a sovereign partner to the world once we take a closer look at the elements of an evolutionary worldview? But if we should encounter insurmountable difficulties regarding this very concept of God what would be the alternative?20

2. Does the classic concept of God, as you can find it in many monotheistic traditions, need revision since the idea of divine simplicity, eternity and aseity tends to threaten the metaphysics of a self-sustaining universe that includes entities that have their own, legitimate ’metaphysical privacy’? But what, on the other hand, would be the price of giving up the set of core attributes of classic theism?

3. What are the resources we have and we can turn to in developing a philosophically justifiable concept of God? Und what, on the other side, are the motives (take for instance metaphysical convictions, sacred scriptures, religious traditions) that foster the notion of a personal God? Is it possible to identify this very notion of a personal God as a result of classic metaphysics? Or is it the offspring of certain religious traditions (Christian, Jewish or Muslim)?21

4. But, are there also counter-indications in these very traditions that might entitle us to turn to a rather a-personal concept of God? Can we identify those counter-instances within specific religious traditions (even within monotheistic traditions)? Or do we have to tap the potential of rather modern and enlightened philosophical resources (compare German or British idealism) that can help us to overcome the shortcomings of a way too personal God?

5. Furthermore, are alternative forms of philosophical theology available today (compare the so-called panentheistic turn or process theology), which can help us to surmount the problems of too personal a God and which could

turn out to be more consistent with a naturalistic or neo-Darwinian worldview and to be, therefore, scientifically and metaphysically more adequate?\textsuperscript{22}

If we focus more specifically on how the notion of God can be reconciled with a \textit{prima facie} naturalistic worldview, five different alternatives of modelling the ultimate can be distinguished which have got some attention and gained some popularity in contemporary debates. I am not claiming that these alternatives are exhaustive or that there are no additional models available\textsuperscript{23}; but what the below mentioned alternatives have in common is that they want to salvage as much as possible from a classical notion of God and that they seem to be attractive to philosophers and theologians who are still interested in following the path of Christian traditions.

Although the following distinction is, to a certain extent, oversimplifying the matter for introductory reasons, the views presented below should be taken as options that mark the layout of the discussions in this book:

(1) The very first position holds on to some of the heritage of classical theism, but endorses also a strong version of personal theism which is seen to keep the notion of a personal God alive but agrees to modify one or the other of the divine attributes (for instance divine omnipotence, divine foreknowledge or divine eternity). Contemporarily, \textit{open theists} could be regarded as the legitimate offspring of classical theism and personal theism – an offspring, which has, admittedly, gone astray and which is willing to sacrifice especially those attributes proposed by classical theism that could undermine the idea of God being a person.\textsuperscript{24}

However, the description of this very first option presupposes implicitly that classical theism is naturally compatible with the concept of a personal God. But, as I have already pointed out, some in-depth research might reveal that (what one might call) ‘\textit{real} classical theism’ gives sufficient reason to fundamentally criticize the idea of a personal God by emphasizing divine substantiality, aseity, simplicity and eternity – in contrast to what some nowadays belief to be the essential attributes of the divine nature. Thus for Avicenna and Anselm giving up the idea of divine eternity, aseity and necessity would equal giving up belief in God as such. So if we can agree upon the fact that Avicenna or St. Anselm represent a paradigm of classical theism then classical theism is by no means guilty of nurturing an anthropomorphic concept of God. Avicenna’s as well as Anselm’s perception of God is developed on a transparent metaphysical basis for which the ontological category of substance or a trans-categorical concept of being/existence respectively play a crucial role. Thus, the attempt to hold on to


classical theism could very well result in a redetection of ‘true’ classical theism which, in its very own right, is capable of counterbalancing the concept of too personal a God, while it confirms that God is primarily the perfect substance, the being in itself ore the ultimate goal of every process or action. In other words: How classy is classical theism?

The remaining positions, strategies, and options are, of course, way more radical than open theism. Although they vary in their basic metaphysical outlines, they still have one motif in common insofar as they deliberately break with those traditions that conceive of God as an almighty, eternal, morally praiseworthy person who, so to speak, watches the world and the development of the universe ‘from above’ or ‘from outside’. In detail, we can distinguish a number different strategies that, eventually, indicate four remaining possible alternatives to classical theism (and its open-theist offspring):

(2) The second alternative is eager to strengthen the idealistic underpinning of certain Western traditions. Adherents of this approach invite us to conceive of God as the self-mediating, dialectically self-identical absolute that truly surpasses the notion of personhood in every respect. Nowadays, this strategy is embraced by the rather rare (but still kicking) adherents of German Idealism as well as by the still ardent followers of British Idealism. Its conceptual results lead to some version of panentheism.

(3) The third alternative connects to process metaphysics in order to reconcile the free and un-guided development of the cosmos (and of Darwinian evolution) with a concept of God in a speculative way. Coming from that perspective, one would have to subscribe to a double role and a double nature of God: being the principle and the outcome of the developments in the cosmos and being the effective and the formal and resulting cause of everything within the universe simultaneously. Within contemporary philosophy of mind process metaphysics has become rejuvenated and has drawn more attention.

(4) The fourth alternative underlines the anthropomorphic aspects of a personal God and is willing to defend this very notion as a version of ‘anthropic/anthropomorphic theism’ – as coined by Peter Forrest. But to do so, anthropomorphic theism, which simultaneously embraces a naturalistic and evolutionary worldview, has to distance itself from a number of classically ascribed divine attributes: i.e. omnipotence, moral goodness and eternity. It is the purpose of this very position to conceive of God as a supreme but sincerely developing and highly relational entity capable of love and trust. Thus, attributes like divine simplicity, divine substantiality, and un-changeability have to be

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Introduction

critically revised, if not abandoned. Instead, God is thought to have a developing nature and, even more so, a developing character that transforms him from a sovereign but trans-moral entity into a loving and caring partner of mankind. This strategy may as well be combined with certain aspects of process metaphysics insofar as the constituents of an evolutionary worldview are taken for granted.

(5) The fifth alternative has been proposed by John Bishop and Ken Perszyk. It sticks to a naturalistic basis of metaphysics but tries to place God—so to speak—within the universe: as the emerging ultimate cause of the universe as well as the ultimate formal cause of every event in the universe. This revision forces us to turn the God-world-relationship from heads to tails providing us with, presumably, new answers to the age-old problem of theodicy and to the problems of divine presence in the world.

2.1 God the Absolute Self

An interesting example for the above-mentioned second alternative can be found in the writings of Klaus Müller who traces his concept back to German idealism explicitly. His main line of thought, which is the basis to favor an apersonal or ‘super-personal’ concept of God, runs as follows:

1. The key for establishing a reasonably and metaphysically sound concept of God is an irreducible and irreplaceable first person perspective (this very perspective human subjects will unequivocally detect while reflecting on the very nature of their own self-consciousness).

2. Coming from this very basis, God has to be regarded as the inner foundation and ontological grounding of the finite self. God is the absolute foundation of the finite self that is, in its own coordinates, a merely contingent absolute.

3. So, an adequate concept of God is available only if we embrace a metaphysics of the self, which hast to be brought in alignment with an appropriate phenomenology of self-consciousness.

4. If God has to be conceptualized as the inner foundation of the contingent human self, he cannot just be outside of the world or beyond the world. Rather the world as the metaphysical framework of continent human selves is inside God (metaphysically dipped into God).

5. If it is true what is said about God being the inner foundation of the self and of every conscious being, every concept of the divine which is built upon an unsurpassable distance between God and world turns out to be highly problematic, if not inadequate. Thus, the difference between God and the

world is surrounded and surpassed by a ‘higher’ form of unity between God and the world.

6. If we seek evidence for our belief in the existence of God every bit of justification can be found exclusively once we address the question of what kind the inner foundation of self-consciousness might be and, to be more precise, what the metaphysical foundation of the self and its first person perspective must look like. As a result we will arrive at a concept of God as omnisubjectivity, containing finite selves as modes of his very own subjectivity.

7. At a larger scale, the development of the cosmos becomes, metaphorically and literally, part of God’s very own history insofar as God, seen as the inner foundation of finite self-consciousness, is immersed in the universe through the myriads of first person perspectives that are rooted in the absolute divine self.

8. Eventually, the basic energies, forces and powers that guide every development within the universe can be identified as primordial forms of consciousness and freedom (being parts of God’s own nature given as a gift to the finite realm as the modes of divine presence in the universe).

9. Therefore, it would be entirely inadequate to perceive God as the ultimate designer of the cosmos. Instead, he is the metaphysical soil and the most inspiring formal cause of everything that happens in the universe to finite entities that are on a journey to realize their very destiny in the form of awakening matter and turn it into to self-consciousness reality.

This briefly sketched outline of Müller’s concept not only connects its thoughts to German Idealism but also to branches of British Idealism, namely to the writings of Timothy L. Sprigge31 who conceives of God as the absolute consciousness that is ‘dialectically identical’ to the universe:

“Absolute and pantheistic idealism in the way Sprigge conceived it, means: Everything that exists is either experience or part of experience. Something un-experiential cannot even be conceived of nor imagined since imagining the un-experiential-ness of the un-experiential presupposes to experience the un-experiential.”32

Sprigge himself assesses his non-classical concept of God based on a list of essential attributes classic theism ascribes to God. It is interesting to take a look at this list (and how it was echoed by Müller) and on what Sprigge has affirmatively checked on this list33 in contrast to what he has ruled out God to be:

(1) creator,
(2) all-knowing (all-conscious),


32 MÜLLER, Glauben – Fragen – Denken [cf. fn. 29], 764. [Translated by Thomas Schärtl]

33 Cf. MÜLLER, Glauben – Fragen – Denken [cf. fn. 29], 767.
(3) all-experiencing,
(4) having a unique mode of being,
(5) necessary in a unique way,
(6) the reason to explain the existence of everything else,
(7) omnipresent,
(8) all-powerful,
(9) possessing an unsurpassable moral perfection,
(10) unsurpassably perfect (in an ontological meaning of goodness)
(11) subject and addressee of worship,
(12) subject and addressee of religious affections,
(13) the anchor of human salvation,
(14) an all-informed, all-controlling person.

According to Sprigge and through the lenses of Müller’s Sprigge interpretation the items (1), (9), and (14) refer to criteria that are not applicable to his ‘idealistic’ concept of God, while items (8), (11), and (12) could remain undecided regarding their applicability. But at least, eight items that once belonged to the classical (and even personal) concept of God are still left; nevertheless, the resulting concept clearly identifies God with an absolute consciousness that is present in every (conscious and maybe non-conscious) being in contrast to a transcendent agent resembling a highly informed and morally praiseworthy person who watches over everything. It is noteworthy how Klaus Müller commented on the result of this process of checking the essential criteria of a concept of God, because his remarks shows precisely where Sprigge parts ways with classical (and personal) theism and what sort impact an idealistic underpinning could have on philosophical theology eventually:

"Of further interest are the three criteria which Sprigge’s concept of the absolute is apparently missing: (1), (9), and (14). If we take a closer look we can identify those criteria as the specific weaknesses of classic theism and its notion of a personal God in contrast to those who regard them as the strength of classic theism:
(Ad 1) The notion of creation has become identified as a highly problematic, and crisis-ridden metaphor during the period of German idealism (compare Fichte and Rosmini) which cannot even live up to the normative standards of a philosophical concept. […]
(Ad 9) If classical theism claims moral perfection of the highest form for God (and to classic theism such a claim is unavoidable) then the dead-end situation induced by the problem of theodicy becomes inevitably and most harshly apparent […]. Thus, Sprigge is opposed to these ideas. His absolute idealism doesn’t conceive the infinite consciousness as a person and is, therefore, not obliged to even take moral perfection into account as a relevant property.
(Ad 14) Criterion (14) is closely connected to criterion (9), but makes us imminently aware of the anthropomorphism which has been put under scrutiny since the period of pre-Socratic philosophy and, even more so, systematically by the critique of religion during the Enlightenment period [...]."

[34] Cf. Müller, Glauben – Fragen – Denken [cf. fn. 12], 768. [Transl. by Thomas Schärtl]
The third of the above mentioned alternative non-standard approaches can be illustrated with Alfred N. Whitehead’s famous ideas. Whitehead hints at a very peculiar concept of God that includes the idea that God has a primordial nature as well as a consequent nature. What we accept as some of the classical divine attributes are still couched in Whitehead’s perception of God, but in his view they only contribute to God’s primordial nature and to a rather abstract way of divine existence while their content needs to spelled out alongside the development of nature and needs to derive new life and new meaning from God’s relation to the temporal world.

“In the first place, God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification.

Viewed as primordial, he is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality. In this aspect, he is not before all creation, but with all creation. But, as primordial, so far is he from ‘eminence reality,’ that in this abstraction he is ‘deficiently actual’ – and this in two ways. His feelings are only conceptual and so lack the fullness of actuality. Secondly, conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness in their subjective forms.”

“But God, as well as being primordial, is also consequent. He is the beginning and the end. He is not the beginning in the sense of being in the past of all members. He is the presupposed actuality of conceptual operation, in unison of becoming with every other creative act. Thus by reason of the relativity of all things, there is a reaction of the world on God. The completion of God’s nature into a fullness of physical feelings is derived from the objectification of the world in God.”

So, neither is there divine a-seity or immutability nor do we find divine simplicity or straightforward a-temporality. Instead, God is perceived to develop along with the world’s processes; he is not ontologically opposed to the world as the one, super-almighty entity that gets trapped in its very own ontological distance and metaphysical isolation. Rather, God as the ultimate entity in process is inspired by the world and bound to the world in some sort of kenotic self-limitation:

“In every respect God and the World move conversely to each other in respect to their process. God is primordially one, namely, he is the primordial unity of relevance of the many potential forms: in the process her acquires a consequent multiplicity, which the primordial character absorbs into its own unity.”

36 WHITEHEAD, Process and Reality [cf. fn. 34], 523.
37 WHITEHEAD, Process and Reality [cf. fn. 34], 529.
"Thus the consequent nature of God is composed of a multiplicity of elements with individual self-realization. It is just as much a multiplicity as it is a unity; it is just as much one immediate fact as it is an unresting advance beyond itself."\(^{38}\)

The above-mentioned conceptual differentiations in Whitehead’s account are most basic and have become normative for process philosophies of any kind throughout the decades. But ingenuity is not an intellectual virtue per se. So process philosophy claims its concepts to be better suited to fit to a modern cosmology and to an evolutionary worldview than the conceptual ideas of so-called traditional theism would ever be. Serving as a sincerely alternative theistic paradigm, Whitehead’s metaphysical approach has become currently rediscovered in German theology and philosophy of religion. But even if a sophisticated follower of classical theism isn’t willing to walk down this route, he or she has to face the fact that nothing less than the relation-less-ness of God and his distanced sovereignty in traditional theism needs to be put under scrutiny.

2.3 A Developing Divine Personality

The fourth non-standard alternative to classical theism echoes process metaphysics to certain extent but is a rather sophisticated revitalization of personal theism. Peter Forrest shaped the idea of a developing divine nature and character.\(^{39}\) Forrest himself aims at broadening and consolidating an option which he described as anthropic/anthropomorphic theism. His basic intuition enters the picture as an axiom for further conceptualization: As does in nature there must exist an anthropic principle in theism as well. The development of conscious beings in our physical universe – beings that possess free will and the ability to love – is of utmost significance for Forrest’s God. In order to clarify, underline and to strengthen this very significance Forrest modifies some if not most of the traditional attributes classical theism (or to be precise: what is perceived to be classical theism) once attached to the essence of God. So, in Forrest’s view God is neither eternal in the sense of an atemporal mode of existence nor is he perfectly good (in a manner of attributing unconditioned moral goodness to God right from the start):

"The position I am rejecting, then, is not that there is a Perfect Being, but that the existence of perfection is a suitable starting-point for philosophical theology. […]

Hence, I say the hypothesis of a Primordial God whose first act is governed by the hedonic motive alone wins on grounds of simplicity. To be sure, hedonic tone is mysterious too, but it is not as complicated as such values as truth, beauty, and goodness."\(^{40}\)

\(^{38}\) Whitehead, Process and Reality [cf. fn. 34], 531.

\(^{39}\) Cf. Forrest, Developmental Theism [cf. fn. 10].

\(^{40}\) Forrest, Developmental Theism [cf. fn. 10], 87.
Moreover, in this view God’s omnipotence is metaphysically limited by the fact that the only temporal beings he can create have a physical nature. The development of a material universe is, therefore, a mirror of the divine nature and its possibilities. Therefore, it is inevitable to perceive God as a being that develops over time. The origin of creation goes back to God’s pure will to be pleased and delighted by the beauty of the cosmos:

"Ours is a universe of great beauty, which is perhaps the chief reason for preferring the theistic over the naturalistic way of understanding, provided part of the motive for creation is taken to be aesthetic. There is no problem with holding that the aesthetic is a source of divine joy. The problem is that God could achieve this joy, we might think, simply by imagining beautiful universes, and imagining the drama of creatures endowed with freedom engaged in the battle between good and evil. Why would God need to behold actual beauty to derive aesthetic joy? There are, I hold, three answers. The first is that there is joy in performing beautifully as well as joy in beholding beauty. Perhaps we should think of creation as like a dance [...]. The second answer is that we humans can attend to some things rather than others, but God, or at least the Primordial God, cannot be selective in this fashion: it was burdened with an awareness of all possibilities. Hence there is no way the Primordial God could attend only to the beautiful possibilities while ignoring the ugly ones. [...] The third answer is that even if the divine aesthetic joy is achieved by imagination, rather than creation, God would derive further joy by sharing this aesthetic joy with creatures that can come to have the joy of beholding the beauty of creation."

Alongside this kind of pleasure and joy God starts developing a morally significant and reliable character which is eventually responsible for weighing and assessing the risks of having brought about the cosmos despite the burden of evil:

"The Primordial God can undergo a more significant change by acting in ways that constrain the future histories of physical universes. In particular, God can change by ensuring that many universes that were once possible are no longer possible. Presumably these include all those in which suffering definitely exceeds joy, and probably all those in which joy does not exceed suffering. What corresponding change occurs to God? Previously God could entertain the possibility of creating a universe in which suffering outweighed joy. This has now become unthinkable, not in the sense of not being understood by God. For might-have-beens have whatever status our metaphysics grants them, [...]. Rather, these universes are unthinkable in the morally relevant sense of not being such as we could decide whether or not to do it. For various acts to have become unthinkable is for God to have acquired a moral character, that of a virtuous consequentialist, whereas previously the divine consequentialism was not the result of a virtuous character. This

[41 FORREST, Developmental Theism [cf. fn. 10], 82f.
illustrates how a change in which universes are still possible implies a change in the divine character."\(^{42}\)

God, according to Forrest, is transforming himself from being pure, unbound and most homogenous will to a Trinitarian God who is able to respond to the love offered to him by human beings with equal and reciprocal love. God turns from a metaphysical initiator into a personal God having a human-like face. But to get to this human-like appearance and personhood God has to restrict his omnipotence for moral reasons: Since God enjoys every aspect of freedom within the development of the universe as he is delighted by the significant freedom of creaturely agents he needs to restrain from executing his essential omnipotence.

### 2.4 An Emerging Ultimate

It is the starting point of our fifth alternative to question whether the God of classical theism is truly a God worth to be worshipped. In an initial paper, which started the discussions about the adequacy of the Omni-\textit{F}-God-concept, John Bishop has raised the question whether a being that is conceived to be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and morally perfect could be truly perfect. In Bishop’s view this almighty and all-knowing being lacks something very important: It might be true that such a being is worthy to be seriously afraid of, but there is no reason to see this being as the addressee of worship, dedication or, let alone, love. \(^{43}\) The Omni-\textit{F}-God-concept gets even less plausible the more we identify God as the first, primary and substantial cause of the universe. Because from this very angle divine primordial causality becomes irreconcilable with the divine promise of an eschatological future since the existence of evil lays a heavy burden on God’s ultimate responsibility. But if one wants to stick go the idea of God being a first cause as well as being the one who grants eschatological salvation the mysteriousness of divine responsibility destroys or, at least, undermines his ability to be worthy of worship.\(^{44}\)

Bishop’s initial intuition consists of the idea of turning the classical, asymmetrical relationship between God and the world from heads to tails. He crucially questions divine aseity and relation-less-ness because the latter would undermine God’s being worthy of worship. To Bishop Christology and Trinitarian theology can serve as conceptual paradigms to spell out what God’s inner nature truly is: unsurpassable love.\(^{45}\) To get to an alternative concept of God we need to perceive God as the ultimate, final cause of the universe in contrast to an initial cause. Furthermore, God must not be regarded as a person seated outside

\(^{42}\) \textit{FORREST}, Developmental Theism [cf. fn. 10], 112.

\(^{43}\) Cf. \textit{BISHOP}, Adequate Alternative [cf. fn. 9], 419–433, esp. 425.

\(^{44}\) Cf. \textit{BISHOP}, Adequate Alternative [cf. fn. 9], 426–428.

\(^{45}\) Cf. \textit{BISHOP}, Adequate Alternative [cf. fn. 9], 431f.
the universe but as an ultimate entity that encompasses the ultimate goal of those developments that take place within our universe.

"God could be the Universe’s ultimate explainer by being its overall final cause in the absence of the Universe having any efficient cause. The Universe would then be explicable in terms of its point. God would be ultimate explainer, not by standing outside the Universe as its efficient cause, but by being its teleological culmination within it [...]." \(^{46}\)

As some others do Bishop embraces a largely naturalistic worldview, which emphasizes the natural causality of processes in the universe and to which straightforward divine intervention would sound like ancient mythology. Thus, Bishop votes for a revision of the classical concept and the personal of God because it is apparent that a God whose nature is in accordance with the self-sustaining developments in the universe is remarkably different from what classic theism or personal theism might tell us:

"On the alternative theism I have been sketching, the Universe is such that Divine Love comes to exist within it. So, in marveling the Universe, we are marvelling not simply at material existence, but at that which [...] gives birth to the Divine. [...] From the perspective of final causality, Got is the telos of the Universe. And the only ultimate explanation we can give for the existence of the Universe will be a teleological one: the Universe exists so that the supreme good [...] should come to exist and ultimately be victorious." \(^{47}\)

3. The Task

In the previous paragraphs and sections I have used the terms “classical theism” and “personal theism” in a rather unspecified way. And some of my comments could have insinuated that classical theism and personal theism are just two sides of one and the same coin. But actually, as I had at least mentioned in a sidestep referring to Avicenna and St. Anselm, it is not the case that classical theism and personal theism should be seen as qualitatively identical twins. In fact, their relationship is much more complicated. And to explore the complexity and extension of their relationship is one of the main goals of this book.

3.1 Straightening Out Our Categories

The first one who introduced the distinction between classical theism and personal theism was, according to my knowledge, Brian Davies\(^{48}\). He coined the

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\(^{46}\) Cf. BISHOP, Adequate Alternative [cf. fn. 9], 429.

\(^{47}\) J. BISHOP, Modest Fideism [cf. fn. 9], 401.

phrase “theistic personalism”\(^\text{49}\). But since the term “theistic personalism” is commonly used in the German-speaking world to denote a certain branch of Christian philosophy, which tried to combine existentialism with a strong notion of personhood, I will prefer the less laden phrase “personal theism” – despite its vagueness.

Now what are the characteristics of classical theism over and against personal theism? Davies underlines that a strong notion of \textit{creation}\(^\text{50}\) is typical for classical theism; additionally a certain type of divine attributes represents the cornerstone of classical theism:

“In terms of classical theism, there is no causality from creatures to God since creatures are wholly God’s effects. […] According to classical theism […] creatures constantly owe all that they are to God, and any causal activity of theirs is, first and foremost, God’s causal activity in them. Many classical theists make this point by insisting that God is impassible.

[…] And for most classical theists the claim that God is impassible goes hand in hand with the teaching that God is immutable. The idea here is twofold: (1) God cannot be altered by anything creature does, and (2) God is intrinsically unchangeable. […]

For many classical theist, this idea also suggests that God is outside time.”

In fact, the doctrine of \textit{divine eternity}\(^\text{52}\) in alliance with the doctrine of \textit{divine simplicity}\(^\text{53}\) defines the key concept of God within the framework of classical theism. If we can presuppose a certain framework in which Platonic or Aristotelian metaphysics is true, eternity and simplicity can be derived from each other since being composed (of matter and form, for instance) includes to be subject to change and to be subject to the seasons of time while pure simplicity is associated with pure actuality.

For the most part I agree with Davies’s characterization of classical theism and its constituents. However, his initial criterion – the doctrine of \textit{creation} – should not be taken as a distinguishing feature, because personal theists usually have an equally strong concept of creation while renouncing divine simplicity and eternity \textit{tout court}. Although \textit{creation out of nothing} is something classical theists and personal theists are able to agree on, there is, nevertheless, some kernel of truth in Davies’s account if in referring back to the laden term “creation” he rather alludes at the idea that \textit{God is the unlimited and uncaused cause of everything}. But instead of using the somewhat problematic term “creation” I’d prefer the phrase “divine aseity” in order to develop a distinguishing aspect if and only if we can conceive of aseity as some kind of entirely asymmetrical

\(^{49}\) Davies, Philosophy of Religion [cf. fn. 47], 9.

\(^{50}\) Cf. Davies, Philosophy of Religion [cf. fn. 47], 2–3.

\(^{51}\) Davies, Philosophy of Religion [cf. fn. 47], 5.

\(^{52}\) Cf. Davies, Philosophy of Religion [cf. fn. 47], 6–7.

\(^{53}\) Cf. Davies, Philosophy of Religion [cf. fn. 47], 9.
feature: While everything depends on God for its existence, God himself depends on nothing else for his very own being, because he is existence per se, being in itself, pure actuality.\textsuperscript{54} Understood this way, Davies is right, because for classical theism the divine aseity-mode of being defines every relation God might or could have with other (abstract or concrete) entities, although the ways in which finite entities are brought into existence by the deity may vary within the spectrum of what can be perceived as \textit{causation}: “creation out of nothing” is just one way of spelling out the dependency of finite entities from God, whereas alternative models of generation and origination are equally conceivable: like emanation and creation out of God’s being or spirit. From this point of view it is also true to say that classical theists attach the divine \textbf{aseity mode of being} to the concept of divine action and activity:

“Some people would say that God can intervene so as to bring it about that changes occur in the world. On the classical theist’s account, however, such changes cannot be literally thought of as divine interventions since they and what preceded them are equally the creative work of God. […] You cannot intervene in what you are doing yourself. And, say classical theists, God cannot literally intervene in his own created order. Sometimes they make this point by claiming that for God to create is not for him to effect any change. Something can be changed only if it pre-exists the activity of a changer. But, asks the classical theist, what can pre-exist the activity of God the creator?\textsuperscript{55}

As we can see, personal theism is to a certain extent the \textbf{opposite} of classical theism although classical theists as well as personal theists might unanimously agree on God’s role as \textit{the almighty and unsurpassably perfect creator of everything}. Brian Davies points out that personal theists usually presuppose a well-established notion of personhood which is derived from human persons\textsuperscript{56} as a starting point. In combination with a strong idea of reciprocity and activity personal theists are more or less forced to reject divine eternity and simplicity based on the idea that such notions would turn God into some kind of metaphysical principle or abstract object which would allegedly be unable to enter into stable and mutually beneficial relationships with human beings. Additionally personal theists offer a strong notion of autonomy and liberty assigned to finite entities; therefore they would emphasize that God, being the creator of the universe, isn’t literally the cause of everything since some events are caused by finite agents who are not under God’s control – not because God is primarily limited in his omnipotence but because God wanted them to be significantly free and relatively self-sustaining.\textsuperscript{57} Epitomes of personal theism can be found in the

\textsuperscript{54} Cf. Davies, Philosophy of Religion [cf. fn. 47], 2–3. 
\textsuperscript{55} Davies, Philosophy of Religion [cf. fn. 47], 4. 
\textsuperscript{56} Cf. Davies, Philosophy of Religion [cf. fn. 47], 10–11. 
\textsuperscript{57} Cf. Davies, Philosophy of Religion [cf. fn. 47], 12.
writings of Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, and Paul Moser. Despite the differences in detail all of them insist on God’s ability to engage in a loving and reciprocal relationship with human beings. They conceive of God as a supreme individual having a nature – as any individual does – and not being identical to his nature (as classical theists would underline). Personal theists also highlight the idea that God is a perfectly knowing and loving being, introducing the notion of love and knowledge as a steady ground for the comparison of God with finite persons – their gradual differences in perfection notwithstanding. Classical theists, however, would maintain that God is entirely beyond comparison – such that we cannot really grasp what divine knowledge and will might or might not entail.

If we place classical theism and personal theism on opposite sides of a certain spectrum of religious convictions how can I say that personal theism is (to a certain degree) the offspring of classical theism? Well, I think that there is, indeed, some common ground between classical and personal theism (without denying the remarkable differences). To my estimation it is the common denominator of perfect being theology on which both branches of theism depend: Although they differ heavily in their detailed conception of the divine both branches will sign off on the idea that we have to conceive of God as the most perfect, ontologically and morally superior, even all-surpassing entity. Therefore, non-standard models of the ultimate cannot sufficiently be characterized by their rejection of classical theism, they additionally have to be described and defined by the ways in which they distance themselves from some metaphysical or moral applications of perfect being theology. In other words: While open theism, as a modern day version of personal theism (at least in the open view version), still holds on to the principles of perfect being theology, process theism, developmental theism, ‘panenconsciousness’ theism or emerging absolute theism put God’s metaphysical perfection under scrutiny and reject some of its elements.

Given that the proposed categorization is as valid as useful some surprising observations might become possible:

1) If we emphasize that the God of classical theism is first and foremost the epitome of certain metaphysical principles – principles that lead, in the case of classical theism, to emphasizing divine simplicity and eternity – we can create subsets of theistic alternatives which share this view on the relationship between God and metaphysical principles with classical theism. So, for example, we can admit that there is a certain vicinity and proximity, let’s say, of classical theism on the one side and of process theism, panenconsciousness theism or emergent absolute theism on the other side; this vicinity is not based, however, on certain details in describing crucial divine attributes but is the result of a certain pro-metaphysical attitude: God has to be seen in each of these alternatives as the epitome and embodiment of
metaphysical constituents that guide our view on reality as a whole. While for a classical, Aristotelian view God is thought of as form of all forms, in process metaphysics God in the acme of complexity and, for emerging absolute theism, God is the embodiment of emergence etc.

2) For personal theists God cannot serve as the *embodiment* of metaphysical principles. If anything, God is the maker or the origin of such principles; and if he were subject to those he would be so, based on his initial decision. Thus, there is a significant and necessary gap between personal theism on the one side and process theism, panenconsciousness theism and emerging absolute theism on the other side. Therefore it is not against all odds that classical theism might be able to integrate certain elements of process theism, panenconsciousness theism or emerging absolute theism (the latter was, in fact, aimed at by Hegel) while personal theism and non-standard theisms of the above-mentioned kind cannot be melded consistently.58 Moreover, we can use process theism, panenconsciousness theism or emerging absolute theism as hermeneutical tools to redetect the valuable insights of classical theism and its trajectory that leads us to move beyond personal theism if necessary.

3) If personal theism wants to include Trinitarian theology the only way of doing this is to adapt a version of so-called Social Trinitarianism59 – for two reasons: A very strong notion of divine personhood allows only for the idea of fission in the deity’s personality60 or for the idea of a pro-generation of distinct divine persons. Since personhood, in this view, equals individuality and self-consciousness the Trinitarian God has to be pictured as a cooperative consisting of three individual centers of self-consciousness, unified (only) by the mutual relationship of love and devotion. In contrast the so-called Latin Trinitarian account, which always signed off on the basic premises of classic theism, tries to stick to the idea that there is just one self in God which might be distinguished into three instances of consciousness or three different life-streams, rendering the Trinitarian persons mere instances of the divine life. Another reason for personal theists’ alliance with Social Trinitarianism might be based on rather historical preconditions: If it

58 Peter Forrest’s *Developmental Theism* seems to be an exemption, since Forrest includes certain elements of process theology in his view. However, I still wonder whether Forrest integrates larger parts of process metaphysics as well – apart from the very open concept of divine changeability and development. A comparable question could be raised with regard to Charles Hartshorne who advertised a “social” and “relational” concept of God. We can look at this view as an attempt to reconcile process metaphysics with some ideas of community-centered personalism. But it is still up to debate whether or not this synthesis is a stable and promising one.


is true that personal theism originated as an Enlightenment phenomenon then a Trinitarian shaping of the concept of God has not been a natural ingredient. Instead, implementing Trinitarian theology into personal theism would have to proceed by way of addition: by augmenting the picture of a personal God who, solely based on his decision and will, prefers the company of other divine persons over leading the life of magnificent solitude all by himself.

4) Maybe classical theism on the one side and personal theism on the other side are two different trajectories monotheistic religions can possibly and consistently follow – based on the conviction that there exists only one God. If this is a correct assessment of conceptual possibilities, then we can view the difference between traditionally Christian and traditionally Muslim concepts of God as embodiment of rivalling theistic options within a monotheistic framework, although we would have to add that within the history of each religion the opposite option always remained present in one way or the other – despite certain tendencies to marginalize its legacy or impact.