

## CHAPTER 32

# OMNIPRESENCE AND SPECIAL PRESENCE

BEN PAGE

WHILST God is standardly taken to be omnipresent, certain religions make additional claims regarding God's presence, such as God being said to be more present at/in a location,<sup>1</sup> what I'll refer to as instances of *special presence*.<sup>2</sup> It seems evident that Christians make this type of claim when they assert that God was specially present at/in the person of Jesus, Christian believers, and the new creation.<sup>3</sup> The Jewish scriptures also make similar claims, for instance regarding the Tabernacle and Temple, something that Lebens (Ch. 22, this volume) has pointed out. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to think about how God can be understood as being *specially present* at/in certain locations given that He is also taken to be present at/in every location in virtue of being omnipresent, what Adams has called the special connection problem (2013, 25).<sup>4</sup>

So to formulate different accounts of special presence this chapter will take one instance of special presence that is shared by both Jews and Christians, namely God's special presence at/in the first Temple.<sup>5</sup> I use this example as some of the other instances of

<sup>1</sup> Here and throughout, I use the terminology of 'location'. However, one should not read anything metaphysical into this and one could substitute it with 'place' if they'd prefer.

<sup>2</sup> Oppy notes some other ways in which religious traditions speak of God being present (2014, 251), although he thinks that ultimately they will all be explained in terms of God's knowledge and action at a location.

<sup>3</sup> The Eucharist might be slightly different here, since it is the physical body of Christ that is located in the eucharistic elements (Adams, 2006, 299).

<sup>4</sup> For another recent essay on the topic of divine special presence see Zimmerman (2025).

<sup>5</sup> The reason why the first Temple is being spoken of here is because not everyone thinks that God returned to the rebuilt Second Temple (Wright, 1992, 269). However, some have claimed that God did return but that His presence at/in the Temple was less 'intense' than before (Greene, 2018). Some of the models given below would find this easier to accommodate compared with others.

special presence noted above have been explored already.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, thinking about God's presence at/in the Temple may aid one's understanding as to how God is present in Jesus, Christian believers, and the new creation, as the biblical text uses Temple imagery in each of these cases (John 2:22; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; Rev. 21). Finally, since it has recently been asserted that many philosophical views conflict with claims concerning God's special presence at/in the Temple (Wright, 2019, ch. 5), it is incumbent for philosophers to show how they could account for these claims and therefore this is a good example to use.

## GOD'S SPECIAL PRESENCE AT/IN THE TEMPLE

That the ancient Israelites thought God dwelled at/in the Temple in a special way is held by a very long list of textual exegetes (e.g. Barker, 1991, 63; Perrin, 2010, 7; Meyers, 1992, 359; Wright, 2013, 96; Fletcher-Louis, 2004; Smith, 2017, 11; Beale, 2011, 628).<sup>7</sup> Chilton, Comfort, and Wise provide a nice summary of this belief in their dictionary entry on the Temple when they write,

the Temple was considered to be the very dwelling place of God, in a way shared by no other place on earth. Even the prophets who had grave reservations about the cultic practices going on in their own time believed that the Temple was nevertheless God's dwelling among humankind. (2000, 1171)

To further emphasize that the Temple, or more precisely the Holy of Holies,<sup>8</sup> was a location where God was specially present, textual scholars often speak of the Temple being the location where Heaven and Earth met or were connected.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Wright reminds us that,

<sup>6</sup> For instance, there is much work written on the incarnation (e.g. Marmodoro & Hill, 2011), and elsewhere I have explored God's presence in believers (Page, 2020) and at/in the new creation (Page, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> The language employed to talk about God's being located at/in the Temple is complicated, due to different terms like presence, dwelling, and glory being used (Greene, 2018, 768). Here I shall ignore these subtleties. However, all who employ these nuances should agree that if there can be differing intensifications of the divine presence, God's presence at/in the Temple would be at the intense end of the scale, and certainly more intense than God being present at/in the rest of creation (Greene, 2018, 768–770). The question for us would therefore be how to understand what it is for God to be specially present in this way.

<sup>8</sup> God's presence at/in the Holy of Holies is really what I have in mind when I speak of God's presence at/in the Temple. Questions as to whether God was present at/in other parts of the Temple to a greater extent compared with the rest of creation raises further interesting questions, but not ones I will address here.

<sup>9</sup> It has also been argued that some of the biblical authors likely thought that the Temple on earth represented a Temple structure in heaven (Moffitt, 2022, 117–134).

the Temple was, after all, the central ‘incarnational’ symbol of Judaism. It was standard Jewish belief, rooted in Scripture and celebrated in regular festivals and liturgy, that the Temple was the place where heaven and earth actually interlocked; where the living God had promised to be present with his people. (2000, 81–82; 2002, 65)

The second book of Chronicles (2 Chr. 7:1–2) provides us with textual support that the Temple was believed to be a location where God was specially present, since we read that, ‘When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the Temple. The priests could not enter the house of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD’s house’ (2 Chr. 7:1–2, NRSV).<sup>10</sup> The presence of God at/in the Temple spoken of here is clearly different from His presence elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> for whilst God is everywhere in virtue of His omnipresence, so that no one can ever escape Him (Ps. 139:7–8; Jer. 23:23–24), it is only where God is specially present, at/in the Temple, where the priests were unable to go.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, the Temple being a location where God is specially present is a theme that can be found all over the Biblical text. For instance, the Garden of Eden, at the start of the biblical narrative, is often taken to be a proto-Temple (Beale, 2011, 621–622; Middleton, 2014, 48–49; Kline, 2017, 190–191) and a location where God was said to dwell in a special way. Similarly, the end of the biblical narrative culminates in talk of Temples and God’s special presence, with Beale writing that,

the Old Testament tabernacle and temples were symbolically designed to point to the cosmic eschatological reality that God’s tabernacling presence, formerly limited to the holy of holies, was to be extended throughout the whole earth. Against this background, the Revelation 21 vision is best understood as picturing the final end-time temple that will fill the entire cosmos. (2004, 25)

As such, God’s changing special presence within creation can be seen as a key theme of the biblical text (Alexander, 2008, 14–15), with much of the text detailing how God sets about trying to extend His special presence throughout the whole of creation given

<sup>10</sup> One might suggest that it is God’s glory that is located at/in the Temple, and so it is not God Himself who is so located. Even *if* we were to accept this, and not all would, it will still be the case that God is specially located in/at a particular location in virtue of His glory being present there and not elsewhere, and so we can translate the question into, how we are to understand God’s particular location of His glory given divine omnipresence?

<sup>11</sup> The Temple’s precursor, the Tabernacle, also provided a location, albeit a movable one, where God was said to be specially present, with the textual description of God’s glory filling the tabernacle largely mirroring that of the Temple (Exod. 40:34–35). Lebens (Ch. 22, this volume) provides some discussion of this.

<sup>12</sup> Although priests could enter the Temple at Yom Kippur after they had performed various ceremonies, with Lebens (Ch. 22, this volume) suggesting that they could enter because God invited them at this time.

Adam and Eve's removal from the garden and the effects of sin on humanity.<sup>13</sup> This isn't the place to provide the details of this narrative and the different and often changing pockets of God's special presence, which for Christians involve such things as mountains, Tabernacles, Temples, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but it does suggest that thinking about how God can be specially present at/in a location is a key question to be answered if we want to take the Tanakh or Bible as an authority on these issues.<sup>14</sup>

## PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

So how should we model God's special presence, and in my particular case, His special presence at/in the Temple?<sup>15</sup> Note that one might attempt to bypass the special presence question by suggesting that we shouldn't *really* think God is specially present at/in various locations, since there are other verses that seem to claim He isn't,<sup>16</sup> and/or that the metaphysical views of the ancient Israelites which allowed for such thoughts are not ones that we should adopt. Within the context of this chapter, I'll veto these possibilities since the aim is to see *if* we can produce some models that make sense of special-presence claims. If it turns out that no models are forthcoming, *then* it would seem appropriate to consider this as a fallback position.<sup>17</sup> However, I suspect there are a multitude of *possible* options for understanding God's special presence and here I'll briefly sketch out several.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, before doing so it will be helpful to make a distinction between different types of presence, so to conceptually lay out in broad brushstrokes the terrain before us.

<sup>13</sup> The Genesis narrative suggests that the Garden of Eden needs to be extended in order that God's special presence can extend throughout all of creation, something that can be inferred from Gen. 1:28 and Gen. 2:8.

<sup>14</sup> The atonement also plays a role as to how God is specially present with His people, with Waetjen writing that after Jesus's death and resurrection, 'Jerusalem is no longer the navel of the world where heaven and earth are united and where God's presence is uniquely experienced. Heaven and earth have been reconciled cosmically and universally. Accordingly, the binary opposition between the sacred and the secular, constituted by the temple as the axis mundi of Judaism, is dissolved. Both are reunited, and the entire creation once again becomes ambiguously sacred and profane' (1989, 238).

<sup>15</sup> For more on modelling the divine more generally see my (forthcoming a).

<sup>16</sup> For instance, see 1 Kgs 8:27; Acts 7:48; 17:24. One could respond to the first text by saying that for God being specially present at/in the Temple does not mean that He is fully contained within it. Perhaps something similar could be said of the other two, in that being specially present at/in a location and dwelling or living at/in a location are not coextensive, since God's presence extends further than the Temple.

<sup>17</sup> Heiser (2017, 17–18) points out that we are often too quick to drop those aspects of ancient thought that we find too 'weird' for our modern ears.

<sup>18</sup> Whether a reader thinks all of these are in fact *possible* will depend upon their background metaphysical assumptions. Whether they are *plausible* will also be for each reader to decide for themselves.

Inman provides us with a nice distinction between fundamental presence and derivative presence, which takes ‘is present at’ to be primitive, and states:

*Fundamental Presence:*  $x$  is present at  $p$  *fundamentally* =<sub>df</sub>  $x$  is present at  $p$  in its own right, that is not solely in virtue of standing in a relation(s),  $R(s)$ , to some distinct  $y$  that is present at  $p$  in its own right.

*Derivative Presence:*  $x$  is present at  $p$  *derivatively* =<sub>df</sub>  $x$  is present at  $p$  in virtue of standing in some relation(s),  $R(s)$ , to some distinct entity,  $y$ , where  $y$  is present at  $p$  fundamentally. (Inman, Ch. 28, this volume)<sup>19</sup>

These two notions of presence provide us with two ways of conceiving of omnipresence, one where God is fundamentally present to all locations, and another where God is derivatively present to all locations. We can also map other terminology onto this way of setting things out,<sup>20</sup> such as talk of being present *in* a location, with this seeming to map onto fundamental location, and talk of God being present *at* a location, with this relating to derivative location.<sup>21</sup> Sadly, however, the popular mapping of occupation and non-occupation accounts of presence found within the omnipresence literature isn’t as straightforward to match up with fundamental and derivative presence.<sup>22</sup> The reason for this is that whilst occupation accounts deliver a *type* of fundamental presence, it’s unclear that *all* non-occupation accounts provide us with a derivative account of presence,

<sup>19</sup> Inman gives a helpful informal gloss on these definitions, writing ‘for an entity to be present at some place *fundamentally* is for it to be present at that place in its own right. That is, the locative facts about where the entity is present obtain in virtue of facts about the entity itself, together with the places and the relevant relation that links them to those places. On the other hand, an entity’s being present at some place *derivatively* amounts to the claim that it is present in virtue of standing in some particular relation or relations to a distinct entity, where the latter is itself present at the place in its own right’ (Inman, Ch. 28, this volume).

<sup>20</sup> Some in the literature have talked of reductive or non-literal theories of omnipresence, where this maps onto derivative theories, whilst literal theories map onto fundamental theories of omnipresence.

<sup>21</sup> Although Stump doesn’t speak about fundamental and derivative presence, her distinction of being *in* and *at* a place *may* map onto this. For she says that God can’t be *in a place* in the sense that the place contains Him (2018, 121; 2013, 34; for a discussion of God containing all spaces, see Leftow, Ch. 7, this volume), but at least some forms of fundamental presence say that God is contained, namely occupation accounts of omnipresence which hold that to ‘occupy a region is to be contained by it’ (Hudson, 2009, 210). Nevertheless, not all fundamental accounts need be occupation accounts and so it may be that one can give a fundamental account without ‘containment’ or similar notions. However, if fundamental presence entails that God has a spatial location (although for some critical discussion, see Inman, 2017), then I suspect that Stump would characterize fundamental presence as God being *in* a place. Note that Stump herself holds that God is present *at* all places, holding a derivative account of presence. But she thinks that in addition to presence *in* and presence *at* there is another distinct type of presence, *personal presence*, which she holds is required for understanding omnipresence. (Note that one can hold that there is this type of personal presence but that it should not be thought of as being part of the analysis of omnipresence, with Leftow (Ch. 7, this volume) taking this view.)

<sup>22</sup> Other mappings also don’t match up perfectly. For instance, Jedwab (Ch. 27, this volume) speaks of basic and derived senses of omnipresence where this is a semantic distinction rather than a metaphysical one.

for the simple reason that occupation relations might not be the only way to account for the notion of fundamental presence.<sup>23</sup> Here I shall leave it open as to whether there are other ways for accounting for fundamental presence, and as such for the remainder of this chapter I'll speak in terms of fundamental and derivative presence.

Given this classification, we have two ways in which we can understand God's omnipresence, namely in terms of fundamental or derivative presence, and similarly two ways of understanding His special presence, also in terms of fundamental or derivative presence. We therefore have four options before us:

1. God is omnipresent in a derivative sense and specially present in a derivative sense
2. God is omnipresent in a fundamental sense and specially present in a derivative sense
3. God is omnipresent in a derivative sense and specially present in a fundamental sense
4. God is omnipresent in a fundamental sense and specially present in a fundamental sense

I suspect that we can produce models for all of these proposals and shall seek to do so momentarily. However, let me first note a couple of things. Firstly, it should be clear that something being fundamentally present does not rule it out from also being derivatively present.<sup>24</sup> For instance, God could be fundamentally omnipresent in virtue of occupying all locations, but also derivatively present at a location in virtue of His causal relations to everything that occupies that location. Equally it seems God could be derivatively omnipresent and yet fundamentally present at a location. As such, many of the different accounts of special presence one can formulate, either employing fundamental or derivative presence, are compatible with either a fundamental or derivative account of omnipresence.

Secondly, there is a distinction I wish to draw between different accounts of derivative presence that I think is important. To see this, note that the definition of derivative presence is silent as to the directionality of the relation *R*, to which *x* stands with *y*. For instance, *x* could be derivatively located at *y*, because *x* has the relation, *R*, of 'causing' *y*, with this causal relation being asymmetric. Or *x* could be derivatively located at *y*, because *y* has the relation, *R*, of 'thinking about' *x*, with this being the case even if *x* no longer exists at that time, such as in cases of posthumous thinking. This distinction will be important for accounts of special presence since we shall see that one might say that

<sup>23</sup> See Inman (Ch. 28, this volume), Cotnoir (Ch. 35, this volume), and Zimmerman (Ch. 34, this volume).

<sup>24</sup> Inman (2017, 175) is right, however, that fundamental omnipresence and derivative omnipresence are incompatible *as models of omnipresence*, but since I'm not using both as models of omnipresence concurrently there is no issue here, as Inman makes clear (2017, 175). This means an advocate of fundamental presence can employ resources found in derivative presence accounts when thinking about God's overall presence, with this providing them an easy way of overcoming Arcadi's (2017) worry concerning special presence based on intensity (see also Inman, Ch. 28, this volume).

God is specially present in a derivative sense either because God produces some special/different relations at that location, or because that location produces some different relations with God.

## DERIVATIVE SPECIAL PRESENCE *WITHOUT A* DIFFERENCE IN THE DIVINE

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To begin with we will explore two derivative accounts of special presence which don't require any special action on behalf of God. These two accounts, I take it, are compatible with both fundamental and derivative omnipresence, and claim that God is specially present at a location in virtue of different relations *we* have with God at that location.<sup>25</sup>

The first of these two views is inspired by Rea's recent work on divine hiddenness, where he suggests that one can make sense of all divine encounters without appealing to a special connection.<sup>26</sup> He writes,

My central thesis is simply that all divine encounters—including apparent perceptions of external voices or visions, communications from God occurring wholly within the subject's own mind, and general senses (vague or vivid) of divine love, forgiveness, comfort, presence, and the like—involve entirely natural stimuli and require no special causal contact with God, and that cognition enters in as part of the explanation for why the stimuli are *experienced* as divine encounters. (2018, 121)

On this view one doesn't need to suggest that God chooses to reveal and/or withdraw Himself from some people and not others (Rea, 2018, 135–136), rather God's action is the same for all. What therefore explains the diverse experiences people have when it comes to God's presence is that different people have different cognitive states, and therefore some will experience God in virtue of some particular natural stimuli, whilst others will experience the same natural stimuli and not God (Rea, 2018, 130). God's special presence therefore does not come about in virtue of God doing something special, but rather it is sensed by those constituted in particular ways.

This type of view can be employed to make sense of God's special presence in the Temple too, for we could say that when fire consumed the Temple offerings, the Israelites experienced this as God being present in the Temple, even though this fire would not have caused the same experience amongst the Babylonians.<sup>27</sup> It may have been the

<sup>25</sup> Given this it avoids Adams's (2013, 25) special connection problem as God does nothing special.

<sup>26</sup> Note that Rea does not think that special causal contact is impossible (2018, 107), but rather that it isn't required to make sense of encounters with God and that the uniformity of God's action can provide us with a response to problem of hiddenness.

<sup>27</sup> This, and what follows, may explain why the Babylonians who ransacked and destroyed the Temple (2 Kgs 25) did not experience God when they entered it.



background beliefs of the Israelites that ultimately meant that they experienced the fire in this way, such as beliefs about the holiness of God, previous stories about fire and God's presence (Exod. 3:2–3; 13:21; Gen. 15:17). In virtue of this the Israelites came to believe that the Temple was the location where God was specially present. Various rituals could have also reinforced this belief, with these also contributing to the continual experience of God whenever an Israelite stepped foot near or in the Temple.

Additionally, as one can experience things more or less intensely, the religious experiences had by the Israelites, we could hypothesize, were so intense that as an Israelite moved closer to the Holy of Holies they would form the belief that if they moved any closer the religious experience would be too intense for them to bear. This belief may well have been true too, since perhaps being in the Holy of Holies would provide such an intense divine encounter that it would have ended up killing the person.<sup>28</sup> For, just as many physical changes take place when one has a panic attack, the physical changes that might have taken place in virtue of this extremely intense experience of God could have led to some form of organ failure.<sup>29</sup> As such beliefs about God's special presence in the Temple would be reinforced by the religious experiences that were intensely experienced in and around the Temple, even though God Himself was performing no special and distinctive action at the Temple and could, in principle, have been experienced as intensely at any location.<sup>30</sup>

Alternatively, we could make sense of the special presence at the Temple by employing Stump's account of personal presence (2010, 108–128; 2013; 2018, 115–142), where this is supposed to provide us with a type of presence distinct from being present *at* or *in* a location, namely being present *with* or present *to* another person (2018, 128). This type of presence, the presence of persons, is said to take place in second-personal experiences, such as those that occur in shared or joint attention, where one is attending to something in a cooperative fashion with another, whereby this individual is also attending to the same thing, making it a cooperative endeavour. Since Stump thinks that our conception of omnipresence should include God's presence *to* all locations, so that 'God is available to share attention with any person at any place in any time' (2013, 37), God can be present to any person at any location if there is someone that He can cooperate with.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> This would explain why God warns people not to enter the Holy place due to fear of death (Lev. 16:2, 13). According to tradition a rope was often tied to the high priest's foot because if they died when entering the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement, they could be removed. Note, however, that this type of explanation doesn't seem to explain the case of Nadab and Abihu who were consumed by fire which came from God's presence when they entered the Tent of Meeting and offered an unholy offering (Lev. 10:1–3), unless they died for the reason given above and dropped their fire pans which then consumed them.

<sup>29</sup> For example, someone might rapidly develop takotsubo cardiomyopathy in light of this experience and then die of heart failure.

<sup>30</sup> We could perhaps extend this story to make sense of Adam and Eve's experience of God within the Garden, and God being specially present throughout the new creation.

<sup>31</sup> Stump also thinks we should understand God's omnipresence as God being present *at* all locations, but not present *in* all locations, since she doesn't think God can be present *in* a location (2013, 34).



Importantly for us, shared attention, so long as it is cooperative, can also be triadic, where both attendants focus on an independent object or event (Cockayne, et. al., 2017, 183), with recent triadic accounts being formulated regarding God's speaking through the scriptures (Green & Quan, 2012) and being present within the Eucharist (Cockayne et. al., 2017; Hill, 2022).

Given these features, we can provide another account as to how God is present at the Temple, whereby the Temple provides another mode of, and occasion for, sharing attention with God, with believers being able to experience God's personal presence at this location. Exactly what about the Temple the believer and God are focusing on can be filled out later through further examination of the significance and symbolism of the Temple, but in virtue of this joint cooperative attention the believer will be engaged in a second-personal encounter with God enabling them to experience and gain personal knowledge of Him. Additionally, as Stump allows that personal presence can come in different degrees and kinds (2018, 129), we can speculate that there is a kind of personal presence that is only had when focusing on the Temple, or some specific theological themes associated with the Temple, such that a belief forms that God is specially present at the Temple, since it is the only location where this kind of intense second-personal experience occurs. However, just as in the Rea-inspired view, strictly speaking, God does nothing different at the Temple location, for He is available to share attention at any location, and therefore one can share attention regarding the Temple even if one was not located at the Temple. Perhaps, however, it is just far easier, given one's background beliefs, to attend to the Temple in the appropriate way when it is in one's presence, which leads to the formulation of this belief concerning God's location.<sup>32</sup> As such, we have a second way of explaining God's special presence at a location without God actually doing anything different at that location.

However, it is this feature of these accounts that might lead one to reject them, for one might claim God *isn't* really specially present at the Temple, as the Israelites seemed to claim, rather it is merely *our* awareness of God that changes when we are located near the Temple. Instead, we might think that claims of special presence, if couched in terms of derivative presence, should require the difference to be in God. After all, the biblical portrayal of God's special presence in the Temple *seems* to involve God doing something different at the Temple location compared to any other location. I suspect here we will largely reach an impasse, with some thinking the account of special presence given above is sufficient to explain the data, whilst others think not. Given this, let us turn to some other derivative accounts of special presence, with these requiring that God's special presence is to be explained in terms of some type of difference in God.

<sup>32</sup> Just as in the Rea case, it is likely that we could tell a story as to how this type of presence could have been experienced more generally in the Garden of Eden and will be experienced more generally in the new creation, so to show how this account of special presence can make sense of other cases.

## DERIVATIVE SPECIAL PRESENCE WITH A DIFFERENCE IN THE DIVINE

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Jedwab's chapter (27, this volume) canvasses many ways in which God could be said to be derivatively present and concludes that the three most plausible take God to be present in virtue of His power, action, and knowledge. I'll assume that this assessment is correct, and therefore if we are to say that God is specially present at a location, it will be because God's power, action, and/or knowledge differ in some respect at that location. Given this, one obvious account of special presence would be to say something like the following: omnipresence concerns God's knowledge of every location, and God's special presence is explained in terms of God's action since it occurs only at one location and not all (one could switch what plays the role of derivative presence for omnipresence and special presence between power, knowledge, and action if they preferred). However, I'll ignore this type of account and instead take it that God's power, action, and knowledge extend to all locations and that therefore it must be something distinctive about the power, action, or knowledge at a certain location that explains God's special presence.

Before I start giving possible models of derivative special presence, let me note that if one were to adopt a derivative account of omnipresence and a derivative account of special presence then the different types of presence will be of degree rather than kind. This may lead one to think that mixing a derivative account of special presence with a fundamental account of omnipresence would be beneficial since this will give one a difference in the kind of presence God exhibits in both of these cases. However, there are two points of caution I wish to make with this thought. Firstly, it might be that we want to say that there can be different kinds of action or knowledge at a location, and so whilst all of God's presence is of the same kind in virtue of all being derivative, it is not all of what we might call the same sub-kind and as such cannot be explained merely in terms of degrees. Secondly, even if one does adopt a fundamental account of omnipresence, it seems likely that they will still hold that God's power, action, and knowledge range over every location even if this isn't how they ultimately define God's omnipresence. However, given this, they will likely also have to appeal to the same type of features as those adopting a derivative account of omnipresence so to explain God's special presence at the Temple location. As such here I'll put forward various accounts of derivative special presence and assume they can be adopted, perhaps sometimes with a little tinkering, by either fundamental or derivative accounts of omnipresence. Thirdly, note that whilst I will give these views in isolation, one may wish to combine them so to account for special presence or different varieties of special presence, since it may be that a plausible account says that God is specially present in virtue of a number of features. Finally, it may well be that one disagrees with some of the specifics of the accounts I give and instead only wishes to adopt the most general features of the views. From my point of view this is perfectly fine, since I make no claim to cover all possible ways in which we

might account for derivative special presence, but instead hope to have provided a clear schema for different types of options that are available, along with some speculative specific accounts.

## Power

Given that we are assuming that God has power over every location, with some making this a component of omnipresence whilst others do not, if God's power is to explain special presence then this power will need to be of a different kind, amount, or degree/intensity at a specific location. I take each in turn.

If being able to produce different kinds of effects at different locations is sufficient for having different kinds of power, then perhaps we could say that in virtue of the way God has created the world, there are some kinds of effects that can only be brought about at certain locations, and as such God has a different kind of power at this location and can be said to be specially present there. How could this be in the case of the Temple? Perhaps God has created a world which is indeterministic, and that God follows a policy that means that in virtue of this indeterminism there are various types of actions He cannot bring about.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the world God has created has a deterministic pocket, and this pocket was located where the Temple was built.<sup>34</sup> As such, there are various kinds of powers that God has over the Temple that he doesn't have anywhere else and so can be said to be specially present at the Temple.<sup>35</sup>

Something similar could be said regarding the amount of power God has at a location, where I take it that this means God can bring about a more diverse range of effects at a location. For we could say that given the policy God follows concerning His actions within the indeterministic world there are far fewer effects that could be brought about here when compared to the deterministic pocket, and therefore God can be said to be specially present at the location of that pocket.

Finally, in terms of intensity, those who postulate the existence of powers often suggest that they can come in differing intensities (Mumford & Anjum, 2011, 24–25) or strengths (Marmodoro, 2016, 210), and therefore are degressed or gradable in some way.

<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the reason for this is some analogue of the reason some give as to why God doesn't interact with liberation acts of human freedom. One might find this type of view more compelling if they allow for a kenotic theology, where God can divest Himself of what we might have mistakenly thought to be essential attributes (Forrest, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Those views of laws of nature that allow them to be local, such as Cartwright's (1999), may allow this scenario to be more plausible. A story will also be required to explain how this pocket can move and grow to accommodate all the different things we want to say about God's special presence. Additionally, God's special presence in humans, if they have libertarian freedom, would seem to require a different explanation.

<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, note that it will be the case that as the modal force of the cans and cannots is given by God's choice/policy He will presumably be able to revoke this. Perhaps He promises not to revoke these policies and given His perfect goodness He cannot violate a promise.

Maybe again, in virtue of a policy which God is constrained by, there are levels of intensity of a power that are impossible to manifest at certain locations but not at others, resulting in God being said to be specially present at those locations where the power can be more intensely manifested.<sup>36</sup>

Whilst these are ways of making God's power explain special presence they all seem problematic insofar as they all require stories to be told as to why God cannot bring about certain effects at some locations yet bring them about at other locations and why He would adopt such constraints. Whilst we might be able to come up with *possible* stories here, unless they are *plausible* then this type of approach of explaining special presence will end up being rejected by many as unconvincing.

## Knowledge

Just as with power, if God's knowledge is going to explain presence then this will be because His knowledge is of a different kind, amount, or degree/intensity at a specific location. Starting with kind, we might suggest that there are only certain kinds of knowledge that God can gain in specific locations. We have already seen that some think there is personal knowledge, with this being considered distinct from propositional knowledge, and therefore perhaps we could say at the Temple location there are certain types of knowledge that God can only gain here. But what this kind of knowledge could be seems difficult to say, for it can't be knowledge of persons, since God can gain personal knowledge when persons are not located at the Temple, so long as there is joint cooperative attention. Given that Stump is open to the thought that God can have second-personal interactions with non-persons (2010, 188), perhaps we could say the distinct knowledge is that of the kind Temple, since knowledge of this kind cannot be had elsewhere. But if God can have personal knowledge of non-animate objects, why can't He have such knowledge about all kinds of non-animate objects, such that He has personal knowledge of every kind of non-animate object? One way to block this would be to say that non-animate objects have to cooperate with God in order for God to have personal knowledge of them, but it seems that if non-animate objects cooperate at any time they will always cooperate and so God will always have personal knowledge of them. Therefore, unless it is God that is just choosing to cooperate in some locations, something I will canvass when I speak of action accounts, then as God is always open to cooperate it seems that God will gain personal knowledge of all non-animate kinds. However, this would seem to imply that God is specially present at every non-animate location, in virtue of Him having the knowledge of its kind at its location, and the result of this is that we might come to think this doesn't make God specially present at any non-animate location.

<sup>36</sup> What was said in the previous footnote applies here as well.

Instead, we might say that God's differing amounts of knowledge at locations explain God's special presence, for perhaps God restricts the amount of knowledge He has at every location other than the Temple. After all, if we hold to a kenotic theology elsewhere where God can freely divest Himself of certain features (Forrest, 2000), why can't He do so regarding His knowledge of locations? Alternatively, if we consider the strange world postulated above, which was largely indeterministic other than at the Temple location, and adopt Peacocke's suggestion that 'God has so made the quantum world that God has allowed God's own possible knowledge to be thus limited' (1995, 279), we might say that God is specially present at the Temple in virtue of having more propositional knowledge concerning what will occur at the Temple. For whilst God has probabilistic knowledge of what will occur in all other locations, He has certain knowledge at the Temple. One might respond by taking insight from how certain Open Theists reply to God's lack of certain knowledge of the future, by claiming that in this case there is a sense in which God has all the knowledge He can regarding the indeterministic world and all the knowledge He can regarding the deterministic Temple and therefore the amount of knowledge should be considered equal. But perhaps one could attempt to push back against this, or alternatively suggest that probabilistic knowledge is a different kind of knowledge to certain knowledge, and as such the scenario postulated here gives us God having different kinds of knowledge and it is in virtue of this that God is specially present at the Temple.

Finally, one might claim that the knowledge God has at the Temple is of a different degree and it is in virtue of this that He can be said to be specially present. So to see how this would work, suppose we can make sense of God being personally present in the Temple, either in virtue of having personal knowledge *of* the Temple itself, or *of* persons at the Temple location. We then need to notice that personal knowledge comes in degrees. For instance, the personal knowledge my wife has about me is far greater than the personal knowledge my colleagues have about me. This is because of the more varied ways in which I am willing to jointly cooperate with my wife and the intensity with which we cooperate when compared with my colleagues. As such, interpersonal knowledge typically holds to a form of symmetry (Benton, 2018, 425; 2017, 826–827), which means that in severe cases, 'interpersonal knowledge between two subjects is lost for both if it is lost for one' (Benton, 2018, 425). The result of this is that God could be open to differing levels and types of cooperation at the Temple, as compared to any other location, such that one could gain more personal knowledge of God, and God gain more personal knowledge of the cooperator, at this location. It would therefore be that whilst God can gain personal knowledge elsewhere, it is only at the Temple location that He can gain this knowledge to the highest degree and is in that sense specially present.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Note, however, that God seems less open to this type of personal knowledge being universally accessed, since only the high priest can enter God's presence at Yom Kippur. Nevertheless, we can give a dispositional account, namely if people were present to God in this place, this knowledge would be gained to the highest degree.

Note that this explanation, since it is one that involves God being more open to interpersonal knowledge at the Temple location, also requires some special action on God's part rather than Him acting uniformly at all locations. However, one could also add this notion of degreed knowledge onto the account given in the previous section, with God acting uniformly at all locations, and it merely being we who differ at the Temple location in virtue of being more willing to cooperate with God at this location. The result again will be that God can gain more knowledge *of us* at this location and *we of God*, and yet we can still say it is in virtue of God having this extra degree of personal knowledge at the Temple location that He is specially present there.<sup>38</sup>

## Action

Action accounts of derivative special presence, like power and knowledge, can also be divided into the categories of kind, amount, and degree/intensity when considering what it is about God's action that explains how God is specially present at a location.

One option for those who think it is a difference in God's kind of action that explains special presence is to give a restricted Stump-style view, claiming that there are only certain locations where God acts so to make His personal presence available.<sup>39</sup> God is therefore specially present at the Temple in virtue of Him acting in such a way that His personal presence is available there and at no other location. Alternatively, and more controversially, if one were to adopt a panpsychist view of the world, a position that has gained more popularity as of late,<sup>40</sup> it could be claimed that God acts on the panpsychist constituents of the Temple in a special way, such that He provides them with phenomenal awareness of Himself which is not had at any other location, in virtue of God withholding such action elsewhere. One could speculate even further and hold that the constituents of the Holy of Holies were combined in such a way that they produced an entity capable of intellection and being presented to.<sup>41</sup> If this were the case, then God could be present in virtue of actively implanting knowledge of Himself into this entity, with intellectual knowledge of the divine being what Aquinas takes to be God's special mode of presence (*Summa Theologica* I, q.43, a.3, co.). Or maybe God could continually act to present Himself to this entity in a way that is similar as to how Alston (1991) thinks

<sup>38</sup> Another suggestion takes inspiration from Lebens (2024), which contends that God's knowledge of the world might be structured analogously to a visual-field having a foreground, background, and centre stage. Given that God implies that His eyes, ears, and heart are always concerned with the Temple (2 Chr. 7:15–16), the Temple seems to be continuously at centre stage for God, with visitors to the Temple coming into God's centre stage as well when they were in this location rather than in the periphery, thus being specially present to God.

<sup>39</sup> God can choose as and when He wants this personal presence to be available, with this changing depending upon where one is in salvation history.

<sup>40</sup> For instance, see Brüntrup and Jaskolla (2017).

<sup>41</sup> Our ignorance regarding the answer to the combination problem for panpsychism might make this less crazy, especially as God could act miraculously upon these constituents as well.



about religious experiences,<sup>42</sup> enabling us to say on both accounts that God's action at this location differs in kind from all other locations where He is not acting in this kind of way.

These options will no doubt seem far-fetched to many and so a final way that we might make sense of God being specially present in the Temple is in virtue of Him acting in a different kind of way at this location. This would enable us to say that God has a different kind of causal relation with the Temple which is not had at any other location. For suppose that God acts upon every location other than the Temple in a mere conservationist fashion, merely keeping everything in existence. However, at the Temple God acts in a concurrentist or occasionalist fashion, and therefore one can say He is more involved in the goings on at the Temple location due to His different kind of causal activity at this location.<sup>43</sup> Supposing that it's possible for God to conserve parts of the world in different ways, then it seems this is another way in which to explain God's special presence. There may well be other ways in which God's actions could be different in kind at different locations, and these too may provide us with the resources we need to make sense of special presence.

When we turn to models where it is the amount of God's action that explains His special presence, we will need to come up with a way to claim that at the Temple location God is doing more here, in terms of His quantity of actions, than He is doing at any other location. One way to do this might be to suggest that our world has a slightly strange makeup, in that every location other than that of the Temple is atomistic, whilst the Temple's location is gunky. *Prima facie* it seems that a combined gunky and atomistic world is possible, and yet given this we might think that God performs more actions upon the gunky part of the world than He does on the atomistic part and is thereby more present at the gunky location. This is because the gunky part of the world has an infinite number of parts, and God must act on every part in order to keep it in existence, whilst, by comparison, God acts far less on the atomistic sections of the world, given that this only has a finite number of parts.<sup>44</sup>

One might also be able to make use of the notion of hyperspace in order to say that the Temple location requires more action on behalf of God compared with any other location, since it is so much larger. Here the story will be that an additional dimension/s is/are connected to the Temple in some way so that this dimension is said to form part of the Temple location and no other.<sup>45</sup> If one is partial to this type of story, then it can be claimed that the ordinary object of the Temple is much larger and requiring of more

<sup>42</sup> Given that an Alston-style account has been used to explain how animals might have knowledge of God (Pawl, 2020), perhaps the entity that is constituted in the Temple need not be really intellectually sophisticated, which might make it a little more plausible.

<sup>43</sup> For more on these three different forms of conservation see Freddoso (1991, 553–555).

<sup>44</sup> One might need to think about this scenario from the bottom up, in that God has to act on the parts to make the whole, rather than God just having to act on the whole, and in virtue of this will conserve the parts.

<sup>45</sup> There has been some use of hyperspace in philosophy of religion (Hudson, 2005; Page, 2021) and this work provides ways of trying to make sense of this suggestion.



divine action than any other ordinary object,<sup>46</sup> enabling us to say that God is specially present at the Temple.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, one could adopt the view that says that God's action can differ in intensity.<sup>48</sup> Here the work of power theorists, as I've already noted, may be useful since some have claimed that powers come in differing degrees of intensity. With this background one could suggest that God's action at the Temple is of a higher intensity than at any other location. For instance, perhaps to keep anything in existence God only needs to manifest His powers to an intensity level of 60 per cent, but at the Temple location He decides to manifest them at 100 per cent intensity. If God did so we could say that God is more present at the Temple. However, the big question is whether we can make sense of God's powers being gradable and coming in different intensities, given divine omnipresence. Whether we can will have to wait for another occasion.

It seems, therefore, that there are multiple different avenues to explain how God is specially present in a derivative sense, and so now it is time to turn to what can be said about God being specially present in a fundamental sense.

## FUNDAMENTAL SPECIAL PRESENCE

As you will recall there are two options before us when thinking about the relationship between fundamental special presence and omnipresence, namely that omnipresence is understood either as a type of derivative presence or as a type of fundamental presence.<sup>49</sup> If we take the first option, then we can say that God is omnipresent in virtue of His power, knowledge and action extending to all locations and specially present in the Temple in virtue of Him being fundamentally present in the Temple, perhaps by occupying it.<sup>50</sup> This type of answer actually seems to accord pretty well with much of the

<sup>46</sup> Talk of 'ordinary object' is needed so to rule out one saying that the Temple-Parthenon object has more of God's presence overall, given that it is the culmination of His presence at both locations. Obviously if one denies ordinary objects, then this option might be more difficult. Perhaps if one is a mereological nihilist, they could claim there is an atom which is connected to the hyperspace that is located within the clump of atoms-arranged-Templewise and God's acting on this atom seems to be greater than His acting on any other.

<sup>47</sup> Note that these two views might also imply that there is more to know at the Temple location, which might give one reason to also endorse an amount of knowledge-based understanding of derivative special presence.

<sup>48</sup> God's powers having different degrees of intensity is something I discuss elsewhere (Page, forthcoming b).

<sup>49</sup> Note that there are many philosophers of religion who think a fundamental account of presence, standardly the occupation account, is a non-starter for a being like God (e.g. see Jedwab, Ch. 27, this volume). Here I shall ignore these types of concerns and assume that God can be said to be fundamentally present. For more on God's presence being understood in terms of fundamental presence see Inman (Ch. 28, this volume; 2017), Pickup (Ch. 29, this volume), and Cotnoir (Ch. 35, this volume).

<sup>50</sup> Hudson (2009, 212) floats this type of idea at the end of his excellent and highly influential essay on omnipresence.

biblical data where God does seem to be located in a specific area, but I suspect many won't want to think of God occupying a finite location since this would seem to imply a finitude to an aspect of God's presence and perhaps a shape to Him as well, something many would want to resist.<sup>51</sup> Instead, I suspect that many will think that if God is both fundamentally and derivatively present, then divine omnipresence should also be explained using the fundamental-presence account.<sup>52</sup>

If we don't take this type of route, then both omnipresence and special presence will need to be understood in terms of fundamental presence. Here it seems we might be able to follow the divisions made in the derivative special-presence accounts, namely with God being specially present in virtue of a difference in kind, amount, or degree/intensity of fundamental presence, although I'm not sure about the latter. Starting with a difference in kind, we might claim that there are different ways in which to account for fundamental presence, such that God can be said to be fundamentally located in virtue of *occupying* a location and also fundamentally located in virtue of \*\*\*\*\* a location, where the details of this \*\*\*\*\* fundamental presence relation is to be filled out at a later date. *If* this is possible, and *if* God could stand in both types of fundamental-presence relation concurrently, then God could be omnipresent in virtue of *occupying* every location and specially present in virtue of \*\*\*\*\* the Temple location. God could therefore be specially present in virtue of being fundamentally located in a different kind of way at the Temple when compared with every other location and, given this setup, in virtue of being fundamentally located twice at the Temple location and at no other.<sup>53</sup>

When turning to accounts that say it is differing amounts of fundamental presence that explain special presence, we can take inspiration from two of the derivative accounts of special presence, namely those employing hyperspace and gunk.<sup>54</sup> Regarding the former, the idea here will once again be that the location of the Temple is larger than any other ordinary object in virtue of the Temple location being constituted by an additional dimension or dimensions. If God is fundamentally located in these hyperspaces as well as what we consider the 'ordinary' Temple dimension and is only located at what we consider the 'ordinary' dimension at all other locations, it would seem like God is specially located in the Temple compared with all other ordinary objects. How exactly God is fundamentally present at this location will require additional spelling out, for if it is in virtue of parts of God occupying a location that makes God fundamentally present, then it will be the case that the Temple is the ordinary object that is occupied by the most parts of God when compared to any other ordinary object. If, however, God is not located in part but in whole at every location, then it will be that the Temple has the

<sup>51</sup> Although see Zimmerman (Ch. 34, this volume) for some relevant discussion.

<sup>52</sup> Perhaps one might appeal to kenotic theology (Forrest, 2000) to suggest that God could divest Himself of being fundamentally present to all locations, but many will find this highly controversial.

<sup>53</sup> Zimmerman (Ch. 34, this volume) may provide some different ways of understanding fundamental location.

<sup>54</sup> Pruss's (2009, 523–526) views concerning bent space might also give us the tools for thinking that God is more present in a location.

greatest number of locations that God wholly occupies when compared with any other ordinary object.<sup>55</sup>

Turning to the view that suggests the Temple is a gunky location, here we can suggest that if God is wholly located in every part, then God is infinitely located in the Temple, and finitely located at all other locations since they are not gunky. However, this way of cashing out special presence might not work on the view that claims God is merely partly present at every location, since we might suggest that parts come in different sizes, and it may well be that despite there being an infinite number of parts of gunk, such that God has an infinite number of parts located at the gunky location, these parts may well just extend to the same size as a number of atoms, meaning that if God is located in part across these atoms, He is just as much located in these atoms as He is in the gunk. Nevertheless, some might not like this type of account at all, since speaking of sizes when it comes to God might be thought of as a mistake, especially if He is considered non-spatial.<sup>56</sup>

The final type of account would be that which suggests that fundamental presence comes in different degrees. Personally, I'm not sure that this is something which is possible on the most popular account of fundamental presence, namely the occupation account. Perhaps another account of fundamental presence can be formulated which would allow for this, or maybe one can merge some views within ontological pluralism with occupation relations so to make this possible. At present, however, I'm uncertain that such an account can be given, although it may be an area for future investigation.

## CONCLUSION

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Given what I've said in this chapter, it seems possible, at least to me, to construct models as to how to understand God's special presence at/in the Temple. As such, those who claim philosophers of religion don't have the resources to make sense of these claims are mistaken. It might be that those who make such a claim don't like any of the specific models given here, but that's different from saying it isn't possible to give any models, and as I've suggested previously, I suspect that many other specific models could also be constructed which might garner more approval.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, I hope here to have

<sup>55</sup> See the chapter by Pickup (Ch. 29, this volume) for more on this type of presence, which can be found in the Eucharist.

<sup>56</sup> For some potential ways to respond to this see Inman (2017). If God is in fact spatial, then there might be additional ways to account for special presence.

<sup>57</sup> It is also worth reiterating, that I suspect the specific model one ends up preferring will largely be based on the prior commitments one has. For instance, if one supports the metaphysical view that Bennett (2013) defends, but ultimately rejects herself (2013, 102–103), namely that an entity can have a part multiple times over, then this might form the basis for explaining special presence. Perhaps a Christian might also be able to make use of claims made in trinitarian theology, and claim that God is more present at/in a location when the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are present, rather

provided a landscape of different ways in which one can understand special presence and how omnipresence and special presence can be related. In doing so I've looked at only one case of special presence, yet as I've noted, there are many different instances to be accounted for. It may well be that some of the models here are able to account for these other instances whilst others are not. Equally, it might be that there is no one model that is able to account for all the varied instances of special presence that certain religious texts attest to, and that each needs to be accounted for on a case-by-case basis. Examining all of this, however, requires further exploration, and hopefully this chapter will have provided some impetus for others to explore these religiously significant questions.<sup>58</sup>

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than just one of the persons. Whether these options have anything going for them, however, would require further exploration.

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