

# Omnisubjectivity

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## I. Introduction

If God is omniscient, he must know every aspect of his creation, including the conscious states of his creatures. But what does it take for one person to know a state of consciousness of another? In one way it seems trivial, and in another way it seems impossible. Surely I can know that Mary feels frustrated or sees the color of the paint sample, but how can anybody but Mary grasp exactly what her feeling of frustration feels like or see the color exactly the way she sees it? An even harder problem arises for knowing what is expressed by the indexical "I." If Mary knows <I spilled the sugar in the supermarket>, she is the only one in the universe who can know *that*, or so it would seem.

I take for granted that if we could really "get" what it is like to feel what another feels, see what she sees, and know what she knows from her own viewpoint, we would have a deeper and better kind of knowledge of her than if we merely know that she sees grey, feels frustrated, and knows she made a mess in the market. The depth of the grasp of some objects of knowledge admits of degrees, and the deeper the grasp, the better the knowledge. In fact, it is not crucial for my point that the deeper kind of grasp be a form of knowledge. Perhaps it is understanding. In any case, it is an epistemic state, and it is epistemically better to have it than not to have it. If an omniscient being has perfect epistemic states, an omniscient being should have it. An omniscient being would have to have the deepest grasp of every object of knowledge, including the conscious states of every creature. The issue I want to address here is whether this is possible and

what the state of grasping or knowing or understanding the consciousness of another being would be like.

My thesis is that omniscience entails a property I call omnisubjectivity. I will explain this property in more detail as the paper progresses, but briefly, it is the property of consciously grasping with perfect accuracy and completeness the first-person perspective of every conscious being. I will use the model of human empathy to argue that omnisubjectivity does not require identity with every conscious being. This property explains how an omniscient being is able to distinguish between first person and third person knowledge of the same fact, and it explains how an omniscient being is able to know what it is like for conscious creatures to have their distinctive sensations and emotions, moods, and attitudes. I will then argue that omnisubjectivity has interesting theological, moral, and metaphysical implications.

## **II. Omniscience, qualia and knowledge *de se***

### **A. What it is like to see color**

Let us begin with Frank Jackson's story in "What Mary Didn't Know" (1986). Mary has been confined to a black-and-white room her entire life. She is educated through black-and-white books and television and comes to know everything there is to know about the physical world by these means. We are to imagine that Mary is omniscient in the realm of the physical. There is no physical fact Mary does not know. But Mary does not know all there is to know because when she leaves the room and begins to see in color, she learns something she did not know before. In common philosophical parlance, she finds out *what it is like* to see red, blue, and other colors. Since physicalism entails the thesis that if you know every physical fact, you know everything there is to know, Jackson concludes that physicalism is false.

I want to use this story for a different purpose. Although I assume that physicalism is false, I do not endorse Jackson's argument for it. In particular, I do not assume that when Mary leaves her black-and-white room and begins to see in color, she comes to *know* something she did not know previously. Although what it is like to see in color differs from what it is like to see in black and white, the difference may not be a difference in what one knows. It might not even be an epistemic difference. Nonetheless, Mary's mental state after she leaves the room differs from her state before she leaves the room. Everyone agrees about that. Therefore, if there is an omniscient God, God must not only know that this difference exists, but he must know what the difference consists in. God must be able to tell the difference between the two states. If the difference is not reducible to a difference in physical facts about Mary and the world around her, but is a difference in what it is like to see in color vs. what it is like to see in black and white, then God can tell the difference in Mary's mental states only if he can tell the difference between what it is like to see color and what it is like to see black and white. Further, since what it is like for Mary to see color may differ somewhat from what it is like for other persons to see color, God does not really understand the difference between Mary's mental states unless he knows what it is like for *Mary* to see in black and white before she leaves the room and what it is like for Mary to see in color after she leaves the room. But since no one can know what it is like to be in a conscious state without adopting that conscious state themselves, at least in imagination, God must be able to adopt Mary's mental states, at least in imagination.

But it is not obvious that this is possible. The particular conscious space each of us inhabits may not be shareable, and it may be necessarily such that it is non-shareable. Perhaps every human conscious state under normal conditions is accompanied by an awareness of self.

So Mary's awareness of red might include awareness of herself, Mary, seeing red. Necessarily, no other person can be in that state since necessarily no other person is Mary.

I am not going to argue for this possibility, but notice that *if* it is possible that there are necessarily unique, non-shareable conscious states, that is a problem for the possibility of omniscience since it has the consequence that no being but Mary can accurately grasp what her conscious states are like. And if the grasp of what Mary's conscious states are like is a necessary condition for the ability to tell the difference between them, then no being but Mary can tell the difference between them. Nor can any being tell the difference between the state Mary is in when she sees red and the state Sam is in when he sees red if their states are necessarily non-shareable. But an omniscient being ought to grasp what every part of his creation is like, and he ought to be able to tell the difference between one part of his creation and another.

### **B. Knowledge *De Se***

Perhaps the clearest class of cases of a potential problem for knowing the consciousness of another being is the knowledge of propositions expressed by sentences containing the indexical "I." Some philosophers maintain that these propositions are not equivalent to propositions expressed by sentences without the respective indexicals. So, according to an argument that comes from John Perry (1979), if sugar is coming out of a hole in a sack in my supermarket cart and I come to know the proposition expressed by

(1) I made a mess in the market and everybody is staring at me,  
what I know is not identical to the proposition I and other people know when they know what is expressed by

(2) Linda Zagzebski made a mess in the market and all the bystanders are staring at her.

One reason to think that (1) and (2) do not express the same proposition is that when I stop myself short, pick up my sugar sack, and start to clean up, my behavior can be explained by my knowledge of (1), but not by my knowledge of (2) unless the latter is supplemented by my knowledge that I am Linda Zagzebski, which, of course, reintroduces the indexical “I.” Furthermore, to adopt a point made by Arthur Prior, my embarrassment at being the object of the stares of my fellow shoppers can be explained by my knowledge of (1), but not by my knowledge of (2) unless, again, my knowledge of (2) is supplemented by my knowledge that I am Linda Zagzebski.<sup>1</sup> Somebody else could be embarrassed at my mishap. Perhaps my spouse is embarrassed, and I will return to the case of being embarrassed on my behalf, but it does look like only *I* can be embarrassed at being the agent of this mess.

Similar considerations suggest that the proposition expressed by (1) also differs from what is expressed *de re* by

(3) She (e.g., that woman in the mirror) is making a mess and people are staring at her, also discussed by Perry. Clearly, other people can know (3) when they do not know (1), and even I can know (3) without knowing (1) since it might come as a shock to me to discover (1) when I already know (3). For example, I might see myself in a mirror trailing sugar without realizing that I am looking at myself, only to suddenly recognize that I am the person in the mirror.

Some writers conclude that only one person can know what I know when I know (1) and that is I. Others disagree.<sup>2</sup> Perry proposes that when I know (1) and somebody else knows (3),

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<sup>1</sup>Patrick Grim (1985) refers to Prior in making this point.

<sup>2</sup>Grim (1985) argues for the incompatibility of *de se* knowledge and omniscience. In response, Stephan Torre (2006) distinguishes two senses in which someone else can know what I know when I have *de se* knowledge, arguing that omniscience is compatible with one of them.

the object of our respective epistemic states is the same. We do know the same thing. However, we are in different belief states. Others can be in the belief state I am in when I know (1), and they are in that state when they believe that *they* are making a mess. What is unique to me is the combination of the two:

Anyone can believe of John Perry that he is making a mess. And anyone can be in the belief state classified by the sentence 'I am making a mess.' By only I can have that belief by being in that state. (Perry, 1979, p. 19).

I wish to remain neutral on the issue of the nature of the difference between knowing (1) and knowing (2) or (3) for the same reason I am neutral on the issue of the nature of the difference between Mary's mental state before and after she leaves the black and white room. Perhaps the proposition expressed by (1) differs from the proposition expressed by (3), and so a person who knows (1) does not know the same thing as a person who knows (3), but perhaps, as Perry suggests, the propositions do not differ; it is only the belief states in the two cases that differ. Or perhaps the difference is not one of belief states but is something else. In any case, it is clear that there is *some* difference between what is going on when I know (1) and what is going on when somebody knows (3). If there is a real difference, an omniscient being must know that difference. It is not enough that an omniscient being knows *that* there is a difference. He must understand what the difference consists in. But if physicalism is false, the difference does not amount to a difference in physical states, so it is not enough that an omniscient being know the difference between the physical states of somebody who knows (1) and somebody who knows (3). In order to tell the difference between the state of a subject who first knows *de re* that she is making a mess and then comes to know *de se* <I am making a mess>, an omniscient being must

be able to assume her first person point of view. This is a challenge to omniscience whether or not the subject *knows* anything different in the two cases.

To recapitulate, I do not assume that when Mary leaves her black-and-white room and begins to see in color, she comes to know something she did not know previously. Nor do I assume that I know something different when I know (1) than what is known by a person who knows (3). But as long as there is a difference between Mary's mental states before and after she leaves the room, and there is a difference between my mental state when I know (1) and somebody's mental state when they know (3), an omniscient God must be able to tell the difference between the two states. And this point can be generalized. If any two qualia differ, God must be able to tell the difference between them. If the first person perspective on some state of affairs differs from the third person perspective on the same state of affairs, he must be able to distinguish them. The only way to distinguish qualia is to have them, and the only way to distinguish first and third person perspectives is to adopt those perspectives.

Human beings understand each other's conscious states and the differences between them by reconstructing the states in our imagination. The more complete and accurate the reconstruction, the better the knowledge of the consciousness of another. But since we rely on relevant similarities between ourselves and others to imagine what their sensations and emotions are like, it is very easy to reconstruct their states inaccurately. Imagining first person knowledge that someone made a mess is one of the easier ones and that is why it is a good example for a philosophy paper. It only takes a couple of sentences to give us the idea. But grasping the state of mind of a person who not only knows she made a mess, but is embarrassed and self-conscious about it, is harder, and it is harder still to imagine the details of her perspective, including the way she notices and interprets the looks of the bystanders and how she reacts to that, the

emotions she has had in the past that are triggered by the incident, the things it reminds her of, and so on. Some of these things she can tell us, but it is notoriously difficult for A to explain her feeling to B in a way that permits B to grasp what it is like. Typically, the way B grasps A's feeling is by imaginatively projecting himself into A's situation as he believes A sees it, and imagining how he would feel in that situation. A's description of her feeling and her outward behavior also contribute to B's imaginative simulation of A's feeling, but there are obviously many ways in which this process can go awry.

Even if B is able to imaginatively simulate A's feeling accurately, his epistemic state does not count as *knowledge* of A's feeling unless B satisfies the problematic third condition for knowledge. B would need to have evidence that his imaginative reconstruction is accurate, or he would have to reconstruct A's feeling in an intellectually virtuous or reliable or properly functioning way. At a minimum, B does not know A's feeling or belief or any other conscious state without both having an accurate representation of that state in his own imagination, and doing so in a way that is non-accidental.

On the classical view of God, God does not know by representing reality outside himself in his intellect. God's knowledge is direct, unmediated by concepts, percepts, the structure of language, logical inference, or any of the other cognitive aids we use in order to know the world around us. And it surely cannot be mediated by imagining what it would be like for *him* to be in our place. I don't think we have a perfect model of direct awareness of another's conscious state, but the closest model in our experience is empathy. In the state of empathy there is a transference of emotion from one person to another, and empathy is the primary way we come to know the emotions of others. It seems to me that the structure of empathy can be generalized to the transference of psychic states other than emotions. Beliefs, hopes, wishes, desires and moods



can also be transferred in a way analogous to the transference of emotion in empathy. In the next section I will look at empathy more closely since I propose that God's knowledge of our conscious lives is something like the perfection of empathy.

### **III. Empathy**

#### **A. Human empathy**

Accounts of the structure of empathy generally agree on its central feature:

- (i) Empathy is a way of acquiring an emotion like that of another person.

Most writers maintain that the emotion one acquires need not be identical to the target emotion, but presumably it should be close. I will return to this issue below. Empathy is not just any transfer of emotion, however. Justin D'Arms (2000) says that empathy is responding "to the perceived feelings of another with vicarious emotional reactions of one's own, and empathy is the capacity for, or the occurrence of, such a vicarious experience." That suggests that it is not enough that one pick up the emotion of another, but that one acquire the emotion in the process of perceiving or coming to believe that the other has it. So emotional contagion, or the spread of an emotion through a crowd, is not empathy. Fear, anger, joy, and despondency can be picked up from others without conscious attention to the emotional states of the person or persons from whom one gets the emotion. In contrast, when A empathizes with B, A focuses attention on B and B's emotion, and is aware of the similarity between B's emotion and her own.

Furthermore, when empathizing, A must see the fact that B has the emotion A acquires as a reason for her to have the emotion. Suppose A watches a television report on a suicide bombing and sees a member of a victim's family interviewed in a state of distress. A's perception of B's distress might lead her to feel distress at the bombing herself, but she is not

empathizing with B unless she perceives B's distress as a reason for her own distress, not simply the cause of it. So a second feature of empathy is this:

(ii) A thinks that the fact that B has a given emotion is a reason for her to have the same emotion.

Why would A think that she has a reason to have the same emotion as someone else? There are at least two obvious reasons. A might care for B or even love him. Sharing B's emotions is a way of being close to B, of sharing emotional space with him. Alternatively, A might want to understand B whether or not A feels any affection or even sympathy with B. Empathy is a way of making the emotional states of others intelligible to us. Understanding their emotions is often important if we want to understand their actions, and we can have many reasons for wanting to do that. So it is possible to empathize not only with the victims of a suicide attack, but with the culprit. This suggests that the emotion I feel when I empathize with another is not one I feel "in my own right," so to speak, but is something I feel on behalf of another, or in her place. But my reasons for having an emotion like hers are my own.

When I have an emotion in the place of another, I take on her emotion in the way she does. I assume her perspective in such a way that the emotion makes sense to me in the way it makes sense to her. So empathy has a third feature:

(iii) When A empathizes with B, A takes on the perspective of B.

As Robert M. Gordon (1995) expresses the point, empathy involves an "imaginative shift in the reference of indexicals" where the imaginer 'recenters his egocentric map.'"(p. 172).

This brings out the difference between imagining yourself in someone else's situation and imagining being that person in that situation. Julinna Oxley (2006) gives the example of empathizing with a friend whose mother died. In Oxley's example, her friend has had a difficult

relationship with her mother whereas Oxley has a good relationship with her own mother. When Oxley empathizes with her friend's feeling at the death of the friend's mother, Oxley imagines how her friend feels given her difficult relationship, not how she would feel if her own mother died. Oxley imaginatively adopts the same feeling as her friend for her friend's reasons. Perhaps Oxley's friend feels grief mixed with anger and guilt. When Oxley acquires that emotion (or set of emotions), she projects herself onto her friend's situation with her friend's history of difficult experiences with her mother.

Notice that Oxley must adopt her friend's perspective in order to acquire the particular sort of grief her friend feels for her friend's reason, but since Oxley is empathizing, she acquires her friend's perspective out of a concern for her friend and a desire to understand her. Oxley therefore has a dual perspective. There is a level of consciousness at which she imagines being her friend, and at that level she adopts her friend's emotion, but there is another level of consciousness underlying that, one that motivates her to adopt the perspective and emotion of her friend. At this level she is motivated by the emotions and desires of friendship. This suggests a further feature of empathy:

(iv) When A empathizes with B, A is motivated from A's own perspective to assume the perspective of B.

The idea that the empathizing person has a dual perspective is endorsed by Oxley and by Alvin Goldman (1993). Goldman says that paradigmatic cases of empathy are those that "consist first of taking the perspective of another person, that is, imaginatively assuming one or more of the other person's mental states" which "are then operated upon (automatically) by psychological processes, which generate further states that (in favorable cases) are similar to, or homologous

to, the target person's states." (p. 351). The empathizer "is aware of his or her vicarious affects and emotions as representatives of the emotions or affects of the target agent." (ibid)

The fact that A has a dual perspective when empathizing with B means that A's emotion is not identical to B's, or as Goldman says, it may begin as an imitation of B's emotion, but A's own beliefs and emotions operate on it immediately, resulting in an emotion that Goldman calls "homologous" and Oxley calls "congruent" with B's emotion. In the example of Oxley's empathy with her friend's feeling at the loss of her mother, Oxley simulates her friend's complex combination of grief and anger, but she is always aware that she is simulating, or feeling as if she were in the place of another. But Oxley cannot feel *as if* she were in the place of her friend unless she continues to be aware that she is not in the place of her friend. Empathetic grief or anger is never quite the same as the grief or anger with which one empathizes. Oxley's friend's emotion of grief has the loss of her mother as its intentional object. Oxley's grief, on the other hand, is a copy or simulation of that emotion, and Oxley is aware of it as a simulation. Typically, empathetic emotions are less strong than the emotions they copy, but that need not be the case, and I doubt that the strength of the emotion is what distinguishes an empathetic emotion from a target emotion. The main difference, I suggest, is this:

- (v) An empathetic emotion is consciously representational. It loses its point once the target emotion disappears.

The target emotion does not depend upon anybody else's emotion for its point, and it is not a copy of anybody else's emotion.

To summarize, when A empathizes with B, A becomes conscious of an emotion of B and sees the fact that B has that emotion as a reason for her to acquire the same emotion. She

acquires a similar emotion by taking on B's perspective, but she is simultaneously aware that her emotion is a simulation of the other's emotion.

Since the point of empathy is to copy another person's emotion, to represent it accurately, it seems to follow that the more accurate the copy, the better the empathy, and that includes accurately copying the strength of the target emotion. In human beings, having an empathetic emotion that is equal in strength to its target emotion can be a disadvantage. All of the problems of excessively strong emotions can be transferred to the empathetic emotion, and the empathizing person may have no deeper insight into a situation than the person with whom she empathizes if she feels just as strongly about it. Nonetheless, I think we can say that the empathizing person does not fully grasp the emotion of another if she does not accurately copy its strength as well as its quality. While it does not serve all the purposes of empathy to copy it exactly, copying it exactly is *epistemically* superior to copying it weakly or inexactly.

Earlier I mentioned the possibility that each person's conscious states are necessarily such that they are possessed by that person and no other. That would be the case if each person's conscious state is accompanied by an awareness of the self. On this view, when I feel frustrated, I am simultaneously aware that it is I who is frustrated. When Oxley's friend feels grief, she is aware that *she* is the one feeling the grief. The dual perspective account of empathy I have endorsed is compatible with this position. The empathizer's copy of the target emotion is not an exact copy in that she is aware of her emotion *as a copy* of another person's emotion, whereas the target emotion is not a copy. In this case the copy would include a copy of the awareness of a different "I." Oxley's empathetic grief would include thinking of herself as her friend thinks of herself when the friend feels grief. Oxley probably cannot do that very well, but I do not see any reason why she cannot do it to some degree.

## **B. Divine empathy**

If it is possible to adopt the perspective of another in order to represent that person's emotion, it ought to be possible to adopt their perspective in order to represent any of their conscious states, and to do so in a way that parallels the structure of empathy. When we empathize we represent someone else's emotions. What I will call total empathy is the state of representing all of another person's conscious states, including their beliefs, sensations, moods, desires, and choices, as well as their emotions.

If perfect empathy includes a complete and accurate representation of another person's emotions, perfect total empathy includes a complete and accurate representation of all of another person's conscious states. If A has perfect total empathy with B, then whenever B is in a conscious state C, A is conscious that B is in C and takes that fact to be a reason to acquire C herself. A acquires a state that is an accurate copy of C both in quality and in strength, and A is aware that her conscious state is a copy of C.

I propose that an omniscient being must have perfect total empathy with you and with all conscious beings. This is the property I call omnisubjectivity. An omnisubjective being would know what it is like to be you, as well as what it is like to be your dog, the bats in the cave, the birds, the fish, the reptiles, and each human being yet to be born. An omnisubjective being would know everything you know or understand from living your life.

It seems to me that it is possible that there is an omnisubjective being, at least, I know of no reason to think it is impossible. And I also see no reason to think that the same being could not be both omniscient and omnisubjective. I will not address the issue of whether omnisubjectivity is compatible with the other traditional divine attributes, but I want now to

argue that if an omniscient being is omnisubjective, that would solve the puzzles for omniscience posed in section II.

The first puzzle was how an omniscient being can tell the difference between Mary's conscious states before and after she leaves the black and white room, as well as the difference, if any, between what Mary sees when she sees red, and what Sam sees when he sees the same patch of red. If an omniscient being has perfect total empathy with Mary, he represents her conscious experience of seeing first in black and white, and then in color, with perfect accuracy. Since an accurate representation of Mary's black and white qualia differs from an accurate representation of her color qualia, he can tell the difference between Mary's qualia. If he also accurately represents Sam's color qualia, he can tell the difference between Sam's way of seeing red and Mary's way of seeing red, if there is such a difference. If there is no difference, he can tell that also.

When an omnisubjective being acquires a representation of Mary's conscious state of seeing red, he sees red as if he sees through Mary's eyes, but since he is aware of that state as a copy of Mary's state, there is no problem that he would be led to make judgments of the world from his own perspective based on conscious states that are copies of Mary's perspective. But if he has total empathy with Mary, he will also acquire a perfect conscious representation of any such judgments Mary makes, and again, he is aware that he is acquiring a copy of a judgment, so he has a dual perspective. In the same way, when Mary leaves the room and is surprised to see that objects are colored, the omnisubjective being will acquire a perfect conscious representation of that surprise. And if Mary chooses to touch a red object to find out if objects in the colored world feel the same as objects in the black and white world, the omnisubjective being will acquire a conscious representation of Mary's choosing to touch.

Now I would like to offer a conjecture about an interesting difference between empathizing with sensations and emotions, on the one hand, and empathizing with judgments and choices, on the other. A person cannot empathize with an emotion or a sensation without feeling the emotion or sensation because a copy of an emotion is an emotion, and a copy of a sensation is a sensation.<sup>3</sup> But a copy of a judgment is not a judgment and a copy of a choice is not a choice. Of course, we can tell the difference between sensing red ourselves and empathizing with someone else's sensation of red, just as we can tell the difference between our own emotion of surprise and empathizing with someone else's emotion of surprise. We can tell the difference if I am right that in empathy we are always aware that our conscious states are copies of someone else's conscious states. But to empathize with surprise is to feel surprise, and to empathize with the sensation of color is to have colored qualia. In contrast, to empathize with a judgment is not to make a judgment, even a half-hearted one. One might, in fact, judge not *p* while empathizing with a person who judges *p*. And to empathize with a choice is not to make a choice.

This leads to the second puzzle, which was how an omniscient being is able to distinguish between first person and third person knowledge of the same fact. I suggested that even if a person who knows of me

(3) She made a mess,

knows the same thing I know when I know

(1) I made a mess,

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<sup>3</sup>It might be too strong to say that a copy of a sensation *is* a sensation since the meaning of "sensation" may include having a certain external cause, but a copy of a sensation is something very much like a sensation.



there is a difference in our conscious states. An omniscient being should be able to tell the difference between them. If an omniscient being is also omnibusjective, he consciously represents both my first person judgment (1) and someone's third person judgment (3). If the states are different, his conscious representations of the states also differ and he can distinguish them. And if I am also right that he does not actually judge either (1) or (3) when he copies the respective judgments, there is no problem that an omnibusjective being judges that *he* made a mess when he empathizes with my judgment (1), nor does he judge that I made a mess when he empathizes with someone's judgment (3). Of course, he may make the judgment if the judgment is true, but that does not follow from being omnibusjective.

Suppose instead that Patrick Grim is right and the proposition expressed by (1) differs from the proposition expressed by (3), and only I can know (1). This is a problem for omniscience if omniscience entails knowing the truth value of all propositions. But if the only difference between knowing (3) and knowing (1) is the point of view, it is reasonable to think that a being who knows (3) and who also perfectly empathizes with me when I know (1) knows everything I know when I know (1). This solution will not satisfy anyone who insists that an omniscient being must know the very same proposition I know and that the proposition expressed by (1) differs from that expressed by (3), but I think that this account succeeds in preserving omniscience even if it does not succeed in preserving one traditional account of omniscience. On the view of this paper God knows exactly what is going on at every moment, and in addition, God knows what each conscious state directed at what is going on is like, including first person states. It seems to me that this account makes God's knowledge more perfect than it is on the standard account of omniscience even if Grim is right that God doesn't know propositions like (1).

Is God omnibusjective? The psalmist writes:

O Lord, you search me and you know me  
you know my resting and my rising,  
you discern my purpose from afar.  
You mark when I walk or lie down,  
all my ways lie open to you.

Before ever a word is on my tongue  
you know it, O lord, through and through.  
Behind and before you besiege me,  
your hand ever laid upon me. (Psalm 139).

Some lines in this poem might suggest the image of God following me around like a shadow, marking my movements, his hand ever upon me. But when the psalmist says, “All my ways lie open to you,” “Before ever a word is on my tongue, you know it,” that suggests that God is much more intimately bound to me than a shadow. God perceives my mind and heart, discerning my thoughts and purposes. If God is in my mind as an observer of my thoughts and feelings, that is not omnibusjectivity. The relationship I am proposing is even more intimate than that. God knows me the way I know myself, knowing my thoughts, feelings, and purposes from my own perspective. This is the most intimate relationship possible. The problem is that it might be *too* intimate to be possible. But in this paper I have tried to begin building a case for the view that it is not impossible and, in fact, is required of an omniscient being.

Omniscience is standardly interpreted as the property of knowing the truth value of all propositions. If I am right, a being can satisfy that definition without knowing all there is to know. A divine being who knows all there is to know ought to be able to distinguish between distinct items in his creation, in particular, the mental states of his creatures. And such a being ought to know what you know, as well as know what it is like to know it the way you know it. If God is omniscient, God knows you as well as you know yourself. God could not only write your biography, God could write your autobiography.

#### **IV. Implications of omniscience**

I would like to conclude by briefly describing some interesting theological, ethical, and metaphysical implications of omniscience. For one thing, omniscience has radical consequences for the way God hears prayers. An omniscient deity would not be like a very close listener, but rather, God would know your prayers the way you know them, when you first have the desire, then possibly struggle for the words, and perhaps use the wrong words.

Omniscience would also be an important concomitant of providence. I will not claim that providence requires omniscience, but a being who has total empathetic identification with your subjective viewpoint has a much deeper grasp of what is good for you than one who does not.

Omniscience also has implications for the moral point of view. Theists usually believe that morality derives in some important way from the divine viewpoint, and there are important disputes about the way in which God's nature or will grounds morality. If God is omniscient, the grounding of morality in the divine perspective is consistent with a view of morality according to which one's personal viewpoint is ineliminable. Furthermore, since an

omnisubjective being's perspective is not limited to a view from nowhere, it combines the advantages of subjective and objective points of view. Thomas Nagel has argued that that is the perspective that would be needed to solve our most entrenched philosophical problems, and it is our inability to assume both perspectives simultaneously that explains why we cannot solve them. If we combined Nagel's point with the argument of this paper, we would conclude that we cannot solve entrenched philosophical problems because we are not God.

Finally, I think that omnisubjectivity could be used to explain the unique metaphysical status of the actual world within the realm of possible worlds. I have always found it puzzling that the only thing distinguishing the actual world from other possible worlds is that the former has the crucial but mysterious property of actuality, a property unlike any descriptive property, but which allegedly makes the difference between existence and non-existence. I propose that a merely possible but non-actual being has no subjectivity. There is no such thing as what it is like to be a conscious being who will never exist. There is nothing that is what the world looks like to such a being. A merely possible conscious being can have general properties such as liking chocolate, but there is no such thing as what this particular piece of chocolate would taste like to that being. My conjecture, then, is that the subjectivity of the beings in the actual world is something that no other possible world has. Omnisubjectivity explains (in part) what an omniscient being knows when he knows that this world is actual. I am not suggesting that this position on possible worlds is entailed by the account I have given in this paper, but I mention it because I think it is one of many interesting lines of research that could be pursued with the idea of omnisubjectivity for those with an interest in the problem.

Few of us dare to speculate on what the mind of God is like. If we think of God as like ourselves, only better, we fall into the error of thinking that the limits of human imagination are

the limits of the possible. But it is very difficult to avoid this error if we also think of God as personal. Omnisubjectivity is an attribute that is distinctively personal, yet incomprehensibly immense. To me that is an advantage. I am speculating, of course, but I think omnisubjectivity makes more sense as a model of how an omniscient being knows his creatures than the model of the deity reading off all the propositions about the world in his mental encyclopedia.

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