What God Does Not Know

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Abstract

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Three answers present themselves when considering the question of divine omniscience and anthropocentric qualia: (1) God knows no anthropocentric qualia, (2) God knows all anthropocentric qualia, and (3) God knows some anthropocentric qualia. It is the contention of this paper that the only solution that *prima facie* explains how divine omniscience can include strictly anthropocentric qualia in a way that maintains orthodoxy is (3). However, it will also be demonstrated that, upon closer examination, even (3) has philosophical difficulties. While this does not discount the epistemic access Christ grants the Godhead, it does compel one to remove qualia from definitions of omniscience completely.

First, the paper defines and discusses the concepts of qualia and omniscience. Next, solution (1) is shown to be based on a Neoplatonic and faulty understanding of immutability. Next, answer (2) is shown to require embracing pantheism. The next section focuses on answer (3), and emphasizes how the Incarnation facilitates this solution. It is then shown that solution (3) also has issues, which can only be avoided by omitting qualia from the definition of omniscience altogether. The final section brings together the contentions of the paper and concludes with some suggestions for further study and final thoughts.

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Anthropocentric imagery is often used in the Bible to describe the thoughts, actions, and mental states of God. The striking imagery used to illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness in Ezek 16 is a prime example. The author of this passage, by using the progressive imagery of birth, betrothal, and betrayal, paints a stark and dramatic scene. The Lord finds the newborn nation of Israel naked and wallowing, devoid of any parental concern or postnatal care. Moved by pity, God speaks life into the neglected nation so that she flourishes and grows. Later, the Lord passes again by the now-mature Israel and covenants with her, bringing her into his divine fold and care. Later still, God eventually adorns Israel with embroidered garments and jewels. By Ezek 16:14, the reader has come to see a complete inversion of the narrative's beginning. The baby found naked and hopeless is now wedded to a King, has her needs satisfied, and wants for nothing.

"'But,' says the Lord 'you trusted in your beauty and played the whore. . . . You took some of your garments and made yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore" (Ezek 16:15-16). Not satisfied with the loving provision of a husband, Israel takes the very gifts bestowed to her by God and upon these gifts sacrifices her faithfulness and her virtue. From punishment to redemption, the remaining verses of this chapter detail the God's response to Israel's unfaithfulness. "Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered. . . . Because of the blood of your children that you [sacrificed] . . . .Behold, I will gather [your lovers] against you from every side [that they may see your shame]."(Ezek 16:36-37, ESV) The

Lord here is speaking with the anger of a betrayed husband, promising to gather the former allies of Israel and align them against her. This will leave the adulterous nation so devastated that proverbs will be written about her desolation (Ezek 16:44, ESV). Despite the anger of God, however, Israel is still promised redemption. She is promised an "everlasting covenant," echoing the covenant which God established with Israel prior to her lust and adultery (Ezek 16:60, ESV).

The imagery is no doubt striking, but what is the literary thrust of the passage? What is it trying to communicate? Clearly, this text is meant to invoke a myriad of emotions in the reader—remorse, anger, and incredulity just to name a few. But why is the passage so effective? One answer is that the reader responds to the story empathetically. That is, the audience recognizes how they would feel if they were in God's position. Their own experiences of anger and betrayal act as a conduit for empathy, allowing them, in some sense, to grasp how God must feel.

Without any epistemic similarities between the experiences of God and those of man, it is hard to see how any finite being could understand how God feels—indeed, without such similarities, one wonders how one could have knowledge of divinity at all. The derivative principle here is that God, in order to communicate what it is like to be God in a given situation, portrays himself in anthropological terms. Clearly, if God uses anthropomorphic language to communicate a truth about Himself, there must be some epistemic middle ground between what it is like to be God and what it is like to be man. If one can in some sense know analogously what it is like to be God or man, there must then *be* something to know. The philosophical term

for that which identifies "what it is like to be *x*" is known as *qualia* (sg. *quale*).[1]

What significance does the existence of qualia have with regards to God's knowledge? Among the many divine attributes that classical or traditional theism (and Christianity, for that matter) assign to God is the attribute of omniscience.[2] Omniscience denotes that God has complete or perfect knowledge. While a fair amount of scholarship in philosophy religion is directed towards the apparent logical difficulties that omniscience poses, very little of it attempts to addresses the idea of subjective, non-propositional knowledge. If God has complete knowledge, and if qualia (or "what it is like to be *x*") can be known, what can be said about God's knowledge of qualia? Being that any conscious mental state is going to be accompanied by the corresponding quale, it seems trivially incoherent to deny God access to any qualia whatsoever. Inasmuch as God has mental states at all, he certainly possesses theocentric qualia. But does God's omniscience extend to anthropocentric qualia? And if God's omniscience does extend to anthropocentric qualia, to what degree does it extend?

When considering the relationship between divine epistemology, omniscience, and anthropocentric qualia, three possible answers present themselves: (1) God knows no anthropocentric qualia, (2) God knows all anthropocentric qualia, and (3) God knows some anthropocentric qualia. It is the contention of this paper that the only solution to the question of divine omniscience and qualia which maintains orthodoxy and philosophical coherence *prima facie* is (3). However, upon closer examination, one can see that (3) has its own philosophical

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[1] Sydney Shoemaker, "Qualia," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., edited by Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 761.

[2] Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 5.

difficulties. While this does not discount the epistemic access Christ grants the Godhead, it does ultimately compel one to remove qualia from definitions of omniscience completely. To illustrate this, this paper first defines and explains the concepts of qualia and omniscience. Next, solution (1) is analyzed and shown to be based upon false theological precepts and wrought with philosophical difficulties. Next, solution (2) is analyzed and, upon discounting all attempts of endorsing it within orthodoxy, shown to entail pantheism. Following this, the strengths of (3) are noted and particular attention is given to the epistemic role played by the incarnation of Christ. Next, it will be pointed out that even solution (3) commits one to philosophical incoherence, which shows that qualia must ultimately be removed from one's definition of omniscience altogether. Finally, the paper concludes with some brief implications, a summary of the main points, and some suggestions for further study.

Qualia, Perfect Being Theology, and Omniscience

Qualia are "the subjective qualities of conscious experience."[3] One explicitly *experiential* way of thinking about qualia comes from the philosopher Frank Jackson. Jackson, in an influential article, poses the following thought experiment.[4] Mary is a brilliant neurophysiologist. Through her years of study, she comes to know every single physical fact about color perception. From principles about light refraction to the effect those refractions have upon the internal workings of the optic nerve, there is not one iota of this physical knowledge that Mary does not possess. Mary, however, has been confined to a black-and-white room her

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[3] Thomas Nagel, "Qualia," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, edited by Ted Honderich (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 736.

[4] Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know," *Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 5 (1986), 291-95.

whole life, learning through black-and-white books and lectures on black-and-white televisions. Despite having an encyclopedic understanding of what happens when someone perceives the color red, Mary herself has never actually perceived the color. Because of this, it seems obvious to say that Mary does not know everything about color perception. To illustrate this point, Jackson asks the reader to suppose that Mary is released from her monochromatic prison and, just outside the doors, she encounters a tomato vine. Upon glancing at a given tomato, she gains a new piece of knowledge—viz., *what it is like* to see the color red or the *qualia* of seeing red.[5] What is important to note here is that Mary gains knowledge by having a certain *experience*.

In addition to this experiential understanding, there is another way to think about qualia. Thomas Nagel offers an *existential* viewpoint concerning qualia. While similar to Jackson's thought experiment, Nagel's understanding of qualia focuses more on the knowledge one has (or does not have) in virtue of *being* a certain thing. For example, Nagel states that one may know quite a lot about bats but one can never know what it is like to *be* a bat.[6] This existential flair to qualia is obviously related to an experiential understanding, but is even more restricting than the experiential approach of Jackson. Mary, the neuroscientist of Jackson's thought experiment, might come to learn what it is like to experience color perception, but if Nagel's understanding of existential qualia is correct, she could never have access to the experiences of bats. Put more simply, an existential quale is a piece knowledge to which a being can have access to if and only

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[5] The whole point of Jackson's thought experiment is to debunk an epistemological system known as *physicalism*. Physicalism holds that the only knowledge possible consists of solely physical facts. Because the thought experiment assumes that Mary knows every physical fact *prior* to learning what it is like to see the color red, Jackson believes that non-physical knowledge is possible and therefore rejects physicalism. Furthermore, inasmuch as the physicalist is unable to explain the physical origins of qualia, Jackson's critique is considered successful.

[6] Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974), 435-50.

if he is the kind of being with which such quale is associated. Humans will never understand what it is like to be bat *simply because* they are not bats. Furthermore, even if some groundbreaking advance in cognitive science allows a given human to peer into the mind and conscious experiences of a bat so he is able to experience the world as a bat does, this would still only leave one with the experience of a man experiencing a bat's experiences.[7] The key difference between the two approaches to qualia is their degree of restriction; two different beings may share experiential qualia but they have no access at all to one another's existential qualia.

The distinction between experiential and existential qualia is admittedly nuanced, but will nonetheless be important to grasp as this paper explores the ontological and experiential gap between divinity and humanity—and how that gap is bridged in Christianity by the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Turning to the subject of omniscience, the most common (and literal) way to define divine omniscience is to take it as simply denoting "God's knowing of all things."[8] For many, if the terms "God" and "omniscience" are to hold any substantive meaning, all-knowing must *literally* mean all-knowing—i.e., omniscience must mean an exhaustive knowledge of all things without qualification. On this understanding, no other set of purported "complete knowledge" is truly omniscience. That is to say, any being that does not possess knowledge of *literally*

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[7] Indeed, attempts to experience a quale of another mind appear only to grant access to a second order qualia of sorts—a "qualia of a qualia."

[8] Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *The Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1999), 86.

everything cannot accurately be called "God".[9]

However, it does not take much investigation to show the deficiency of this definition. When one says that God is all-knowing, one is immediately confronted with the question of limits. Does God really know *everything*? For instance, it is seemingly absurd to state that God's knowledge includes false propositions, like "All circles have four corners" or "Ronnie is a married bachelor." One can certainly know that a false proposition is false, but not even God can know a false proposition to be true. If one is unwilling to say that God's knowledge includes such absurdities, then omniscience needs to be qualified to maintain coherency.[10]

A helpful way to qualify divine omniscience is to view it through the framework of perfect being theology (PBT). PBT is, in a nutshell, a branch of natural theology which examines the nature and attributes of God through logic and value judgments.[11] PBT holds that God is the *greatest conceivable being*, or to use Anselm's phrase "that than which a greater cannot be thought."[12] If it is true of any being that there exists something greater which can be thought, this

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[9] Patrick Grim, "Some Neglected Problems of Omniscience," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1983), 265-76.

[10] It might be noted that this critique is unnecessary. One might say that God under the simplistic definition knows all things which count as objects of knowledge. Clearly, false propositions don't count as objects of knowledge, so therefore one does not need to explain how God might know them. However, the definition being discussed here is not 'God's knowing of all objects of knowledge' but rather "God's knowing of all *things*." If one tries to defend the simplistic definition by piping in additional qualifiers, one ends up defending a different definition entirely. One could, of course, deny that false propositions are "things" at all, but it is not entirely clear if this is possible. If false propositions are not things, what are they? No satisfactory answer comes to mind.

[11] Natural theology is taken here to mean any study of God without the aid of divine revelation. Natural theology, as opposed to its revelatory cousin, relies solely on logical truths about the apparent nature of a divine being. For PBT to examine the nature and attributes of God, then, is to do so from the lens of rational, *non-revelatory* truths.

[12] See Anselm *Proslogion* 2.

being cannot rightly be called God. Therefore, PBT conceives of God as "a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties."[13] According to PBT, a great-making property is a property which is "intrinsically good to have", "better to have than not", and which "endows its bearer with some measure of value, or greatness, or metaphysical stature."[14] Putting all this together, if God is the greatest possible being, then he must possess every great-making property to the greatest possible extent.[15]

With regards to God's attributes, the most important implication of PBT is that God does not possess any great-making property to such an extreme that it conflicts with another aspect of his greatness. For instance, if God's omniscience included false propositions, this would make him misinformed and susceptible to deceit. If it can be assumed that the properties "being misinformed" and "being susceptible to deceit" entail a less-than-maximal state of greatness for any being which instantiates them, then neither property can be possessed by the greatest conceivable being. This difficulty again shows that an overly literal definition of omniscience is inadequate and requires further qualification.

The classic way of qualifying omniscience is as follows: For any being *S*, *S* is omniscient if and only if, for any proposition *x*, *S* knows *x* and knows that *x* is true. Simply put, the classic definition upholds that God knows all true propositions.[16] This allows one to circumvent many of

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[13] Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 35.

[14] Ibid., 35.

[15] Edward Wierenga, "Augustinian Perfect Being Theology and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69, no. 2 (2011), 141.

[16] Edward Wierenga, "Omniscience," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by

the logical incoherencies entailed by the simplistic definition.[17] Moving forward, the following arguments will assume and utilize the classic definition of omniscience. With this understanding of omniscience and the experiential/existential perspective on qualia in mind, the discussion now turns towards solution (1).

Solution (1): Immutability, Neoplatonism, and Atemporalism

The first solution to the problem of divine knowledge and qualia that will be examined claims that God does not possess knowledge of any anthropocentric qualia at all. The primary reason one might endorse solution (1) appears to be a strict commitment to God's immutability, a long held belief of classical orthodoxy.[18] Philosophical theologians suggest that it is impossible to know what it is like to have a particular experience without having that same particular experience.[19] If God existed before the creation of man, then prior to man's creation, he would have no access to strictly human experience as strictly human experience did not exist at that

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Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 129-44.

[17] There are those who believe that the classic definition is deficient, however. Jerome Gellman, for instance sees no inconsistency between the classic definition and beliefs of false propositions. That is to say, because Gellman maintains that an omniscient being's knowledge of all truths does not prevent him from believing false propositions, omniscience must be modified to include knowledge of *all and only* true propositions.

Edward Wierenga, however, states that this addendum is unnecessary. According to Wierenga, if a being knows all true propositions, then for every false proposition, *y*, he will know the corresponding true proposition that *y* is false. For the purposes of the discussion at hand, this paper will assume that Wierenga's critique is sound and will maintain the classic definition. See Edward Wierenga, "Omniscience," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 129-44 and Jerome Gellman, "The Coherence of Omniscience," in *Debating Christian Theism*, edited by J.P. Moreland, Chad Meister, and Khaldoun A. Sweis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 181.

[18] God, as understood in the classical framework, is completely static and unchanging and exists in the eternal present. While a softer, more modern understanding of immutability might circumvent many of the issues found in this section, answer (1) simply does not subscribe or utilize this version of changelessness. Therefore, no attention is given to it.

[19] Daniel J. Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness* (London: Routledge, 2005), 66.

time. If, therefore, God is immutable and was at one time ignorant of anthropocentric qualia, he must always remain ignorant of human qualia, for immutability entails that he is incapable of changing from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge.

The historicity of strict immutability, combined with its strong doctrinal ties to the framework of PBT, has contributed to its widespread influence. Therefore, it is understandable that one might utilize strict immutability as a *plumb-line* for more obscure theological topics like the one addressed in this paper. Checking one's beliefs against those of antiquity is a noble practice and this paper makes no attempt to discredit that practice. However, if one fails to ensure that the *plumb-line* beliefs of the Christian tradition actually originated *within* Christian theology, he may unwittingly find himself under the influence of non-Christian frameworks. To see this, one need only look at two of the earliest Christian thinkers to endorse strict immutability because they were unduly influenced by Neoplatonism.

Neoplatonism and Medieval Christian Thought

Neoplatonism is a third century AD development of Platonic thought.[20] Its founder is traditionally though to be Plotinus, who is best known for his hierarchical ontology, which above all else places value upon metaphysical unity. Plotinus believed unity to be the defining characteristic of being itself, stating that "it is in virtue of unity that beings are being. . . . Deprived of unity, a thing ceases to be what it is called: no army unless as a unity: a chorus, a flock, (all) must be one thing."[21]

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[20] Though Neoplatonists believed, along with the Middle Platonists and Academics, their teachings to be true to the original thought of Plato.

[21] Plotinus *Enneads* 5.3.16.

It is no surprise, then, that Plotinus believes the highest reality to be an absolute singularity. At the top of the ontological pyramid lies the "One" or "First." A descendent of the "One" of Parmenides and identified with the "Good" of Plato, the Neoplatonic "One" is supremely unified in its existence.[22] The One is united to such a degree that even predication upon it is not possible, for the functionality of predicate statements assume a distinction between the subject of the sentence and the property or relation that is being predicated.[23]

A vital attribute of the One is its immutability. While Plotinus is relatively quiet on this doctrine, one does get a glimpse of his understanding of divine changelessness. In the third *Ennead,* Plotinus states that the inability to change is the standard by which one can judge a things ontological status.[24] With this in mind, it is not hard to see the correlation between absolute unity and strict immutability. In true Parmenidean fashion, the unity championed by Neoplatonism entails a changeless state—a functional stasis of sorts. In fact, despite being in some way causally responsible for everything else in existence, the changelessness of the One prevents it even from creating, a duty which is delegated to the Mind, which is the first emanation from the One.[25]

However, strict immutability did not stay confined within Neoplatonism. Indeed, by examining the thought of Medieval Christians, one can see a distinctly Neoplatonic influence. A well-known aspect of the thought of Augustine is his version of perfect being theology. He states

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[22] Anthony Kenny, *Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

[23] Plotinus *Enneads* 5.3.16.

[24] Ibid., 3.7.5.

[25] Ibid., 5.4.2.

in *On Free Choice of the Will* that "the beginning of piety is to think as highly of God as possible."[26] Moreover, speaking to God in his meditative autobiography *Confessions*, Augustine says that "no soul has ever been, or ever will be, able to conceive of anything better than you, who are the supreme good, the perfect good."[27]

Upon closer examination, it become clear that Augustine's PBT is heavily Neoplatonic, and furthermore ushers in other Neoplatonic doctrines. He evidently holds that existing as the supremely perfect being "entails possessing many of the traditional divine attributes," including the attribute of immutability.[28] In *On Free Choice of the Will*, one finds that Augustine believes thinking of God as highly as possible entails the belief that God is "not changeable in the smallest respect."[29] That Augustine is thinking along Neoplatonic lines is made more evident later in the same work when he, echoing the causal relationship between the One and the Intellect, states that God "generated one who is equal to himself, whom we call the only son of God."[30]

A more explicit connection between Neoplatonic and Augustinian thought can be seen in his 18th *Letter*, where Augustine lays out a Neoplatonic ontological hierarchy. At the bottom lies that "which is susceptible to change with respect to both place and time." Above this lies that which changes not "with respect to place, but only with respect to time." Finally, the highest

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[26] Augustine *On Free Choice* 1.2.

[27] Augustine *Confessions* 7.4.

[28] Wierenga, *Augustinian Perfect Being Theology*, 141.

[29] Augustine *On Free Choice* 1.2.

[30] Ibid.

position is occupied by that "which can be changed neither in respect to place nor in respect to time."[31] The natures described here, respectively, are corporeal, spiritual, and divine. Here one sees a pyramid of ontology, where priority is determined by the ability to change. Just as in Neoplatonic ontology, Augustine places God firmly at the top, stating that one "cannot fail" to judge immutable being as the highest possible form of existence.[32] All this shows that Augustine's affirmation of strict immutability is chiefly due to Neoplatonic influences.

Augustine is not the only figure of Christian history to affirm strict immutability because of Neoplatonic influence. Anselm of Canterbury is another Medieval Christian proponent of this doctrine, and similar to Augustine, Anselm's path to affirming strict immutability begins with his utilization of PBT. In the *Monologion*, Anselm states that for God to be of maximally just character *just is* for God to *be* justice itself.[33] This equation is an attempt to maintain God's aseity—his self-dependence. If being just is good, and God is just "by participation" in the quality of justice, then he is dependent upon some external quality for his goodness.[34] This is unacceptable for Anselm, who states that the Supreme Being is "good, or great, or whatever it is at all, through itself and not through another."[35] This Being, therefore, must be identical with any property it possesses.

At this point in the argument, there seems only to be a trace of Neoplatonic immutability

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[31] Augustine *Letter 18*, 2.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Anselm *Monologion* 16.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

present in the thought of Anselm. It is as he turns to discuss divine simplicity that he begins to show his Neoplatonic sympathies more explicitly. After establishing that God is identical with every maximally good property that he possesses, Anselm asks if there are distinctions in the nature of the Supreme Being. Is the nature of God a composite of all maximal goods or is there but a "single good described by many names?"[36] Anselm's answer echoes the Neoplatonic disparity of distinctions within the divine nature. If a thing is a composite entity, it "requires for its subsistence the things of which it is compounded, and indeed, owes to them the fact of its existence. . . . [For] whatever it is, it is through these things."[37] To preserve divine aseity, Anselm denies that there is any distinction within the nature of God whatsoever. The Supreme Being is metaphysically simple, Anselm posits. Any distinction that one might find in his nature is simply illusory. Any distinction in the divine nature exists only in the understanding of the person perceiving it, not in the nature of the Being itself. Just as the One of Neoplatonism exists in complete unity, so also does Anselm's Supreme Being exist as a metaphysical singularity. Anselm's refusal to allow distinction within the divine nature champions an immutability of decidedly Neoplatonic colors.

One also finds that Anselm's affirmation of absolute divine metaphysical unity necessarily affects his understanding of divine immutability. Not only does he conceive of God as eternally substantially identical with himself, Anselm also commits himself to the eternal *accidental* self-identity of God.[38] Similar to his dismissal of perceived distinctions in God's

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[36] Anselm *Monologion* 17.

[37] Ibid.

[38] "Accidentals" here are to be understood as non-necessary characteristics or properties. In other words, accidentals are properties that a thing could fail to possess and still be that thing. For instance, Ronnie could fail to

character, Anselm explains away any apparent accidental change in God as illusory and occurring completely outside of the divine nature. He states that there are two kinds of accidents: one kind of accident that entails change and one kind of accident that does not. Anselm denies exhaustively that God possesses any accidents of the first type and then illustrates the second type of accident in the following way: A person *X* is neither taller nor shorter than a person, *y*, who has not yet been born. It is only after *y* is born that *x* becomes taller than *y*. This change happens completely independent of *x* and necessitates no change within *x* himself. Anselm thus concludes that while God may "change" with regards to his relationships with other beings, this itself is not really change at all, as the change occurs wholly outside the divine nature.[39] So strong is Anselm's aversion to divine distinction that he embraces a God who exists in a stasis, clearly influenced by the ontology of Neoplatonism. It seems that, at least in the cases of Augustine and Anselm, strict immutability is inextricably linked with PBT, which is itself inextricably linked with Neoplatonism.[40]

While it is indeed noble to allow one's thought to be influenced by those who have come before, it is foolish to accept every doctrine one is given without closely analyzing its origins. If one endorses solution (1) simply because he believes it aligns with a historical conception of orthodoxy, what reason is left when solution (1) is shown to be influenced and motivated by Neoplatonic—non-Christian—forces? Because strict immutability is a decidedly Neoplatonic

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have hair and still be Ronnie.

[39] Anselm *Monologion* 25.

[40] There might very well be some who affirm strict immutability without embracing Neoplatonic influences, but this author can think of none. Indeed, it seems like the whole *motivation* for affirming strict immutability is found in the tenants of Neoplatonism, and not Christianity *per se.*

doctrine, Christians should feel no pressure to affirm it in the name of orthodoxy.

Atemporalism and Change

Additionally, there are a few philosophical issues with solution (1). Any theist who believes (1), and thus who upholds a strict view of divine immutability, is also likely to be an atemporalist who believes that God exists and operates outside of time itself. On this view, there is no problem of change with regards to non-propositional knowledge and immutability. This is because time, as popularly conceived, just is the dimension of change.[41] If God is outside of time, he cannot change. God, therefore, knows all that he will ever know, including any anthropocentric qualia, in one single and eternal act.[42] And if this is so, there is really no reason to affirm (1) in the first place.

It also bears mentioning that this strict understanding of immutability appears to have enough problems with omniscience on its own. For if one affirms omniscience and strict immutability, he falls prey to the trap Norman Kretzmann.[43] In a nutshell, Kretzmann argues that if God knows everything, including what time it currently is, then God's knowledge changes as the present time progresses. Therefore, the propositions "God is strictly immutable," "God is omniscient," and "God knows what time it currently is," form an inconsistent triad, and one of these three propositions must be tossed.[44]

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[41] J. Ellis McTaggart, *The Unreality of Time* (London: MacMillan and Company, Limited, 1908), 457.

[42] Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 1.14.6.

[43] Current scholarship does suggest, however, that one's understanding of time, God's temporality, and God's immutability are inextricably linked. See R. Keith Loftin, "On the Metaphysics of Time and Divine Eternality," *Philosophia Christi*, no. 1 (2015): 177-87.

[44] Norman Kretzmann, "Omniscience and Immutability," *The Journal of Philosophy*, no. 14 (1966): 409.

So, if one wants to deny God's knowledge of anthropocentric qualia because of his commitments to strict divine immutability, he must by the same token deny that God is omniscient at all. On the other hand, if one chooses to sacrifice strict immutability for a softer version of immutability, there is no longer any motivation to maintain that God has no knowledge of anthropocentric qualia, for soft immutability affirms the stability of God's character, not his inability to change whatsoever. Without the divine changelessness mandated by strict immutability, one has no reason to deny divine knowledge of qualia in virtue of God's changelessness. Either way, answer (1) is not a viable option.

Solution (2): Omnisubjectivity, Pantheism and Panentheism, and Abstract Objects

On the opposite side of the spectrum of solutions are those who affirm solution (2)—viz., that God knows all anthropocentric qualia. This belief would appear to stem from the simplistic definition of omniscience stated above. If omniscience is taken to mean that God knows everything, then God in virtue of his omniscience must know all anthropocentric qualia. This certainly seems to be the position of Linda Zagzebski who, in her article "Omnisubjectivity", attempts to articulate a variation of solution (2).[45] However, if one follows her train of thought, it becomes apparent that omnisubjectivity does not adequately explain how exactly solution (2) is possible.

According to Zagzebski, omnisubjectivity as a divine attribute is "the property of consciously grasping with perfect accuracy and completeness the first-person perspective of

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[45] Linda Tinkaus Zagzebski, "Omnisubjectivity," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Johnathan L. Kvanvig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 231-47.

every conscious being."[46] She believes that omnisubjectivity is entailed by omniscience, stating that if "God is omniscient, he must know every aspect of his creation, including the conscious states of his creatures."[47] In addition to believing that omnisubjectivity is entailed by omniscience, Zagzebski also believes that PBT requires omnisubjectivity. She she takes it for granted that if one could grasp the qualia of others, one would have a "deeper and better" knowledge than simply knowing *that* one feels a certain way. Because this knowledge is "better," God as the best possible being must possess it.

Zagzebski presents her case for omnisubjectivity by framing it against the problems omniscience poses for qualia and knowledge *de se*. The difficulty presented by knowledge *de se* is quite similar to the problem of omniscience and qualia. Knowledge *de se*, or self-knowledge (literally, knowledge about the self), is as its name suggests knowledge about the attitudes, actions, and mental states of one's self. For instance, it is what one knows when he knows "I made a mess in the supermarket."[48] If it exists, self-knowledge appears to be inaccessible to anyone but the subject, as the indexical (the "I") of such sentences is essential.[49] But this poses a problem for God. If this statement is inaccessible to anyone but the subject, how can God know any *de se* propositions that are not self-referential?[50]

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[46] Ibid., 232.

[47] Ibid., 231.

[48] John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," *Nous*, 13, no. 1 (1979): 4.

[49] Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*, 234-5.

[50] The fact that knowledge *de se* poses an issue at all is not an uncontested fact. See Stephan Torre, "*De Se* Knowledge and the Possibility of an Omniscient Being," *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2006): 191-200.

Zagzebski posits that empathy might be the solution to both the problem of qualia and the problem of knowledge *de se*. Hoping to shed light on divine empathy, Zagzebski spends a good amount of time establishing desiderata on human empathy. Most of these are unimportant for the purposes of this paper, but worth noting is her admittance that empathy requires a "dual perspective."[51] That is, empathy requires one to adopt the perceived perspective of another while simultaneously realizing that one's own mental state is not numerically identical with the targeted state, no matter how accurate the replication. It appears that she views this dual perspective as necessary. This should be kept in mind as her argument is further analyzed. In summarizing her discussion on human empathy, she states that "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."[52]

Following this, Zagzebski turns to analyze divine empathy. Divine empathy, she states, ought to be maximal or perfect empathy, which she defines as the "state of representing all of another person's conscious states, including their beliefs, sensations, moods, desires, and choices, as well as their emotions."[53] This exhaustive representation of another's mental states is what she calls omnisubjectivity. Following this, Zagzebski states that it seems to her that omnisubjectivity is possible and that it appears to solve the problems of qualia and knowledge *de*

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[51] Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*, 239.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 241.

se.[54] She finally concludes by simply stating that God possesses such comprehensive knowledge of one's mental states that he could not only write the biography of any given person, but his "autobiography."[55]

Despite Zagzebski's optimism, there are significant problems with omnisubjectivity. Though Zagzebski states that she can think of no hindrance to the possibility of omnisubjectivity, she makes no contentions for its possibility either. Furthermore, she makes several fatal missteps in her argument. The first mistake she makes is found in her attributing omnisubjectivity to God in virtue of PBT. In her explanation of the relationship between PBT, omniscience, and omnisubjectivity, Zagzebski states that "an [perfectly] omniscient being would have to have the deepest grasp of every object of knowledge, including the conscious states of every creature."[56] In her utilization of PBT, she omits a vital part of modern-day PBT arguments; she forgets to add a *modal qualifier*. This is wrongheaded, as PBT without modal qualifiers is a crass methodology that is prone to self-refutation.

Take for example the popular defeater attempt of omnipotence. Would-be detractors of this attribute often ask, "If God is all powerful, can he create a rock so large that he cannot lift it?" The implication here is that, when taken *prima facie*, the doctrine of omnipotence leads one into absurd situations. Either God *can* create a rock which he is unable to destroy or he cannot. In either case, we have the omnipotence of God limiting the omnipotence of God. The way out of

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[54] This essentially amounts to her saying if one is omnisubjective and can recreate the mental states of others with perfect accuracy, qualia and knowledge *de se* are no longer inaccessible.

[55] Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*, 245.

[56] Ibid., 232.

this difficulty is to modify omnipotence to include the modal qualifier: omnipotence is not simply "the attribute of being able to do all things" but "the attribute of being able to do all *possible* things." Zagzebski errs fatally by failing to include such modal considerations in her formulation of PBT. She simply assumes that God has omnisubjectivity because it is better to have than to not. This causes her to predicate an attribute upon God without considering whether or not it is actually possible.

The second misstep in her argument compounds the problems inherent in her first misstep. As mentioned above, the dual perspective required of empathy is a necessary part of empathy.[57] If one is unable to shed self-awareness during their empathetic pursuits, then one does not experience numerically one and the same qualia as she is attempting to replicate. Rather, this yields a "second order" qualia of sorts—the self-experience of the experience of another.

Her third and final mistake is that she fails to address the difference between experiential and existential qualia. This is evident by her use of human-to-human empathy as a possible example for divine empathy. As stated above, God-qua-conscious-emotive-being can only grasp the qualia of humanity-qua-conscious-emotive-being, not humanity-qua-humanity. Zagzebski equivocates across the most significant ontological divide in existence. Any claims she makes based on this equivocation are dubious at best.

Pantheism and Panentheism

Additionally, the truth of solution (2) commits one to an unorthodox understanding of

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[57] If Zagzebski believes otherwise, she certainly makes no argument for any other modal classification of the dual perspective.

God. As has already been noted, Nagel points out that any quale that includes reference to a specific kind of being is accessible only to that kind of being.[58] Only bats, in virtue of their being bats, know what it is like to be a bat. It might be *further* argued, however, that qualia which make reference to a specific singular entity bring with them the same epistemic exclusivity. It is obviously true that a given man, Ronnie, knows what it is like to be angry as a man (taken here to mean a male member of the human species). This does not entail, however, that Ronnie, as an angry man, knows what it is like to be angry as another man, Stephen. Surely, there is sufficient middle ground to enable Ronnie to get the general idea, but this is only in virtue of Ronnie's and Stephen's both being male humans. From psychological to circumstantial variables, there appear to be an innumerable amount of variances between the two sets of experiences. Furthermore, even if the two could come to exhaustive knowledge of the variances, this still does not give one access to the particular quale. "Knowledge-of" does not entail "knowledge-of-what-it-is-like."

Similarly, assuming that God is a conscious emotive being, God certainly has a sufficiently similar idea of what it is like for Ronnie, as a conscious emotive being, to be angry. He does not, however, know what it is like to be the angry conscious being that is Ronnie, simply because God would have to be Ronnie to have access to this quale. However, one might argue that an omniscient being would have exhaustive knowledge of Ronnie's psychology, history, and circumstances. Surely this being would be able to "peer through the eyes" of Ronnie and see his experiences.[59] True as it may be, this would yield only "what it is like to be God

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[58] Nagel, *What is it Like to be a Bat?*, 435-50.

[59] Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness*, 67.

experiencing what it is like to be Ronnie", and not the qualia associated with being Ronnie.[60]

The only way around this difficulty is to remove any separate divine personal identity. Where there is a distinct personal consciousness, there are distinct experiences. If there are distinct experiences, there are exclusive experiences. Therefore, to maintain a divine consciousness which is distinct from the rest of the universe is to reject a divine consciousness which has epistemic access to all anthropocentric qualia. It then follows that if one desires to maintain that God knows all anthropocentric qualia, one must reject any distinction within the divine consciousness.

There are many who have no problem with the idea of a divine reality without distinction. A pantheist, for example, is one who believes that "everything [that exists] constitutes a unity and that . . . unity is divine**."**[61] If one eliminates all conscious distinction and in the process melds every consciousness together into an ontological singularity, there is obviously no issue**.** This is because any apparent division between individual minds is simply illusory. Yujiin Nagasawa makes this argument with regards to *de se* knowledge and omniscience, and the central idea of his argument easily applies to the issue of anthropocentric qualia. [62] What one conscience knows experientially, so does the other, because in reality there is no "other conscience" at all, only a single unified whole. However, pantheism is not a claim any orthodox

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[60] Admittedly, this is not an ontologically parsimonious concept. However, populating the realm of qualia with a specific quale for each individual being, or type of being, seems to be a natural consequence of the nature of qualia. There appears to be, in as much as qualia is subjective, no such thing as "what it is like to be angry *simpliciter."*

[61] Philip L. Quinn, "Pantheism," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, edited by Ted Honderich, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 641.

[62] Yujin Nagasawa, "Divine Omniscience and Knowledge De Se," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 53, no. 2 (2003): 739.

Christian will want to affirm.

In addition to theological issues, solution (2) has a few philosophical problems. For, in many prominent pantheistic systems, consciousness itself, even shared consciousness, is seen as a lower order unity, and therefore less ideal. True unity with the pantheistic "one substance" requires a loss of consciousness completely—especially that of self-consciousness. How is it then that a non-conscious unity could come to experience anything at all, not to mention come to possess comprehensive access to qualia? It therefore seems that even pantheism is unable to adequately defend solution (2).

It might be argued that *panentheism* can circumvent this difficulty.[63] What if one affirms this strain of quasi-monistic monotheism, which holds there is only one person whose essence and personhood pervades all things? Even if one is able to explain how a single person can pervade seemingly distinct and individual persons, this does not solve the issue of distinct experiences. For if this "pervading-one" were to look into the mind of any one of its constituents, this would only yield the second order quale "what it is like for the 'pervading-one' to experience its constituents experience," not the constituent's quale itself. It appears then that panentheism is also unable to show how the divine could possess knowledge of all anthropomorphic qualia.

Finally, if the threat of pantheism and panentheism are not enough to deter one from endorsing solution (2), then one should consider what is included in the set "all qualia." "All qualia" includes such experiences as knowing what it is like to be selfishly angry, murderous,

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[63] Briefly, Panentheism is the belief that "although God and the world are ontologically distinct, and God transcends the world, the world is 'in' God ontologically." The core idea here is that God's existence or essence thoroughly pervades the entirety of creation. This definition can be found in John W. Cooper, "Panentheism: The Other 'God of the philosophers': An overview," *American Theological Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (2008): 15.

and vindictive. Regardless of one's conception of the divine, attributing these qualia (and *ex hyopthesi*, these experiences) to God is a rather high price to pay. Every major theistic conception of divinity maintains omnibenevolence as a core attribute in the nature of God. If one is not deterred from solution (2) by sacrificing divine personhood, surely the idea of losing divine omnibenevolence is reason enough to abandon this view.

Abstract Objects and Omniscience

Daniel J. Hill offers one final attempt to affirm God's comprehensive knowledge of anthropocentric qualia. According to the Hill, believing that God knows all anthropocentric qualia is well grounded, and he offers two arguments to show this. In his first argument, Hill states that "if all lies *open* before the eyes of a divine being then such a divine being will surely be able to 'see into' our minds and 'see' our experiences."[64] However, as has already been established *ad nauseam*, this is easily refuted. One cannot simply conflate "knowledge-of" with "knowledge-of-what-it-is-like". Hill's second argument assumes that Jackson's critique of physicalism is successful. Given that there is knowable non-physical knowledge, might not abstracta offer non-experiential access to so-called experiential knowledge?[65] If this is the case, Hill asks, suppose that there are non-physical properties of any given quale. Being that God is acquainted with all abstracta, he is therefore acquainted with every non-physical property of each individual quale. Because of this epistemic acquaintance, Hill states that there is "no reason that

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[64] Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness*, 67.

[65] Abstracta, as well as its synonym "universal", as defined in this paper can be taken to mean "a repeatable entity" such as the color red or the feeling of anger, which can be present in many places at once. This definition comes from Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 18-9.

a divine being would be ignorant of what anything is like, since he is acquainted with the abstract properties that particular experiences instantiate."[66] Unfortunately, this argument is also unsuccessful. Even if one ignores the fact that the existence of abstracta at all—much less a rather niche branch such as the "non-physical properties of the experience of seeing something red"—is highly contentious, a more fundamental flaw exists in Hill's argument.[67] Hill conflates the "knowledge of non-physical properties of qualia" with the "experience of qualia."[68] This is misguided. It is a misunderstanding of the nature of qualia to believe that acquaintance with their properties is the same as the experience of them. Taking Jackson's illustration as accurate, the connection between non-experiential knowledge, even full knowledge, and experience is hazy at best. It is left unclear exactly how God's grasp of abstracta can lead to concrete experiences.

Both of Hill's attempts to reconcile comprehensively God's omniscience with anthropocentric qualia have been shown as inadequate. With this final attempted at providing a plausible account of (2) having now failed, it seems that if one wants to maintain that God has knowledge of all anthropocentric qualia, one must do so by accepting pantheism. As this is definitively denied by orthodoxy, the Christian must deny that God knows all anthropocentric qualia.

Solution (3): The Incarnation, Russellian Epistemology, and Empathy

Having rejected both solution (1) and (2), the third solution now presents itself. It has

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[66] Ibid.

[67] William Lane Craig, "God and Abstract Objects," *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2 (2015), 270-76.

[68] Or, at the very least, Hill believes the two yield the same epistemic outcome.

already been established that God trivially has access to theocentric qualia. God knows what it is like to be God in a given situation. However, the question of God and qualia ceases to be trivial when directed towards anthropocentric experiences. The difficulty, stated explicitly, lies in assigning experiential knowledge to God concerning experiences that His divinity precludes. How is it that an infinite and immaterial being can experience anything as a human being? It seems that as long as one conceives of God as completely transcendent, the answer is simply "He cannot experience anything as a human being." If God remains non-spatiotemporal, it is unclear how he can understand what it is like to have any experience that is dependent upon a spatiotemporal nature. Is the theist then committed to a God ignorant of man's experiences?

Theism may not offer a way out of this conundrum, but Christianity does. There is no single doctrine that is more important in the Christian faith than the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is well attested that the theological implications of God becoming man are staggering.[69] But in additional to this, Christ's incarnation also has massive philosophical ramifications for how one understands God's access to human experiences. "For we do not," states the author of Hebrews, "have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin."[70] (Heb 4:15 NIV) The author here, as well as earlier in 2:17, directly links Christ's empathetic ability with his own temptation. Christ, in his time on earth, endured every temptation known to man, and in this manner, is able

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[69] Rob Lister, "What Jesus' Righteous Suffering Means for Our Perseverance," *Criswell Theological Review* 13, no. 1 (2015), 77-83.

[70] The NIV was used here because the ESV uses "sympathy" instead of "empathy". This is a curious choice, as the context suggests that "empathy" is a more appropriate translation. The author of Hebrews links Christ's ability to relate with mankind precisely because Christ experienced the same weaknesses as man. This clearly suggests an empathetic relationship, not a sympathetic one.

to relate to man. This concept can easily be reframed so as to align with the topic at hand. Christ, by being made fully human in every way, comes to know human qualia. And by coming to know human qualia through the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, one might say that God attains a greater knowledge than he would have had otherwise.[71]

Qualia By Acquaintance

While Christ's becoming man enables God to have a greater knowledge of anthropocentric qualia than he would otherwise, it does not *prima facie* give the Godhead any greater access to anthropocentric qualia than any "normal" human being. Christ, as a man, appears to know what it is like to be a human simply *as a human* and nothing more. Should the theist then be satisfied with a God who knows human experiences simply as a human does? Is there not some further knowledge of qualia that sets Christ apart from the everyday man?

As with all things related to the incarnation of Christ, however, one must place chief importance upon the duality of Christ's nature.[72] If one examines the epistemological structure of the incarnated Word more deeply, it becomes apparent the Christian need not affirm that the

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[71] However, it is a necessary to point out beforehand that if God has knowledge of anthropocentric qualia through the experiences of Christ, this obviously excludes any qualia Christ did not experience. For example, Jesus did not sin during his time on earth and therefore does not have knowledge of the quale "what it is like to sin." Jesus was also incarnated as a male, so knowledge of the qualia "what it is like to be a woman" is also off limits. Indeed, the simple fact that Christ was incarnated into a specific body at a specific location with a specific culture introduces, and subsequently excludes, a horde of qualia that are rather menial. These qualia can be responsibly disregarded as *non-essential* to understanding and empathizing with human nature.

To avoid combing exhaustively over every possible quale that Christ could have failed to possess, a brief qualification is necessary. When this paper states that Christ knows all anthropocentric qualia, the following is being communicated: the incarnated Christ experienced everything that (a) does not conflict with his nature as an omnibenevolent being and (b) a normal 1st century AD being with a human nature could reasonably be expected to experience.

[72] Bruce Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections of the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013) 15-29.

divine Christ has a "strictly human" comprehension of qualia. Indeed, analyzing the unique epistemic position of Christ through a modern epistemological system reveals a striking aspect of the knowledge of Christ.

Ironically, the epistemological framework of Bertrand Russell can help elucidate the method by which Christ knows anthropocentric qualia. Russell states that there are two fundamental categories of knowledge with regards to things: that of acquaintance and that of description.[73] Briefly put, knowledge by acquaintance consists of, among other things, knowledge of sense-data to which one has immediate and unmitigated access. Russell's favorite example is that of a table. One has knowledge by acquaintance of a table only when one perceives through one senses the qualities that make up the table—i.e. the table's color, temperature, texture, and the like. As Russell states, knowledge of acquaintance does not give epistemic access to "physical objects (as opposed to sense-data), nor other people's minds."[74] This sort of knowledge is only accessible via description. Knowledge by description, for Russell, is the method by which one, through knowledge of the sense-data of a given particular and the corresponding universals, comes to knowledge of the particular itself.

It seems safe to say that because both qualia and sense-data are known through experience, one possesses the same kind of unmitigated and immediate access to his qualia as he does his sense-data. This is to say that just as one cannot doubt his perceiving a certain color when he is doing so, one similarly would be hard pressed to say, while experiencing certain qualia or after having experienced a quale, that he is not experiencing or did not experience that

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[73] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 46.

[74] Ibid., 52.

quale. In this manner, the process whereby one comes to acquire sense-data and qualia appear to be sufficiently similar to allow a comparison of sorts.

With this in mind, suppose then that Russell's theory of knowledge by acquaintance applies also to qualia. Fit into Russell's system, God's knowledge of qualia might look like the following: an unincarnated God has knowledge by acquaintance of all and only qualia of the type "what-it-is-like-to-*x*-as-a-conscious-being", where *x* is any experience possible for a conscious being, whatever.[75] While this set of qualia may overlap an anthropomorphic set, it does not include all human qualia.[76] Inasmuch as a deity is completely transcendent and immaterial, the physical qualia of his creation are by and large unknown to him. However, the incarnation allows God to bridge the epistemic gap between the divine and anthropocentric qualia. Christ being fully human, has direct access—direct acquaintance with—qualia of the type "what-it-is-like-to-*x*-as-a-human," where *x* is any experience that is reasonable to assume a 1st century AD Jew would have. Put simply, because Christ became man, he understands what it is like to be a man in a staggeringly large, though not exhaustive, amount of situations.

Returning briefly to indirect knowledge, or knowledge by description, Russell says the following:

> It is obvious that it is only what goes on in our own minds that can be thus known immediately. What goes on in the minds of others is known to us through our perception of their bodies, that is, through the sense-data in us which are associated with their bodies. But for our acquaintance with the contents of our own minds, we should be unable to imagine the minds of others, and therefore we could never arrive at the

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[75] "Conscious being" is taken here to mean a conscious being as of yet without a body.

[76] Like, for instance, what it is like to feel bodily pain. Put another way, both sets include "what it is like to be angry" but not "what it is like to be an angry man." Remembering the distinction between Jackson's and Nagel's explanations of qualia can further clarify the relationship between these two sets of qualia. If a deity has been angry, he understands what it is like to be angry. However, if that deity remains unincarnated, he would have no idea what it is like to be angry as a *man*. Just as a man cannot know what it like to be a bat because he is not a bat, any unincarnated deity cannot know what it is like to be human (in any given situation) because he is not human.

knowledge that they have minds.[77]

If one is comfortable with indirect epistemic access, it appears that inasmuch as Russell's system can apply to qualia, knowledge of the qualia of other human minds is in fact accessible to humans. Through one's observation of the physical activities of another body, one can come to know indirectly what some other embodied entity is experiencing.[78] If this is true, and one has also experienced a quale which is similar to the quale that is believed to be experienced by the other embodied entity, it therefore follows that, inasmuch as the one and the other are sufficiently similar, the one has some form of access to the qualia of other.[79] In a highly dubious and imprecise sense, then, one man can know what it is like to be another man.

Christ's Unique Empathetic Ability

Having fit divine knowledge of anthropocentric qualia into Russell's framework, the unique empathetic ability of Jesus is now easier to grasp. As a man, Christ has access to anthropocentric qualia. As God incarnated, Christ has deeper and more accurate knowledge of the qualia of other minds than his fellow humans. This is because Christ, assuming that he has the same degree of omniscience when incarnated, directly knows the mental states of other humans.[80]

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[77] Ibid., 49.

[78] This process probably looks something like the following: "I see that Michael is behaving a certain way *x*. I know that when I behave that certain way *x*, it is because I am experiencing a certain mental state *y*. Therefore, it is likely Michael is currently experiencing mental state *y*."

[79] To further the same example: "It is likely that Michael is currently experiencing mental state *y*. When I experience mental state *y*, I feel like *z* (or, I experience qualia *z*). Therefore, it is likely that Michael, who is experiencing mental state *y*, is also feeling like *z* (or, experience qualia *z*)

[80] "Directly" is here used to denote the unmediated nature of Christ's access to all propositional

Christ, therefore, knowing perfectly the mental states of a given man *M*, knows *that M* is experiencing a quale *y*.[81] If Jesus has experienced a sufficiently similar quale *z*, he therefore indirectly knows, in virtue of His own sufficiently similar qualia, what it is like to experience something as *M*. This concept can be formalized as:

> For any being *S*, *S* knows what it is like to be any other being *M,* in a given situation iff *S* knows that *M* is experiencing qualia *y* and has experienced a quale *z* that is sufficiently similar to *y*.

What is crucial to note here is that while any normal human being can have an educated guess regarding the qualia of other minds, only a being that has direct access to the mental states of another being can *know* the qualia of other minds. But it is also important to note that though Christ's knowledge of another mind's qualia may be indirect, this indirectness does not entail any possibility of inaccuracy. This, in effect, means that Christ is able to understand *indirectly*, *yet infallibly* the qualia of another mind, provided that Christ has experience a sufficiently similar quale to that which he is to know.

To recap, the incarnation of Christ allows God a wider epistemic view than he would have had otherwise. This does not mean, however, that Christ's becoming man grants him exhaustive access to anthropocentric qualia. Christ only knows the qualia that he experiences. However, Christ's knowledge of the qualia of other minds is not limited in the way that other

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knowledge, which he has in virtue of his omniscience. While the degree of the incarnated Christ's omniscience is not undisputed, it at minimum grants him access to propositions concerning the mental states and thoughts of men. (see Matt 9:1-8)

[81] It is important to point out the function of the italicized "that" in this sentence. Introducing a demonstrative pronoun into a truth statement effectively "propostionalizes" it. That is to say, it construes a particular truth as a proposition, thus making the now-propositional content something to which God can have access. For example, Christ may not know *what it is like* to sin but he does know *that* it feels like *x*. This distinction between direct and indirect, propositional and non-propositional knowledge is crucial for the cogency of the answer being presented.

humans beings know the qualia of other minds, because Christ has access to the propositional knowledge of other minds. Therefore, if one is to examine the relationship between God's perfect knowledge and qualia, it appears that God's omniscience not only includes all propositional knowledge, but also all human qualia that Christ knows through his incarnation.[82]

A Problem with Solution (3) With Respect to Atemporality and Changing Definitions

Unfortunately, solution (3) is not without its difficulties. For it appears that one cannot include qualia in a definition of omniscience and at the same time maintain that this epistemic access is grounded in Christ's experience. This is because doing so commits one to either (a) God's knowledge, despite his omniscience, still grows as time passes or (b) God has always had knowledge of qualia through Christ's experiences. Both (a) and (b) pose difficulty for those affirming solution (3).

The difficulty with (a) is obvious. How can God be all-knowing, even in a qualified sense, if he *gains* knowledge? Omniscience seems to entail a complete and closed set of knowledge. If at any point, a being goes from not knowing *p* to knowing *p*, this being clearly does not possess a complete and closed set of knowledge. Indeed, affirming otherwise is akin to believing that God is both omniscient and not omniscient, which is a clear violation of the law of non-contradiction. Option (b) also has difficulties. As mentioned above, experiential knowledge of a given event is grounded in actually experiencing that event. If this is true, it is difficult to see how exactly God has knowledge of anthropocentric qualia before the incarnation of Christ. On

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[82] It could also be argued that perfect being theology adds a further qualifier to omniscience: God, in virtue of his omniscience, knows all true propositions and all human qualia *which does not diminish his status as the greatest conceivable being.*

solution (3), God has no access to the existential qualia of mankind, so long as the ontological gap between divinity and humanity remains unbridged. If one desires to maintain otherwise, it falls upon him to make it clear exactly how God can have experiential knowledge without the experiences themselves.

So, if one desires to endorse solution (3), he must solve the issues associated with either (a) or (b).

Atemporalism Revisited

One might attempt to solve the problems with (b) by appealing to an atemporal view of divine eternality. On atemporalism, God simultaneously knows all that he will ever know. There is no sequence in God's thought because sequence entails change and God is wholly outside the dimension of change.

With regards to God's knowledge, many atemporalists follow the arguments of Thomas Aquinas. In the philosophical language of the Scholastics, this concept of simultaneous and comprehensive knowledge is known as *occurrent knowledge*, it's counterpart is known as *discursive knowledge*.[83] Aquinas states that there are two types of discursive knowledge and that neither can be rightly predicated upon God's knowledge.[84] The first type occurs when one contemplates thing *x* and then, ceasing contemplation of *x*, turns to contemplate thing *y,* as if successively contemplating parts of a whole. Aquinas argues that God only contemplates things through himself. There is no segmentation in God, who is metaphysically simple, and so "God

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[83] Occurrent knowledge is knowledge that is currently being thought about by a given mind. Discursive knowledge refers to knowledge that is either not currently being held, or to the syllogistic-like thought process whereby one thought leads to another.

[84] Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 1.14.7.

sees all things together, and not successively."[85] The second type of discursive knowledge occurs when the contemplation of one thing leads or causes one to contemplate another thing. Aquinas has in mind here something akin to the contemplation of cogent syllogisms, where understanding the premises naturally leads one to grasping the conclusion of the argument. Aquinas claims that God does not experience this type of discursion for two reasons. First, it presupposes the previous type of discursion. Secondly, Aquinas believes that it heavily implies that God does not know the conclusions without first considering the premises.[86]

Like many of his other beliefs concerning the attributes of God, Aquinas' rejection of divine discursive knowledge depends heavily upon the idea that God is outside of time. Perhaps, then, the modern day atemporalist can do likewise.[87] Unfortunately, running towards atemporality to solve the difficulties presented by (b) only leads to more trouble. This is because it is not clear that omniscience and atemporality are compatible. At least two philosophers maintain that they are mutually exclusive. Kretzmann, as mentioned above denies that an immutable being can also be omniscient.[88] If one is immutable, he cannot know what time it currently is for this would subject him to change. Seeing how atemporality and immutability are necessarily co-instantiated, it is difficult to see how the atemporalist can avoid the trap posed by Kretzmann. William Lane Craig points out that "the existence of an atemporal world also seems to entail intrinsic change in God in view of his knowledge of what is happening in the temporal

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[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Anthony Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 301.

[88] See pages 15-6 above.

world."[89] Craig's argument begins with the intuitive assumptions that a temporal world exists and that God is omniscient. He then states that if a temporal world exists, there are obviously tensed facts within that world. If there are tensed facts, then God in virtue of his omniscience knows them. But, Craig argues, if God is timeless, he does not, and cannot, know tensed facts. This, therefore, entails that God is not timeless.[90]

Both Kretzmann and Craig offer compelling reasons to reject atemporality. That being the case, it appears that atemporalism is not a viable escape for one wanting to avoid the difficulties of (b).

Changing Definitions

The only way, it seems, that one cane endorse solution (3) is to simply rethink omniscience around qualia in a way that circumvents the difficulty of (a). This is done by limiting omniscience to *propositional* knowledge only.[91]

Admittedly, this redefinition is not an easy process. One is no longer able to define God's entire epistemic system as omniscient, but refining omniscience seems necessary in order to avoid the pitfalls of atemporality and the difficulty of (a). If one removes qualia from the definition of omniscience, it allows one to explain how God's experiential knowledge can

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[89] William Lane Craig, "Timelessness and Omnitemporality," in *God and Time: Four Views*, edited by Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 145.

[90] In addition to epistemic restrictions imposed by atemporalism, there are also significant difficulties with the incarnation of Jesus Christ for the atemporalist. If God is atemporal and unchanging, how exactly does one explain Christ becoming man? This seems to entail a change of states. One might state that Christ is eternally both unincarnated and incarnated, but this is an obvious violation of the law of non-contradiction. In any case, adequately explaining the incarnation is no small task for the atemporalist.

[91] Propositional knowledge should be taken here to denote the contents of propositional statements and sentences, as opposed to subjective knowledge based in experience.

increase in size without compromising the static and complete nature of knowledge that God possesses in virtue of his omniscience.

In addition to avoiding the difficulties mentioned above, there are a few other noteworthy implications of this epistemic segregation. The first has to do with occurrent and discursive knowledge. While one can easily state that God's propositional knowledge is not discursive, this is not the case with regards to qualia. If one were to hold the knowledge of all qualia occurrently, the result would be a mind-boggling and counter-productive state. Indeed, one can see how this distinction is important to those upholding a Thomistic understanding of divine epistemology. If one adopts the proposed redefinition of omniscience, he separates God's propositional and non-propositional knowledge. This separation allows him to maintain the static and occurrent nature of propositional knowledge while still allowing for the possibility of God having non-propositional knowledge that grows, changes, and can be held in mind at different times.

Another important implication concerns whether or not God learns anything. With regards to propositional objects of knowledge, God clearly possesses a full and exhaustive grasp of them. To maintain otherwise would be unorthodox. As has been shown, however, God does come to know non-propositional knowledge over time. Obviously, such knowledge includes knowledge of anthropocentric qualia, but this seems also to be true of theocentric qualia. Prior to creating mankind, did God know *what it was like* to create man?[92] One can safely assume that he did not.

A further interesting, if not contentious, implication here is that if God learned the qualia

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[92] The reader would do well here to acknowledge that this sentence refers to the creation of man, and not creation in general. Using tensed language to refer to moments 'before' the creation of time is notoriously tricky, which is why this author illustrates his point using an act of creation which comes *after* the creation of time.

of mankind upon the incarnation, the incarnation is indeed *necessary* for God to empathize adequately with mankind. It is extremely difficult to see how, prior to Christ becoming man, God possessed any idea of what a "day in the life" of a given human being is like. Unless one is an atemporalist, one cannot ground divine empathy in the incarnation of Christ and not also endorse that God was less able, if not completely unable, to empathize with humanity prior to Christ becoming man.

Conclusion

It has now been shown that, with regards to the question of God and anthropocentric qualia, all three solutions to the problem of omniscience and qualia are wrought with theological and philosophical difficulties. First, the claim that (1) God knows no anthropological qualia is shown to be based upon a strict view of immutability, a view which ultimately finds its origins in the thought of Plotinus. Additionally, those who usually uphold strict immutability are atemporalists, and atemporalists generally affirm that God's knowledge is known by him in a single and eternal act. Atemporalist have no reason to deny God's knowledge of qualia based on his changelessness. But, those who do uphold a strict view of immutability fall prey to Norman Kretzmann's inconsistent triad, which shows the incompatibility of immutability and omniscience. If one is unwilling to sacrifice the idea of divine immutability, the only way to avoid Kretzmann's trap is to uphold a softer view of immutability. Soft immutability, however, holds that God is "stable, not static," and if soft immutability is not impossible, and for the Christian within the bounds of orthodoxy, then there is no longer any real motivation to affirm

(1).[93]

Solution (2) was shown to be unacceptable for the Christian theist. After discounting Zagzebski's argument concerning omnisubjectivity, it was shown that the only way to affirm solution (2) is to also affirm pantheism or panentheism, both claims well outside Christian orthodoxy. However, even the pantheist or panentheist who affirms (2) is not without difficulties, as most pantheistic and panentheistic systems affirm an unconscious and impersonal force. It is unclear how an unconscious force can know anything, much less a comprehensive set of anthropocentric qualia. Furthermore, God's possession of all qualia would require God to have personally experienced a multitude of things which would directly conflict with his omnibenevolence. Hill's attempt to reconcile solution (2) with Christian orthodoxy, but his attempts were shown to be largely unsuccessful. If then, one is unable to accept pantheism and a less-than-omnibenevolent God, solution (2) must be rejected as well.

Finally, solution (3) was discussed. It was shown that God, through the incarnation, has direct knowledge of all anthropocentric qualia that Christ experienced during His time on earth. Russell's epistemology was utilized to show that Christ has a greater understanding of the qualia of other minds than man. Because of his omniscience with regards to propositional knowledge, Christ possesses indirect yet infallible knowledge of the qualia of other minds. Solution (3), however, was shown not to be without its problems. To endorse solution (3), one must either affirm that (a) God's knowledge, despite his omniscience, still grows as time passes or (b) God has always had knowledge of qualia through Christ's experiences. These difficulties seemed to necessitate that one completely remove qualia from his definition of omniscience. Finally, a few

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[93] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 3rd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 250.

implications of redefining omniscience were briefly discussed. First, the relationships between propositional vs. non-propositional knowledge and occurrent vs. discursive knowledge were introduced. Second, the idea of God learning was briefly discussed, and finally, the state of divine empathy before and after the incarnation was introduced.

Suggestions for Further Study and Final Thoughts

There were several concepts touched upon in this paper which fell well outside of its scope. All of these ideas warrant further study, but three in particular stood out. First, this thesis largely assumed that knowledge is completely shared between members of the Trinity. While this is not an assumption that is likely to be contested, the exact mode of how the knowledge is shared remains to be seen. Like all issues concerning the Trinity, whatever solution is presented must walk the line between strict non-Trinitarian monotheism and tri-theism. Secondly, though Christ lacks certain qualia which his spatiotemporal context and divine nature preclude, this paper assumed that none of these qualia count as essential to the human experience. While it is easy to see that some experiences are not necessary to understand life as a human, the criterion by which these experiences are judged not clear. Further study elucidating the nature of such a criterion is needed. Finally, though this paper assumed that God was empathetically effete prior to the incarnation, there are likely those who would disagree with this assumption. Exploring the exact nature of God's pre-incarnation empathy would also be a fruitful area of study.

While this paper does not claim to be the first treatment of the nuances of God's omniscience, its author was nonetheless hard-pressed to find sources directly dealing with God's knowledge of anthropocentric qualia. Admittedly, the topics discussed above are a bit difficult and rather technical, but they remain important nonetheless. Indeed, there are at least three reasons why the study of God's knowledge of qualia is important.

First, studying the knowledge of God, like any other intellectual pursuit within Christianity, allows one to know his creator more deeply. If the Christian is called to worship God with all his mind, he cannot be satisfied with anything less than a well-thought conception of the divine attributes.

Secondly, there is immense apologetic value in thinking critically about the nature of God's knowledge. So-called incompatibilities within the nature of God, like the ones listed in this paper, are becoming more and more popular points of attack upon his existence. If one seeks out these purported problems with vigor, anti-theistic arrows are blocked much more easily. If the Christian is going to believe in and proclaim God to the world, he would do well to pursue a deeper understanding of the divine nature.

Finally, there is immense spiritual comfort in finding dearly held beliefs to be grounded in solid argument. It is one thing to hold an arbitrary and vacuous belief that God is empathetic and understanding of one's trouble. It is another thing entirely to underpin this belief with well-reasoned arguments. Indeed, intellectual pursuits have long been thought to be a vital part of the Christian faith. Anselm famously lead a life of *fides quarens intellectum*, of "faith seeking understanding." Any Christian would do well to follow in his footsteps.

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