


**OMNISCIENCE**  
**PUZZLES IN THE PHILOSOPHY**  
**OF RELIGION AND MIND**

**By**  
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Omniscience: Puzzles in the Philosophy of Religion and Mind

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## DECLARATION

*I certify that the content of the thesis is the product of my own work and that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.*

*I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged.*



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For my parents, whom I believed to be omniscient in my childhood

Indeed, the Reverend Frank Milvey was a forbearing man, who noticed many sad warps and blights in the vineyard wherein he worked, and did not profess that they made him savagely wise. He only learned that the more he himself knew, in his little limited human way, the better he could distantly imagine what Omniscience might know.

——Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*

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## Abstract

The aim of this work is to shed light on the concept of omniscience and demonstrate that it plays crucial roles in a number of important philosophical topics, particularly in the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of mind. In Part I, I try to provide a proper formulation of omniscience and show that the issue of omniscience emerges in many distinct areas of philosophy, such as the philosophy of religion, epistemology, aesthetics, the philosophy of language, logic and the philosophy of mind. In Part II, I focus on the philosophy of religion and analyse two arguments that are held to refute the existence of an omniscient God: the argument from knowledge *de se* and the argument from concept possession. I evaluate the existing objections to these arguments and demonstrate that none of them is successful. I then provide my own objections to the arguments by utilising the concept of omniscience. To evaluate these anti-theist arguments is an important task in itself. However, in Part III, I argue that my analyses of the arguments are applicable to quite different arguments in the philosophy of mind: Thomas Nagel's bat argument and Frank Jackson's knowledge argument, both of which purport to undermine the dominant physicalist position on

the mind-body problem. I construe the arguments in terms of omniscience and, on that basis, I maintain that the argument from knowledge *de se* is parallel to the bat argument, and that the argument from concept possession is parallel to the knowledge argument. By comparing the knowledge argument and the bat argument with their counterparts I construct new objections to the arguments.

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## Preface

When I first became interested in philosophy I was fascinated by two philosophical topics in particular. The first was the existence of God in the philosophy of religion. How could we prove the existence or non-existence of the greatest possible being that is worthy of religious worship? I was impressed by philosophers' great efforts to prove the existence and non-existence of God. The second was the mystery of phenomenal consciousness in the philosophy of mind. How could the phenomenal aspect of perceptual experience be realised in the brain, which is nothing but an aggregation of billions of individually non-sentient neurons? I was impressed by philosophers' elaborate attempts to formulate and solve this deep metaphysical mystery.

The goal of the present work is to bridge these two distinct topics in two different areas of philosophy by appealing to the concept 'omniscience'.

This work is divided into three parts. In Part I, I try to demonstrate that the issue of omniscience emerges, not only in the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of mind, but also in other areas of philosophy,

such as epistemology, aesthetics, the philosophy of language and logic. I claim that the concept plays crucial roles in each area.

In Part II, I focus on the philosophy of religion and analyse two arguments that allegedly refute the existence of an omniscient God: the argument from knowledge *de se* and the argument from concept possession. I maintain that the existing objections to these arguments are unsuccessful and construct new objections to the arguments.

To evaluate these anti-theist arguments is an important task in itself. However, in Part III I argue that my analyses of the arguments are applicable to quite different arguments in the philosophy of mind: Thomas Nagel's bat argument and Frank Jackson's knowledge argument. I demonstrate that the argument from knowledge *de se* is parallel to the bat argument, and that the argument from concept possession is parallel to the knowledge argument. I argue that the bat argument and the knowledge argument fail to undermine the physicalist position on the mind-body problem by utilising my analyses of the anti-theist arguments.

This work draws upon material that has been published as papers in various journals. Chapter 2 draws heavily on my papers 'Divine Omniscience and Knowledge *De Se*', 2003, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Volume 53, Issue 2, pp. 73-82 and 'God's Point of View: A Reply to Mander', 2003, *Heythrop Journal: A Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology*, Volume 44, Issue 1, pp. 60-63. The second last section of Chapter 3 consists almost entirely of my paper 'Divine Omniscience and Experience: A Reply to Alter', 2003, *Ars Disputandi*, Volume 3. Chapter 5 comes from my paper 'Thomas vs. Thomas: A New Approach to Nagel's Bat Argument', 2003, *Inquiry*, Volume 46, Number 3, pp. 377-394. Finally, Chapter 6 comes from 'The Knowledge Argument Against Dualism', 2002, *Theoria*, Volume LXVIII, Part 3, pp. 205-223. I would like to thank Kluwer Publishing Company, Blackwell Publishing,



the Utrecht University, Taylor and Francis, and Theoria for letting me use the material again here.

Part of Chapter 2 was read at the Pacific Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers in Spokane, Washington in 2002 and the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Philadelphia in 2002. Part of Chapter 5 was given at the ANU Philosophy Society in Canberra in 2002. Part of Chapter 6 was read at the ANU Philosophy Society in Canberra in 2001 and at the Toward a Science of Consciousness conference in Tucson, Arizona in 2002. I would like to thank the American Philosophical Association and the Philosophy Program at the Australian National University for their financial support for my attendance at the conferences. I would also like to thank all in the audiences, including Harriet Baber, Stephen Biggs, Campbell Brown, David J. Chalmers, Philippe Chuard, Daniel Cohen, Nic Damnjanovic, Mitchell Joe, Josh Parsons, Karen Riley, Howard Robinson, Kim Sterelny, Charles Taliaferro and Keith Wyma.

Lisa Bortolotti read an entire draft of this work. I would like to acknowledge gratefully her feedback, which led to numerous improvements of this work. I am also grateful to the following people for their useful comments and constructive suggestions on various parts of this work: Ben Blumson, William Hasker, Daniel Hill, Peter Ludlow, Graham Oppy, Thomas Sullivan, Chris Wright and anonymous referees for *Ars Disputandi*, *Inquiry*, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* and *Theoria*. Without Torin Alter's and Patrick Grim's inspiring works I would not have seen the connection between the arguments in the philosophy of religion and in the philosophy of mind. I would like to thank them warmly.

I would also like to thank Karen Bennett and Laura Schroeter, who were members of my advisory panel while they were at the Australian



National University, for their helpful feedback on my work, and Michael Smith, the Head of the Philosophy Program, for his encouragement and support. I am deeply indebted to my supervisors, Martin Davies and Frank Jackson, whose useful suggestions and insightful advice have made a significant effect on the development of my research. I also owe a deep debt, of a different sort, to my family and friends for their loving support. Finally, my greatest debt is to Daniel Stoljar, my principal supervisor, who taught me how to tackle intractable philosophical puzzles through helpful comments, enjoyable discussion and truly invaluable encouragement!

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# **Part I**

## **Omniscience**

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# Chapter 1

## Omniscience in Philosophy

### 1.1 Introduction

To be omniscient is to know everything; in particular, to be omniscient about a subject matter is to know everything about the subject matter. Omniscience is, of course, best known as one of the necessary attributes of the traditional Judaeo-Christian God or the God in the Anselmian tradition. (In what follows I use the words, 'Judaeo-Christian God', 'Anselmian God' and 'God' interchangeably.) Scripture says, for instance, 'God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything' (1 John 3: 20). But what exactly does it mean that one knows everything or one is omniscient?

It has long been recognised by philosophers of religion that defining *omnipotence*, another necessary attribute of God, is an enormously difficult task. Whenever a new formulation of omnipotence is introduced, powerful counter-arguments soon follow.<sup>1</sup> Peter Geach (1974), for example, describes the situation as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> For the debate on how to define omnipotence see Richard La Croix (1978), Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso (1983), Peter Geach (1973), Geach (1977), Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz (1980), Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1984), Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1988) Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002), George I. Mavrodes (1977), Wes

When people have tried to read into ‘God can do everything’ a signification not of Pious Intention but Philosophical Truth, they have only landed themselves in intractable problems and hopeless confusions; no graspable sense has ever been given to this sentence that did not lead to self-contradiction or at least to conclusions manifestly untenable from the Christian point of view. (p. 4).

Similarly, Richard La Croix (1978) writes:

[I]t is impossible to produce a satisfactory definition of ‘omnipotence’ which universally generalises over persons because any such definition will entail either that a being is omnipotent who is clearly not omnipotent or that if God is omnipotent then he is not omniscient, not omnipresent, and not all-loving. (p. 219)

By contrast, it is generally regarded as a much easier task to define *omniscience*. Anthony Kenny (1979), for example, explicitly states, ‘The doctrine of omniscience is easy to formulate precisely’ (p. 10). But is this really true? Many philosophers often think that *omnipotence* is difficult to define because such definition requires the prior definition of ability. Ability itself is difficult to define because it appears to involve counterfactuals, which require careful treatment.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, omniscience does not obviously involve counterfactuals. For while omnipotence concerns what one *can* do omniscience concerns what one *does* know.<sup>3</sup> However, defining omniscience cannot be so easy because such definition requires the prior definition of knowledge. Needless to say,

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Morrison (2001b), Bruce R. Reichenbach (1980), Richard Swinburne (1973), Erik J. Wielenberg (2000), Edward Wierenga (1983).

<sup>2</sup> One might define, for example, an ability to speak French as follows: One can speak French if and only there is a possible world in which one speaks French. However, this sort of simple conditional analysis of ability is highly implausible. See Chapter 4 of this work.

<sup>3</sup> I discuss this point in detail in Chapter 2.



knowledge is widely regarded as one of the most intractable concepts in philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, there are a number of neglected arguments against the traditional formulation of omniscience, some of which are very powerful. As I explain below, once those arguments are taken seriously it is not as easy as it initially appears to provide a proper formulation of omniscience.

Since omniscience is best-known as one of the divine attributes, the concept of omniscience has been discussed mainly in the philosophy of religion. I argue in the following, however, that the issue of omniscience arises in a number of other areas of philosophy.

This chapter has the following structure. In Section 1.2 I introduce what I think is a correct formulation of omniscience. From Sections 1.3 to 1.8, I demonstrate that the concept of omniscience appears, and plays important roles, in many areas of philosophy. I argue that a number of distinct ideas in philosophy should be construed either as challenges to the possibility of one's being omniscient or arguments that lead to challenges to the possibility of one's being omniscient. In particular, I discuss the concept of omniscience in the philosophy of religion in Section 1.3, epistemology in 1.4, aesthetics in 1.5, the philosophy of language in 1.6, logic in 1.7 and the philosophy of mind in 1.8. Finally, in Section 1.9, I argue that the arguments that I discuss in this chapter are divided into two categories.

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<sup>4</sup> As we will see, I make some minimal, uncontroversial assumptions about knowledge in this work. For example, I assume that if one knows that  $p$  then it is true that  $p$ . However, I make no attempt to define knowledge. I try to minimise the dependence on a specific definition of knowledge in my discussions.

## 1.2 Definitions of Omniscience

As I mentioned earlier, Scripture states that 'God knows everything' (1 John 3: 20). If we construe this statement literally as a correct description of God's omniscience we can formulate omniscience in general as follows:

(1) For any  $x$ ,  $x$  is omniscient if and only if  $x$  knows everything.

This formulation of omniscience is analogous to the following formulation of omnipotence:

(2) For any  $x$ ,  $x$  is omnipotent if and only if  $x$  can do anything.

To the extent that (2) does not set any restrictions on  $x$ 's ability or power (1) does not set any restrictions on  $x$ 's knowledge.

(1) is, however, clearly unsatisfactory because it does not exclude the absurdity that an omniscient being knows meaningless non-propositions. (Similarly, (2) is unsatisfactory because it does not exclude the absurdity that an omnipotent being can perform meaningless non-tasks.) In order to solve this problem we can revise (1) as follows:

(3) For any  $x$  and any proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is omniscient if and only if  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

(3) is analogous to the following formulation of omnipotence:

(4) For any  $x$  and any task  $k$ ,  $x$  is omnipotent if and only if  $x$  can do  $k$ .

(3) is, however, also unsatisfactory. Consider the following proposition:

(5) A square is seven-sided.

Although (5) is a meaningful proposition nobody, not even an omniscient being, knows (5) because (5) is false. In general, if a proposition  $p$  is false then one cannot know that  $p$ , because the truth condition of knowledge is not satisfied. (Similarly, (4) is often regarded as being unsatisfactory as a formulation of omnipotence. For, if (4) is true, an omnipotent being can create, for instance, a seven-sided square, which seems absurd. Drawing a

seven-sided square is not a proper task but a 'pseudo task'.<sup>5</sup>) Put this point in a different way. If (3) is a correct formulation of omniscience then we can easily show that there is no omniscient being by constructing the following absurd argument: Consider a proposition  $P$ . If (3) is true then an omniscient being must know that  $P$ , because according to (3) an omniscient being knows all propositions. Suppose, however, that  $P$  is false. If  $P$  is false then it is impossible for any being to know that  $P$  because, in general, one can know that  $p$  only if it is true that  $p$ . Therefore, for any  $x$  and for the proposition  $P$ , the right hand of side of the biconditional in (3) is false and consequently the left hand is false too. And, hence there is no omniscient being.

Proponents of (3) might respond as follows. If we accept (4), which is in fact accepted by a number of philosophers<sup>6</sup>, then an omnipotent being like God must be able to perform literally any task, including tasks that it is logically impossible to perform. Then surely God can make (5) true. That is, if He<sup>7</sup> changes the truth-value of (5) from false to truth then the truth condition is indeed satisfied and hence God can know (5).

There are at least two responses to this objection. First, this objection only shows that God *can* know (5), not God *does* know (5). Since, again, the doctrine of omniscience is a doctrine about what one *does know*, rather than what one *can know*, even if we can show that God can know (5) by using His power to change the truth-value of (5) that does not entail that God actually knows (5). It seems clear that God does not know (5), at least

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 5 of this work for the issue of omnipotence and pseudo tasks.

<sup>6</sup> Philosophers who endorse the doctrine of omnipotence similar to (4) include Earl Conee (1991), René Descartes (1970), D. Goldstick (1990), J. L. Mackie (1955), John Ellis McTaggart (1906), Leon Shestov (1992). See also Conee (1991), Antoine Côté (1998), Goldstick (1990), Louis Groarke (2001), Nick Trakakis (1997).

<sup>7</sup> In this work, following a tradition, I use the word 'He' when I refer to God. However, this does not imply that I think that God has a gender.



at present, because (5) is false before God brings it about that a square is seven-sided, whatever that means. Second, even if God does have a power to change a falsity into a truth it still does not make sense to say that He knows all propositions. Consider the following proposition:

(6) A square is not seven-sided.

If He knows all propositions then He knows (5) *and* (6). However, knowing (5) and (6) entails that God has 'inconsistent knowledge', the notion of which itself is logically incoherent.

Therefore, (3) is not a compelling formulation of omniscience. In order to eliminate the difficulties of (3) we can introduce the following formulation:

(7) For any  $x$ , and for any proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is omniscient if and only if, if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

As I noted earlier, Kenny (1979) contends that omniscience is 'easy to formulate precisely' (p. 10). In fact (7) is almost identical to Kenny's formulation<sup>8</sup> and it also represents the most popular notion of omniscience. The following is a list of philosophers who subscribe to this formulation, or one very similar to it: Peter Geach (1977, pp. 40 and 43), Anthony Kenny (1979, p. 10), William E. Mann (1975, pp. 153-154), Alvin Plantinga (1980, p. 91), A. N. Prior (1962, p. 114), James F. Ross (1969, p. 214), Richard Swinburne (1977, p. 162), James E. Tomberlin and Frank McGuinness (1977, p. 472).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kenny's formulation (1979) is the following:

For all  $p$ , if  $p$ , then God knows that  $p$ . (p. 10)

If we generalise the above and change it to a biconditional properly then we can obtain (7) because presumably Kenny denotes proposition by ' $p$ '.

<sup>9</sup> See Grim (1983), p. 265, p. 275, fn 5. Although Plantinga uses a formulation of omniscience like (7) which allows an omniscient being to have false beliefs in the work cited above, in a later exchange with Grim he adopts a different formulation of

(7) seems consistent with the commonsense idea that omniscience is 'all-knowing'. Assuming that  $P1$  is a true proposition we can imagine that  $X$  knows that  $P1$ . Again, assuming that  $P2$  is a true proposition we can imagine that  $X$  knows that  $P1$  and  $P2$ . Again, assuming that  $P3$  is a true proposition, we can imagine that  $X$  knows that  $P1$ ,  $P2$  and  $P3$ . The more we reiterate this procedure, the closer  $X$  would be to being omniscient. (7) also seems consistent with the idea of being knowledgeable. Suppose that  $X$  knows two true propositions  $P1$  and  $P2$ . And suppose also that  $Y$  knows three true propositions  $P1$ ,  $P2$  and  $P3$ . In this case  $X$  is more knowledgeable than  $Y$ , or closer to omniscient than  $Y$ , because  $X$  knows more true propositions than  $Y$ .<sup>10</sup>

One might claim that (7) is untenable because it fails to exclude the possibility that an omniscient being has false beliefs or inconsistent beliefs.<sup>11</sup> For instance, one might think, even if (7) excludes the possibility

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omniscience that excludes the possibility that God has false beliefs. See Plantinga and Grim (1993).

<sup>10</sup> An interesting question here is which would be closer to being omniscient if propositions that they know are not neatly overlapping. Suppose, for example, that John knows that  $1+2$  is 3, that  $1+2$  is close to 2.999, and that  $1+2$  is not 289. And suppose also that Kate knows  $1+2$  is 3 and that some spiders are poisonous. One might claim that although John knows numerically more propositions than Kate, he is less close to being omniscient than Kate. For, one might say, Kate's knowledge is more comprehensive, more useful or more informative.

<sup>11</sup> See Grim (1983), p. 265. Grim contends that the following simple definition of omniscience is unsatisfactory because it allows God to have 'any number of *false* beliefs':

$x$  is omniscient =<sub>df</sub> for all  $p$ ,  $p$  is true IFF  $x$  knows that  $p$ . (p. 265)

Similarly, Richard Gale (1991) defines an omniscient being as one 'who knows all and believes only *true* propositions' (p. 57, my emphasis). See also Michael Martin (1990), p. 243 and Martin (2000), p. 18. For objections to a formulation of omniscience similar to (7) see Grim (1983), pp. 265-267, John Lachs (1963) Martin (1990), Martin (2000), Charles Taliaferro (1985).



that an omniscient being *knows* (5)—viz., that a square is seven-sided—that does not exclude the possibility that it *believes* (5). However, if the omniscient being believes (5) then it believes both that a square is four-sided and that a square is seven-sided. In other words, it believes both that a square is four-sided and *not* four-sided. This seems deeply counter-intuitive.<sup>12</sup>

In what follows, unless I explicitly state otherwise, I denote (7) by the term ‘omniscience’ because it is simple yet captures correctly the commonsense notion of omniscience. However, if we are to exclude false beliefs from omniscience we can always hold the following formulation:<sup>13</sup>

(8) For any  $x$  and for any proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is omniscient if and only if,  $x$  does not have false beliefs and if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Proponents of (7) might argue as follows. Given that omniscience is the possession of knowledge, which is a form of *true* belief, a proper formulation of omniscience does not need to be concerned with whether or not an omniscient being has *false* beliefs. What the above objection to (7) shows is that there is a possible *irrational* omniscient being that has false beliefs or inconsistent beliefs in addition to true beliefs, which is unproblematic. Just as it is possible for an irrational *omnipotent* or *omnibenevolent* being to exist, it is perfectly possible for an irrational omniscient being to exist. For being omniscient is one thing and being rational is quite another.

<sup>13</sup> If we are only concerned with *God's* omniscience then (7) does exclude the possibility that He has a false belief. If God is omniscient, then presumably He will know that He has this belief, know that it is false, know how to revise it, and know that He ought to revise it (because He will also know what the canons of rational belief are). So, unless there are any impediments to His eradicating the belief He will eradicate it. Now, given that God is omnipotent, there are no impediments. Hence, God has no false beliefs. I owe this point to Daniel Stoljar.

<sup>14</sup> Grim (1983) provides the following complicated formulation of omniscience:

$x$  is omniscient =<sub>df</sub> for all  $p$ ,  $p$  is true if and only if  $x$  believes that  $p$ , and  $x$  believes that  $p$  if and only if  $x$  knows that  $p$ . (p. 266)

This is essentially equivalent to (8), which I believe is more straightforward.

Important provisos are, however, in order: First, (7) is not concerned with, and does not state, whether or not omniscience includes foreknowledge. Some philosophers think that God knows, for instance, what I will eat for dinner tonight or what the name of the first baby in 3004 will be (if the human race survives that long), *because* He is omniscient. However, some other philosophers think that even an omniscient God does not know exactly what will happen in the future, in particular what kind of actions human beings (possessed, as they are, of free will) will perform. I have formulated (7) so that it is neutral with respect to this point because (i) the issue of foreknowledge and free will is enormously controversial and (ii) arguments about omniscience that I discuss in this work are irrelevant to foreknowledge.<sup>15</sup> What is clear, however, is the following. If the truth-values of propositions about the future are fixed then an omniscient being knows them. If they are not fixed, on the other hand, then, at least on the face of it, the fact that one cannot know them does not undermine one's omniscience.

Second, (7) does not cover 'non-propositional knowledge'. One might think that in order for one to be omniscient one has to possess non-propositional knowledge, such as, 'knowledge by acquaintance' or 'knowledge-how' in addition to propositional knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Apart from a few brief comments in Section 1.5 and Chapter 7 I set aside the controversial issues of whether or not knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge-how are really non-propositional knowledge and whether or

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<sup>15</sup> See John Martin Fischer (1989), for instance, for the issue of foreknowledge.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Martin (1974), p. 232, Martin (1990), pp. 243-244, Martin (2000), p. 19.

not there really is such a thing as non-propositional knowledge in the first place.<sup>17</sup>

In the following I demonstrate that the concept of omniscience, as formulated above, emerges as a topic of discussion in many different areas of philosophy. I maintain that a number of ideas in these areas of philosophy may be profitably construed either as challenges to the possibility of one's being omniscient or arguments that lead to challenges to the possibility of one's being omniscient. It should be emphasised, however, that, except for a few cases, I do not aim to evaluate these challenges in this chapter. My main goal is simply to show the significant roles that the concept of omniscience plays in philosophy. At the end of this chapter I contend that the arguments about omniscience introduced here may be classified into two categories, according to their structure.

### **1.3 Omniscience in the Philosophy of Religion**

Probably the concept of omniscience has most thoroughly been considered in the philosophy of religion because, as I noted earlier, omniscience is best known as one of the necessary attributes of the traditional Judaeo-Christian God. Since I spend the entirety of Part II of this work discussing arguments about God's omniscience, here I briefly review only two arguments in the philosophy of religion. The aim of both arguments is to show that God does not exist because omniscience is inconsistent with other divine attributes.

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<sup>17</sup> For the issue of knowledge by acquaintance see John Bigelow and Robert Pargetter (1996), Conee (1994), Richard Fumerton (2004). For the issue of knowledge-how see Torin Alter (2001), Fred Dretske (1988), William G. Lycan (1966), John Perry (2001), Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson (2001), Alan R. White (1982).



*The Argument from Concept Possession*

What I call the ‘argument from concept possession’ concerns a putative inconsistency between omniscience and omnipotence. The most basic version of this argument is based on the following thesis about concept possession:

- (9) In order for one to understand certain concepts fully, one has to have relevant experiences.

So, for example, according to the argument, God cannot be both necessarily omnipotent and necessarily omniscient. For if He is necessarily omnipotent then He does not fully understand the concepts *fear*, *frustration* and *despair*, possession of which require Him to have experienced fear, frustration and despair. Therefore, the argument concludes, an omniscient and omnipotent God does not exist. Although the argument from concept possession has been discussed by a number of philosophers in various different forms it has not, I believe, attracted the attention it warrants. I discuss this argument in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

*The Argument from Immutability*

Another argument about omniscience in the philosophy of religion concerns an alleged inconsistency between omniscience and immutability. This argument is most notably endorsed by Norman Kretzmann (1966).<sup>18</sup> Kretzmann contends that God cannot be omniscient because given that He is necessarily immutable, that is, given that necessarily He is not subject to change, He does not know temporally indexed propositions like the following:

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<sup>18</sup> For the argument from immutability see also William Lane Craig (2001), Gregory E. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff (2002), Grim (1985), William Haster (1989), Peter Ludlow (1995c), Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (1981), Thomas V. Sullivan (1991), Edward Wierenga (1988).

(10) It is 10:00 am.

On the fact of it, this argument is similar to the argument from knowledge *de se* that I discuss in Section 1.6 below.

It is important to note that the cogency of this argument largely rests on how the doctrine of divine immutability is interpreted. Some philosophers think that God's immutability should be understood as timelessness. That is, according to them, God exists outside time. However, other philosophers think that God's immutability should be understood as eternity. That is, according to them, God exists inside time, but exists at every time. If the latter view is correct, then perhaps God's immutability does not immediately undermine His omniscience. For, given that God is, just like us, in time it seems easy for Him to know (10).

It is also important to note that this argument rests on one's understanding of time as well. Some philosophers contend that even if God does not know a temporally indexed proposition like (10) that does not undermine His omniscience because He can have temporal knowledge timelessly. However, if one accepts the four-dimensionalist picture of time—according to which an object in time has temporal parts in the various subregion of time it occupies—then it appears difficult to think that anyone can have temporal knowledge timelessly.<sup>19</sup>

#### 1.4 Omniscience in Epistemology

As I noted earlier, to be omniscient is to *know* everything. Hence, epistemology seems to be another place to look for the concept of omniscience. In this section I discuss two important topics in epistemology that are closely related to the concept.

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<sup>19</sup> See Theodore Sider (2003) for a defence of four-dimensionalism.

### *Scepticism*

One of the oldest and most perplexing ideas in epistemology, or even in philosophy in general, is scepticism. For almost anything you think you know, the sceptic will produce an argument that undermines your confidence that you know that thing. Consider the traditional Cartesian sceptical scenario. I believe the following proposition:

(11) I have hands.

It is plausible to say not just that I believe (11) but also that I *know* (11) because: (i) by looking at my hands I can justify my belief that I have hands, (ii) it is indeed true that I have hands and (iii) there is no Gettier-type perplexity in this situation. However, the sceptical hypothesis says that I do not really know that I have hands. For, according to the hypothesis, it is perfectly possible that an evil demon is creating an illusion of my hands and, therefore, I falsely believe that that I have hands.

Scepticism may be taken as a challenge to the possibility of one's being omniscient. For while one has to know all true propositions in order to be omniscient, scepticism says that there are at least some propositions, such as (11), that are not knowable even *in principle*.

As Peter Klein (2003) says, it is important to distinguish scepticism from ordinary incredulity. Suppose John claims that he knows that the bird that he sees is a robin. He might begin to doubt his claim if someone introduces the following hypothesis:

(12) The flight pattern of this bird is not typical of robins.

There are two possible ways to deprive this hypothesis of its force. The first is to *falsify* it. Perhaps John can show, by referring to an encyclopedia, that in fact there are certain kinds of robin that fly in the manner of the bird under observation. The other is to *neutralise* (12). Perhaps although it is true that the bird in question is flying in an unusual way, it is discovered that it cannot fly properly because, for instance, one of its wings is

damaged. Consider, on the other hand, the following sceptical hypothesis, which might also make John doubt his belief that the bird that he sees is a robin:

(13) John has an illusion of a robin, which illusion has been created by an evil demon.

(13) is much more persistent than (12) because, unlike (12), it is impossible *in principle* to falsify or neutralise (13). Thus, while ordinary incredulous hypotheses do not undermine the possibility of one's being omniscient, sceptical hypotheses do. Incredulous hypotheses show, if they show anything, only the *practical* impossibility of one's being omniscient.

One might think it mistaken to construe scepticism as an argument against the possibility of one's being omniscient *in general*. For, one might say, scepticism shows, if it shows anything, only that we, human beings, cannot be omniscient. However, this is not correct. If scepticism is cogent, then it appears difficult even for God to refute sceptical hypotheses, *e.g.* He is not in fact God.<sup>20</sup>

Scepticism is usually taken as an argument for one's ignorance. We have seen, however, that they may also be taken as an argument against one's omniscience. This makes sense, given that omniscience is the exact opposite of total ignorance.

### *The Paradox of Knowability*

Frederic Fitch (1963) introduces the so-called 'paradox of knowability' as follows:<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> I owe this point to Ben Blumson.

<sup>21</sup> According to Berit Brogaard and Joe Salerno (2002) this argument was originally introduced by Fitch and then rediscovered by W. D. Hart (1979) and Hart and Colin McGinn (1976). For an argument against God's omniscience in a similar vein see Roland Puccetti (1963). Puccetti argues as follows: An omniscient being must know the fact that it itself is omniscient. To know this fact, however, it must know the proposition expressed



(14) If there is an unknown true proposition then the true proposition that it is an unknown proposition is itself unknowable.

(15) There are unknown true propositions.

Therefore,

(16) There is an unknowable true proposition.<sup>22</sup>

(14) is an axiom that Fitch introduces. (15) is easily motivated by simple examples. For instance, no one knows, I presume, true propositions of the following forms, simply because no one bothers to investigate them:

(17) The exact number of typos in this chapter is \_\_\_\_.

(18) The name of the person who was the 1352th baby born in the year 1828 was \_\_\_\_.

(16) is derived from (14) and (15) by *modus ponens*. The conclusion (16), if it is true, shows that the following principle of knowability is false:

(19) Necessarily, any true proposition is knowable.

This argument is often construed as a refutation of verificationism. Strong verificationism says that necessarily, all true propositions are *known* and weak verificationism says that necessarily, all true propositions are *knowable*. Strong verificationism is false because, as we have seen, as a matter of fact, there are many true propositions that are unknown. Thus only weak verificationism seems tenable. However, the paradox of knowability seems to show that even weak verificationism is false. In order to see how weak verificationism is refuted we can formulate the

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as 'there are no facts unknown to me'. Since this proposition is universal and negative, the only way that one can know this is to know that its denial is false. However, there is no way of knowing this. Therefore, there is no omniscient being.

<sup>22</sup> The argument is often formulated in terms of truths rather than true propositions. I formulate it in terms of true propositions so that we can clearly see the connection between the paradox of knowability and the concept of omniscience that I have formulated.

paradox in a slightly different way. Letting  $p$  be a true proposition and  $Kp$  mean ' $p$  is known' we can represent weak verificationism as follows:

$$(20) \forall p(p \supset \Diamond Kp)$$

The fact that there are unknown true propositions, *i.e.*, (15), is symbolised as:

$$(21) \exists p(p \& \sim Kp)$$

Consider a particular instance of (21), say  $P \& \sim KP$ . If we instantiate  $p$  with  $P \& \sim KP$  then with (20) we can derive  $\Diamond K(P \& \sim KP)$ . This is equivalent to  $\Diamond(KP \& K \sim KP)$  and hence  $\Diamond(KP \& \sim KP)$ . This means that (20) and (21) jointly reduce to absurdity. Since (21) is an innocuous claim it seems that we need to reject (20), which represents weak verificationism. This argument is based on two principles. The one is that knowledge distributes across conjunctions, that is,  $K(p \& q) \vdash Kp$  and  $K(p \& q) \vdash Kq$ . The other is that knowledge implies truth, that is,  $Kp \vdash p$ .<sup>23</sup>

It is mistaken to think that the paradox of knowability proves one's non-omniscience, because it presupposes that one is not omniscient in its premiss (15), *viz.*, There are unknown true propositions. However, we can still derive an interesting thesis about omniscience from the paradox, which is that if the paradox is cogent, any being that *is not*, as a matter of fact, omniscient *cannot* be omniscient.

If we suppose that weak verificationism is true and that the paradox of knowability is cogent then we can derive that (15) is false. One might think this shows that there is an omniscient being that knows all true propositions. However, this is mistaken. Even if the above suppositions are right, it only follows that every true proposition is known<sup>24</sup>, which is

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<sup>23</sup> See Michael Hand and Jonathan L. Kvanvig (1999).

<sup>24</sup> This is another way of presenting the paradox. That is, if Fitch is right, then weak verificationism entails strong verificationism, which seems much more implausible than weak verificationism.

consistent with the non-existence of an omniscient being. For it could well be the case that there is no single omniscient being but, for instance, two knowledgeable beings, one of which knows half of all the true propositions and the other of which knows the rest of all the true propositions.<sup>25</sup>

### 1.5 Omniscience in Aesthetics

#### *The Acquaintance Principle*

Malcolm Budd (2003) formulates the ‘acquaintance principle’, an influential principle in aesthetics as follows:

(22) Aesthetic knowledge must be acquired through first-hand experience of the object of knowledge and cannot be transmitted from person to person. (p. 386)

This principle is, of course, influenced by Bertrand Russell’s epistemology. Russell (1912) famously distinguishes ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ from ‘knowledge by description’.<sup>26</sup> He defines knowledge by acquaintance as knowledge of a thing of which we are ‘directly aware’ (p. 25). The significance of this knowledge is, according to Russell, that, unlike knowledge by description, we can acquire it ‘without the intermediary of process of inference or any knowledge of truths’ (p. 25). In order to illustrate his point Russell introduces the following example:

It is sometimes said that ‘light *is* a form of wave-motion’, but this is misleading, for the light which we immediately see, which we know directly by means of our senses, is not a form of wave motion, but something quite different—something we all know if

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<sup>25</sup> For general discussions of the paradox of knowability see Berit Brogaard and Joe Salerno (2002), Jonathan Kvanvig (2005-forthcoming), Neil Tennant (1997), Timothy Williamson (2000).

<sup>26</sup> See Richard Fumerton (2004) for the issue of knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance.

we are not blind, though we cannot describe it so as to convey our knowledge to a man who is blind. A wave-motion, on the contrary, could quite well be described to a blind man, since he can acquire a knowledge of space by the sense of touch; and he can experience a wave-motion by a sea voyage almost as well as we can. But this, which a blind man can understand, is not what we mean by light: we mean by light just that which a blind man can never understand, and which we can never describe to him. (pp. 27-8).

Here Russell regards a certain sort of empiricism to be obvious, namely, that experience is necessary for the sort of perceptual knowledge of light only available to the sighted. It follows from this that a congenitally blind person—someone who by definition has not had the relevant experiences—cannot attain that sort of knowledge.

Knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description are often regarded as being equivalent to propositional knowledge and non-propositional knowledge, respectively. However, proponents of the acquaintance principle do not necessarily need to accept such idea. One can endorse the acquaintance principle by claiming that there are *propositions* about aesthetics, which cannot be known without having relevant first-hand experiences. This claim is plausible if we assume that in order to understand certain aesthetic propositions one has to comprehend fully certain concepts that require one to have relevant first-hand experiences. (Notice that this reasoning is very similar to that manifested in the argument from concept possession that I explained above.)

As Budd (2003) explains, there are a number of interpretations of the principle: Richard Wollheim (1980) thinks that the principle is concerned with knowledge about judgement of aesthetic *values*; Frank Sibley (1974) and Michael Tanner (2003) think that the principle is applied to knowledge about judgement of aesthetic *properties*; Roger Scruton (1974) and Philip



Pettit (1983) contend that the principle holds for knowledge about aesthetic *description*. Whichever of the above interpretations may be correct, if the acquaintance principle is cogent then in order for one to have complete aesthetic knowledge of an object one has to have every possible first-hand experience of the object of knowledge. However, it is obviously impossible to have every possible first-hand experience of the object of knowledge unless, perhaps, we are omnipresent. In other words, if the acquaintance principle is cogent then it is impossible for us to be aesthetically omniscient, and *a fortiori* it is impossible for us to be omniscient simpliciter. (In this sense, the acquaintance principle leads to, just like ordinary incredulous hypotheses, the practical impossibility, rather the necessary impossibility, of being omniscient.)

## 1.6 Omniscience in the Philosophy of Language

### *The Argument from Negative Existentials*

One of the most important papers in the twentieth century philosophy of language is undoubtedly Russell's 'On Denoting' (1905). In this paper, he tackles the problem of reference to non-existents. Consider the following sentence:

(23) The present King of France is bald.

It is difficult to provide a satisfactory analysis of (23) because while it seems that a meaningful subject-predicate sentence needs to pick out some individual entity and ascribe some property to that entity, (23) does not pick out or denote anything that exists given that there is no such thing as the present King of France. Russell provides the theory of descriptions and analyses (23) as a conjunction of three separate claims as follows:

(24) (i) At least one person is presently King of France, and (ii) at most one person is presently King of France, and (iii) whoever is presently King of France is bald.

And he concludes that (23) is false because the conjunction expressed in its analysis, (24), is false because one of the conjuncts, (i), is false.

Another well-known philosophical puzzle about singular terms is the problem of negative existentials.<sup>27</sup> Consider the following:

(25) The present King of France does not exist.

It is difficult to provide a satisfactory analysis of (25) because, just like (23), whether or not (25) is true, it seems that (25) cannot be about the present King of France because there is no such King for it to be about. Russell's theory purports to solve this problem by analysing (25) again as a conjunction of three separate claims, as follows:

(26) The following is not the case: (i) At least one person is presently King of France, and (ii) at most one person is presently King of France, and (iii) whoever is presently King of France exists.

Russell concludes that (26) is true because one of the conjuncts, (i), is false. There are many objections to Russell's theory, but I do not discuss them in this section. What is important here is that the problem of singular terms, in particular, the problem of negative existentials, is still regarded as an intractable puzzle among philosophers of language and that there are a number of on-going debates on this topic.

Christopher Hughes (1998) attempts to utilise the problem of negative existentials in order to disprove the existence of an omniscient God. Suppose that there are possible worlds in which God exists but Anselm does not. In these possible worlds, Hughes says, God cannot even entertain the thought expressed as the following negative existential statement:

(27) Anselm does not exist.

For, according to Hughes, in such worlds God does not even know that Anselm does not exist. Therefore, he concludes, God is not necessarily

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<sup>27</sup> Some philosophers deny that 'the present King of France' is a singular term, but I set this point aside for the sake of simplicity.



omniscient. Hughes's argument is based on various assumptions about proper names and existential judgements, which one might try to reject. However, it seems that his argument has a more fundamental flaw: On the one hand, he assumes that God's capacity is constrained by this world, for he seems to think that God can know only what is the case in this world. However, on the other hand, he assumes that in order for God to be omniscient His capacity needs to extend to all possible worlds. This is unfair for God. If one is allowed to make two obviously conflicting assumptions about God then it is too easy to prove that He does not exist.

#### *The Argument from Knowledge De Se*

In order to reveal the intractable character of essential indexicals and knowledge *de se* John Perry (1979) provides the following scenario: Imagine that I find a trail of spilled sugar on the floor in a supermarket. I wonder which shopper is making this terrible mess all around the aisles and I decide to search for the one responsible. Suddenly, however, I realise there is a hole in the bag of sugar in *my own* shopping cart. *I* am the one who is making the mess!

Here I can express what I come to know as:

(28) I am making the mess.

One might think that (1) is the same as the following:

(29) Yujin Nagasawa is making the mess.

According to Patrick Grim (1983, 1985, 2000), however, 'what I know in knowing (28)',<sup>28</sup> is different from what I know in knowing (29) because I can know (28) without knowing (29) (and *vice versa*). What surprises me is not that someone named Yujin Nagasawa is making the mess but that *I* am making the mess. If I believed that I was not Yujin Nagasawa but, say, Aristotle, then I would not think that (29) concerns me. But I would be

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<sup>28</sup> See Grim (1983), p. 272, Grim (1985), p. 151, Grim (2000), p. 142.

surprised at finding out that *I* am making the mess. Whoever I think I am, I am surprised by what I know in knowing (28). Over the last twenty years or so it has been one of main goals for philosophers of language to provide a satisfactory treatment of essential indexicals like 'I'. Grim utilises Perry's example in order to undermine the doctrine of divine omniscience. He argues that God cannot be omniscient because He cannot know what I know in knowing (28) even though He can know what I know in knowing (29). I discuss this argument in detail in Chapter 2 of this work.

### 1.7 Omniscience in Logic

#### *The Liar Paradox*

One of the oldest and most intractable paradoxes in logic is the liar paradox. The following is the standard formulation of the liar sentence:

(30) This sentence is false.

The paradoxical nature of this self-referential sentence is shown as follows: Either (30) is true or it is false. Suppose that (30) is true. Given that what (30) says is true (30) is false. Hence, if (30) is true then (30) is false. Suppose, on the other hand, that (30) is false. Since (30) says that (30) is false—*i.e.*, it is false that (30) is false—if (30) is false then (30) is true. Therefore, (30) is true if and only if (30) is false!<sup>29</sup>

Grim (1983) introduces a liar paradox about omniscience—which he calls the 'divine liar':

(31) God believes that (31) is false.

Either (31) is true or false. Suppose that (31) is true. Given that what (31) says is true, God believes that (31) is false. However, since we suppose that (31) is true there is a truth—*i.e.*, (31) is true—that God does not

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<sup>29</sup> For issues concerning the liar paradox see Jon Barwise and John Etchemendy (1987), J. C. Beall (2003), Robert Martin (1978), Martin (1984), Vann McGee (1991), Graham Priest, Richard Routley and Jean Norman (1989).

believe.<sup>30</sup> If there is a truth that God does not believe then He does not know it. Hence, if (31) is true, God is not omniscient. Suppose, on the other hand, (31) is false. Given that what (31) says is false God does not believe that (31) is false. However, since we suppose that (31) is false there is a fact—*i.e.*, that (30) is false—that God does not believe. Again, if there is a truth that God does not believe then He does not know it. Hence, if (31) is false, and God is not omniscient. Therefore, in either case God is not omniscient!

The most common way of responding to the liar paradox is to claim that a sentence like (30) is neither true nor false, that is, a self-referential sentence like (30) has a 'truth value gap'. Can we respond to the divine liar paradox in the same way? Grim contends that we cannot. Suppose that (31) is neither true nor false. If God is omniscient then He knows that (31) is neither true nor false. This entails that (31) is false because (31) does not state that God believes that (31) is neither true nor false but that God believes that (31) *is* false. However, if (31) is false then God does not believe that (31) is false, which follows that God does not know the fact that (31) is false. Therefore, again, God is not omniscient.

The following is the so-called 'strengthened liar', which is not vulnerable to a number of objections to the classic liar:

(32) This sentence is not true.

Grim introduces the 'strengthened divine liar', which is analogous to (32):

(33) God believes that (33) is false.

Or alternatively:

(34) God does not believe that (34) is true.

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<sup>30</sup> Here Grim assumes that if God believes that *p* is false then He does not believe that *p* is true. This assumption is not obviously true.



John E. Abbruzzese (1997) rejects the strengthened divine liar. He argues that that a strengthened divine liar sentence such as (34) does not undermine God's omniscience because, Abbruzzese says, just like the divine liar, it 'does not express anything at all' (p. 29). That is, according to Abbruzzese, (34) is a mere 'garble of words', which is not an object of God's knowledge. Grim claims that this objection is unsuccessful. Abbruzzese seems to assume that God believes only truths. If this is right then given that (34) is nothing but a garble of words he needs to conclude the following: God does not believe that (34) is true. However, this *is* the very strengthened divine liar sentence that Abbruzzese rejects (Grim, 2000, p. 145)!

#### *The Cantorian Argument*

Patrick Grim (1984, 1986, 1991, 2000)<sup>31</sup> purports to prove that there is no set of all truths (or equivalently, there is no true proposition about all true propositions) by utilising the Cantorian set theorem. Grim's argument is a *reductio*. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there *is* a set of all truths, call it  $T$ . Let  $P(T)$  be the powerset of  $T$ . To each element  $s_i$  of  $P(T)$  there exists a unique truth. For example, to each  $s_i$  there is a unique truth as follows:

$$s_i \in P(T)$$

Alternatively, let  $Q$  be a truth. Then for every element  $s_i$  of  $P(T)$ , either of the following is true:

$$Q \in s_i$$

$$Q \notin s_i$$

This means, however, that there are at least as many elements of  $T$  as there are elements of  $P(T)$ . This contradicts the Cantorian set theorem, according to which the powerset has more elements than its original set. Therefore,

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<sup>31</sup> See also Plantinga and Grim (1993).

Grim concludes, there is no set of all truths. Grim says that if we assume that omniscience subsumes a set of all truths then the Cantorian argument undermines the possibility of one's being omniscient.<sup>32</sup>

Various objections to Grim's argument have been raised. First, philosophers such as Gary Mar (1993) and Keith Simmons (1993) argue that Grim's argument fails because the Cantorian theorem does not hold in some powerful set theories, for instance, the system of NF introduced by W. V. O. Quine (1937). Grim (2000) regards that this objection is unsuccessful because if we accept set theories like NF we have to accept notions of truth that are too radically counter-intuitive. That is, the price of accepting alternative set theories is greater than accepting the conclusion that there is no set of all truths.

Second, J. C. Beall (2000) points out that Robert Stalnaker's theory of propositions (1984) entails that the following assumption in Grim's argument is false:

(35) To each element of  $P(T)$  there corresponds a unique truth.

Stalnaker's theory says that there is precisely one necessary truth, because propositions are functions from worlds to truth-values. If this theory is right then, while it is true that to each element of  $P(T)$  there corresponds a truth, it is not true that to each element of  $P(T)$  there corresponds a *unique* truth. Therefore, Beall says, '[s]ince there is exactly one necessary truth [(35)] is false' (p. 39). This objection to Grim's argument inherits a problem similar to that which the previous objection inherits. That is, the price of accepting Stalnaker's theory is greater than accepting the conclusion that there is no set of all truths. If the theory is cogent then, for example, the necessary truths that  $1+2$  is 3 and that triangles are three-sided are the same truth, which is highly counter-intuitive. Moreover, as Beall himself notes, if we assume that propositions are the sole content of

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<sup>32</sup> A prototype of this argument is found in Grim (1983).



intentional states then it follows from the theory that *we* are logically omniscient, that is, we know all consequences of what we believe (Beall 2000, fn. 5). This is also highly counter-intuitive.

Third, Plantinga (in Plantinga and Grim (1993)) and Abbruzzese (1997) argue that Grim's Cantorian argument is self-defeating.<sup>33</sup> If the Cantorian argument against a set of all truths is sound then we can also construct a Cantorian argument against a proposition about all propositions. However, if there is no proposition about all proposition then the conclusion of the argument that there is no proposition about all proposition, which itself is a proposition about all proposition, does not express anything meaningful. Therefore, Grim's argument is self-defeating. Grim (2000) contends, however, that even if we could not derive a *general* conclusion about all propositions by advancing the Cantorian argument we could still defeat every particular claim about omniscience by constructing a Cantorian argument for each claim.<sup>34</sup>

## 1.8 Omniscience in the Philosophy of Mind

### *Externalism and Authoritative self-knowledge*

Since Hilary Putnam published his influential paper, 'The Meaning of "Meaning"' (1975), the doctrine of externalism has held considerable interest for philosophers of mind and language. According to externalism, the content of our mental states conceptually depends on external factors about which we do not have authoritative knowledge.

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<sup>33</sup> This objection is also anticipated in Grim (1991).

<sup>34</sup> For the debate on the Cantorian argument see: Abbruzzese (1997), Bringsjord (1989), Richard M. Gale (2004-forthcoming), Grim (1984), Grim (1986), Grim (1990), Grim (1991), Grim (2000), Mar (1993), Christopher Menzel (1986), Plantinga and Grim (1993), John F. Post (2004-forthcoming), Post (forthcoming), Alexander R. Pruss (2004-forthcoming), Simmons (1993), Jordan Howard Sobel (2004).

In order to illustrate externalism consider the following *Twin Earth* case introduced by Putnam: The molecular structure of the liquid that people call 'water' is, of course,  $H_2O$  on Earth. Imagine, however, that, the molecular structure of the liquid that people call 'water' on Twin Earth—call it 'twater'—is 'XYZ' on Twin Earth. According to externalism, when you entertain a thought expressed as 'water is wet' the content of the thought could be either *water is wet* or *twater is wet* depending on whether you are on Earth or Twin Earth. This means, according to externalism, that in order for you to know whether you are thinking that water is wet or twater is wet you need to find out which natural environment you inhabit.

Many philosophers think that externalism is incompatible with the doctrine of authoritative self-knowledge, according to which we have a privileged access to our own mental states, such as beliefs, desires, and sensations. In the following I introduce two of the principal arguments against the compatibility of externalism and authoritative self-knowledge and demonstrate that they may be construed as arguments about omniscience.

The most well-known argument against the compatibility has been proposed by Michael McKinsey (1991).<sup>35</sup> McKinsey argues as follows: If the doctrine of authoritative self-knowledge is true then if I think that water is wet then I know *a priori* that I am thinking that water is wet. On the other hand, if externalism is true then the proposition that I am thinking that water is wet conceptually implies the following proposition:

(36) Some particular externalist condition for thinking that water is wet is met.

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<sup>35</sup> McKinsey is concerned with anti-individualism, which he distinguishes from externalism. Since the difference between these two doctrines, if there is any, does not make any difference in my discussion I use the word 'externalism' for the sake of uniformity.

However, (36) cannot be known *a priori*, but only by empirical investigation. Therefore, McKinsey says, externalism is incompatible with authoritative self-knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

Paul Boghossian (1989) introduces another argument against the compatibility of externalism and authoritative self-knowledge, which is known as the ‘memory argument’. The memory argument utilises slow-switching, which Tyler Burge (1988) introduces with the intention of illustrating the compatibility of externalism and authoritative self-knowledge. A slow-switching case is one in which an agent is switched from one environment to another and, according to externalism, the content of one’s beliefs shifts as a consequence. Let us consider a social externalist type of slow-switching case in which I am switched between two linguistic communities. I am transported, without being aware of the transport, from Earth to Twin Earth, where people have slightly different individuating conditions for the meaning of the word ‘chicory’ from those on Earth.<sup>37</sup> That is, while people on Earth mean chicory by ‘chicory’, people on Twin Earth mean *twicory* by ‘chicory’. Hence, after a certain amount of time on Twin Earth, my belief expressed as ‘chicory is bitter’ comes to have the content that *twicory is bitter*. Likewise, my second-order belief expressed as ‘I think that chicory is bitter’ comes to have the content that *I think that twicory is bitter*. Boghossian argues that the slow-switching case can be used to derive a situation which entails the incompatibility of externalism and authoritative self-knowledge of the contents of our own beliefs: I believe at time *t*/I that chicory is bitter and

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<sup>36</sup> More precisely, McKinsey says that anti-individualism is incompatible with privileged access. For McKinsey’s argument see Jessica Brown (1995), Brown (2003), Martin Davies (2003), McKinsey (2003), Brian P. McLaughlin (2003), Crispin Wright (2003).

<sup>37</sup> The case of chicory was originally introduced by Ludlow (1995a) as a ‘real life’ example of slow-switching. See also Ludlow (1997), Ted Warfield (1992), Warfield (1997).



authoritatively know what I am believing, then forget nothing, but at time  $t_2$  do not authoritatively know that I believe at  $t_1$  that chicory is bitter.<sup>38</sup>

On the face of it, there is no connection between the concept of omniscience and the arguments against the compatibility of externalism and authoritative self-knowledge. However, once we recognise that the doctrine of authoritative self-knowledge is related to the concept of omniscience we can see the connection.

The doctrine of authoritative self-knowledge has traditionally been construed as entailing that, in a relevant sense, we have complete knowledge of certain kinds of our own mental states. That is, we know exactly what we believe, desire, sense and so on. So, for example, if I believe that the capital city of England is London and that my car is blue then, the doctrine says, I know that I believe that the capital city of England is London and that my car is blue. The phrase 'in a relevant sense' is added to the above statement because even if we have authoritative self-knowledge we do not necessarily have, for example, complete knowledge of what neurophysiology and psychiatry tell about our mental states.

Some philosophers relate the doctrine of authoritative self-knowledge to omniscience.<sup>39</sup> For example, Brie Gertler (2003) writes:

The strongest epistemic claims on behalf of self-knowledge are infallibility and omniscience. If self-knowledge is infallible, one cannot have a false belief to the effect that one is in a certain

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<sup>38</sup> For the memory argument see Anthony Brueckner (1997), Burge (1998), Sanford C. Goldberg (1997), Jane Heal (1998), Ludlow (1995b), Ludlow (1996), Ludlow (1997), Ludlow (1999), Yujin Nagasawa (2000), Nagasawa (2002), Michael Tye (1998).

<sup>39</sup> In addition to Brie Gertler (2003), see Goldberg (2003) for the issue of omniscience and authoritative self-knowledge.



mental state. One is omniscient about one's own states only if being in a mental state suffices for knowing that one is in that state.<sup>40</sup>

The mention of infallibility in the above passage seems redundant. If one *knows* what one believes, for example, then it is impossible for one to be mistaken about what one believes. For knowing that *p* entails that it is true that *p*. It is also unclear what sort of conception of knowledge Gertler adopts when she talks about knowledge in the passage. Given that she thinks that being in a certain mental state suffices for knowing that one is in that state, she does not seem to think that knowledge is a form of belief.

In any case, if it is really possible to construe self-knowledge as a form of omniscience with respect to our mental states, then we can see that externalism is a challenge to the possibility of one's being omniscient.<sup>41</sup> For granting that externalism is true and that the arguments against the compatibility of externalism and authoritative self-knowledge are cogent, we can derive that we are not omniscient with respect to our own mental states. Of course, if we know everything about the external world then we may still be omniscient with respect to our own mental states. We can assume, however, that the argument against our omniscience with respect to our own mental states excludes the possibility that we know all those

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<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that Gertler correctly states that an unqualified form of the omniscience thesis about our own mental states is subject to counter-examples. Suppose, for instance, that Kate trusts John's insight into her own psychology. Thus if John says that she wants to live in New York she believes that she does want to live in New York. However, suppose further that John is mistaken—Kate really wants to live in Los Angeles, though she hasn't reflected sufficiently on her desire to realise this. Hence, Kate has a false belief about her own desires and she is not omniscient with respect to her own mental states.

<sup>41</sup> It is important to emphasise that the doctrine of authoritative self-knowledge is not the trivial thesis that if I know a proposition about my mental states, then I am omniscient with respect to that single proposition. If the doctrine is cogent then we could have an astronomically large, if not an infinitely large, body of knowledge about our mental states.

things about the external world that are related to our authoritative self-knowledge.

*The Bat Argument and the Knowledge Argument*

Thomas Nagel (1974) argues that the physicalist approach to phenomenal consciousness seems untenable, because no matter how complete our knowledge of the physical sciences is we can never know what it is like to be a bat, the subjective aspect of a bat's experience. For, in order to know what it is like to be a bat we need to have a bat's unique sensory apparatus.

Frank Jackson (1982, 1986) also tries to undermine physicalism by appealing to phenomenal consciousness. His 'knowledge argument' is based on the following scenario:

Mary is confined to a black-and-white room, [and] is educated through black-and-white books and through lectures relayed on black-and white television. In this way she learns everything there is to know about the physical nature of the world. She knows all the physical facts about us and our environment, in a wide sense of 'physical' which includes everything in *completed* physics, chemistry, and neurophysiology, and all there is to know about the causal and relational facts consequent upon all this, including of course functional roles. If physicalism is true, she knows all there is to know. For to suppose otherwise is to suppose that there is more to know than every physical fact, and that is what physicalism denies. ... It seems, however, that Mary does not know all there is to know. For when she is let out of the black-and-white room or given a color television, she will learn what it is like to see something red, say. This is rightly described as *learning*—she will not say "ho, hum." (1986, p. 291)



Jackson says that physicalism is false because Mary, who has complete physical knowledge, still comes to know something new when she leaves her black-and-white room for the first time in her life.

How are Nagel's and Jackson's arguments related to the concept of omniscience? Notice that both of them derive the metaphysical conclusion that physicalism is false by refuting the following epistemological thesis, which physicalism seems to entail:

(37) Complete physical knowledge is complete knowledge simpliciter. (Jackson, 1986, p. 291)

Nagel tries to show that (37) is false by claiming that even if we have complete physical knowledge we do not have complete knowledge simpliciter, because we cannot have complete knowledge about a bat's phenomenology. Jackson claims that (37) is false because even if Mary has complete physical knowledge she does not have complete knowledge simpliciter before she leaves her black-and-white room. For, he says, her knowledge misses what it is like to experience colours.

We can clearly see that (37) is relevant to the concept of omniscience by rephrasing it as follows:

(38) Physical omniscience is omniscience simpliciter.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, we can construe Nagel's and Jackson's arguments as challenges to the physicalist conception of omniscience stated in (38). Although many philosophers have described Mary as a 'physically omniscient scientist' the connection between their arguments and the concept of omniscience has almost never been considered. In Part III of this work I provide objections to these antiphysicalist arguments by comparing them with arguments about omniscience in the philosophy of religion.

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 6 for the precise definition of physical omniscience.

## 1.9 Conclusion

We have seen that the concept of omniscience is closely related to important ideas in a number of distinct areas of philosophy. Surprisingly enough, many of them represent the most well-known and most discussed topics in relevant areas—*e.g.*, the liar paradox in logic, scepticism in epistemology, externalism and the knowledge argument in the philosophy of mind, essential indexicals in the philosophy of language, and so on.

The arguments against the possibility of one's being omniscient that I have introduced can be classified into two categories, on the basis of their structures.

The first is to appeal to logical impossibilities. The idea is to show that one cannot be omniscient, typically by demonstrating that there is a true proposition that no one could ever know. Scepticism, the paradox of knowability, the argument from negative existentials, the divine liar paradox and the Cantorian argument fall into this category.

The second is to appeal to some principle that fits the following general scheme: In order for one to know a certain proposition *p* one has to do a certain thing *q* or one has to be a certain (kind of) being *r*. Given this principle and the alleged fact that the being at issue cannot do *q* or cannot be *r* an argument in this category concludes that it cannot be omniscient. The argument from concept possession, the argument from immutability, the argument derived from the acquaintance principle, the argument from knowledge *de se*, the arguments against the compatibility of externalism and authoritative self-knowledge, the bat argument and the knowledge argument fall into this category.

In the rest of this work I focus on some of the arguments in the latter category. I evaluate the argument from knowledge *de se* in Chapter 2, the argument from concept possession in Chapters 3 and 4, the bat argument in Chapter 5, and the knowledge argument in Chapters 6 and 7. The



structure of my overall argument goes as follows: (i) I maintain that neither the argument from knowledge *de se* nor the argument from concept possession is successful in showing that God is not omniscient, or more generally, that theism is false. (ii) I explain that the argument from knowledge *de se* is structurally parallel to the bat argument, and that the argument from concept possession is structurally parallel to the knowledge argument. (iii) Finally, I argue that the bat argument and the knowledge argument are not successful in establishing the falsity of physicalism by utilising my analyses of the argument from knowledge *de se* and the argument from concept possession.

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## **Part II**

### **Divine Omniscience: Puzzles in the Philosophy of Religion**

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## Chapter 2

### Divine Omniscience and the Argument from Knowledge *De Se*

#### 2.1 Introduction

Patrick Grim (1983, 1985, 2000) challenges the doctrine of divine omniscience<sup>1</sup> by using John Perry's famous example of knowledge *de se*.<sup>2</sup> According to Grim, since no one else—no one other than me—can acquire knowledge *de se* of me, God cannot be omniscient.<sup>3</sup> Ever since Aquinas,

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<sup>1</sup> Some philosophers might think that divine omniscience is different from omniscience simpliciter, as it is defined in Chapter 1 of this work. However, I assume, for the sake of simplicity, that divine omniscience is omniscience simpliciter instantiated as one of God's necessary properties. See Chapter 7 for a slightly different formulation of divine omniscience.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'knowledge *de se*' was introduced by David Lewis (1979). Perry uses a more general term 'essential indexicals' in his original paper (1979).

<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 1 I treated Grim's argument as an argument in the philosophy of language because it involves essential indexicals. However, in this chapter, I regard it as an argument in the philosophy of religion because I focus on the fact that it is directed to *God's* omniscience. Grim also provides an argument against divine omniscience from knowledge *de presenti*; namely, knowledge of 'now'. According to Grim, since God is necessarily timeless He cannot know, for example, what a temporal being knows in knowing that it is 10:00 am *now*. Since this argument involves enormously controversial

philosophers have been interested in the relationship between divine omnipotence and necessary impossibilities.<sup>4</sup> However, in this chapter I am concerned with the relationship between divine *omniscience* and necessary impossibilities, which has attracted little attention. I argue that given two plausible principles regarding divine attributes, we need not accept Grim's conclusion that God cannot be omniscient. I then claim that my objection to Grim's argument is applicable to another argument against the doctrine of divine omniscience discussed by William J. Mander (2002).

Imagine that, borrowing Perry's example, I find a trail of spilled sugar on the floor in a supermarket. I wonder which shopper is making this terrible mess all around the aisles and I decide to search for the one responsible. Suddenly, however, I realise there is a hole in the bag of sugar in *my own* shopping cart. *I* am the one who is making the mess! I can express what I come to know as:

(1) I am making the mess.

One might think that (1) is the same as the following:

(2) Yujin Nagasawa is making the mess.

According to Grim, however, 'what I know in knowing (1)'<sup>5</sup> is different from what I know in knowing (2) because I can know (1) without knowing (2) (and *vice versa*).<sup>6</sup> What surprises me is not that someone named Yujin

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issues concerning divine timelessness and eternity, I focus on his argument from knowledge *de se* in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Thomas Aquinas (1967), Campbell Brown and Yujin Nagasawa (2002), René Descartes (1970), Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso (1983), Harry G. Frankfurt (1964), Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz (1988), Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002), E. J. Khamara (1978), Richard R. La Croix (1977), George I. Mavrodes (1963), C. Wade Savage (1967), Richard Swinburne (1973).

<sup>5</sup> See Grim (1983), p. 272, Grim (1985), p. 151, Grim (2000), p. 142.

<sup>6</sup> A precise interpretation of the phrase 'what I know in knowing (1)' raises a further issue in the philosophy of language. Grim uses this phrase to denote an object of knowledge.



Nagasawa is making the mess but that *I* am making the mess. If I believed that I was not Yujin Nagasawa but, say, Aristotle, then I would not think that (2) concerns me. But I would be surprised at finding out that *I* am making the mess. Whoever I think I am, I am surprised by what I know in knowing (1).

If God knows everything knowable, then, according to Grim, He must know what I know in knowing (1) as well as what I know in knowing (2). However, while anyone can know in principle that Yujin Nagasawa is making the mess, which is expressed by (2), no one but I can know what I know in knowing (1). Grim concludes, therefore, that God cannot be omniscient.

The structure of Grim's argument is as follows:

- (3) I know that *I* am making the mess. (*i.e.* I know what I know in knowing (1).)
- (4) God cannot know what I know in knowing (1).
- (5) Therefore, there is something knowable that God cannot know.
- (6) Therefore, God cannot be omniscient.

If I know something that God cannot know, it follows that there is at least one knowable thing that is unknown to God, and thus, it would seem, God cannot be omniscient. Given that God is a being such that, if He exists, He knows all there is to know, it appears reasonable to deny the existence of God, as in fact Grim does.

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But if objects of knowledge are Russellian propositions, then what I know in knowing (1) just *is* what I know in knowing (2). It follows that Grim cannot think that objects of knowledge are Russellian propositions. Beyond this, however, Grim remains neutral on the nature of objects of knowledge.

## 2.2 Objections to Grim's Argument

As we have seen, Grim's argument consists only of two premisses: (3) and (4). Since (3) is innocuous, it seems that we should focus on (4). In this section, I briefly examine two attempts to undermine (4).

Hector-Neri Castañeda (1967) argues that (4) is false because someone other than me can perfectly well know what I know in knowing (1) by using a 'quasi-indicator'.<sup>7</sup> Castañeda's solution is based on the following assumption:

(P) If a sentence of the form 'X knows that a person Y knows that ...' formulates a true statement, then the person X knows the statement formulated by the clause filling the blank '...'. (p. 201)

If the sentence 'I know that Mary knows that the capital city of France is Paris' formulates a true statement, it follows that I know that the capital city of France is Paris. If the sentence 'I know that Fred knows that  $25 + 12 = 37$ ' formulates a true statement, it follows that I know that  $25 + 12 = 37$ . Similarly, Castañeda argues, someone else, like God, can know what I know in knowing (1) using a quasi-indexical statement of the form 'I know that Yujin Nagasawa knows that he (himself) is making the mess'. (Here 'he (himself)' is the quasi-indicator.)

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<sup>7</sup> In the text I treat Castañeda's objection as a criticism of Grim's argument, but in fact, Castañeda's objection, which is older than Grim's argument, is intended to undermine Norman Kretzmann's argument (1966) from which Grim derived his basic idea. Kretzmann argues that no one other than Jones can know what the statement 'Jones knows that he is in a hospital' describes Jones as knowing. Kretzmann also writes, 'Anyone could have proved that Descartes existed, but that is not what Descartes proved in the Cogito, and what he proved in the Cogito could not have been proved by anyone else' (p. 421).

Since Castañeda's objection has already been criticised elsewhere<sup>8</sup> I here provide only a small point that might support those criticisms.<sup>9</sup> Obviously an assumption like (P) is not applicable to so-called 'know-wh', such as know-when, know-where, know-who, know-what and know-how. For example, even if the sentence 'I know that Mary knows how to ride a bicycle' formulates a true statement it does not follow that I know how to ride a bicycle. Or, to take another example, even if the sentence 'I know that Fred knows where he hid my book' formulates a true statement it does not follow that I know where he hid my book. This is why Castañeda formulates (P) so that it is applied only to know-that. Yet the distinction between know-that and know-wh is not so clear. Many philosophers have argued that know-wh (especially know-how) is essentially the same as know-that.<sup>10</sup> If their arguments are cogent, (P) is false. Given the uncertainty of (P), it is at least not as obvious as Castañeda thinks that God

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<sup>8</sup> Grim argues against Castañeda as follows. Someone may well know that Yujin Nagasawa knows that he (himself) is making the mess and yet not know what I know in knowing (1). S/he may not know it, according to Grim, if s/he does not know that *I* am Yujin Nagasawa. See Grim (1985), pp. 162-168. John E. Abbruzzese (1997) contends that Castañeda's argument is unsuccessful because (P) is subject to counter-examples. For instance, Abbruzzese argues, even if the sentence 'I know that Dr. Lawless of the Classics Department knows that *vis consili expers mole ruit sua*' formulates a true statement for someone s/he cannot be said to know that *vis consili expers mole ruit sua* unless s/he knows Latin (pp. 26-28).

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Daniel Stoljar on this point.

<sup>10</sup> Perry (2001), for example, argues that know-how is a unique form of know-that, which involves a special kind of representations, namely, executable schemas. To take another example, Stanley and Williamson (2001) argue that knowing how to *F* is knowing, of some way *w*, that *w* is a way to *F* and entertaining the proposition that *w* is a way to *F* under a practical mode of presentation. For arguments against the know-that/know-how distinction see also Fred Dretske (1988), William G. Lycan (1966), Alan R. White (1982).

can know exactly what I know in knowing (1) using the quasi-indexical statement.<sup>11</sup>

John E. Abbruzzese (1997) proposes an alternative way to reject (4). He argues that the difference between what I know in knowing (1) and what God knows in knowing (2) is only the 'feelings of guilt or embarrassment I experienced' (p. 28). Obviously, such feelings have nothing to do with divine omniscience because feelings are not pieces of knowledge. Therefore, Abbruzzese concludes that God, who knows (2), does not fail to *know* anything.

Abbruzzese, however, misses a crucial point here. The feelings that I come to have upon finding out that I am making the mess do not play a role in Grim's argument. Grim argues that I can know (1) without knowing (2) (or *vice versa*) and that my knowing (1) *explains* my surprise, surprise that my knowing (2) could not explain. Thus, '[w]e don't need feelings to go on to argue that these two pieces of knowledge cannot be the same. The non-identity of discernibles will suffice' (Grim, 2000, p. 143).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, this is not a knockdown argument against Castañeda's strategy. One may coherently hold that the inapplicability of (P) to know-wh is the very reason that we should not identify know-wh with know-that.

<sup>12</sup> One might think that Grim's use of the principle of the non-identity of discernibles is illegitimate. Consider Descartes' use of the same principle in his argument for dualism:

(i) I can conceive that my body is independent of myself.

(ii) I cannot conceive that my soul is independent of myself.

Therefore,

(iii) By the principle of the non-identity of discernibles, my body and soul are distinct entities.

Therefore,

(iv) Dualism is true.

Descartes' use of the principle is widely regarded as being illegitimate because the principle seems inapplicable to propositional attitudes like 'conceive'. Similarly, one might claim that Grim's use of the principle is illegitimate because he applies it to a



Castañeda's and Abbruzzese's arguments to undermine (4) are not compelling. Must we then accept Grim's conclusion that God cannot be omniscient? In what follows I argue that given two plausible principles regarding divine attributes, each of which has been independently motivated, there is no reason to agree with Grim's conclusion.

### 2.3 First Principle: Divine Omniscience and Epistemic Powers

The first principle says that *a statement about divine omniscience can be restated in terms of a divine epistemic power*.

An epistemic power is a power to know a true proposition. So, for example, if I know that my shirt is blue then I have an epistemic power to know that my shirt is blue. However, from the fact that I have an epistemic power to know that my shirt is blue it does not follow that I know that my shirt is blue; for I might have not exercised the epistemic power.

Assuming that  $p$  is true, consider the following statement relevant to divine omniscience:

(7) God can know that  $p$ .

(7) can be restated as follows:

(8) God has an epistemic power to know that  $p$ .

Or, again assuming that  $p$  is true, consider the negation of (7):

(9) God cannot know that  $p$ .

(9) can also be restated in terms of an epistemic power:

(10) God does not have an epistemic power to know that  $p$ .

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propositional attitude, 'know'. However, this objection is unsuccessful. Descartes' argument is fallacious not just because he applies the principle to a propositional attitude, but because he tries to derive a *metaphysical* conclusion, (iii), from the alleged *epistemological* facts, (i) and (ii), by appealing to the principle. Since Grim derives only an *epistemological* conclusion—viz. what I know in knowing (1) and what I know in knowing (2) are distinct objects of knowledge—from an alleged *epistemological* fact—viz. I can know (1) without knowing (2)—his use of the principle *is* legitimate.

Is it also possible to restate a non-modal claim about divine omniscience in terms of an epistemic power? Again assuming that  $p$  is true, consider the following:

(11) God knows that  $p$ .

(11) can be restated as follows.

(12) God has, and has exercised, an epistemic power to know that  $p$ .

Or, again assuming that  $p$  is true, consider the negation of (11):

(13) God does not know that  $p$ .

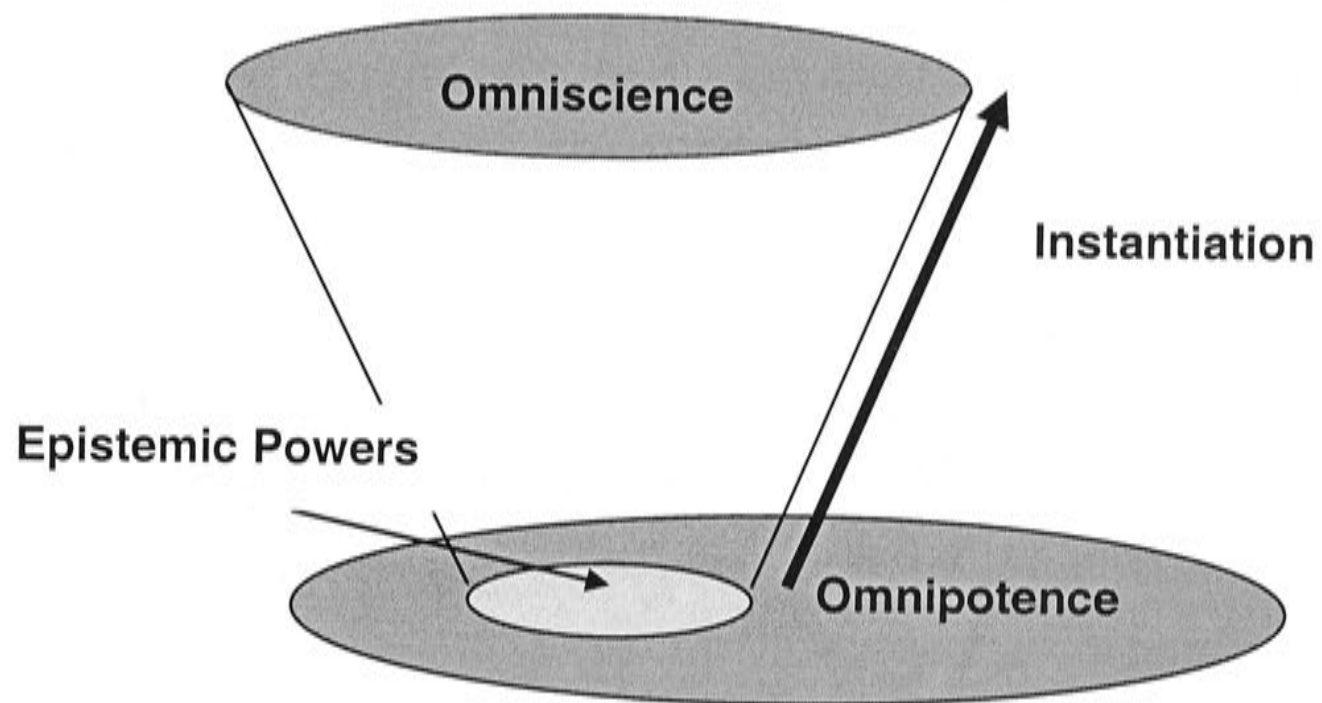
(13) can also be restated as follows:

(14) Either God does not have an epistemic power to know that  $p$  or, while God does have such a power, He has not exercised it.

This principle reveals a connection between divine omniscience and omnipotence. The doctrine of divine omnipotence subsumes, by definition, all the powers that God has, such as physical powers, sensory powers, epistemic powers and so on. God does not have, and does not have to have, any more powers than those under the scope of His omnipotence. Hence, divine omniscience can be understood as God's exercising a particular part—the epistemic part—of His omnipotence.<sup>13</sup> (See the following diagram).

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that this is a simplified, approximate model of omniscience. As I argue in Chapter 4, it seems that in order for one to be omniscient one needs to have not only complete epistemic powers, but also other kinds of relevant powers. For other attempts to define omniscience in terms of power, see David Hunt (2000) and Charles Taliaferro (1985). Hunt's and Taliaferro's understanding of omniscience differs from mine in two respects. First, they think that omniscience is most closely associated with what they call 'cognitive powers'. This terminology is misleading. One might need to have cognition in order for one to be omniscient, but since to be omniscient is to *know* everything, omniscience should be most closely associated with epistemic powers. (In fact, it seems that what Hunt and Taliaferro mean by the term 'cognitive powers' are epistemic powers.) Second, they think that possession of cognitive powers itself suffices for omniscience. I think this is mistaken. In order for one to be omniscient one has to



#### 2.4 Second Principle: Divine Omnipotence and Necessary Impossibilities

The second principle represents a consensus that theologians and philosophers have reached regarding the nature of divine omnipotence. It states that *the fact that God does not have a power to do what it is necessarily impossible to do does not undermine His omnipotence*.<sup>14</sup>

This principle is described in the following passage by Nick Trakakis (1997):

No matter how much controversy and debate may currently surround the extraordinary attribute of divine omnipotence, there is a virtually complete consensus amongst philosophers and theologians that Aquinas is correct in saying that ‘anything that

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*exercise* one’s power to know everything; the mere possession of the power does not suffice.

<sup>14</sup> For the application of the second principle to the ‘paradox of the stone’ see Brown and Nagasawa (2002), and Mavrodes (1963).



implies a contradiction does not fall under God's omnipotence'<sup>15</sup> ...<sup>16</sup> (p. 55)

According to this principle the fact that it is impossible for God, for example, to draw a square circle or to make a married bachelor does not threaten His omnipotence. As George I. Mavrodes (1963) notes, my failure to draw a circle in a geometry examination indicates my lack of geometrical skill, but God's, or anyone's, failure to draw a square circle does not indicate any such lack (p. 221); for it is not merely contingently, but *necessarily impossible* to do.

Obviously, Aquinas, who was not aware of Saul A. Kripke's distinction between what is necessary *a priori* and necessary *a posteriori*,<sup>17</sup> had only necessary *a priori* impossibilities in mind when he formulated the second principle. However, the principle must be applied to necessary *a posteriori* impossibilities as well, because both of them are equally *necessarily impossible*; that is, *impossible throughout all possible worlds*. Consequently, divine omnipotence is not undermined even if God cannot bring about such necessary *a posteriori* impossibilities as separating water from H<sub>2</sub>O or Hesperus from Phosphorus.

## 2.5 Applying the Principles

As we have seen, Grim, Castañeda and Abbruzzese have disputed the issue of whether or not (4) is true. Grim argues that it is true and Castañeda and Abbruzzese disagree with him. However, a more crucial issue is whether

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<sup>15</sup> Aquinas (1967), p. 167.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Wierenga (1983) similarly remarks, 'it has long been realized that in order to be omnipotent God need not be able to do exactly everything; for example, an omnipotent being need not be able to do what is logically impossible' (p. 363). See also Mavrodes (1963), p. 221.

<sup>17</sup> See Kripke (1972).



(4), if it is true, really threatens the traditional doctrine of divine omniscience.

Having in mind the two principles just introduced, consider Grim's argument again. (4) states that God cannot know what I know in knowing (1). Employing the first principle, (4) can be restated as follows:

(15) God does not have an epistemic power to know what I know in knowing (1).

Now it is clear that Grim's argument is relevant to divine omnipotence as well. The reason that (4), or equivalently (15), is true, according to Grim, is that only I can know that *I* am making the mess. God, or anyone else other than me, cannot know what I know in knowing (1) simply because they are not *me*. There are no other reasons. In general,

(16) If *x* is not me then *x* cannot know what I know in knowing (1).

(16) is equivalent to the following:

(17) If *x* is not me then *x* does not have an epistemic power to know what I know in knowing (1).

Suppose, however, for the sake of argument, that God does have a miraculous power to know what I know in knowing (1). Then the following is true:

(18) God has an epistemic power to know what I know in knowing (1).

Grim's assumption, exemplified in (17), is logically equivalent to:

(19) If *x* has an epistemic power to know what I know in knowing (1) then *x* is me.

Applying (19) to (18) we can derive:

(20) God is me.

However, (20) is false because, obviously, God is not me! Furthermore, (20) is not merely contingently, but is *necessarily* false.<sup>18</sup> Thus, by

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<sup>18</sup> Here I simply mean that the proposition expressed by (20) is necessarily false.

assuming that God, as omniscient, must know what I know in knowing (1), Grim requires that God be able to do what it is necessarily impossible to do. However, as we have seen, the second principle states that the fact that God does not have a power to do what it is necessarily impossible to do does not undermine His omnipotence. So even if (4) is true, that is, even if God does not have an epistemic power to know what I know in knowing (1), it does not threaten divine omnipotence. Moreover, since, as I have argued, divine omniscience can be understood as God's exercising the epistemic part of His omnipotence—the sum of all the powers that He has to have and He actually has—it does not undermine divine omniscience either. Therefore, given the two principles, Grim fails to derive the conclusion that God cannot be omniscient.

## 2.6 Possible Objections

I now examine four possible objections to my argument.

First, one might claim that my argument is not compelling because it is based on an unusual theistic view of divine omniscience, according to which the doctrine of divine omniscience is a doctrine about divine epistemic powers. While the doctrine of divine omnipotence is construed as being about what God *can* do, the doctrine of divine omniscience is usually construed as being about what God actually knows and not about what God *can* know. However, this would appear to make my argument unacceptable to the majority of theists.<sup>19</sup>

I have two responses here. First, the view that I adopt for my argument does not claim that the doctrine of divine omniscience is a doctrine about divine epistemic powers themselves. It rather claims that the doctrine of divine omniscience is a doctrine about God's *exercising*

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<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to an anonymous referee for *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* on this point.

His epistemic powers. Second, and more importantly, this claim *is* consistent with the standard theistic view of divine omniscience. For all it says is that God's knowing that *p* can be construed as God's exercising His epistemic power to know that *p*, which does not conflict with the standard view.<sup>20</sup>

Second, one might argue that the second principle of my argument is not compelling because God *can* do what it is necessarily impossible to do.<sup>21</sup> For example, according to Christianity, although God is one entity,

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<sup>20</sup> It does not follow, however, that my strategy is applicable to any possible argument against the doctrine of divine omniscience. Suppose, for example, that there is an argument that allegedly shows that while God can know that *p*, He just does not. Since this argument does not commit to a claim that God *cannot* know that *p* my argument is not applicable to it.

<sup>21</sup> Many philosophers claim that Descartes does believe that God can do absolutely anything, including that which it is necessarily impossible to do. See Harry G. Frankfurt (1964), Frankfurt (1977), Peter Geach, (1973), D. Goldstick, (1990), Leonard G. Miller (1957), Alvin Plantinga (1980b), Trakakis (1997). For example, the following passage by Descartes (1970) is said to prove it:

I do not think that we should ever say of anything that it cannot be brought about by God. For since everything involved in truth and goodness depends on His omnipotence, I would not dare to say that God cannot make a mountain without a valley, or that one and two should not be three. I merely say that He has given me such a mind that I cannot conceive a mountain without a valley, or an aggregate of one and two which is not three, and that such things involve a contradiction in my conception'. (pp. 236-237)

See also Descartes (1970), pp. 11-12, pp. 14-15, pp. 150-151, pp. 236-237, pp. 240-241. La Croix (1984) argues, however, that Descartes does not really mean to contend that God can turn necessary impossibilities into possibilities. Other philosophers who endorse the doctrine of absolute omnipotence, according to which if God is omnipotent He has to be able to do everything, including that which it is necessarily impossible to do, include: Earl Conee (1991), Goldstick, (1990), Mackie (1955), John Ellis McTaggart (1906), Leon Shestov (1962). In this work I do not attempt to provide a precise definition of divine omnipotence. I assume, however, for the sake of argument, that an omnipotent God can



He is also a unity of three distinct entities: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To cite another example, God became a man, Jesus Christ, without sacrificing His divinity at all. One might think that these examples represent necessary impossibilities.

Many philosophers argue that a careful examination shows that those examples do not represent necessary impossibilities.<sup>22</sup> Suppose, though, for the sake of argument, that they *are* necessary impossibilities. Then we can reasonably assume that God, who can do what it is necessarily impossible to do, really can know what I know in knowing (1). Yet if He can know what I know in knowing (1) Grim cannot establish his argument in the first place.

Third, one might object to my argument to the effect that the second principle is not applicable to the doctrine of divine omniscience. It is, according to this objection, exclusively applicable to the doctrine of divine omnipotence.

If this objection is right, then the principle needs to be amended to read *the fact that God does not have a power to do what it is necessarily impossible to do does not undermine His omnipotence, except that part which involves His epistemic powers*. Obviously, this is *ad hoc*. I do not think that Aquinas or others would have ever meant to limit the principle in this way. It does not make sense to narrow the scope of the principle radically for the sole purpose of blocking my objection to Grim's argument. Moreover, if this revised second principle is cogent then the

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do everything that it is possible to do and cannot do that which it is necessarily impossible to do; and in fact, this is what most theists and anti-theists accept. See Conee (1991), Antoine Côté (1998), Louis Groarke (2001), Trakakis (1997).

<sup>22</sup> For the debates on the coherence of the trinity see James Cain (1989), Richard Cartwright (1987), John Macnamara, Marie Reyes, and Gonzalo Reyes (1994), Trakakis (1997), John Zeis (1993), on the coherence of the incarnation see Thomas V. Morris (1986a), Thomas V. Morris (1986b), Trakakis (1997), Keith E. Yandell (1994).



doctrine of divine omnipotence is easily undermined by the fact that, for instance, God cannot know a false proposition. However, of course, no one, even anti-theists, would think that God's inability to know a false proposition undermines the doctrine of divine omnipotence.

Fourth, one might argue, by appealing to pantheism, that I am wrong in saying that it is necessarily impossible for God to know what I know in knowing (1). Pantheism says that divine unity is constituted by the totality of existence and hence that there is no radical distinction between God and His creation. Thus, given pantheism, my acts could be mine as well as God's. If my act of making the mess were also God's, then God would definitely know what I know in knowing (1).<sup>23</sup>

Whatever the merits of this position, it cannot save Grim, for he assumes that God cannot know what I know in knowing (1) precisely because *I am distinct from God*. This excludes pantheism from the start. If pantheism is right, then God can indeed know what I know in knowing (1) and Grim's argument fails.

Even if Grim is right in saying that God cannot know what I know in knowing (1), there is no reason to accept his conclusion that God cannot be omniscient, provided that we accept the two plausible principles regarding divine attributes to which I have appealed.

## 2.7 Application of My Strategy

The two principles that I have adopted to undermine Grim's argument have wide application. In this section I argue that those principles can be used to undermine another anti-theist argument, which is quite distinct from Grim's.

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<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Richard Francks (1979) argues that cases similar to Grim's entail a pantheism that is close to Spinoza's.

In 'Does God Know What It Is Like to Be Me?', William J. Mander (2002) examines an anti-theist argument that is based on Thomas Nagel's argument against physicalism (1974).<sup>24</sup> The argument goes as follows: In order for God to know what it is like to be me, He must have my point of view. However, since, according to Judaeo-Christian theism, God is necessarily unlimited and necessarily incorporeal, while I am limited and corporeal, He cannot have my point of view. Therefore, God cannot know what it is like to be me. In the following, I demonstrate: (i) Mander's objection to the argument is unsuccessful; (ii) we can defeat the argument by utilising my objection to Grim's argument.

Mander (2002) himself claims that this anti-theist argument is fallacious because, according to him, God can in fact have His own point of view *and* my point of view at the same time:

To say that one cannot simultaneously hold two perspectives is not quite right; this *can* be done where one of them *includes* the other. For where a point of view includes another more restricted sub point of view as one of its parts or components, in holding the wider view one is simultaneously holding the narrower view which it contains. ... We may suggest that God knows what it is like to be us because his complete and unlimited perspective on the world includes as one of its parts our limited and imperfect perspective on the same.<sup>25</sup> (p. 439)

Mander cannot simply stipulate that God can have these two distinct points of view at the same time because that is the negation of the sub-conclusion of the anti-theist argument. (If he simply stipulates it then his argument begs the question against the anti-theist argument.) However, because of

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<sup>24</sup> I discuss Nagel's argument in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> Mander uses the terms 'point of view' and 'perspective' interchangeably. I use only 'point of view' throughout this chapter for the sake of uniformity.

its speculative nature, neither can Mander *demonstrate* his claim. Thus, he tries to motivate it by providing five relevant examples (p. 439):

(A) *University and Colleges*: Individual colleges have their own points of view but the university as a whole has a point of view which includes those sub points of view.

(B) *Week and Days*: Last Sunday and next Friday are different points from which we can regard the passing of time, but both are included within the wider point of view of this week.

(C) *Europe and Britain*: Britain has its own point of view but, at the same time, it is a part of the European point of view.

(D) *Awareness and Senses*: Our visual, tactile or auditory senses have their own points of view but they are parts of the wider point of view of our complete conscious awareness.

(E) *Adults and Children*: Children's points of view are included in adults' point of view.

Now, in the following, I maintain that those examples fail to motivate Mander's objection to the anti-theist argument.

(A), (B) and (C) are simply irrelevant to the anti-theist argument. As those examples show, the phrase 'point of view' is often ascribed to many different objects like colleges, countries, and so on. However, the point of view with which Nagel and the anti-theist argument—at least one version of the anti-theist argument—are concerned is one in a much more limited sense.<sup>26</sup> It is a point of view with which one's 'subjective phenomena is

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<sup>26</sup> Mander (2002) himself admits, 'My use of the words 'perspective' and 'point of view' is a broad one, comparable to that found in T. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), or A. W. Moore, *Points of View* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)' (ft. 14). As I claim in the main text, this makes Mander's argument



essentially connected' (Nagel, 1974, p. 437). This type of point of view cannot be taken by colleges, days or countries, but only by an agent, such as a human being, that can have phenomenal experiences.<sup>27</sup>

(D) and (E) involve, contrary to (A), (B) and (C), agents that can have phenomenal experiences. Do they then motivate Mander's objection to the anti-theist argument? The answer is, unfortunately, no.

(D) says that while we have different forms of senses, each of which has its own point of view, they are parts of our complete conscious awareness. However, according to the restricted sense of a point of view noted above, senses *themselves* are not qualified to have points of view. For, again, they are not agents that can have phenomenal experiences. While it does make sense to say that I have my own point of view *through* those senses, it does not make sense to say that my visual sense *alone* or my tactile sense *alone* has its own point of view.

(E) seems more promising than the others because it involves only adults and children, both of whom can have points of view in the restricted sense; and, in fact, (E) seems to prove that one can have two points of view at the same time. Nevertheless, this example does not support Mander's objection to the anti-theist argument. For although adults are different from children, they are not as different from children as God is from me. The main thrust of the anti-theist argument is that God cannot have my point of view because God and I are fundamentally distinct from each other. While God is necessarily unlimited and necessarily incorporeal, I am limited and corporeal. The anti-theist argument derives the

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particularly weak because the concerns of Nagel's and the anti-theist arguments are not a point of view in such a broad sense.

<sup>27</sup> If panpsychism is true then perhaps any physical object can have a point of view. I shall set aside this issue because the cogency or otherwise of panpsychism is not directly relevant to the current discussion.



impossibility of God's knowing what it is like to be me by appealing to this fundamental difference between God and me. This sort of distinctiveness is not present in the example of adults and children. For, after all, adults are merely grownup children!

In order to motivate his objection to the anti-theist argument Mander needs to provide an example in the following form: while agents  $x$  and  $y$  are fundamentally distinct,  $x$  can have  $x$ 's and  $y$ 's points of view—points of view in the restricted sense—simultaneously because  $x$ 's point of view includes  $y$ 's point of view. As we have seen, however, none of Mander's examples fits this form.

At this point Mander might argue that his examples are mere metaphors. That is, they are not supposed to *justify* the truth of his objection to the anti-theist argument but merely to *illustrate* the relationship between God's point of view and my point of view. However, they are problematic even as metaphors. For those examples entail the exact opposite of what Mander needs to show for the purpose of defending his claim.

Forget about a point of view in the restricted sense and consider again the example of Europe and Britain. Europe's point of view includes Britain's point of view. That is why Britain can have both the British point of view and the European point of view at the same time. Consider, again, the example of a university and colleges. The University of London's point of view includes Heythrop College's point of view. That is why Heythrop College can have both Heythrop College's point of view and the University of London's point of view at the same time. Thus those examples seem successfully to support Mander's claim: 'To say that one cannot simultaneously hold two perspectives is not quite right; this *can* be done where one of them *includes* the other' (Mander, 2002, p. 439). However, given Mander's assumptions that Europe and the University of

London correspond to God and that Britain and Heythrop College correspond to me, what those examples actually show is not that God can know what it is like to be me but that *I can know what it is like to be God!* This is the exact opposite of what Mander needs to show. Therefore, Mander's objection to the anti-theist argument is untenable.

In what follows, I argue that we can undermine the anti-theist argument by using the strategy that I adopt to refute Grim's argument. The anti-theist argument says that the following is true:

(21) God cannot know what it is like to be me.

According to the first principle regarding the doctrine of divine omniscience (21) is equivalent to the following:

(22) God does not have an epistemic power to know what it is like to be me.

Now, again, it is clear that the anti-theist argument is relevant not only to the doctrine of divine omniscience but also the doctrine of divine omnipotence. The reason that (21), or equivalently (22) is true is that only I can have my own point of view. God, or anyone else other than me, cannot know what it is like to be me simply because they, who are distinct from me, cannot have my point of view. Therefore,

(23) If  $x$  is not me then  $x$  cannot know what it is like to be me.

(23) is equivalent to the following:

(24) If  $x$  is not me then  $x$  does not have an epistemic power to know what it is like to be me.

Suppose, however, for the sake of argument, that God does have a miraculous power to know what it is like to be me. Then the following is true:

(25) God has an epistemic power to know what it is like to be me.

The anti-theists' assumption, exemplified in (24), is logically equivalent to:

(26) If  $x$  has an epistemic power to know what it is like to be me then  $x$  is me.

Applying (26) to (25) we can derive:

(27) God is me.

However, (27) is false because, again, God is not me. Furthermore, (27) is not merely contingently, but is *necessarily* false. Thus, by assuming that God, as omniscient, must know what it is like to be me, proponents of the anti-theist argument require, just as Grim does, that God be able to do that which it is necessarily impossible to do. However, as we have seen, the second principle states that the fact that God does not have a power to do what it is necessarily impossible to do does not undermine His omnipotence. So even if (22) were true, that is, even if God does not have an epistemic power to know what it is like to be me, its truth would not threaten divine omnipotence. Moreover, since, as I have argued, divine omniscience can be understood as God's exercising the epistemic part of His omnipotence—the sum of all the powers that He has to have and He actually has—its truth would not undermine divine omniscience either.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, given the two principles, proponents of the anti-theist argument also fail to derive the conclusion that God cannot be omniscient.

As Mander contends, there seems no obvious reason to think that God cannot know what it is like to be me. However, given the two principles regarding divine attributes, *even if* God cannot know what it is like to be

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<sup>28</sup> Mander (2002) himself seems to be aware of the necessary impossibility at issue. He writes as follows:

[A] man [cannot] know what it is like to be a dog, for even if he could become one, no dog can know what it is like to be a man. ... You can't occupy more than one [point of view] at the same time. We may become adept at flitting from one [being] to another but we can no more hold two such perspectives in our mind together than we can simultaneously see both a duck and a rabbit in the famous duck-rabbit illustration from Gestalt Psychology' (p. 438).

me, for the reason to which the anti-theist argument appeals, the omniscience of God is not undermined at all. The anti-theist argument that Mander discusses fails to the same extent that Grim's argument fails.

## 2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Grim's argument from knowledge *de se* is unsuccessful. In particular, I have tried to show that, given two plausible principles regarding divine attributes, there is no reason for us to think that God cannot be omniscient. I have argued that even if Grim is right in saying that God cannot know what I know in knowing that *I* am making a mess, that claim does not undermine the doctrine of divine omniscience. I have also claimed that my objection to the argument from knowledge *de se* is applicable to another argument against the doctrine of divine omniscience, according to which God cannot know what it is like to be me. In the rest of Part II, I discuss what I call the 'argument from concept possession', a further argument against the doctrine of divine omniscience.



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## Chapter 3

### Divine Omniscience and the Argument from Concept Possession (1)

#### 3.1 Introduction

The primary concern for philosophers of religion for the last half century has undoubtedly been the argument from evil.<sup>1</sup> The core of the argument is construed as an apparent inconsistency between divine attributes. According to the Anselmian tradition, God is a being such that He is necessarily omnipotent, necessarily omniscient, and necessarily omnibenevolent. However, the existence of evil in this world seems to show that either God could not have created the actual world such that it be free from evil (that is, He is not omnipotent<sup>2</sup>), He does not know our

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<sup>1</sup> According to Daniel Hill (1998) more than 3600 articles and books have been written on the problem of evil since 1960 alone (p. 32). For important papers on the problem of evil see, for instance, Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (1990), Michael L. Peterson (1992), and William L. Rowe (2001).

<sup>2</sup> One might contend that the existence of evil does not show that God *is not* omnipotent but only that God *was not* omnipotent when He created the universe. However, no traditional theists would accept that God was not omnipotent when He created the universe. Here I am concerned with J. L. Mackie's logical argument from evil (1955, 1982) rather than the evidential argument from evil.

suffering from evil (that is, He is not omniscient), or He does not care about our suffering from evil (that is, He is not omnibenevolent.) Therefore, the argument concludes, there is no Anselmian God.

Just like the argument from evil, what I call the 'argument from concept possession' concerns an alleged inconsistency between divine attributes. It states that God cannot be both necessarily omnipotent and necessarily omniscient because if He is necessarily omnipotent then He does not fully understand certain concepts, possession of which requires Him to have particular experiences. For instance, according to one version of the argument, if God is necessarily omnipotent then He does not fully understand the concepts *fear*, *frustration* and *despair*, possession of which require Him to have experienced fear, frustration and despair. Therefore, the argument concludes, there is no Anselmian God. (As I noted in Chapter 1, I use the words, 'Judaean-Christian God', 'Anselmian God' and 'God' interchangeably.)

Although the argument from concept possession has been recurrently introduced by a number of philosophers in various different forms, it has attracted far less attention than the argument from evil. The aim of this chapter and the next chapter is to shed light on the argument and examine its significance. I construct what I take to be the strongest possible version of the argument and demonstrate that it fails to derive any inconsistency between divine attributes. My conclusion is not, however, entirely negative. In Chapter 4 I argue that the failure of the argument from concept possession teaches us something important about God's necessary attributes.

This Chapter has the following structure. In Section 3.2, I review the historical background of the argument. In Section 3.3, I analyse its basic formulation. In Sections 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 I examine three types of objection to the argument, which attack the first, second and third of its premisses,

respectively. I argue that none of them succeeds. In Section 3.7 I discuss Torin Alter's attempt to undermine the fourth premiss of the argument in more detail. I argue that while his argument is compelling, it does not ultimately save the Anselmian conception of God because it is inconsistent with traditional doctrines of Judeo-Christian theism. I summarise the discussion of this chapter in Section 3.8.

### 3.2 Historical Background

As I noted above, the argument from concept possession has been introduced by a number of philosophers. In this section I discuss its historical background by reviewing the various forms in which it has been presented.

#### *The Doctrine of Divine Impassibility*

Perhaps early Christian apologists and theologians influenced by pre-Christian Greek philosophy, such as Justin Martyr, are the ones who first stated explicitly the basic intuition behind the argument from concept possession. According to their 'doctrine of divine impassibility' God is free from pain and sufferings because He is *apathes*, that is, he is not affected by any causal processes.<sup>3</sup> Regarding this doctrine Dennis Ngien (1997) remarks:

Virtually all the early church fathers took it for granted, denying God any emotions because they might interrupt his tranquillity. The Council of Chalcedon (a.d. 451) declared as "vain babblings" the idea that the divine nature could suffer, and it condemned those who believed it.

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<sup>3</sup> For contemporary discussions of divine impassibility, see Richard E. Creel (1986), Paul S. Fiddes (1992), J. K. Mozley (1926), Marcel Sarot (1992), Sarot (2001), Thomas G. Weinandy (2000), Weinandy (2002).



Like most theologians of Chalcedonian and earlier times, Calvin—and Reformed theology after him—assumed divine impassibility. The Westminster Confession of Faith explicitly asserted that God is “without body, parts, or passions, immutable.” Similarly, a contemporary evangelical theologian argues that when Jesus died on the cross it was his human nature that suffered, not the divine.

Augustine is also known for his endorsement of the doctrine of divine impassibility. He writes, ‘who can sanely say that God is touched by any misery?’ and ‘far be it from us to imagine that the impassible nature of God suffers any vexation. For as He is jealous without any envy, is angry without any perturbation, is pitiful without any grief, repents without having any evil in him to correct so He is patient without any suffering’ (Mozley, 1926, pp. 105-107).

The doctrine of divine impassibility itself is not a thesis about God’s knowledge. However, many theologians believe that the doctrine entails that God does not have complete knowledge about human pains and sufferings.<sup>4</sup> Notice that this idea is similar to the thrust of the argument from concept possession. That is, God lacks a certain kind of knowledge *because of His very perfection*. However, unlike contemporary anti-theists, proponents of the doctrine of divine impassibility still believe that God is omniscient. They think that God’s impassibility represents His perfection.

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<sup>4</sup> The following passage in Scripture *appears* to be inconsistent with those theologians’ belief: ‘And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows’



*Lachs's Version*

As far as I can locate, the argument from concept possession was clearly formulated for the first time by John Lachs in 1963. In that year Lachs published two papers on omniscience. In the first paper, 'Omniscience' (1963a) he attempts to establish that '[o]n the supposition that a certain consciousness is omniscient, we can show that there is at least one thing it does not know' (p. 401). Lachs's argument is based on a form of empiricism, according to which it is impossible to know, for example, 'the nature of surprise without having experienced it' (p. 401). Lachs thinks that this thesis is cogent because, according to him, 'surprise is a feeling or experience, and as such no description can ever hope to capture its essence' (p. 401). From this thesis he infers that an omniscient being, who knows everything and accordingly has never been surprised, does not fully comprehend the concept *surprise* and concludes that the notion of omniscience is 'internally incoherent' (p. 401).<sup>5</sup> While Lachs does not explicitly talk about God in that paper it is clear that he has in mind a *necessarily* omniscient being, such as the Anselmian God. For, if the being at issue is not necessarily omniscient then it does not follow from Lachs's empiricism that this being has not experienced surprise. The being might have had the experience by temporarily abandoning its omniscience.

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(Exodus 3:7). Whether or not they are really inconsistent is, however, a further issue which I do not examine in this work.

<sup>5</sup> Lachs's argument is a *non sequitur*. Even if it is true that no description can ever capture the essence of surprise, it does not immediately follow that one can know the essence of surprise *only by being surprised*. Consider a parallel example. Even if it is true that one cannot go to a certain place by car, it does not immediately follow that one can go there *only by airplane*, unless it is shown that one can go to that place only by car or airplane. In order to complete his argument, Lachs has to hold that knowledge can be acquired only by description or acquaintance, which is not obviously true, since it might also be

In the second paper, 'Professor Prior on Omniscience' (1963b) Lachs introduces a similar form of the argument in order to undermine the following formulation of divine omniscience introduced by A. N. Prior (1962):

For every  $p$ , if  $p$  then God knows that  $p$ . (p. 114)

Notice that this is almost identical to Kenny's formulation of omniscience, which I introduced in Chapter 1.<sup>6</sup>

Lachs contends that if Prior's formulation really represents God's knowledge then God is not truly omniscient. According to Lachs (1963b), given that doubt is 'a consciousness of uncertainty or a sense of vacillation' God, who is omniscient according to Prior's formulation, does not fully understand such a proposition as 'Descartes doubted the existence of God'. For, Lachs says, '[n]o one can know the meaning of 'doubt' in this sense unless he is having or has had the experience of doubting' and presumably, God, who is necessarily omniscient, has not had it (p. 364).

Interestingly enough, Prior (1963) does agree with Lachs's main point:

I agree ... that Lachs is on to something here. Knowing whether  $p$ , and even knowing what it is to know whether  $p$ , do seem in some cases to presuppose having experiences, e.g. toothaches and sinking feeling and dismay, which it is difficult to imagine a divine being as having. I may, for example, mentally advert to a pain which I am experiencing, and ask myself, in my private language,

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acquired by inference or intuition. See Chapter 4 of this work for related issues. I owe this point to Daniel Stoljar.

<sup>6</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter 1, this is a typical formulation of omniscience. The following is a list of philosophers who subscribe to this formulation, or one very similar to it: Peter Geach (1977, pp. 40-43), Anthony Kenny (1979, p. 10), William E. Mann (1975, pp. 153-154), Alvin Plantinga (1980, p. 91), James F. Ross (1969, p. 214), Richard Swinburne (1977, p. 162), James E. Tomberlin and Frank McGuinness (1977, p. 472). See Patrick Grim (1983), p. 265, p. 275, fn 5.

whether God knows that a toothache feels to me like *this*, and I do not see how God can know either that or anything else directly involving a sensation of *this* quality without actually having one.<sup>7</sup> (p. 365)

Prior continues to claim, however, that Lachs's argument does not affect his formalisation of omniscience:

I don't know, however, of any proof that having such experiences would be incompatible with *omniscience*; what emerges here is rather a question as to whether omniscience is itself compatible with other attributes traditionally ascribed to divine beings. (p. 365)

Prior's argument here is a straw man. He might be right, on the one hand, in saying that given God's necessary perfection He has not had toothaches, or experienced a sinking feeling and dismay. And it might follow, as Prior says, that God is precluded from fully understanding those concepts. However, on the other hand, while this *is* a version of the argument from concept possession, it is largely different from Lachs's original version. Lachs's aim is not to show that God's omniscience is inconsistent with His other divine attributes but that the notion of omniscience is '*internally incoherent*' (1963a, p. 401, my emphasis). Lachs contends that the notion of omniscience is self-contradictory because, given the form of concept empiricism, the very fact that God is omniscient entails that He does not fully understand what surprise and doubt are. The examples of toothaches, sinking feeling and dismay are Prior's artefacts and Lachs does not even discuss them in his papers.

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<sup>7</sup> One might think that Prior is here concerned with whether or not God can have certain indexical knowledge rather than experiential knowledge. I do not examine this construal in this work. On the issue of divine omniscience and indexical knowledge see Chapters 1 and 2 of this work, John E. Abbruzesse (1997), Grim (1983), Grim (1985), Grim (2000), Norman Kretzmann (1966), Peter Ludlow (1995), Yujin Nagasawa (2003a), Thomas D. Sullivan (1991), Edward Wierenga (1988).



*Martin's Version*

The second oldest version of the argument from concept possession that I can locate was introduced by Michael Martin in 1970<sup>8</sup>. Martin (1974) says that God does not exist because if He did, He would have to satisfy the following two conditions at the same time<sup>9</sup>:

(i) To be omnibenevolent.

(ii) To have 'all of men's knowledge' (p. 234).

Martin thinks that it is impossible to satisfy (i) and (ii) at the same time because, on the one hand, an omnibenevolent being does not know what lust and envy are but, on the other hand, a being that has 'all of men's knowledge' *must* know them.<sup>10</sup> Just like Lachs's argument, Martin's is based on a form of empiricism. He derives his conclusion that an omnibenevolent being does not know what lust and envy are by using the empiricist thesis that '[a] person who knows lust and envy has at least had the feeling of lust or envy' (p. 233-234).

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<sup>8</sup> See Martin (1970), Martin (1974), Martin (1990), Martin (2000).

<sup>9</sup> Martin notes that he does not mean to undermine every conception of God by his argument. He says that his target is not the 'God of professional philosophers or theologians' but the 'God of the common man'. In other words, he does not exclude the possibility that there is some coherent conception of God that is not vulnerable to his argument.

<sup>10</sup> Here, by the word 'know', Martin refers to a form of knowledge that is neither 'knowledge-that' nor 'knowledge-how'. He writes:

There is a use of 'know' in ordinary parlance which cannot be reduced to knowledge that or knowledge how. When one says "I know Smith," one does not ordinarily mean merely that one has certain propositional or procedural knowledge concerning Smith. ... When one says "Jones knows sorrow," one does not usually mean only that Jones knows that sorrow results in such and such behavior or that sorrow is caused in such and such a way. One is usually suggesting rather that Jones has had the experience of sorrow. The same thing



*Blumenfeld's Version*

Perhaps the best-known version of the argument from concept possession is that introduced by David Blumenfeld in 1978.<sup>11</sup> Blumenfeld argues that given the 'most restricted' (p. 204) form of concept empiricism, which he thinks 'obviously true' (p. 205), we can demonstrate the incoherence of the notion of the Anselmian God. The form of concept empiricism that Blumenfeld adopts for his argument is the following:

For some concepts, in order fully to comprehend them, one must have had the experience of an instance or exemplification of them (p. 205).

Consider the concept of the sensation of red. If Blumenfeld's concept empiricism is right then one must have had the experience of an instance or exemplification of the concept *red sensation*. It is important to note, however, that he does not mean that one must have had the experience of seeing a *red object* in order to possess the concept:

Surely one could not fully grasp this notion if one had never had an experience of redness. I do not say that one needs to experience a *red object*. One might come to understand the concept by pushing one's eyeball and getting the appropriate sensation in that way. But I do say that without any acquaintance with redness, one could not fully comprehend the *sensation of red*. (p. 205)

Blumenfeld contends that there are concepts that God is precluded from fully comprehending. For example, he says, God cannot fully comprehend such concepts as *fear*, *frustration* and *despair* because the occurrence of fear, frustration and despair 'depends logically on the subject's believing

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goes for the expression "He has known lust" or "He has known envy". (1974, p. 233)

<sup>11</sup> For debates on Blumenfeld's version of the argument from concept possession, see Alter (2002), Michael Beaty and Charles Taliaferro (1990), Nagasawa (2003b).

in the limitation of his power' (p. 206). According to Blumenfeld in order fully to comprehend the concept *fear* one has to believe that one was in danger; in order fully to comprehend the concept *frustration*, one has to believe that one was thwarted; and in order fully to comprehend the concept *despair*, one has to believe that one has faced a situation for which one is very unlikely to find a remedy (pp. 206-207). It might be the case that there is no reason for one to fear, be frustrated or be in despair because s/he is indeed very powerful. However, if one *believes* in the limitation of her/his power s/he might be able to comprehend fully *fear*, *frustration* and *despair*. Without believing it, Blumenfeld says, one cannot fully comprehend them. Since an omnipotent God does not believe in the limitation of His power, Blumenfeld says, He does not fully comprehend those concepts. Therefore, Blumenfeld concludes, God cannot be omniscient.

Blumenfeld's argument has an obvious, minor defect. His 'minimal concept empiricism' says that for some concepts, in order fully to comprehend them, one must have had the experience of an instance or exemplification of them. However, it does not say that *fear*, *frustration*, and *despair* are among the concepts that require relevant experiences. All it says is that there are *some* concepts that require relevant experiences and it is completely silent as to exactly which concepts require one to have them. Thus Blumenfeld's minimal concept empiricism is consistent with a case in which while there *are* some concepts that require one to have certain relevant experiences, God can easily have those experiences. If this case is actual, then Blumenfeld's version of the argument from concept possession fails to undermine God's omniscience. Therefore, instead of the above, Blumenfeld needs to endorse a form of empiricism as follows:

In order fully to comprehend the concepts *fear*, *frustration* and *despair* one must have had the experience of an instance or exemplification of them.

Notice that this is even more restricted than what Blumefeld calls the 'most restricted' form of concept empiricism.

### *Bringsjord's Version*

Selmer Bringsjord (1989) provides another version of the argument from concept possession in order to undermine Patrick Grim's definition of omniscience. Letting  $Kxp$  mean ' $x$  knows that  $p$ ' Bringsjord formulates Grim's definition as follows:

$$\Box x(x \text{ is omniscient} \supset \Box p(p \text{ is true} \equiv Kxp))^{12} \text{ (p. 186)}$$

Notice that this formulation of omniscience is very similar to the formulation by Prior that Lachs discusses. Just like Lachs, Bringsjord argues that the above formulation shows that 'there are certain propositions God can't *possibly* know' (p. 188). For example, Bringsjord says, God does not know 'what it's like to be ignorant, finite, shortsighted, etc.' (p. 188). Bringsjord does not explicitly state a reason why God does not understand those concepts, but it is obvious that what he has in mind here is similar to Lachs's and Blumenfeld's concept empiricism. That is, God, who is necessarily omniscient, necessarily infinite and necessarily perfect, does not fully understand those concepts because He is precluded from having the relevant experiences.

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<sup>12</sup> As Grim himself says (1990, p. 273) this is *not* in fact his definition of omniscience. He explicitly rejects this definition in his earlier (1983) paper. For his attempt to define omniscience see Grim (1983), pp. 265-267, Grim (1990).



### 3.3 The Structure of the Argument

We have seen several different versions of the argument from concept possession. In the following, I try to provide the basic schema of the argument.

The argument from concept possession relies on two important theses. The first is about God's necessary perfection, which is, as I noted earlier, based on the Anselmian tradition. According to this thesis, God is necessarily perfect; in particular, God is necessarily omniscient, necessarily omnipotent and necessarily omnibenevolent.

The second is a claim about concept possession, which often, (though not always, as I explain later) depends on a form of empiricism about concept acquisition. Empiricism is a thesis about knowledge of the external world. It is based on the idea that, roughly speaking, having an appropriate experience is necessary for acquiring non-inferential knowledge about the external world. The form of empiricism that the argument from concept possession usually adopts is *concept* empiricism, which is more restricted than standard empiricism. The simplest formulation of concept empiricism is the following:

For any agent  $x$  and for any concept  $c$ ,  $x$  fully comprehends  $c$  only if  $x$  has actually had a relevant experience.

However, this version of concept empiricism is subject to simple counter-examples. For instance, in order fully to comprehend the concept *triangle* we do not need to have an experience of looking at or touching a triangle at all. Thus a plausible version of concept empiricism needs to be much more restrictive than the above. All we need is something like the following:

For any agent  $x$ ,  $x$  fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if  $x$  has actually had an experience of being in fear.



As we have seen, different versions of the argument from concept possession focus on different concepts: Lachs's version focuses on *surprise* and *doubt*, which appear to conflict with God's necessary omniscience; Martin's version focuses on *lust* and *envy*, which appear to conflict with God's necessary omnibenevolence; Blumenfeld's version focuses on *fear*, *frustration* and *despair*, which appear to conflict with God's necessary omnipotence; Bringsjord's version focuses on *ignorance*, *finitude* and *shortsightedness*, which appear to conflict with God's necessary omniscience and necessary infinitude;<sup>13</sup> another possible version, which I did not discuss in the previous section, focuses on *evil* or *hatred*, which appear to conflict with God's necessary omnibenevolence.<sup>14</sup> In the following, however, for the sake of simplicity, I focus on the version that involves *fear*, though most of my claims apply equally to different versions of the argument.

From these two theses about the perfection of God and concept empiricism it follows, it is claimed, that God cannot fully comprehend *fear* and, accordingly, that God is not omniscient. The general schema of the argument from concept possession may be presented as follows:

- (1) If God exists then necessarily, He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.

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<sup>13</sup> To be more precise, Bringsjord's focus is not on abstract concepts, such as *ignorance*, *finitude* and *shortsightedness*, but on so-called 'phenomenal concepts' such as *what it is like to be ignorant*, *what it is like to be finite*, and *what it is like to be shortsighted*. I ignore the distinction between phenomenal concepts and non-phenomenal concepts in this work because it does not affect my discussion. See, for instance, David J. Chalmers (forthcoming) and Michael Tye (1999), Tye (2000), Tye (forthcoming) for issues regarding phenomenal concepts.

<sup>14</sup> This version of the argument from concept possession is introduced and critically examined by Alter (2002). See also Nagasawa (2003b).

(2) If God does not fully comprehend the concept *fear* then He is not omniscient.

(3) Because of His necessary omnipotence God has not actually experienced fear.

(4) For any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has actually experienced fear.

Therefore,

(5) God does not fully comprehend the concept *fear*. (from (3) and (4))

Therefore,

(6) God is not omniscient. (from (2) and (5))

Therefore,

(7) God does not exist. ((1) and (6))

One might think, as do Lachs and Blumenfeld, that the argument from concept possession must be based on concept empiricism. However, this is not correct. While the specific version of the argument from concept possession that I examine in this chapter relies on concept empiricism, the foundation of the argument is more general. The crucial assumption of the argument is not that the possession of certain concepts requires one to acquire them only through relevant experiences, but that the possession of certain concepts requires one to acquire them only in a particular, as yet unspecified, way. Thus, one can advance a similar argument without appealing to concept empiricism at all.<sup>15</sup> (This is why I call the argument the 'argument from concept possession' rather than the 'argument from concept empiricism'.) For example, one might hold the following *prima facie* plausible thesis about concept possession:

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<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Daniel Stoljar for this point.

For any agent  $x$ ,  $x$  fully comprehends the concept *water* only if  $x$  has actually had an appropriate causal, physical interaction with water.<sup>16</sup>

Using this thesis one might argue that God does not fully comprehend the concept *water* because He, who is necessarily incorporeal and necessarily impassible, has not actually had a causal, physical interaction with water. In particular, He has not touched or drunk water. While the above thesis does concern the way a certain concept is acquired, it is distinct from concept empiricism.<sup>17</sup>

In the next three sections I discuss attempts to undermine (1), (2) and (3) and demonstrate that none of them is successful.

### 3.4 Objections to the Argument: Rejecting (1)

(1) states that necessarily, God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. This notion of God<sup>18</sup> is not derived from Scripture but most notably, as I stated earlier, from Anselm's theism.<sup>19</sup> One might undermine the argument from concept possession by rejecting this Anselmian notion of God.

Theists have long been perplexed by the nature of divine attributes. In particular, as I noted in Chapter 1, they have had difficulty in providing an adequate formulation of divine *omnipotence*. Again, Peter Geach (1977) describes the situation as follows:

When people have tried to read into 'God can do everything' a signification not of Pious Intention but Philosophical Truth, they have only landed themselves in intractable problems and hopeless

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<sup>16</sup> I do not examine whether or not this thesis is true in this work.

<sup>17</sup> As we will see in Chapter 4, what I regard as the strongest form of the argument from concept possession does not rely on concept empiricism, either.

<sup>18</sup> John Bishop (1998) calls this the notion of 'omniGod'.



confusions; no graspable sense has ever been given to this sentence that did not lead to self-contradiction or at least to conclusions manifestly untenable from the Christian point of view. (p. 4)

Recently some theist philosophers, who share similar worries, have made a radical move. They have dropped necessary omnipotence (at least, necessary omnipotence as it is defined by traditional Judaeo-Christian theism) from the list of God's necessary attributes. John Bishop (1993, 1998), for example, is persuaded by the argument from evil against the existence of God and concludes that it is more reasonable to believe in an alternative conception of God, which does not include omnipotence as one of God's necessary attributes, than to retain the traditional Judaeo-Christian conception. To take another example, Wes Morriston (2001a, 2001b) contends that since necessary omnibenevolence is inconsistent with requirements for omnipotence, theists should endorse a different notion of God, according to which God is not omnipotent.<sup>20</sup> Morriston thinks that while his alternative conception of God does not include omnipotence as one of His necessary attributes He is still properly regarded as a being than which no greater can be conceived.

If such alternative conceptions of God are cogent then the argument from concept possession seems to fail because (1) turns out to be false. Given that God is not necessarily omnipotent He should be able fully to comprehend the concept *fear* by having a relevant experience.

However, there are at least two reasons to resist this strategy to undermine the argument from concept possession.

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<sup>19</sup> Generally, Scripture is not explicit about God's necessary attributes.

<sup>20</sup> In particular, Morriston thinks that there are states of affairs which a necessarily omnipotent being is *able* to bring about but which a necessarily omnibenevolent is not *justified* in bringing about. (e.g. a state of affairs in which an innocent child is tortured).



First, since (1) represents one of the most central notions of traditional theism, this solution is not compelling for the majority of theists. Given that the aim of the argument from concept possession is to show the incoherence of the *Anselmian notion of God*, rejecting (1) is essentially the same as accepting the conclusion of the argument itself. Thus, this objection does not save traditional theism as based on Anselmian theism. Although I am sympathetic to the alternative notion of God for a number of reasons, I must admit that at the very least, this solution appears to be a significant compromise for most theists. It would be better if theists could undermine the argument without modifying the Anselmian notion of God.

Second, and more importantly, even if God were not in fact omnipotent, the force of the argument from concept possession would *not* be eliminated completely. (In this respect, the argument from concept possession is much more persistent than the argument from evil; because, arguably, the argument from evil is not a threat to theists who are willing to drop at least one of three main attributes from God's perfection.<sup>21</sup>) For,

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<sup>21</sup> Mackie (1955) writes, for instance, as follows:

The problem of evil, in the sense which I shall be using the phrase, is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good. And it is a logical problem, the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs: it is not a scientific problem that might be solved by further observations, or a practical problem that might be solved by a decision or an action. ... In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological propositions: the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three. ... Now once the problem is fully stated it is clear that it can be solved, in the sense that the problem will not arise if one gives up at least one of the propositions that constitute it. If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not



as I noted in Section 2, there are forms of the argument from concept possession that involve attributes of God other than His omnipotence. For example, according to one version of the argument, God does not fully comprehend the concept *surprise* because He, who is necessarily omniscient, has not experienced surprise. To take another version, God does not fully understand the concept *evil* because He, who is necessarily omnibenevolent, has not experienced being evil.<sup>22</sup> Even if proponents of the argument from concept possession decide to drop necessary

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exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you. (pp. 200-201)

Similarly, Martin (1974) writes, '[T]he problem of evil presumably does not show that God does not exist when 'God' refers to some being that is either not omnipotent or not completely benevolent' (p. 232). Notice that the same claim does not apply to the argument from concept possession. As I contend in the main text, even if one is willing to eliminate omnipotence or omnibenevolence from the list of God's necessary attributes, the argument from concept possession is not thereby undermined. (It should be noted, however, that not all philosophers agree with Mackie's claim about the argument from evil: P. J. McGrath (1986, 1987) argues that even if theists revise the concept of God so that God is limited in His power or goodness the argument from evil persists; Peter Hutcheson (1992) argues that even if theists revise the concept of God so that God is limited in His knowledge the argument from evil persists. For objections to McGrath (1986) see Michael B. Burke (1987) and Roger Crisp (1986).

<sup>22</sup> Opponents of the argument from concept possession might contend that one does not need to have experienced being evil in order to understand it. One may understand it, they might claim, for instance, just by reading about the slaughter in East Timor in the newspapers. Proponents of the argument from concept possession have two responses here. First, they might contend that even if one understands the concept *evil* just by reading the newspapers one cannot *fully* understand it unless one becomes evil, or at least performs a morally wrong action. Second, they might contend that even if one may fully understand the concept *evil* by reading the newspapers, one might not understand the *phenomenal* concept *what it is like to be evil* unless one becomes evil, or at least performs a morally wrong action.

*omnipotence* from God's attributes they cannot block these versions as long as they hold that God is necessarily omniscient and necessarily omnibenevolent. However, it is not possible for theists to drop necessary omniscience and necessary omnibenevolence from the list of God's attributes while maintaining a conception of God sufficiently robust to satisfy them. For, first, it does not make sense to drop those attributes because, again, doing so is equivalent to accepting the conclusion of the argument from concept possession, that the Anselmian God does not exist, from the start. And, second, traditional Judaeo-Christian theists in particular cannot eliminate omnibenevolence from God's necessary attributes because it is almost an uncontroversial consensus among them that God is necessarily omnibenevolent.

Therefore, one cannot undermine the argument from evil by rejecting (1).

### 3.5 Objections to the Argument: Rejecting (2)

(2) says that if God does not fully comprehend the concept *fear* then He is not omniscient. One might reject this premiss by claiming that that even if God does not *fully* comprehend *fear* because He lacks the relevant experience, He can still be omniscient. For, according to this objection, having an experience is different from having *knowledge of* the experience, and so it is knowledge of the experience, and not the experience itself, that is relevant to God's omniscience. Thus, according to this objection, God can be omniscient without having a fearful experience. Suppose that while I have experienced fear, God has not. Then the difference between what I know in knowing that, say, I am in fear and what *God* knows in knowing that I am in fear seems to lie only in the feelings and sensations associated with *my* fearful experience. However, since knowledge is, roughly speaking, a true justified *belief*, feelings and sensations are irrelevant to



God's knowledge. Thus, this objection says, God does not need to experience fear in order to be omniscient.

Anthony Kenny (1979) adopts this line of reasoning. He argues that even if God cannot have a certain experience there is nothing to be added to His knowledge, which remains complete:<sup>23</sup>

To have a sensation is not the same thing as to be in possession of a piece of knowledge. We do, of course, acquire information by the senses, but whatever information we acquire by the senses can be reported to others provided that they possess the appropriate language; and whatever can be reported to others can be discovered by others without the use of the sense in question, and without having the sensation. ... All the information which we can acquire by our senses is possessed by God but without the pleasure-pain modality which constitutes the acquisition of this information a form of sensation. (pp. 31-32)

Kenny is correct in claiming that having a sensation is not identical to having a piece of knowledge. For example, the existence of animals that have the sensory apparatus to have conscious experience yet lack an epistemic apparatus to form relevant beliefs seems to support his claim. However, Kenny's argument is subject to the following counter-arguments. Suppose that there is a being that contingently satisfies Kenny's criteria of omniscience. While this being does not 'fully' comprehend the concept *fear*, because of its lack of having a relevant experience, it nevertheless has knowledge about *fear*. However, suppose further that this being has an experience of, say, fearing dental surgery for the first time. This being can have an experience of fearing because it can cease to be omnipotent for a while thanks to its *contingent* omnipotence. Upon having the new experience the being would say, 'This is *what it is like to fear dental*

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<sup>23</sup> See Abbruzzese (1997) for a similar argument.



*surgery!* Now I understand it'. However, this situation seems to contradict the assumption that this being *is* omniscient. For if the being really is omniscient, it would be impossible for it to *discover* anything.<sup>24</sup>

Another way of undermining Kenny's claim is the following. In general, possession of a concept *c* is based on knowing a bundle of relevant descriptions of the form '*c* is such and such'. Therefore if, as the argument from concept possession says, God does not fully understand the concept *fear* then it follows that God lacks some description about fear. If so, contrary to what Kenny says, God lacks certain propositional knowledge.

Thus Kenny's narrow notion of omniscience is untenable and his strategy for rejecting (2) fails.

### 3.6 Objections to the Argument: Rejecting (3)

We have seen that attempts to undermine (1) and (2) fail. Should then proponents of the argument from concept possession take aim at (3)?

(3) says that because of His necessary omnipotence God has not actually experienced fear. The justification for (3) is the following. We experience fear because our power is limited. However, since God is necessarily omnipotent there is no possible situation in which God fears. As Peter Geach (1977) writes, 'God is almighty: the source of all power, for whom there is no frustration or failure' (p. v).

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<sup>24</sup> This scenario is, of course, parallel to the 'black-and-white Mary' case in Frank Jackson's knowledge argument (Jackson, 1982, 1986). In that case a brilliant scientist Mary, who lives in a black-and-white room, knows everything physical through her black-and-white books and black-and-white TV programs. When she leaves her room for the first time, Jackson says, Mary, who is physically omniscient, discovers what it is like to see red. From this scenario Jackson concludes that complete physical knowledge cannot be complete knowledge *simpliciter* and hence that physicalism is false. See Chapters 6 and 7 of this work.

One might think, however, that (3) is false. For if one has to have a limitation in power in order to experience fear then surely God must have had the experience by temporarily abandoning His omnipotence. Stephen T. Davis (1983) takes this line of reasoning.<sup>25</sup>

[E]ven if it is true that certain things cannot be known unless experienced, there is nothing to prevent an omniscient being who is also omnipotent from taking whatever steps are necessary to experience them. If God wants to know what watermelon tastes like, why can't he take bodily form and find out? If God wants to know what it is like to doubt, why can't he temporarily abandon some of his knowledge—*e.g.* his knowledge of when the world will end—and know doubt? Of course during that period he would not be omniscient, but unless omniscience is essential to God (using 'God' here as a proper name) I see no reason why he could not do so. And ... there is no good reason to affirm that omniscience is an essential property of God. (pp. 39-40)

Davis is correct in thinking that a perfect being can have limited beings' experiences *if* it can sacrifice its perfection. In particular, God can have an experience of being in fear *if* He can temporarily abandon His omnipotence. However, this point is irrelevant to the argument from concept possession.

An obvious response to Davis's argument is that since, according to the Anselmian conception of God displayed in (1), omnipotence is a *necessary* attribute of God it is impossible for Him, even temporarily, to abandon His omnipotence. Theists would not be willing to concede that there is a possible world in which God is powerless. I think that this is the most straightforward response to Davis's objection.

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<sup>25</sup> Davis's argument is directed at Lach's version of the argument from concept possession (1963a), which we saw in Section 3.2.

One might insist, however, that, whatever method He uses, God *can* abandon His omnipotence because there is Scriptural evidence for that: The New Testament reports that God incarnated as Jesus, and hence experienced life, and death with its concomitant suffering. If Jesus *is* God then it follows that God can indeed have human experiences by temporarily abandoning His omnipotence.

However, even if we grant that it is possible for God to experience fear by incarnating, there are a number of reasons to resist the idea that this is how God actually completes His knowledge.

First, it is difficult to believe that God would abandon His perfection and have every single experience relevant to each concept, merely in order to possess certain concepts.<sup>26</sup> For instance, in order fully to comprehend the concept *fear* God might have to incarnate as a person who believes he is about to undergo extremely painful and protracted dental surgery; in order fully to comprehend the concept *frustration* God might have to incarnate as a person who drives a car in heavy traffic; and in order fully to comprehend the concept *despair* God might have to incarnate as a person who has been sentenced to a lifetime of hard labour in a Siberian gulag. It is simply implausible that God, who is necessarily perfect, has had such experiences merely for the purpose of possessing certain concepts and that God's incarnation is a *necessary condition* for His full understanding of all concepts.

Second, even if God can have human experiences and possess relevant concepts about these experiences by incarnating as a human being it is not obvious at all that concepts that He acquires will be preserved. If there

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<sup>26</sup> One might suggest that if pantheism is true then this sort of worry is needless. This suggestion is, however, irrelevant because the target of the argument from concept possession is not the pantheist notion of God, but the traditional Judaeo-Christian notion of a personal God who is distinct from His creation.



really is a kind of concept that, necessarily, *only* a limited being like us can possess, then it seems reasonable to think that God can continue to possess these concepts only *as long as He remains a limited being*. Thus, if He returns to His perfect, *unlimited* state after incarnation it seems reasonable to think that He loses the concepts that He has acquired while being a limited being. If so, the idea that God can incarnate does not lead to an effective objection to the argument from concept possession.

Third, there is a worry that this objection might even entail that God is not in fact omniscient. It might be the case that there are infinitely many concepts, the possession of which requires one to have relevant experiences. If so, God will never be able to know everything. Perhaps God Himself is eternal, not subject to the constraints of time and space, but once He takes a bodily form in order to have human experiences, He is subject to all the limitations of a spatio-temporal being. According to the above supposition, when God finishes having one experience of a particular kind there will remain infinitely many experiences of different kinds that He still has to have. Yet it is not possible for a finite being (one subject to the limitations of space and time) to complete an infinite number of tasks. It follows that God has never been omniscient.

Fourth, even if proponents of the objection to (3) can show that God can temporarily abandon His *omnipotence* that does not defeat the argument from concept possession. For, as we have seen, some versions of the argument from concept possession involve God's other attributes. Consider again the one that involves God's omnibenevolence. In order to undermine this version of the argument, proponents of the objection to (3) must contend that God has experienced evil by incarnating as a human being. However, no traditional theist would be willing to concede that God became evil for a while with the sole purpose of fully comprehending the concept *evil*.

I have discussed three objections to the argument from concept possession and shown that none of them is compelling. In the next section I introduce yet another objection to the argument, which seems more compelling.

### 3.7 Objections to the Argument: Rejecting (4)

In 'On Two Alleged Conflicts Between Divine Attributes' (2002) Torin Alter attempts to defeat the argument from concept possession by providing three elaborate objections to (4). In what follows, I claim that while Alter's objections might be successful in showing that *some beings* can comprehend *fear* fully without having the relevant experience, they fail to show that *God* can do that. For, I argue, Alter's objections are, contrary to what he thinks,<sup>27</sup> inconsistent with the attributes that are traditionally ascribed to God. I discuss Alter's objections to the argument from concept possession in more detail than other objections because his objections are helpful in constructing a successful objection, as I explain in the next chapter.

(4) says that for any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has actually experienced fear.<sup>28</sup> If God is omniscient then He has to understand all concepts fully. However, given (4), one's full

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<sup>27</sup> Alter (2002) writes, his objections are 'consistent with the principal divine attributes' (pp. 47, 48).

<sup>28</sup> In the second section of his paper Alter (2002) remarks that (4) seems to gain support from Jackson's knowledge argument (p. 49-50). This remark is, however, perplexing because, as is shown by the passage from Jackson that Alter himself quotes in his paper (p. 53), Jackson explicitly rejects concept empiricism, or a thesis like (4), for the exact same reason that Alter does. Jackson thinks that concept empiricism is untenable because, as Alter argues in his third objection, one may understand such the concept *fear* without actually experiencing it if one acquires relevant false memory traces. See Jackson (1998b), p. 77. See also Chapters 6 and 7 of this work for Jackson's knowledge argument.



understanding of the concept *fear* requires one to experience fear. However, God cannot have those experiences because, by definition, He is necessarily omnipotent and so could not fall prey to the weakness entailed by the having of such experiences. Therefore, the argument concludes, God does not exist. Notice that in order to establish the argument anti-theists have to hold that (4) is a *necessary* truth. For, if (4) were merely contingently true then an omnipotent God could bring it about that (4) is false and the argument would immediately become unsound.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Alter's First Objection*

As a first objection to (4), Alter (2002) argues that even if God *Himself* cannot experience fear there is no reason to conclude that He cannot possess concepts of them. For, according to Alter, God can possess such concepts by directly perceiving the 'contents of human consciousness' (p. 51).<sup>30</sup> For instance, if someone—say, in a silent prayer—reflects vividly

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<sup>29</sup> This statement is based on the assumption that God is omnipotent if and only if, roughly speaking, He can do everything that it is possible to do and He cannot do that which it is necessarily impossible to do. However, as I noted in Chapters 1 and 2, some philosophers argue that if God is truly omnipotent then He can do absolutely anything, including that which it is necessarily impossible to do. In this case the argument from concept possession fails from the beginning.

<sup>30</sup> Martin (1974) discusses a similar objection. According to this objection, just as a great novelist can create certain emotions in her/his readers—emotions that are quite alien to the readers—by inducing them to identify empathetically with some character in a story, God can create feelings of envy and lust in Himself by empathetic identification with envious and lustful people without being lustful and envious Himself. Martin's response to this objection is as follows: either empathetic feelings are as strong as non-empathetic feelings, or they are not. If they are as strong as each other, then God is not omnibenevolent because He must have been morally tainted by His empathising. On the other hand, if they are not as strong as each other, then God does not *fully* understand what lust and envy are. See Martin (1974), pp. 238-239.



on her/his fear, Alter says, then God will be able to perceive this person's feeling and to come to understand fully what fear is.

There are various difficulties with this objection.<sup>31</sup> First, what Alter takes for granted, *i.e.*, that God can perceive the contents of human consciousness, is controversial among theists. Most notably, as we have seen in Section 3.2, early Christians formulated and defended the doctrine of divine impassibility, according to which God cannot perceive human feelings, in particular, human sufferings. This doctrine states that God, who transcends space and time, is not in a position to share human feelings. A number of contemporary theists endorse this doctrine.<sup>32</sup>

Second, even if the doctrine of divine impassibility is false and God can in fact perceive human pains and sufferings, Alter's objection is still untenable on two grounds: (i) it is unlikely that any attribute of God is *dependent* largely on the experience of humans. According to Judaeo-Christian theism God is an independent, self-existing being. That is, God is entirely self-sufficient, not dependent upon anything or anyone outside of Himself.<sup>33</sup> Alter's claim that God's knowledge of fear, relies on the contents of human consciousness is inconsistent with this doctrine of divine independence. (ii) According to the Anselmian tradition, if God

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<sup>31</sup> One might claim that if Alter's first objection is right then God would not have been omniscient before His creatures experienced, say, fear for the first time. Alter (2002) argues that we can block this claim if we suppose that God 'created a creature experiencing fear at the instant the universe began' and that He was 'able to perceive the first instant of that creature's experience' (p. 51).

<sup>32</sup> For the contemporary debate on divine impassibility see Creel (1986), Fiddes (1992), Mozley (1926), Sarot (1992), Sarot (2001), Weinandy (2000), Weinandy (2002).

<sup>33</sup> For example, the following passage in Scripture is said to describe God's independence:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else (Acts 17: 24-25).

exists at all He is necessarily omniscient. However, if Alter's objection is cogent, God's omniscience is contingent at best, since it will largely depend upon contingent human experiences. Then Alter's objection entails that the Anselmian God, who is necessarily omniscient, does not in fact exist. This is, for theists, as unfavourable as the conclusion of the argument from concept possession itself. Alter's first objection is not successful.

One might claim that God comprehends fully the concept *fear* by *imagining* or *inferring* what it would be like for a creature to have experiences pertaining to them, instead of directly perceiving the contents of human consciousness. This claim appears more compelling because in this case God's knowledge is not dependent on contingent human experiences. This idea leads to Alter's second objection to (4).

#### *Alter's Second Objection*

As a second objection to (4), Alter (2002) argues that even if God cannot be directly acquainted with fear, *itself*, that may not preclude Him from fully understanding the concepts. For, God can be acquainted with 'components' of fear, and deduce what it would be like to combine those components into states of fear, without actually having the appropriate experiences (p. 52). In other words, according to Alter, God can fully comprehend the concept *fear* by imagining or inferring what it would be like for a creature to have fear.

It is not clear what exactly Alter means by components of fear.<sup>34</sup> And, in any case, it is a matter of enormous controversy in the philosophy of

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<sup>34</sup> As candidates for components of fear, frustration and despair, Alter (2002) suggests 'qualia that tend to accompany (or partially constitute) those mental states' (p. 52). But without a further argument it is hard to see how they could actually be components of fear, frustration and despair.

mind whether mental states such as fear are reducible to something else. Suppose though, for the sake argument, that they *are* composite states and it is possible for God to understand fully what fear is by deducing what it would be like to combine their components. However, most theists would nevertheless disagree with Alter that God actually does so. For, according to the traditional doctrine of divine omniscience, God's knowledge is not discursive. Thomas Aquinas (1997) describes this doctrine as follows:

In the divine knowledge there is no discursiveness. ... God sees all things in one thing alone, which is Himself. Therefore, God sees all things together, and not successively. (p. 416)

Similarly, Alvin Plantinga (1980) writes, 'Of course God neither needs nor uses logic; that is, he never comes to know a proposition A by inferring it from proposition B' (p. 144).<sup>35</sup> This means that God knows (if He knows at all) fear just as it is.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, even if Alter can prove that *in principle* God can know discursively what fear is, which, by itself, seems extremely difficult to do, that does not satisfy most Judaeo-Christian theists. Alter's second objection is not successful.

### *Alter's Third Objection*

Alter's final objection to (4) is the following. Again, because of His omnipotence, God might not be able to experience fear. However, He can come fully to comprehend the concept *fear* by creating false memory

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<sup>35</sup> George I. Mavrodes (1988) also writes, '[The doctrine according to which God's knowledge *is* discursive] has not been popular among Christian philosophers and theologians. I can think of no one who has positively defended this doctrine, and several seem to have explicitly denied it' (p. 346).

<sup>36</sup> Here I simply assume that being non-discursive is equivalent to being non-inferential, which suffices to undermine Alter's objection. I discuss the issue of non-discursive knowledge in more detail in Chapter 4.



traces of relevant experiences. In order to motivate his objection Alter (2002) invites us to imagine the following scenario (p. 54). Suppose that I have never seen red, but one night, while I am asleep, a neurosurgeon operates on my brain so that it is in the state it would have been, had I seen red. Then, thanks to these false memory traces created by the neurosurgeon I know exactly what it is like to see red without actually having experienced red. Similarly, Alter contends, God can come fully to understand the concept *fear* by creating false memory traces of relevant experiences for Himself without actually having those experiences.

Again, there are a number of problems with this objection. The first, obvious problem is that the case of false memory traces makes sense only if the agent under consideration has a physical body, because the case is based on the assumption that one's mental states are at least correlated with one's physical states; in particular, one's brain states. However, according to traditional Judaeo-Christian theism God is incorporeal. That is, unlike us, God does not have relevant physical states at all.<sup>37</sup>

Second, the above brain surgery case is plausible because it is possible that I could have seen red, even though I have not, and that a neurosurgeon can, in principle, bring about the brain state that I would have been in had I seen red by operating on my brain. However, in the case of God, opponents of the argument from concept possession, like Alter, are not allowed simply to make a parallel supposition that counterfactually, God has been in fear; because that is the very thesis that the argument denies.

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<sup>37</sup> One might argue that this is not a problem for theists because God can incarnate. However, as I argued in Section 3.6, it is still difficult to think that God's incarnation is a *necessary condition* for His full understanding of the concept *fear*. Even if God can know, in principle, what fear is by incarnating that cannot be the way He in fact comes to know them.

Stipulating this thesis begs the question against the argument. Alter's third objection is, again, unsuccessful.<sup>38</sup>

Alter (2002) notes that his objections 'are consistent with the principal divine attributes' (pp. 47, 48). However, I have argued the contrary. His first objection is inconsistent with the doctrines of divine impassibility and divine independence. His second objection is inconsistent with the doctrine of divine omniscience. His third objection is inconsistent with the doctrines of divine incorporeality.

The simplest way for Alter to undercut my criticisms is to reject those doctrines. However, given that they have widely been accepted among Judaeo-Christian theists for hundreds of years, or more, Alter faces an uphill struggle.

### 3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have accomplished the following. First, I have reviewed the historical background of the argument from concept possession and introduced a number of different forms of the argument. Second, I have formulated the basic structure of the argument and claimed that the existing objections to premisses (1), (2) and (3) of the argument clearly fail. Third, I have discussed in detail Alter's three objections to premiss (4) and contended that they also fail. However, it is important to emphasise that Alter is still correct in holding that (4) is the most dubious premiss in the argument. In the next chapter I provide new objections to (4), which improve on his third objection.

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<sup>38</sup> There is another potential problem with Alter's third objection: If a definition of omniscience such as (8) in Chapter 1—*viz.*, For any  $x$  and for any proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is omniscient if and only if,  $x$  does not have false beliefs and if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ —is correct, then an omniscient being is not allowed to have false beliefs. However, false memories, which Alter demands that God have, are essentially false beliefs about past experiences.

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## Chapter 4

### Divine Omniscience and the Argument from Concept Possession (2)

#### 4.1 Introduction

Here is the argument from concept possession against the existence of God again:

- (1) If God exists then necessarily, He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.
- (2) If God does not fully comprehend the concept *fear* then He is not omniscient.
- (3) Because of His necessary omnipotence God has not actually experienced fear.
- (4) For any agent  $x$ ,  $x$  fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if  $x$  has actually experienced fear.

Therefore,

- (5) God does not fully comprehend the concept *fear*. (from (3) and (4))

Therefore,

- (6) God is not omniscient. (from (2) and (5))

Therefore,

- (7) God does not exist. ((1) and (6))



In Chapter 3 I have argued that philosophers' objections to (1), (2) and (3) are clearly fallacious. I have also argued that Torin Alter's objections to (4) are more compelling than the others but still unsatisfactory.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the chapter, however, I noted that Alter is right in saying that (4) is the most dubious premiss of the argument. In this chapter I examine the argument further.

This Chapter has the following structure. In Section 4.2, I demonstrate that (4) is indeed false. On the face of it, my objection to (4) is similar to one of Alter's objections. However, I argue, the way in which I reject (4) is crucially different from Alter's. In Section 4.3, I formulate what I think is the strongest version of the argument, one that is *not* vulnerable to the objection of the previous section. In Section 4.4, I demonstrate that even the strongest version fails. Finally, in Section 4.5, I state and discuss the implication of the failure of the argument.

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<sup>1</sup> Another objection to the argument from concept possession was suggested to me by Daniel Stoljar, in personal communication. Stoljar suggests that the argument from concept possession fails because it equivocates on the notion of experience. In (3)—*viz.* Because of His necessary omnipotence God has not actually experienced fear—the word 'experience' is used to denote an *event* such that an agent comes to be in a certain mental state. Hence, it should be construed as follows:

(3\*) Given His necessary omnipotence there has been no event such that God comes to be in fear.

However, in (4)—*viz.* For any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has actually experienced fear—the word 'experience' is used to denote a kind of *feeling* that an agent has. Hence, it should be construed as follows:

(4\*) For any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has actually had a particular feeling that is associated with a fearful situation.

If we take the word 'experience' to denote an event then, while (3) is true (4) appears to be false. On the other hand, however, if we take it to denote a kind of feeling then while (4) is true (3) appears to be false. Although I do not examine this objection I make a similar point when I examine critically the conditional analysis of ability in Section 4.4.

## 4.2 A New Objection to (4)

Consider (4) again:

(4) For any agent  $x$ ,  $x$  fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if  $x$  has actually experienced fear.

Although (4) is much weaker than the traditional form of concept empiricism (4) is still vulnerable to prevalent counter-examples to a certain form of empiricism.

In order to undermine (4), and, *a fortiori*, traditional empiricism, all we need to do is to provide a logically possible scenario in which the following are true at the same time:

- (i) An agent fully comprehends the concept *fear*.
- (ii) The agent has *not* actually experienced fear.

In what follows, I introduce three such scenarios.

### *Scenario 1: The Instant Creation of the Universe*

Suppose that Kate fully comprehends the concept *fear*. According to (4) it follows that she has actually experienced fear. However, what if God created the universe only a moment ago, which is not long enough for Kate to have had the experience? This is a variation of Bertrand Russell's sceptical hypothesis regarding the creation of the universe. According to Russell it is logically possible that the earth was created only, say, five minutes ago. Perhaps God just placed apparent historical objects like fossils and relics to make people believe that the universe has a long history.<sup>2</sup> If this scenario is logically possible then (i) and (ii) can be both true, which entails that (4) is false.

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, this is similar to what creationists believe. It is interesting to see that even an atheist like Russell regards creationism as a logical possibility.

*Scenario 2: Molecular Duplication*

We do not even have to imagine the creation of the entire universe. Perhaps only Kate herself was created a moment ago. Again, according to (4), if Kate fully comprehends the concept *fear* then she has experienced fear. But it seems logically possible that *she did not exist until now*. Perhaps she is just created as a consequence, say, of a miraculous event.<sup>3</sup> Suppose that Kathy fully comprehends the concept *fear* thanks to her experience of having horrible dental surgery. Suppose further that on the way Kathy back to her house from the dental surgeon lightning hits the swamp and Kate, a molecular duplicate of Kathy, is created.<sup>4</sup> If (4) is true then Kate, who has never experienced fear, does not fully comprehend the concept *fear*. But is this plausible? Since Kate is a physical duplicate of Kathy there is not a single difference between their brain states, which means that Kate knows everything that Kathy knows. It then appears that both Kathy and Kate fully understand the concept *fear*. This scenario shows, just like the previous one, that (i) and (ii) can be true at the same time and, accordingly, that (4) is false.

*Scenario 3: Neurosurgery*

Perhaps neither the universe nor Kate was created but only her apparent memory traces were created. Suppose that Kate has never experienced fear. And suppose further that at one night, while Kate is asleep, a mad scientist performs neurosurgery on her brain so that she has apparent memory

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<sup>3</sup> By a miraculous event, I do not mean an event such that it is logically impossible for it to occur. I rather mean something that is extremely unlikely, but the occurrence of which is, nevertheless, logically possible.

<sup>4</sup> This scenario is parallel to Donald Davidson's famous thought experiment of 'swampman' (1987) though Davidson does not use it as an objection to concept empiricism. Peter Unger (1966), among others, articulates a similar scenario while constructing counter-examples to concept empiricism.



traces of being in fear. In this case it seems that, after the operation, Kate can fully comprehend the concept *fear* without actually having experienced fear. Again, this case shows that (i) and (ii) can be both true and that (4) is false.

David Lewis (1988) rejects a certain form of empiricism on the same ground:

[T]he exact same change [that occurs when one comes fully to comprehend the concept *fear*] could in principle be produced in you by precise neurosurgery, very far beyond the limits of present-day technique. Or it could possibly be produced in you by magic. If we ignore the laws of nature, which are after all contingent, then there is no necessary connection between cause and effect: anything could cause anything. (p. 448)

While the above are just prevalent counter-examples to traditional empiricism they are nonetheless powerful enough to undermine even such a restricted thesis as (4).<sup>5</sup> Chris Daly (1998), Frank Jackson (1998b), Daniel Stoljar (2002), Peter Unger (1966) and Robert Van Gulick (forthcoming), agree with Lewis and reject empiricism in the same way. Furthermore, even empiricists themselves admit the force of those counter-examples. For instance, Michael Tye (1999, 2000, forthcoming) thinks that the above scenarios do undermine his version of concept empiricism, which is essentially identical to (4).<sup>6</sup> However, at the same time, he also

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<sup>5</sup> One might think that these scenarios are possible only if physicalism is true. This is not correct. In order to accept them we need to assume only a correlation between Kathy's acquisition of the concept *fear* and her relevant brain states. I ignore the possibility that there cannot be any correlation because most, if not all, anti-physicalists believe that there is a correlation.

<sup>6</sup> Tye (1999) describes his empiricism as follows:

To possess the phenomenal concept *RED*, for example, is to possess a simple concept that has been acquired by undergoing experiences of red (barring

claims that he can save his empiricism simply by adding a proviso that it does not apply to cases that involve a ‘neurosurgery to induce the [relevant brain] state or a miracle’ (1999, p. 712). He seems to think that the addition of the proviso is innocuous because the counter-examples are always based on imaginary, sci-fi style scenarios that are far from reality.

However, Tye’s strategy is not compelling for two reasons. First of all, it is widely assumed that if empiricism is true then it is *necessarily* true. Thus formulating empiricism as a contingent truth, as Tye does, is simply a rejection of empiricism.<sup>7</sup> Second, Tye’s proviso is useless, particularly in the context of the argument from concept possession. For, even if the above scenarios, which contradict (4), are unrealistic *for us*, God can easily bring them about. For, as (1) says, God is necessarily omnipotent. Hence, He can do at least anything that it is logically possible to do.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, proponents of the argument cannot dismiss the counter-examples by adopting Tye’s ploy.

One might think that my objection to (4) is identical, in essence, to Alter’s third objection, because both of them are based on prevalent counter-examples to empiricism. However, there is a crucial difference between them. As we have seen, Alter tries to undermine the argument by stating that God can fully understand the concept *fear* without having a

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neurosurgery to induce the state or a miracle) and that not only disposes one to form a visual image of red in response to a range of cognitive tasks pertaining to red but also is brought to bear in discriminating the experience of red from other color experiences in a direct and immediate manner via introspection. (p. 712)

<sup>7</sup> See Stoljar (2002) for a similar point.

<sup>8</sup> It is controversial how to interpret this statement. According to one interpretation, God can do anything that it is logically possible for *Him* to do, but according to the other, God can do anything that it is logically possible for *anyone* to do. I do not commit myself to either interpretation in this chapter, because my argument is consistent with both of them. See Chapter 5 of this work for further discussion of this issue.

relevant experience if He creates false memory traces for himself. And I have argued that, if proponents of the argument are right, it is impossible for God to do that because there is no counterfactual situation in which God fears. By contrast, my objection does not say that *God* can possess the concept *fear* without having a relevant experience but merely that *someone*, like Kate, can do that, which is sufficient to falsify (4).

How, then, can proponents of the argument from concept possession block the counter-examples while retaining the argument? Notice that all the counter-examples to (4) concern *human beings'* full understanding of the concept *fear* but not *God's or diving beings'*. All they show is that human beings like Kate can in principle fully comprehend the concept *fear* without actually having relevant experiences. However, what is really relevant to the argument from concept possession is whether or not *God* can do that. Thus proponents of the argument might amend (4) by limiting its scope strictly to God as follows:

(4') *God* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if He has actually experienced fear.

(4') is no longer vulnerable to the above counter-examples. For the scenarios of Kate do not show that *God* can fully comprehend the concept *fear* without actually having a relevant experience. All it shows is that *human beings* like Kate can do that.

Can opponents of the argument from concept possession construct parallel counter-examples to (4') that involve, not human beings, but God? Unfortunately, they cannot. Those scenarios make sense only if an agent at issue has a physical body. As I have argued, this kind of scenario is based on the assumption that one's mental states are at least correlated with her/his physical states; in particular, brain states. However, according to



traditional Judaeo-Christian theism God is necessarily incorporeal.<sup>9</sup> That is, unlike us, God does not have relevant physical states at all. Take the third scenario, the case of false memory traces. This case is plausible because we can suppose that counterfactually, Kate has been in fear and that a neurosurgeon can, in principle, create the brain state that Kate would have been in had she been in fear by operating on her brain. However, again, opponents of the argument from concept possession are not allowed to make a parallel supposition that counterfactually, *God* has been in fear. For the argument is based on the very supposition that God cannot be in fear in any situation. Stipulating that there *is* a counterfactual situation in which God is in fear begs the question against the argument.

At this point one might argue that those scenarios are effective even if an agent at issue does not have a physical body. I have taken the moral of those scenarios to be as follows: one can fully comprehend such a concept as *fear* without having a relevant experience because all one needs to do is to be in particular physical states rather than to have a relevant experience. Thus I regard the scenarios as being effective only if an agent at issue has a physical body. However, one might draw a different moral from those scenarios. One might think that what they teach us is simply that ‘anything can cause anything’ (Lewis, 1988, 1997). Thus even if an agent at issue does not have a physical body, one might say, we can still establish parallel scenarios. While I do take this suggestion as a possibility I think that a parallel scenario for a non-physical agent like God is at least significantly weaker than the original scenarios in which an agent has a

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<sup>9</sup> One might argue that this is not a problem because, according to Christianity, God can incarnate as a human being. However, as I argued in Chapter 3, it is difficult to think that God’s incarnation is a *necessary condition* for His full understanding of concepts. Even if God can, in principle, fully understand relevant concepts by incarnating that cannot be the way He actually comes to know them.

physical body. The original scenarios clearly show *how* a physical agent can comprehend fully the concept *fear* without having a relevant experience. That is, of course, to be in physical states in which the agent would have been in had s/he be in fear. However, if an agent does not have a physical body then the parallel scenario does not show exactly how the agent can comprehend the concept fully without having a relevant experience. All it shows, if it shows anything, is that *somehow* the agent can comprehend the concept fully without having a relevant experience. However, stipulating that an agent can somehow comprehend the concept fully is equivalent to simply stipulating the negation of (4'), which begs the question against the argument from concept possession.

However, (4') raises a difficulty of its own, which is that there is no motivation to hold (4'). Original (4)—*viz.*, For any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has actually experienced fear—is at least *prima facie* plausible through our ordinary experiences. People often think that we fully understand what fear is only if we have actually been in a fearful situation. Plants or primitive animals, for example, do not understand it because, they say, these creatures cannot have such experiences. However, this motivation is lost in (4') because (4') is not relevant to *our* ordinary experiences. (4') is plausible only if (4) is true but here (4') is introduced *because of the failure of (4)*.

In sum, with (4) the argument from concept possession is unsound and with (4') it is simply unmotivated.

### 4.3 Amending (4)

In the last section we saw the following: On the one hand, although (4) is motivated by our ordinary experiences, it is subject to counter-examples. On the other hand, although (4') is not subject to counter-examples it is not motivated by our ordinary experiences.

Thus in order to improve on the argument from concept possession one needs to revise (4) so that it satisfies the following two conditions: (i) it blocks the counter-examples; (ii) it retains the original motivation.

Now I submit that the following thesis, which satisfies both (i) and (ii), can replace (4) and constitute the strongest form of the argument:

(4'') For any agent  $x$ ,  $x$  fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if  $x$  has an ability to experience fear.

Notice that, unlike (4) and (4'), (4'') does not represent concept empiricism because according to (4'') a necessary condition for fully comprehending *fear* is not to actually have a relevant experience but to have an *ability* to have a relevant experience. (4'') is not, unlike (4), undermined by the counter-examples because it is *consistent* with them. According to (4'') Kathy and her molecular duplicate, Kate can fully comprehend the concept *fear* not because they have experienced fear but because they have an ability to experience it. Moreover, unlike (4'), (4'') is also motivated to the same extent that (4) is motivated. While *we* can fully comprehend *fear*, plants or primitive animals, for instance, cannot because they do not have an ability to have a relevant experience.

In order to preserve the validity of the argument from concept possession (3)—*viz.*, Because of His necessary omnipotence God has not actually experienced fear—needs to be amended as follows:

(3') Because of His necessary omnipotence God does not have an ability to experience fear.

Proponents of the argument may contend that, given His omnipotence, it is not only the case that God has not experienced fear but also that, as (3) says, he does not have an *ability* to experience it.

Hence the strongest version of the argument from concept possession, which blocks effective counter-examples to concept empiricism while keeping its original motivation, may be schematised as follows:



(1) If God exists then necessarily, He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.

(2) If God does not fully comprehend the concept *fear* then He is not omniscient.

(3') Because of His necessary omnipotence God does not have an ability to experience fear.

(4'') For any agent  $x$ ,  $x$  fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if  $x$  has an ability to experience fear.

Therefore,

(5) God does not fully comprehend the concept *fear*. (from (3') and (4''))

Therefore,

(6) God is not omniscient. (from (2) and (5))

Therefore,

(7) God does not exist. ((1) and (6))

In the following I call the above the 'new argument from concept possession', or the 'new argument' for short.

#### 4.4 Objections to the New Argument

We have seen that (3') and (4'') constitute the most powerful version of the argument from concept possession. (3') and (4'') undercut the strong counter-examples to empiricism while retaining the motivation of the original argument. Is then the existence of God finally refuted by the new argument? Although it is not as easy as before I believe that we can still provide effective objections to the new argument, of which I shall now provide two. The first rejects (3') and the second rejects (4'').

*Rejecting (3')*

(3') says that given His necessary omnipotence, God does not have an ability to experience fear. But why does He not have the ability if He is necessarily omnipotent? Proponents of the new argument might answer as follows: God is necessarily omnipotent. Thus necessarily, there is no situation in which He actually fears. (Notice that the necessary part of necessary omnipotence plays a crucial role here. If God is merely contingently omnipotent then He can be in a situation in which He fears by, for example, temporality abandoning His omnipotence.) However, since God is *necessarily* omnipotent He does not, even in principle, fear in any possible situation. Therefore, He does not have an ability to experience fear. Opponents of the new argument might try to reject (3') by saying that it is self-contradictory. For, they might claim, if God *is* omnipotent then surely He has an ability to do anything, including an ability to experience fear. However, this objection is not successful. The point of (3) is that the very fact that God is omnipotent precludes from Him having an ability to be in fear. Thus, proponents of the new argument would say, if (3') is self-contradictory then that is because *the notion of divine omnipotence* is self-contradictory.

The above consideration seems to show that (3') is based on the following conditional analysis of an ability to fear:

(A) For any agent *x*, *x* has an ability to fear if and only if *x* would fear if *s* were in a certain situation (*e.g.* standing on the edge of a cliff).

According to (A), I have an ability to fear because I would fear if, for instance, I stood on the edge of a cliff. On the other hand, God does not have an ability to fear because He would not fear if He stood on the edge of a cliff. In the following, however, I demonstrate that (A) is false.

(A) is parallel to the so-called 'simple conditional analysis' of fragility (Lewis, 1997):

(F) For any  $x$ ,  $x$  is fragile if and only if  $x$  would break if  $x$  were dropped.

According (F), for instance, a vase is fragile because it would break if it were dropped. It is widely known, however, that the simple conditional analysis of fragility like (F) is fallacious. In particular, (F) is defeated by the following counter-examples<sup>10</sup>:

*First Counter-Example to (F):* A gold cup is not fragile. However it would break if God decided to shatter it when it is dropped. Therefore, it is not the case that a gold cup is fragile if and only if it would break if it were dropped.

*Second Counter-Example to (F):* A glass is fragile. However, it would not break if God decided to make it shatterproof when it is dropped. Therefore, it is not the case that a glass is fragile if and only if it would break if it were dropped.

*Third Counter-Example to (F):* Again, a glass is fragile. However, it would not break when it is dropped if it had an internal packing to stabilise it against hard knocks. Therefore, it is not the case that a glass is fragile if and only if it would break if it were dropped.

Since (F) is parallel to (A) we can defeat (A) with similar counter-examples:

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Johnston (1992), Lewis (1997).



*First Counter-Example to (A):* Bill does not have an ability to fear because congenitally he misses certain neurons in his brain that enable him to fear. However, he would fear when he stood on the edge of a cliff if a neuroscientist implanted silicon chips to his brain that are functionally isomorphic to the missing neurons. Therefore, it is not the case that Bill has an ability to fear if and only if he would fear if he stood on the edge of a cliff.

*Second Counter-Example to (A):* I have an ability to fear. However, I would not fear when I stood on the edge of a cliff if God decided to change my brain state so that I experience only happiness. Therefore, it is not the case that I have an ability to fear if and only if I would fear if I stood on the edge of a cliff.

*Third Counter-Example to (A):* Again, I have an ability to fear. However, I would not fear when I stood on the edge of a cliff if I acquired an extremely strong body by training myself. Therefore, it is not the case that I have an ability to fear if and only if I would fear if I stood on the edge of a cliff.

Since those scenarios are logically possible (A) is false. Therefore, (3') is false if it is based on (A).

Proponents of the argument from concept possession might claim that they can vindicate the new argument if they modify (A) appropriately so that it undercuts the counter-examples. For instance, they might modify (A) by restricting its scope as follows:

(A') *God* has an ability to fear if and only if He would fear if He were in a certain situation (*e.g.* standing on the edge of a cliff).

It is true that (A') is not undermined by the counter-examples to (A) because agents of the scenarios are always limited beings like us, but not divine beings like God. However, (A') inherits a familiar problem. That is, while (A') is not vulnerable to the counter-examples it is simply unmotivated. (A') is plausible only if (A) is true but here (A') is introduced *because of the failure of (A)*.

One might point out that metaphysicians have proposed more sophisticated conditional analyses of dispositions that are not vulnerable to the counter-examples. If we adopt a conditional analysis of ability that is parallel to the sophisticated conditional analyses of dispositions then, one might think, the new argument withstands. The most well-known and arguably the most sophisticated version of the conditional analysis of dispositions is that introduced by David Lewis (1997). Lewis's analysis is formulated as follows:

Something  $x$  is disposed at time  $t$  to give response  $r$  to stimulus  $s$  if and only if, for some intrinsic property  $B$  that  $x$  has at  $t$ , for some time  $t'$  after  $t$ , if  $x$  were to undergo stimulus  $s$  at time  $t$  and retain property  $B$  until  $t'$ ,  $s$  and  $x$ 's having of  $B$  would jointly be an  $x$ -complete cause of  $x$ 's giving response  $r$ . (p.149)

Lewis's analysis is quite complicated. However, we can simplify it safely by setting aside complications that are irrelevant to our current discussion. Focusing on fragility the core of Lewis's analysis is formulated as follows:

(F-L) For any  $x$ ,  $x$  is fragile if and only if  $x$  is intrinsically such that if it were dropped it would break.

(F-L) is not vulnerable to the counter-examples. (F-L) tells that a gold cup is not fragile even if it is true that it would break if God decided to shatter when it is dropped. For, according to (F-L), a gold cup is not intrinsically such that if it were dropped it would break. A glass is fragile even if it is true that it would not break if God decided to make it shatterproof or it had

internal packing to stabilise it against hard knocks because, according to (F-L), a glass is intrinsically such that if it were dropped it would break.

Now we can introduce the following dispositional analysis of ability which is parallel to (F-L):

(A-L) For any  $x$ ,  $x$  has an ability to fear if and only if  $x$  is intrinsically such that  $x$  would fear if  $x$  were in a certain situation (*e.g.* standing on the edge of a cliff).

(A-L) is not vulnerable to the counter-examples. Bill does not have an ability to fear even if it is true that he would fear if a neuroscientist implanted silicon chips to his brain. For, according to (A-L), he is not intrinsically such that he would fear if he stood on the edge of a cliff. Similarly, I do have an ability to fear even if it is true that I would not fear if God decided to change my brain states appropriately or if I acquired an extremely strong body by training myself. For, according to (A-L), I am intrinsically such that I would fear if I stood on the edge of a cliff.

Now the question is whether or not God can be said to have an ability to fear if we adopt (A-L). Consider (3') once more:

(3') Because of His necessary omnipotence God does not have an ability to experience fear.

Combining (A-L) with (3') we can derive the following:

(3'') Because of His necessary omnipotence God is not intrinsically such that He would fear if He were in a certain situation (*e.g.* standing on the edge of a cliff).

(3'') seems true.<sup>11</sup> When theists say that God is necessarily omnipotent they mean that God is intrinsically such that He is not powerless. This seems to be consistent with what (3'') says.

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<sup>11</sup> I accept (3'') for the sake of argument, but I do not commit myself to the analysis of an ability described as (A-L). I also do not examine whether or not (3') undermines God's



Hence, if proponents of the new argument from concept possession adopt a sophisticated conditional analysis of ability like (A-L) then we cannot easily undermine (3'). However, this still does not mean that the new argument is sound. In what follows I argue that (4'') should be rejected.

*Rejecting (4'')*

(4), the fourth premiss of the original argument from concept possession, states that for any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has actually experienced fear. In Chapter 3 we saw that Torin Alter (2002) attempts to reject this premiss by showing that God can indeed fully comprehend *fear* without actually experiencing it. In particular, Alter suggests that God can accomplish it by: (i) directly perceiving the content of human consciousness; (ii) being acquainted with components of fear and deducing what it would like to combine those components into states of fear; or (iii) creating false memory traces of relevant experiences. I argued, however, that even if Alter's suggestions successfully establish that *some beings* can fully comprehend *fear* without actually experiencing it, they do not establish that *God* can do that. For, God has various attributes that are incompatible with Alter's suggestions.

We may say the same thing with respect to the fourth premiss of the new argument, (4''). (4'') states that for any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has an ability to experience fear. If we apply Alter's strategy to (4''), then, again, while we might be able to establish that *some beings* can fully comprehend *fear* without having an ability to experience fear, we cannot establish that *God* can do that because of the attributes that He has. Hence, in order to undermine (4''), we need to seek

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omnipotence. For, as I noted in Chapters 1 and 3, the issue of how to define omnipotence, particularly *divine* omnipotence, is enormously controversial.

for another way for God to comprehend *fear* fully without having an ability to experience fear.

As I noted in Chapter 3, traditionally, philosophers of religion maintain that God's knowledge is non-discursive. For example, again, Thomas Aquinas (1997) writes, 'In the divine knowledge there is no discursiveness' (p. 416). But what exactly is non-discursive knowledge? Various views have been propounded as to the nature of non-discursive knowledge.

According to the first view, non-discursive knowledge is *non-propositional*. Thomas D. Sullivan (1991), for instance, writes, 'In a more contemporary idiom ... [Aquinas's contention is] that God's knowledge is non-propositional, *i.e.*, God does not form propositions to understand the world' (pp. 25-26). It is not entirely clear, however, what 'forming propositions' means. Richard Sorabji (1983) describes the idea more clearly without endorsing it. He writes, 'It is commonly held that non-discursive thinking does not involve thinking *that* something is the case. Instead it contemplates concepts in isolation from each other, and does not string them together in the way they are strung together in 'that'-clauses' (p. 137). According to this view, non-discursive knowledge is not a propositional attitude because it does not grasp the object of knowledge as a proposition. In other words, non-discursive knowledge is, as it is sometimes put, 'knowledge-of' rather than 'knowledge-that'.

According to the second view, non-discursive knowledge is *non-inferential*. Alvin Plantinga (1980), for example, holds that God's knowledge is propositional and non-inferential. He writes, 'Of course God neither needs nor uses logic; that is, he never comes to know a proposition A by inferring it from proposition B' (p. 144). God knows each proposition, this view says, independently without any inference or derivation.



According to the third view, non-discursive knowledge is *intuitive*. I think that this view captures the essence of non-discursive knowledge most accurately. Intuition is immediate intellectual insight which involves nothing, not even direct perception of an object.<sup>12</sup> The nature of intuition is nicely summarised by George Bealer (2002):<sup>13</sup>

Intuition is the source of all a priori knowledge—except, of course, for that which is merely stipulative. The use of intuition as evidence (reasons) is ubiquitous in our standard justificatory practices in the a priori disciplines ... . By intuitions here, we mean *seemings*: for you to have an intuition that A is just for it to *seem* to you that A. Of course, this kind of seeming is *intellectual*, not experiential—sensory, introspective, imaginative. Typically, the contents of intellectual and experiential seeming cannot overlap. You can intuit that there could be infinitely many marbles, but such a thing cannot seem experientially (say, imaginatively) to be so. Intuition and imagination are in this way distinct. Descartes was right, I believe, to distinguish sharply between imagination and understanding, especially intuitive understanding. (p. 73)

The view that non-discursive knowledge is intuitive entails that it is also non-inferential. Suppose that you intuitively know that there could be infinitely many marbles. Even though it might be possible for you to prove it and know it inferentially, the intuition itself does not require any inference. As Bealer says, intuitive knowledge is also non-experiential. Hence, even if there are some facts that are only known by intellectual

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<sup>12</sup> Descartes, Locke, Leibniz and Hume subscribe to a similar conception of intuition to mine but Kant does not. He uses the term 'intuition' to mean direct perception of an object, because he thinks that there are only sensory intuitions, and no non-sensory, intellectual intuitions.

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to Daniel Stoljar for bringing this passage to my attention.



intuition that does not follow that empiricism—at least versions of empiricism that I rejected in Chapter 3—is true. However, Bealer's claim that 'intuitions are seemings' is slightly misleading, especially when it comes to God's knowledge. For, while seemings imply fallibility, God's intuition is *infallible*.

I assume that intuitive knowledge is propositional for the following reasons. First, it is not clear whether or not there really is such a thing as non-propositional knowledge. Second, even if there is non-propositional knowledge, it is still unclear whether or not intellectual intuition itself is non-propositional.<sup>14</sup> Third, considering the possibility of non-propositional knowledge creates an unnecessary complication in the current discussion, given that I have formulated omniscience in terms of propositions, as is standard.

Consider again the new argument from concept possession. Again, (4'') states that for any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has an ability to experience fear. Referring to the third view on non-discursive knowledge I submit that (4'') is false because God could comprehend a proposition that tells what fear is intuitively. This is consistent with (3'), according to which God does not have an ability to experience fear, as well as the rejection of concept empiricism formulated in (4). God can just intuit what fear is accurately without possessing or exercising an ability to fear. Hence, He can grasp the concept *fear* and perhaps also other propositions on which the concept is imbedded before

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<sup>14</sup> For an argument against the idea that intuitive knowledge is non-propositional see, for instance, Sorabji (1983). Sorabji also denies the common claim that intuition as non-propositional thinking is to be found in Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus.

inferring anything from other propositions that He knows. Admittedly, my suggestion here is speculative,<sup>15</sup> but I can see no reason to reject it.

An interesting question here is whether or not God's intuitive knowledge of the concept *fear* has any ground. Two possible responses are in order. First, we might claim that it does not have any ground at all and that the nature of fear is just self-evident to Him. In other words, His intuitive knowledge of fear does not require any justification. Second, we might think, on the other hand, when God knows what fear is His intuition serves as a justificatory ground of His knowledge of the concept *fear*.<sup>16</sup> I leave both possibilities open.<sup>17</sup> Whichever turns out to be true (4'') is false and the new argument from concept possession fails.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See George I. Mavrodes (1988) and Peter Forrest (1994) for the nature of philosophical speculations.

<sup>16</sup> Notice that, in the passage quoted in the main text, Bealer (2002) seems to hold this position. He says that '[t]he use of intuition as evidence (reasons) is ubiquitous in our standard justificatory practices in the a priori disciplines' (p. 73).

<sup>17</sup> Another question that I do not attempt to answer here is whether or not God's knowledge is *entirely* intuitive. Some might think that God knows every proposition intuitively but other might think that God intuits only certain kinds of propositions.

<sup>18</sup> Here is another possible objection to (4''), which I do not discuss in detail in the main text: Again, (4'') says that for any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has an ability to experience fear. However, (4'') seems to have a gap. That is, there is no obvious connection between *x*'s full comprehension of the concept *fear* and *x*'s ability to experience fear. For while the former concerns *x*'s epistemic capacity the latter concerns *x*'s sensory or experiential capacity.

The only way to fill the gap is to argue as follows: Suppose that *x* does not have an ability to experience fear. Then *x* has not experienced fear and, consequently, *x* does not fully comprehend the concept *fear*.

However, this argument is unacceptable because it presupposes a form of concept empiricism, according to which in order to comprehend the concept *fear* fully one has to experience fear. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this thesis is untenable. Therefore, there is no reason to hold (4'').



#### 4.5 Conclusion

Principally, I have made the following two points in this chapter: (i) The standard version of the argument from concept possession is vulnerable to the traditional counter-examples to empiricism. (ii) Although the strongest version of the argument is not vulnerable to the same counter-examples it nevertheless fails to show that God cannot comprehend fully what fear is.

Should we conclude at this point that the argument from concept possession has no significance for traditional Judaeo-Christian theism? I think not.

As I contended at the beginning of Chapter 3, the thrust of the argument from concept possession is the following: *because of His very perfection God cannot be omniscient*. The argument says that God is not omniscient because His other divine attributes preclude Him from acquiring certain concepts that are necessary for having complete knowledge. However, curiously enough, what we have seen motivates the exact opposite to this: *because of His very perfection God can be omniscient*. For, as we have seen, in order to undermine the argument with the counter-examples we need to rely on the fact that God is necessarily perfect; in particular, that He is necessarily omnipotent. If God is not necessarily omnipotent then the argument from concept possession does successfully disprove the existence of God. This seems to show that the failure of the argument from concept possession indeed *illuminates* God's perfection.

In Chapters 2, 3 and 4 I discussed two anti-theist arguments that concern divine omniscience. To examine these arguments is, of course, an important task in itself. However, in the rest of this work I argue that my analyses of these arguments can be utilised when we evaluate quite different arguments in the philosophy of mind: Thomas Nagel's bat argument and Frank Jackson's knowledge argument, the two most well-



known arguments against the physicalist position on the mind-body problem.

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# **Part III**

## **Physical Omniscience: Puzzles in the Philosophy of Mind**

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## Chapter 5

### Physical Omniscience and Nagel's Bat Argument

#### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 I discussed Patrick Grim's argument from knowledge *de se* against the doctrine of divine omniscience. I argued that the argument was unsuccessful because it appealed to a necessary impossibility. In this chapter I discuss Thomas Nagel's bat argument against physicalism in the philosophy of mind. On the face of it, there is no connection between Grim's argument and Nagel's argument. I argue, however, that Nagel's argument fails for essentially the same reason that Grim's does.

In his famous paper, 'What Is It Like To Be a Bat?' (1974) Nagel illustrates the difficulty of characterising phenomenal consciousness in general. Nagel argues that in order for us to know the subjective nature of a bat's phenomenal experience we need to share a bat's 'point of view'. However, he contends, a bat's sensory apparatus is so fundamentally different from ours that it appears impossible for us to have that point of view. Therefore, he concludes, we seem unable to know 'what it is like to be a bat'.

While Nagel is not himself explicit about the implication of this line of reasoning in his 1974 paper, his argument has been taken as a strong



criticism of physicalism. In fact, many philosophers claim that Nagel's argument is, at its root, identical to Frank Jackson's knowledge argument (1982, 1986), which is specifically designed to defeat physicalism.<sup>1</sup> Some even call this style of anti-physicalist argument the 'Nagel-Jackson knowledge argument'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Nagel himself rejects physicalism in his later book (1986). In this chapter I hope to show that, whatever may be the verdict on Jackson's knowledge argument, Nagel's argument does not undermine physicalism.

As Daniel C. Dennett (1991) writes, the argument is regarded as '[t]he most widely cited and influential thought experiment about consciousness' (p. 441) and accordingly a number of objections have already been made to it.<sup>3</sup> However, I propose to undermine Nagel's argument in a novel way, which appeals to Thomas Aquinas's principle regarding the nature of divine omnipotence that I introduced in Chapter 2, which, at first sight, has no connection with the argument.

## 5.2 The Bat Argument

Nagel's bat argument (1974) is based on a prevalent worry among contemporary physicalists that the phenomenal aspect of the world might necessarily remain physically or objectively uncharacterised. Nagel claims, 'If physicalism is to be defended, the phenomenological features must themselves be given a physical account. But when we examine their

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, David Lewis (1983), Carolyn McMullen (1985), Derek Pereboom (1994). I discuss the knowledge argument in Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Torin Alter (2002), Pereboom (1994).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Kathleen Akins (1993a), Akins (1993b), Jeff E. Foss (1989), Foss (1993), Vinit Haksar (1981), John Kekes (1977), Lewis (1983), Lewis (1988), McMullen (1985), D. H. Mellor (1993), Lawrence Nemirow (1980) Nemirow (1990), B. R. Tilghman (1991), Robert Van Gulick (1985), Van Gulick (1993).

subjective character it seems that such a result is impossible' (p. 437).

In order to illustrate his claim Nagel introduces the famous example of a bat. A bat presents a range of activities and a sensory apparatus that are radically different from ours. In particular, it has a unique perceptual system: sonar. While bat sonar is 'clearly a form of perception', Nagel says, 'it is not similar in its operation to any sense that we possess' (p. 438). Nagel considers a bat, rather than a bird or a fish, as he explains it, for the following two reasons. First, since a bat is a mammal there is no doubt that it has consciousness, just as much as a dog or a chimpanzee. Second, a bat's extremely unusual sensory apparatus enables it to have its own, very special, point of view. Since 'every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view' (p. 437), Nagel argues, a human being like him, who cannot have a bat's point of view, is precluded from knowing what it is like to be a bat.

Nagel's bat argument may be schematised as follows:

*The Bat Argument*

(1) If  $x$  is not a bat-type creature, then  $x$  does not have a bat's point of view.

(2) If  $x$  does not have a bat's point of view, then  $x$  cannot know what it is like to be a bat.

Therefore,

(3) If  $x$  is not a bat-type creature, then  $x$  cannot know what it is like to be a bat.

(4) Nagel (a human being) is not a bat-type creature.

Therefore,

(5) Nagel (a human being) cannot know what it is like to be a bat.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> (4) is true of metaphysical necessity. However, the question is whether or not (1) and (2) are also true of metaphysical necessity. If (1) and (2) are both true of metaphysical necessity then (3) and (5) are also true of metaphysical necessity. On the other hand, if

By a bat-type creature, I mean a creature that is reasonably similar to a bat with respect to its perceptual apparatus. Roughly speaking, if a creature is bat-type, it can have a bat's point of view and hence it is in a position to know what it is like to be a bat.<sup>5</sup> However, since Nagel is not a bat-type creature he cannot have a bat's point of view and accordingly he is not in a position to know what it is like to be a bat.

### 5.3 Objections to the Bat Argument

Notice that so far, the bat argument does not say anything about the status of physicalism. It says only that Nagel (a human being) cannot know what it is like to be a bat. Hence, in order to derive the falsity of physicalism from the bat argument, more premisses are needed, as I explain in detail in the next section. For the present, I wish to consider two typical objections to the bat argument itself, both of which say that there is something wrong with it because we *can* know what it is like to be a bat. Nagel's replies to those objections clarify what exactly he means by the phrase 'what it is like to be a bat'. We then see that knowing what it is like to be a bat is much harder than people tend to think.

#### *Objection 1: Imagination / Simulation*

One might object to Nagel's argument by stating that if we have great powers of imagination, or a sophisticated simulation system, it is perfectly

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either (1) or (2) is not true of metaphysical necessity, but say, only nomological necessity, then (3) and (5) are not guaranteed to be true of metaphysical necessity. Throughout this chapter, I present my argument so that it does not rely on the status of these necessities. However, if either (1) or (2) is not true of necessity at all, then (3) and (5) are not guaranteed to be true of necessity either. In this case my argument *appears* to be in trouble. I come back to this point in Section 5.8.

<sup>5</sup> Whether or not, apart from a bat itself, there really is such a creature is not our concern here.



possible for us to know what it is like to be a bat without being a bat-type creature. That is, according to this objection, (3) is false. Surely, we cannot know what it is like to be a bat just by reading textbooks on physics or biology. However, the objection says, we *can* know it by carefully imagining or simulating how a bat, for example, flies and detects the location of its target; just as one, who has never controlled an airplane, can know what it is like to be a pilot by using a well-designed flight simulator. However, this objection is not to the point, for imagination or simulation plays no part in what Nagel means by what it is like to be a bat:

In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for *me* to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resource of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task. I cannot perform it either by imagining additions to my present experience, or by imagining some combination of additions, subtractions, and modifications.

To the extent that I could look and behave like a wasp or a bat without changing my fundamental structure, my experiences would not be anything like the experiences of those animals. (1974, p. 439)

The above passage suggests that what Nagel intends is the following:

(6) Nagel (a human being) knows what it is like for a bat to be a bat.<sup>6</sup>

However, if Nagel imagines or simulates being a bat he can bring about only the following:

(7) Nagel (a human being) knows what it is like for a human being to behave as a bat behaves.

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<sup>6</sup> In what follows, I use phrases 'what it is like to be a bat' and 'what it is like for a bat to be a bat' interchangeably.

(7) is clearly different from (6). And the bat argument says that (6) is impossible to bring about.

*Objection 2: Transformation / Transplant*

One might also object to Nagel's argument by claiming that it is possible for Nagel to know what it is like to be a bat by transforming himself into a bat or transplanting a bat's neurophysiological system into his body. That is, according to this objection, again, (3) is false. What this objection suggests might sound unrealistic, but we may at least imagine it as a possibility. However, Nagel says, this is not what he intends either:

[I]t is doubtful that any meaning can be attached to the supposition that I should possess the internal neurophysiological constitution of a bat. Even if I could by gradual degrees be transformed into a bat, nothing in my present constitution enables me to imagine what the experience of such a future stage of myself thus metamorphosed would be like. The best evidence would come from the experience of bats, if we only knew what they were like. (1974, p. 439)

If Nagel transforms himself into a bat then he may bring about at most the following:

(8) Nagel (a bat) knows what it is like for a bat to be a bat.

Again, this is different from what he intends:

(6) Nagel (a human being) knows what it is like for a bat to be a bat.<sup>7</sup>

Colin McGinn (1999) suggests that in order to bring about what Nagel wants '[w]e would have to become half bat—bat men, literally' (p. 54). However, even if we grant that Nagel can really become a batman and that

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<sup>7</sup> If Nagel can transform from a human being into a bat and then into a human being again, while preserving his memory, then perhaps Nagel, as a human being, can know what it is like for a bat to be a bat; but I take it that Nagel does not regard that as a possibility.

a batman is reasonably similar to a bat it would still not suffice. For by being a batman Nagel can bring about only the following:

(9) Nagel (a batman) knows what it is like for a bat to be a bat.

Although (9) might be slightly closer to what Nagel intends it is still far from satisfactory. For what he intends is not that a half-bat, half-human monster knows what it is like for a bat to be a bat. What he really wants is that he, as a normal human being, knows what it is like for a bat to be a bat.

A batman is like a bat that is as intelligent as a human being. If there were such a being then perhaps it could talk about what it is like to be a bat in a human language. However, Nagel's complaint is not that there is not such a creature. It is rather that we are not equipped with a bat's sensory system and that this fact precludes us, *as regular human beings*, from knowing the subjective nature of a bat's phenomenal experience.

#### 5.4 The Anti-Physicalist Argument

We have seen that Nagel shows vividly what a 'fundamentally *alien* form of life' (p. 438) a bat is and how hard it is for us to have a bat's point of view. Thus, we may say that Nagel's bat argument is successful in showing the difficulty for a human being, of knowing what it is like to be a bat. However, it is not at all clear how this difficulty could threaten physicalism.

Nagel's ultimate goal is to undermine physicalism by showing the difficulty of giving a purely physical characterisation of what it is like to be a bat. However, the bat argument shows only that it is hard to know what it is like to be a bat *in general*. Knowing what it is like to be a bat in general is not the same as knowing a physical characterisation of what it is like to be a bat. For it might be possible that we manage to know what it is like to be a bat in general *without* being able to characterise it in physical terms. I claim that this might be possible because *we do know what it is*



*like to be a human being without being able to characterise it in physical terms.* Thus, there is a gap between the difficulty of knowing what it is like to be a bat in general, which the bat argument elaborately shows, and the difficulty of knowing a purely physical characterisation of what it is like to be a bat, which Nagel really needs to show. In order to fill this gap, Nagel is required to add more premisses to the bat argument.

Regarding what physicalism needs to accomplish, Nagel states as follows:

While an account of the physical basis of mind must explain many things, this appears to be the most difficult. It is impossible to exclude the phenomenological features of experience from a reduction in the same way that one excludes the phenomenal features of an ordinary substance from a physical or chemical reduction of it—namely, by explaining them as effects on the minds of human observers. If physicalism is to be defended, the phenomenological features must themselves be given a physical account. (1974, p. 437)

Nagel claims that physicalism has to, if it is true at all, provide complete explanation of not only physical, chemical and biological but also phenomenological features of the world. It follows that if physicalism is true then one who knows everything physical knows everything simpliciter. Applying this claim to the bat case we get the following:

(10) If physicalism is true then  $x$ , who knows everything physical about bats, knows everything about bats.

An addition of the following innocuous statement enables Nagel to derive the falsity of physicalism:

(11) If  $x$  knows everything about bats then  $x$  knows what it is like to be a bat.

In order to simplify (10) and (11) it will be useful to introduce our

own terminology. Recall the concept of omniscience that I formulated in Chapter 1:

For any  $x$  and for any proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is omniscient if and only if, if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

This concept of omniscience may rightly be called 'omniscience simpliciter' because it subsumes absolutely all true propositions. It is also possible for one to be omniscient *with respect to a specific kind of proposition*. For instance, we can define omniscience with respect to physical propositions—call it 'physical omniscience'—as follows:<sup>8</sup>

(12) For any  $x$  and for any physical proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is physically omniscient if and only if, if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

By 'physical propositions' I mean (i) propositions about events, entities and properties in the world that have basic physical entities and properties as their ultimate constituents and (ii) propositions that are entailed *a priori* by such propositions. Although it is highly controversial whether the relevant entailment is only *a priori* I accept it for the sake of argument because both Nagel and Jackson, the proponents of the anti-physicalist arguments that I discuss in this work, accept it. Using this terminology, we may rephrase (10) and (11) as follows:

(10') If physicalism is true, then if  $x$  is physically omniscient about bats then  $x$  is omniscient about bats.

(11') If  $x$  is omniscient about bats, then  $x$  knows what it is like to be a bat.

Now consider a particular example. Suppose that Nagel is physically omniscient about bats. If physicalism is true, then, according to (10'), he is

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<sup>8</sup> Authoritative self-knowledge is construed as another form of omniscience with respect to a specific kind of proposition. For, as I noted in Chapter 1, the doctrine of authoritative self-knowledge is often regarded as claiming that we are omniscient with respect to propositions about our own mental states.

omniscient about bats. And if he is omniscient about bats, according to (11), then he knows what it is like to be a bat. However, as the bat argument shows, he cannot know what it is like to be a bat, that is, he cannot be omniscient about a bat, simply because he is not a bat-type creature. It follows that Nagel, who is physically omniscient about bats, is not indeed omniscient about bats and accordingly that physicalism is false.<sup>9</sup> This line of reasoning can be schematised as follows:

*The Anti-Physicalist Argument*

(13) If physicalism is true then Nagel, who is physically omniscient about bats, is omniscient about bats.

(14) If Nagel is omniscient about bats then he knows what it is like to be a bat.

(15) Nagel cannot know what it is like to be a bat. (Conclusion of the bat argument)

Therefore,

(16) Nagel is not omniscient about bats.

Therefore,

(17) Physicalism is false.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> One might also expand Nagel's bat argument in the following way: the bat argument shows that we cannot know what it is like to be a bat. Therefore, we cannot provide a complete physical explanation of what it is like to be a bat, for we do not know what needs to be explained in the first place! In this case, however, Nagel's argument has an impact only on the epistemological status of physicalism. Thus, it entails what we may call mysterianism, according to which phenomenal consciousness is not ontologically but only epistemologically distinct from the physical. However, Nagel himself (1974) argues that he is 'not raising [an] epistemological problem' with his argument (p. 442).

<sup>10</sup> (15) says that Nagel *cannot* know what it is like to be a bat, but in order to derive the conclusion of the anti-physicalist argument, (17), Nagel needs only the weaker claim that Nagel *does not* know what it is like to be a bat. That is, (15), which is the conclusion of the bat argument, is unnecessarily strong. I believe that this is what makes his anti-



The most popular response to the above anti-physicalist argument is to reject (13) by appealing to so-called *a posteriori* physicalism. According to this response, even if physicalism is true it is perfectly possible that Nagel, who knows everything physical about bats, does not know everything phenomenal about bats. For, there is no *a priori* derivation from physical facts (about bats) to phenomenal facts (about bats). I do not examine this response here<sup>11</sup> because what I try to show in the following entails that even if *a posteriori* physicalism is false, Nagel's argument does not undermine physicalism.

In order to defeat Nagel's argument I use the second principle introduced in Chapter 2 of this work, a principle about omnipotence. I claim that Nagel's argument is similar to Grim's because it, also, appeals to a necessary impossibility.

### 5.5 The Thomistic Principle

According to Judaeo-Christian theism, God is necessarily omnipotent. Thus, roughly speaking, He is able to do anything.<sup>12</sup> However, as I noted in Chapter 2, Aquinas says that 'anything that implies a contradiction does not fall under God's omnipotence' (1967, p. 167). He writes:

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physicalist argument problematic. Those who are familiar with Jackson's knowledge argument should notice that it uses only a claim which corresponds to the weaker one.

<sup>11</sup> For issues of *a posteriori* physicalism see, for instance, Daniel Stoljar (2000).

<sup>12</sup> Since the issue of defining omnipotence is enormously controversial, I do not attempt to provide a precise definition here. I try to minimise the dependence of my argument on a particular definition of omnipotence. For the debate on how to define omnipotence see Richard La Croix (1978), Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso (1983), Peter Geach (1973), Geach (1977), Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz (1980), Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1984), Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1988) Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002), George I. Mavrodes (1977), Wes Morriston (2001b), Bruce R. Reichenbach (1980), Richard Swinburne (1973), Erik J. Wielenberg (2000), Edward Wierenga (1983).

[God] cannot make one and the same thing to be and not to be; He cannot make contradictories to exist simultaneously. Contradiction, moreover, is implied in contraries and privative opposites: to be white and black is to be white and not white; to be seeing and blind is to be seeing and not seeing. For the same reason, God is unable to make opposites exist in the same subject at the same time and in the same respect. (1975, p. 8)

So, for example, according to Aquinas, the fact that God cannot draw a square circle or make a married bachelor does not entail that God is not omnipotent. Using somewhat contemporary terminology, in Chapter 2 I formulated Aquinas's principle—call it the 'Thomistic Principle'—as follows:

Thomistic Principle (TP): The fact that God does not have a power to do what it is necessarily impossible to do does not undermine His omnipotence.

Ever since Aquinas, (TP) has been used only to defend the omnipotence of God. However, I believe, the idea behind (TP) is more general and the principle may be modified so as to be applicable to other sorts of argument as well. I demonstrate this in the next section.

### 5.6 The Revised Thomistic Principle

The applicability of (TP) may be widened significantly if we reformulate it according to the following three points.

First, as I stated in Chapter 2, when Aquinas formulated (TP) he was, of course, not aware of Kripke's distinction between the necessary *a priori* and the necessary *a posteriori* (Kripke, 1972). Thus Aquinas had only necessary *a priori* impossibilities in mind, impossibilities such as drawing a square circle or creating a married bachelor. However, (TP) must be applied to *all* necessary impossibilities, both *a priori* and *a posteriori*.

Hence, the omnipotence of God is not undermined even though he cannot perform such necessary *a posteriori* impossibilities as separating water from H<sub>2</sub>O or Hesperus from Phosphorus.

Second, (TP) may be more clearly formulated by introducing the notions of 'pseudo tasks' and 'real tasks'. It is necessarily impossible to perform pseudo tasks, while it is possible to perform real tasks. Drawing upon the distinction appealed to above, concerning *a priori* and *a posteriori* impossibilities, it may be either *a priori*, or *a posteriori*, impossible to perform any given pseudo task. While arguably an omnipotent God is able to perform all real tasks, such as drawing a circle or baking a chocolate cake, He does not have to be able to perform, according to (TP), any kind of pseudo task, such as drawing a square circle or creating a chocolate cake that is Socrates at the same time, for they are not, in fact, tasks at all!<sup>13</sup>

Third, the basic idea in Aquinas's principle is relevant not only to God but also to anyone. For, if an omnipotent God does not have to be able to perform a pseudo task, then surely no one has to be able to perform a pseudo task. Hence, for example, my failure to draw a circle in a geometry examination indicates my lack of geometrical skill, but my—or anyone's—failure to draw a square circle does not indicate any such lack (Mavrodes, 1963, p. 221); for, again, it is not merely contingently, but

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Swinburne (1977) makes a similar point in terms of action: 'A logically impossible action is not an action. It is what is described by a form of words which purport to describe an action but do not describe anything which it is coherent to suppose could be done.' (p. 231). It is interesting to note that pseudo tasks are not always easily distinguishable from real tasks. For instance, the Athenian and Cyzician schools were trying to solve the duplication of a cube, the trisection of an angle and the squaring a circle. However, all of them turned out to be necessarily insoluble. That is, while they had believed (or hoped) that they could solve them, solving these problems was found to be a pseudo task. See C. Anthony Anderson (1984), p. 113.



necessarily impossible to do.

Taking the above three points into consideration, (TP) can be revised as follows:

Revised Thomistic Principle (RTP): For any agent  $x$ , the fact that  $x$  does not have a power to perform a pseudo task does not entail  $x$ 's lack of power.

I now apply (RTP) to Nagel's argument.

### 5.7 Applying the Revised Thomistic Principle

With (RTP) in mind, consider the bat argument again.

(1) If  $x$  is not a bat-type creature, then  $x$  does not have a bat's point of view.

(2) If  $x$  does not have a bat's point of view, then  $x$  cannot know what it is like to be a bat.

Therefore,

(3) If  $x$  is not a bat-type creature, then  $x$  cannot know what it is like to be a bat.

(4) Nagel (a human being) is not a bat-type creature.

Therefore,

(5) Nagel (a human being) cannot know what it is like to be a bat.

According to this argument, Nagel (a human being) cannot know what it is like to be a bat simply because he is not a bat-type creature. However, suppose, for the sake of argument, that Nagel (a human being) does have a miraculous power to know what it is like to be a bat. Then the following is true:

(18) Nagel (a human being) can know what it is like to be a bat.

(3) is logically equivalent to the following:

(19) If  $x$  can know what it is like to be a bat, then  $x$  is a bat-type creature.

Applying (19) to (18) we can derive:

(20) Nagel (a human being) is a bat-type creature.

However, (20) is false because, as Nagel emphasises, a human being is fundamentally different from a bat-type creature. Furthermore, (20) is not merely contingently, but *necessarily* false.<sup>14</sup> Thus, by proposing his argument Nagel requires physicalism to place him in a position to perform a pseudo task, namely, being a bat-type creature while being a non-bat-type creature. Notice that this is very similar to the result of Grim's argument from knowledge *de se* that I introduced in Chapter 2 of this work. Grim says that God is not omniscient because He cannot know what I know in knowing that *I* am making a mess. However, I argued that if Grim's assumptions were right, then God's knowing what I know in knowing that *I* am making a mess would entail that God is me, which is, just like (20), necessarily false.

Now it is clear that Nagel's anti-physicalist argument is parallel to a typical, unsuccessful argument against Judaeo-Christian theism:

*The Anti-Theist Argument*

(21) If Judaeo-Christian theism is true then God is omnipotent.

(22) If God is omnipotent then God can draw a square circle.

(23) God cannot draw a square circle.

Therefore,

(24) God is not omnipotent.

Therefore,

(25) Judaeo-Christian theism is false.

The contrapositive of (21) says that if God cannot draw a square circle then God is not omnipotent. However, (RTP) says that even if God cannot perform a pseudo task like drawing a square circle that does not entail His

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<sup>14</sup> Here I simply mean that the proposition expressed by (20) is necessarily false.

lack of power. Therefore, given (RTP), the anti-theist argument is unsuccessful. Judaeo-Christian theism is not undermined just by the fact that God cannot perform a pseudo task.

The following is Nagel's anti-physicalist argument that we have discussed:

(13) If physicalism is true then Nagel, who is physically omniscient about bats, is omniscient about bats.

(14) If Nagel is omniscient about bats then he knows what it is like to be a bat.

(15) Nagel cannot know what it is like to be a bat. (Conclusion of the bat argument)

Therefore,

(16) Nagel is not omniscient about bats.

Therefore,

(17) Physicalism is false.

Just as the argument against Judaeo-Christian theism is unsuccessful, the above argument against physicalism is unsuccessful. Given that an acquisition of knowledge requires one to have particular powers—epistemic powers, as I called them in Chapter 2—Nagel, who is omniscient about bats, is regarded as omnipotent with respect to knowing about bats. The contrapositive of (14) says that if Nagel does not know what it is like to be a bat then he is not omniscient about bats. However, (RTP) says that even if Nagel cannot perform a pseudo task that does not entail his lack of power. Hence, the fact that Nagel cannot perform such a pseudo task as knowing what it is like to be a bat does not undermine Nagel's omnipotence with respect to knowing about bats. Therefore, given (RTP), the argument is unsuccessful. Physicalism is not undermined just by the fact that Nagel cannot perform a pseudo task.

Notice that if Nagel's bat argument is cogent then God, who is not a



bat-type creature, cannot know what it is like to be a bat either.<sup>15</sup> And, according to (TP), God does not have to be able to do it in order to be omnipotent. Why, then, do human beings have to be able to do what even God does not have to be able to do in order only to defend physicalism?

### 5.8 Possible Objections

I now examine three possible objections to my argument.

#### *Objection A: The McEar Problem*

One might try to undermine my argument by rejecting (TP), on which (RTP) is based, on the grounds that it is unacceptable because it entails that a being that is obviously not omnipotent *is* omnipotent. This is the infamous 'McEar problem'. Borrowing Bruce Reichenbach's refinement (1980) of Alvin Plantinga's example (1967), imagine an extraordinary creature called Mr. McEar. Mr. McEar is a being such that *necessarily* he is only capable of scratching his left ear. If (TP) is correct then, according to this objection, one cannot undermine the omnipotence of Mr. McEar because he can do *everything* except what it is necessarily impossible for him to do. 'Everything' is, of course, to scratch his left ear.

However, as many philosophers argue, even if (TP) is true, this absurdity does not follow. For, there is no possible world in which Mr. McEar exists. Edward Wierenga (1989), for example, contends as follows:

Necessarily, scratching one's ear takes time. Accordingly, it is necessary that there are infinitely many intervals of time *t* such that

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<sup>15</sup> One might argue that God *can* know what it is like to be a bat if He incarnates as a bat. However, this results in the trouble that we discussed in Section 5.3. That is, by incarnating as a bat, God can bring about only the following: God (*as a bat*) can know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. This is crucially different from the claim that God (*as God*, that is, *as a non-bat-type being*) knows what it is like for a bat to be a bat.

anyone who is able to scratch his ear is also able to scratch his ear throughout *t*. So if McEar is able to scratch his ear, he is able to do infinitely many things. Moreover, if McEar can scratch his ear, he must be able to do so by moving some other part of his body, perhaps his arm, in the appropriate way. But then McEar can also move his arm, contract his muscles, disturb adjacent air molecules, and do countless other things as well. So it does not seem possible that there be such a being as McEar. (p. 29)

Wierenga is correct in saying that it is metaphysically impossible for Mr. McEar to exist, given that the task of scratching his ear itself involves complicated procedures. However, at the same time, it is not at all obvious that there can never be a primitive being that is necessarily able to perform only one very simple task or no task at all. Suppose that this sort of being *is* possible. Does it then immediately follow from (TP) that this being is omnipotent?<sup>16</sup>

(TP) says that the fact that God does not have a power to do what it is necessarily impossible to do does not undermine His omnipotence. As I

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso (1983, n. 4) make the following interesting historical remarks:

To best of our knowledge, McEar makes his first contemporary appearance in Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, 1967), pp. 168-73. But a similar difficulty was recognized at least as early, as the later Middle Ages. For instance, the following note was added by an anonymous writer to one of the manuscripts of Ockham's *Ordinatio* I, distinction 42: "Nor is a being said to be omnipotent because he can do all things which are possible for him to do ... since it would follow that a minimally powerful being is omnipotent. For suppose that Socrates performs one action and is not capable of performing any others. Then one argues as follows: 'he is performing every action which it is possible for him to perform, therefore, he is omnipotent'" (See Etzkorn and Kelly, 1979, p. 611).

It is worthy of note that the formulation of the McEar problem in the Middle Ages is much less susceptible to criticism than the modern formulation.

stated earlier, if (TP) is true then it should be applied to other beings, like Mr. McEar and us, as well. Thus (TP) can be generalised as follows:

(TP') For any agent  $x$ , the fact that  $x$  does not have a power to do what it is necessarily impossible to do does not undermine  $x$ 's omnipotence.

Now there are two possible interpretations of (TP'):

(TP'1) For any agent  $x$ , the fact that  $x$  does not have a power to do what it is necessarily impossible *for  $x$*  to do does not undermine  $x$ 's omnipotence.

(TP'2) For any agent  $x$ , the fact that  $x$  does not have a power to do what it is necessarily impossible *for anyone* to do does not undermine  $x$ 's omnipotence.

If we adopt (TP'1), then a primitive being, called Ms. X, who can necessarily perform only one very simple task,  $k$ , is indeed omnipotent. She can only perform  $k$  and there are many other tasks, such that others can perform them but Ms. X cannot. Nevertheless, according to (TP'1), this fact does not undermine her omnipotence because they are necessarily impossible *for her* to perform. However, (TP'1) does not seem compelling. As we saw earlier, the motivation for holding (TP) is to block an argument against omnipotence that appeals to, for instance, God's inability to draw a square circle. God does not have to be able to do it precisely because it is what *no one can do*, even in principle. Thus, the tasks to which (TP') applies are those that are necessarily impossible, not just for a particular being, but for any being at all, to perform. Therefore, (TP'2) seems to be the correct interpretation of (TP'), and if we adopt (TP'2), then clearly, neither Mr. McEar nor Ms. X, who cannot do many things that others can do, is regarded as omnipotent.

There is, however, an apparent drawback to my argument. Judaeo-Christian philosophers often prefer (TP'1) to (TP'2) because if they accept



(TP'1) they can show that even if God cannot, for example, kill someone or break a promise His omnipotence is not thereby undermined. For, according to them, given His necessary omnibenevolence, killing someone or breaking a promise is necessarily impossible *for Him* to do.<sup>17</sup> However, this line of reasoning is costly because it conflicts with our commonsense notion of power.

Suppose that necessarily Ms. X can perform only task *k1* and that necessarily Dr. Y can perform tasks *k1* and *k2* but nothing else. In this case, it is natural to claim that Dr. Y is more powerful than Ms. X because, numerically, Dr. Y has more abilities than Ms. X. However, if we adopt (TP'1), Ms. X and Dr. Y are both omnipotent because both of them can do everything except what is necessarily impossible for them to do. And this entails the absurdity that, even though Dr. Y can perform numerically more tasks than Ms. X, they are as powerful as each other!<sup>18</sup> The upshot is that it seems better to think that (RTP) is based not on (TP'1), but on (TP'2), which does not entail that a being that is obviously non-omnipotent is omnipotent.

At this point, one might claim that if (TP'2) is the correct interpretation (RTP) cannot be applied to Nagel's anti-physicalist

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<sup>17</sup> Some theists argue that they do not have to give up omnibenevolence of God even if they hold (TP'2). For, they say, the general thrust of (TP) is directed only to metaphysical necessity and it is not metaphysically, but only morally, impossible for God to kill someone. That is, God *can* kill someone, but He just does not.

<sup>18</sup> An interesting question here is which should be regarded as being more powerful if tasks that they can perform are not neatly overlapping. Suppose, for example, that Dr. Y can calculate  $1+2$ ,  $0.9999+2$  and  $0.99999+2$ . Suppose further that Ms. X can calculate  $1+2$  and build a house. One might claim that although Dr. Y can perform numerically more tasks than Ms. X, Dr. Y is less powerful than Ms. X. For, one might say, Ms. Y's ability is more practical or more useful. For the sake of simplicity, I set aside this issue in the main text.

argument. For, while knowing what it is like to be a bat is necessarily impossible *for a human being*, it is possible *for a bat*. I now examine this objection.

*Objection B: Is It Really a Pseudo Task?*

One might try to reject my argument by claiming that Nagel's bat argument does not involve a pseudo task. Drawing a square circle or making a married bachelor are clearly pseudo tasks because no one can perform them. However, according to this objection, knowing what it is like to be a bat is not a pseudo task because, by definition, at least a bat can perform it. And if it is not a pseudo task, then I cannot undermine Nagel's argument by using (RTP).

However, this objection is based on a misunderstanding. I have not claimed that knowing what it is like to be a bat is a pseudo task. As Nagel himself allows, not only a bat, but even we could know what it is like to be a bat if we transformed ourselves into bats or transplanted bats' neural system into our bodies. My complaint is rather that, given the premisses of Nagel's bat argument, bringing about the following is a pseudo task:

(6) Nagel (a human being) knows what it is like for a bat to be a bat. If the premisses of the bat argument are true, in order for Nagel to bring about (6) he has to do the following two things at the same time: be a human being and know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. If Nagel fails to do either of them, he fails to bring about (6). However, while being a human being entails being a *non-bat-type* creature, knowing what it is like for a bat to be a bat requires, if Nagel is right, being a *bat-type* creature. Hence, in order to bring about (6) Nagel has, essentially, to do the following two things at the same time: *be a non-bat-type creature and be a bat-type creature*. This is as necessarily impossible as, say, being married and being a bachelor at the same time or being a chocolate cake and being



Socrates at the same time. Although knowing what it is like to be a bat is possible for a bat and for us, knowing what it is like to be a bat while being a non-bat-type creature is clearly necessarily impossible, *even for a bat*.

*Objection C: This is Not Nagel's Argument*

Finally, one might claim that my argument is unacceptable because I have not correctly interpreted Nagel's bat argument. According to this objection, Nagel's argument does not involve a pseudo task because he does not maintain that it is *necessarily impossible* for a non-bat-type creature to know what it is like to be a bat. If it is not necessarily impossible, then, contrary to my supposition, bringing about (6) is not indeed a pseudo task.

It is true that Nagel does not explicitly claim that it is necessarily impossible for a non-bat-type creature to know what it is like to be a bat, but if Nagel does not endorse the claim, his entire argument will be trivial.

I have taken the intermediate conclusion of Nagel's bat argument to be the following:

(3) If  $x$  is not a bat-type creature, then  $x$  cannot know what it is like to be a bat.

However, according to the objection under consideration, the real intermediate conclusion is as follows:

(3') If  $x$  is not a bat-type creature, then it is *difficult* for  $x$  to know what it is like to be a bat.

But, after all, who would deny that it is *difficult* for a non-bat-type creature like us to know what it is like to be a bat? (3') is so weak that it fails to show anything about the cogency or otherwise of physicalism and its alternatives. Given (3') physicalists would hope that a future theoretical revolution within physicalism will enable us to know what it is like to be a



bat.<sup>19</sup> And, by the same token, dualists, would claim that it is not physicalism but dualism that will enable us to know what it is like to be a bat. Further, some other anti-physicalists, such as mysterians, would claim that while it is possible in principle for *some* non-bat creatures to know what it is like to be a bat, at least *we* are cognitively bounded with respect to this knowledge.

Nagel (1974) summarises his main claim as follows: 'physicalism is a position we cannot understand because we do not at present have any conception of how it might be true' (p. 176). However, this conclusion cannot be derived from (3') without presupposing that physicalism is true. And, as I have stated, (3') is completely silent about the cogency or otherwise of physicalism. All it says is that it is *difficult* for us to know what it is like to be a bat, a thesis which does not have any significant impact on physicalism or its alternatives. Hence, if (3') is the conclusion then, while it does not involve a pseudo task, Nagel's bat argument turns out to be trivial.

## 5.9 Conclusion

Most philosophers have taken it for granted that Nagel's argument raises an important issue for physicalism. However, I have maintained that there is a fundamental problem with his argument, which is that he tries to derive an apparent difficulty for physicalism by appealing to a necessary

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<sup>19</sup> In fact, Nagel himself (1974) is inclined to bet on this possibility. He argues that perhaps contemporary physicalists' hypothesis that a mental event is a physical event is analogous to the pre-Socratics' hypothesis that matter is energy (p. 447). Just as pre-Socratic philosophers needed a concept that enabled them to understand how matter could ever be energy, according to Nagel, perhaps we need a concept that enables us to understand how a bat's phenomenal experience can ever be physical. But as I mentioned earlier, Nagel rejects physicalism in his later book (1986).

impossibility. Whether or not we can characterise the subjective nature of a bat's phenomenal experience in physical terms is a genuine philosophical question, one that might lead to a strong objection to physicalism. But the necessary impossibility of our knowing what it is like to be a bat, while being ourselves, does not count against the case for physicalism.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from their names(!), there is no obvious connection between Thomas Nagel's philosophy of mind and Thomas Aquinas's philosophy of religion. However, as I have argued, Aquinas's principle regarding divine omnipotence provides an effective argument against Nagel's challenge to physicalism.

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<sup>20</sup> As I noted in the main text many philosophers contend that Nagel's argument is, at its root, identical to Jackson's knowledge argument. However, Jackson (1982) clearly distinguishes his argument from Nagel's by taking a similar line of reasoning to mine:

When I complained that all the physical knowledge about Fred was not enough to tell us what his special colour experience was like, I was not complaining that we weren't finding out what it is like to *be* Fred. I was complaining that there is something *about* his experience, a property of it, of which we were left ignorant. And if and when we come to know what this property is we still will not know what it is like to *be* Fred, but we will know more about him. No amount of knowledge about Fred, be it physical or not, amounts to knowledge "from the inside" concerning Fred. We are not Fred. There is thus a whole set of items of knowledge expressed by forms of words like 'that it is *I myself* who is ...' which Fred has and we simply cannot have because we are not him. (p. 132)

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## **Chapter 6**

### **Physical Omniscience and Jackson's Knowledge Argument (1)**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

I discussed Thomas Nagel's bat argument against physicalism in Chapter 5. In the remainder of this work I discuss another well-known argument against physicalism: Frank Jackson's knowledge argument.

The knowledge argument (1982, 1986), which, just like the bat argument, purports to show that there can be no physicalist account of phenomenal consciousness, is one of the most famous and provocative thought experiments in the philosophy of mind. In contemporary philosophy there are few arguments that have attracted greater philosophical attention. Daniel C. Dennett (forthcoming) describes the argument as 'one of the most successful intuition pumps ever devised by analytic philosophers' and Robert Van Gulick (1993) regards it as 'the most widely discussed anti-physicalist argument in the American philosophical world during the 1980's' (p. 462). Once we accept the knowledge argument, physicalism appears hopeless and there seems no choice other than dualism. The argument, however, might not give dualists cause to rejoice, after all. According to what I call the 'parity of reasons objection', which is introduced by Paul Churchland, the knowledge



argument is so strong that if it served to defeat physicalism it would equally well serve to defeat 'substance dualism'.

The purpose of this two-part chapter is to articulate the parity of reasons objection, which, in spite of its strength, has attracted little attention. In the first part, I examine Churchland's formulation of the parity of reasons objection. I suggest that while his formulation is not wholly satisfactory, it may be modified so that the knowledge argument would defeat a particular form of dualism to the exact extent that it would defeat physicalism. I demonstrate this point by using the concept of physical omniscience, which I introduced in Chapter 5, and a new concept, 'dualistic omniscience'. In the second part, I consider an application of the parity of reasons objection. David J. Chalmers, a well-known dualist and a proponent of the knowledge argument, introduces two possible forms of dualism and explicitly states his preference for one over the other. However, I demonstrate, by applying the parity of reasons objection, that his preferred option would be defeated by the knowledge argument to the exact extent that physicalism would be defeated. Therefore, I conclude, if he wishes to reject physicalism on the basis of the knowledge argument, he has to subscribe to the form of dualism which he *does not* prefer.

## 6.2 The Knowledge Argument Against Physicalism

Imagine Mary, a brilliant scientist who is confined to a black-and-white room. Although she has never been outside her room in her entire life, she has learned *everything* there is to know about the physical from black-and-white books and lectures on a black-and-white television. Mary's complete knowledge includes everything about the physical facts and laws of physics, which will include causal and relational facts, and functional roles. This is the beginning of the knowledge argument.

Physicalism is the metaphysical thesis that, in the relevant sense, everything is physical, or as contemporary physicalists often put it, everything logically supervenes on the physical. Thus, if physicalism is true Mary, who has complete knowledge about the physical, must have complete knowledge simpliciter.<sup>1</sup>

What will happen, Jackson continues, when Mary leaves her room and looks at, say, a ripe tomato for the first time? According to physicalism she should not come to know anything new because she is supposed to know everything about the physical. It appears obvious, however, that she will discover something new upon her release; namely, 'what it is like to

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<sup>1</sup> The knowledge argument—at least Jackson's original formulation of the knowledge argument—is based on the assumption that if physicalism is true then *a priori* physicalism is true. *A priori* physicalism states that mental phenomena logically supervene on physical phenomena and that there is an *a priori* derivation from physical facts to mental facts. However, many philosophers reject *a priori* physicalism. For example, *a posteriori* physicalists, such as Ned Block and Robert Stalnaker (1999), argue that neither macrophysical nor mental phenomena logically supervene on microphysical phenomena and that there is not an *a priori* but only an *a posteriori* derivation from physical facts to mental facts. *A posteriori* physicalists reject the knowledge argument on the ground that Mary does not have to be able to make an *a priori* derivation from physical facts, which she knows in a black-and-white room, to mental facts, which she comes to know upon her release. Hence Mary's surprise at finding out what it is like to see red is, they claim, perfectly consistent with (*a posteriori*) physicalism. I set aside the issue of *a posteriori* physicalism and use the notion of reduction that is based on *a priori* physicalism throughout this work. This does not affect the force of the parity of reasons objection because, as we will see later, the targets of the parity of reasons objection are proponents of the knowledge argument, such as Jackson and Chalmers, who accept the assumption that if physicalism is true then *a priori* physicalism is true. (If they do not accept it, then they cannot undermine physicalism by the knowledge argument in the first place.) It is important to note that *a posteriori* physicalism has been introduced and elaborated as a response to anti-physicalist arguments like the knowledge argument.



see red', a phenomenal feature of her visual experience.<sup>2</sup> This contradicts the physicalist assumption that Mary, prior to her release, has complete knowledge simpliciter. Therefore, Jackson concludes, physicalism is false.<sup>3</sup>

Jackson (1986) provides a 'convenient and accurate way of displaying' the knowledge argument:

(1) Mary (before her release) knows everything physical there is to know about other people.

(2) Mary (before her release) does not know everything there is to know about other people (because she *learns* something about them on her release).

Therefore,

(3) There are true propositions about other people (and herself that escape the physicalist story).<sup>4</sup> (p. 293)

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Physicalists need this sort of independent response to the knowledge argument because the parity of reasons objection is not applicable to all kinds of dualism.

<sup>2</sup> If we want to be precise we need to add many conditions to this thought experiment: Mary's body must be painted completely black-and-white; Mary must not rub her eyes so that she does not experience phosphenes; Mary must not experience any colourful illusions or dreams, etc. In order to get rid of this complication, Howard Robinson stipulates instead that the protagonist of the thought experiment is a congenitally deaf scientist. See Robinson (1982), pp. 4-5, Robinson (1993), p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> After sixteen years of defending the knowledge argument, Jackson announced in 1998 that he had changed his mind, stating that although the argument contained no obvious fallacy, its conclusion, that physicalism is false, must be mistaken. In this work, I am concerned only with Jackson's original claim. It should be emphasised, however, that even since his 'conversion' Jackson still insists that if physicalism is true Mary must know what it is like to see red *before* she goes outside her room. That is, he still believes that if physicalism is true *a priori* physicalism is true. See Jackson (1995), Jackson (1998b), Jackson (2003), Jackson (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> I have modified (3) slightly so that we can see the connection between the knowledge argument and my formulation of omniscience. Jackson's original statement of (3) is



In Chapters 1 and 5, I formulated the concept of omniscience simpliciter as follows:

For any  $x$  and for any proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is omniscient if and only if, if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

Further, I articulated the concept of physical omniscience as follows:

For any  $x$  and for any physical proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is physically omniscient if and only if, if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

Using these concepts, we rephrase the above formulation of the knowledge argument as follows:

(4) Mary (before her release) is physically omniscient about other people.

(5) Mary (before her release) is not omniscient simpliciter about other people (because she *learns* something about them on her release).

Therefore,

(6) Physical omniscience is not omniscience simpliciter.<sup>5</sup>

Since, if it is successful, the knowledge argument defeats physicalism, its proponents, such as Chalmers (1996), John Foster (1991), J. P. Moreland (2003), and Howard Robinson (1982, 1993), subscribe to dualism.<sup>6</sup>

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'There are truths about other people (and herself) that escape the physicalist story'. Jackson would not mind this modification because he thinks, as he must on pain of inconsistency, that what Mary comes to know upon her release are new propositions.

<sup>5</sup> In fact it is a common practice to describe Mary as a 'physically omniscient scientist'. See, for example, Chalmers (2002a), Chalmers (forthcoming), Brian Loar (1997), William G. Lycan (2003), Philip Pettit (forthcoming), Tillmann Vierkant (2002).

<sup>6</sup> The important question that arises here is whether the mere distinction of the mental from the physical is really sufficient to establish dualism. One might argue that even if the knowledge argument showed the falsity of physicalism it would not immediately follow that dualism is true. The following passage by John Searle (1992) illustrates this point:

However, Churchland contends that dualists who defend their position by appeal to the knowledge argument are on shaky ground, because the argument against physicalism may be directed, in an exactly parallel form, against substance dualism. I call this the 'parity of reasons objection'.

### 6.3 The Parity of Reasons Objection

Churchland (1985a, 1985b, 1989) argues that if the knowledge argument were sound, it would prove far too much, contending that if, as Jackson says, the knowledge argument showed physicalism to be false it would equally show 'substance dualism' to be false. He defines substance

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Dualists asked, "How many kinds of things and properties are there?" and counted up to two. Monists, confronting the same question, only got as far as one. But the real mistake was to start counting at all. ... It is customary to think of dualism as coming in two flavors, substance dualism and property dualism; but to these I want to add a third, which I will call "conceptual dualism." This view consists in taking the dualistic concepts very seriously, that is, it consists in the view that in some important sense "physical" implies "non-mental" and "mental" implies "non-physical." Both traditional dualism and materialism presuppose conceptual dualism, so defined. (p. 26)

Although Searle's claim deserves serious consideration, it has no impact on the parity of reasons objection. For both proponents and opponents of the knowledge argument would agree with Jackson's objection (1998a) to Searle as follows:

Searle is right that there are lots of kinds of things. But if the thought is that any attempt to account for it all, or to account for it all as far as the mind is concerned ... in terms of some limited set of fundamental (or more fundamental) ingredients, is mistaken in principle, then it seems to me that we are being, in effect, invited to abandon serious metaphysics in favour of drawing up big lists. (p. 4)

It should be noted, however, that Searle's main thrust is consistent with the idea behind the parity of reasons objection. That is, if physicalism really were false then the mere introduction of an additional entity, such as mental substance, could not be a significant improvement.

dualism as the thesis that there exists a mental substance called 'ectoplasm', the 'hidden constitution and nomic intricacies' of which form mental phenomena, such as visual experiences (1985a, p. 24, 1985b, p. 119). It seems that, just like physicalism, substance dualism is a perfect target for the knowledge argument because no belief about ectoplasm, its structure, function, composition, etc., appears to enable Mary to know, in a black-and-white room, what exactly it is like to see red. Churchland (1989) thus concludes, 'Given Jackson's anti-physicalist intentions, it is at least an irony that the same form of argument should incidentally serve to blow substance dualism out of the water'<sup>7</sup> (p. 574). Churchland's idea is simple. He thinks that if we could defeat physicalism by appealing to a scenario in which Mary is omniscient with respect to the physical, then we could also defeat substance dualism by appealing to a scenario in which an agent is omniscient with respect to the physical *and* the ectoplasmic.

Now we can illustrate Churchland's parity of reasons objection by providing the following case, a simple variation of the original knowledge argument.

#### 6.4 The Knowledge Argument Against Dualism

Imagine Mark, a brilliant thirty-fifth century scientist who is confined to a black-and-white room. People at this time have not only the complete science of the physical, but also the complete science of the mental stuff 'X', which one of their ancestors discovered in the thirty-second century. The constitution and nomic intricacies of X ground all mental phenomena.

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<sup>7</sup> It should be emphasised that, as a physicalist, Churchland *does not* accept the knowledge argument. While he provides several objections to the argument, his main complaint is that the knowledge argument equivocates on the notion of knowledge. According to Churchland, while in premiss (1) of the knowledge argument Jackson focuses on propositional knowledge in premiss (2) he focuses on non-propositional knowledge. See Churchland (1985a), Churchland (1989).



Although Mark has never been outside his room in his entire life, he has learned *everything* there is to know about the nature of the physical and of X from black-and-white books and lectures on a black-and-white television. Mark's complete knowledge includes everything about the physical facts and laws of physics, which will include causal and relational facts, and functional roles. Moreover, his knowledge of X provides explanations about our ordinary mental phenomena, such as thoughts and feelings in terms of their relations to X. What will happen, we may ask, when Mark leaves his room and looks at, say, a ripe tomato for the first time? Since Jackson's original knowledge argument is valid, the following argument is equally valid.

(7) Mark (before his release) knows everything physical and everything 'X-ish' there is to know about other people.

(8) Mark (before his release) does not know everything there is to know about other people (because he *learns* something about them on his release).

Therefore,

(9) There are true propositions about other people (and himself) that escape the physicalist and X-ish stories.

In order to see further that the above 'knowledge argument for dualism' is parallel to the original knowledge argument, the following new terminology will be useful:

For any  $x$  and for any dualistic—*i.e.* physical plus X-ish—proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is dualistically omniscient if and only if, if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

Using this concept, the above formulation of the knowledge argument against dualism is rephrased as follows:

(10) Mark (before his release) is dualistically omniscient about other people.

(11) Mark (before his release) is not omniscient about other people  
(because he *learns* something about them on his release).

Therefore,

(12) Dualistic omniscience is not omniscience simpliciter.

Just as Mary's omniscience with respect to the physical is silent about the phenomenal character of her visual experience, Mark's omniscience with respect to the physical and X is silent about the phenomenal character of his visual experience. Therefore, if the knowledge argument were cogent, it would refute dualism based on X as completely as it would refute physicalism. It is now clear that the knowledge argument is much stronger than people tend to think; perhaps too strong. Of course, the knowledge argument itself cannot be rejected solely by pointing out that it might be too strong, but Mark's case shows that there is, at least at first glance, the parity of reasons problem for dualists. Dualists adopt the knowledge argument in order to reject physicalism despite the fact that the argument might equally well defeat certain forms of dualism. It is at least unfair for dualists to emphasise only the anti-physicalist aspect of the knowledge argument.

In sum: if the knowledge argument served as an argument against physicalism, it would equally well serve as an argument against a particular form of dualism.

### 6.5 Replies from Dualists

Jackson (1986) does not accept the parity of reasons objection to dualism. According to him, while it is possible to acquire complete knowledge based on physicalism in a black-and-white room, it is impossible to acquire complete knowledge based on dualism in a black-and-white room:

To obtain a good argument against dualism (attribute dualism; ectoplasm is a bit of fun), the premise in the knowledge argument

that Mary has the full story according to physicalism before her release, has to be replaced by a premise that she has the full story according to dualism. The former is plausible; the latter is not. Hence, there is no 'parity of reasons' trouble for dualists who use the knowledge argument. (p. 295)

One might think that the key issue here is the distinction between *substance dualism* and *property (attribute) dualism*. Churchland argues that ectoplasmic *substance dualism* is vulnerable to the knowledge argument as much as physicalism is. Jackson replies to him that ectoplasmic *substance dualism* is just a 'bit of fun' and that *property dualism*, a much more realistic option for him, can avoid the parity of reasons problem.<sup>8</sup>

Substance dualism is the metaphysical thesis that our world consists of two fundamentally distinct substances: the physical and the mental. According to this thesis, mental states are derived solely from the states of mental substances, which have only nomological connections to physical bodies. On the other hand, property dualism states that mental properties exist, while mental substances do not. According to this thesis, mental states are mere physical states with special mental properties, properties that are clearly distinct from physical properties. Hence, the essential

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<sup>8</sup> One might argue that Jackson's concern here is not merely the distinction between substance dualism and property dualism. Perhaps his intention is simply to dismiss ectoplasmic substance dualism out of hand, as a viewpoint not even worthy of consideration, taking property dualism, instead, as a more plausible position. Then, he may be taken as arguing that there is no parity of reasons trouble because it is simply not plausible to suppose that anyone could have the full story according to property dualism. If this is the correct interpretation of Jackson's passage, it runs into trouble of its own. If it is not plausible to suppose that anyone could have the full story according to property dualism, the position becomes a mere *ad hoc* hypothesis, with no substance of its own other than to shore up gaps in our knowledge.



difference between substance dualism and property dualism comes from what each takes as components of the mental nature of the world. Substance dualism regards the mental nature as composed of mental substances and property dualism regards it as composed of mental properties. While classifying dualism in this way is a common practice in the philosophy of mind, this distinction has, essentially, nothing to do with the parity of reasons objection, because it makes no difference whether one identifies X with substances or properties. Mark's story could work perfectly well in either case.

Howard Robinson (1993), another proponent of the knowledge argument, correctly realises the irrelevance of the distinction between substance dualism and property dualism. He claims that a certain kind of substance dualism is not vulnerable to the knowledge argument:

Jackson points out that [the parity of reasons objection] does not touch property dualism, which is all that the argument proves.<sup>9</sup> But neither does it touch a sensible substance dualism. 'Mental substance' is not something composed of 'ghostly atoms'—whatever that would mean—but something that is not *made of* anything at all. In so far as it has a structure, that structure would be entirely psychological—that is, would consist of the faculties, beliefs, desires, experiences, etc. There would be no autonomous sub-psychological stuff. Such a notion faces many problems, of course, but this is the Cartesian conception, not the ectoplasmic one; and against this conception the knowledge argument is irrelevant. (p. 183)

In the above passage Robinson shows that there are two kinds of substance dualism. According to the first, mental substance is composed of 'ghostly atoms'. Robinson implies that this kind of substance dualism would be

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<sup>9</sup> Here Robinson refers to Jackson's passage quoted in the main text.

defeated by the knowledge argument to the extent that physicalism would be defeated. According to the second kind, mental substance is not made of anything at all. Robinson claims that this kind of substance dualism would not be defeated by the knowledge argument. Now we can make a parallel claim about property dualism. While one kind of property dualism, according to which mental properties are composed of 'ghostly atomic properties', would be defeated by the knowledge argument to the extent that physicalism would be defeated, another kind of property dualism, according to which mental properties are not composed of anything at all, would not be defeated.

At this point it is clear that Churchland's simple claim that substance dualism is vulnerable to the knowledge argument and Jackson's simple claim that property dualism is not vulnerable to the argument, are both incomplete. I now introduce a new way of looking at dualism in order to distinguish clearly a kind of dualism that would be defeated by the knowledge argument from a kind of dualism that would not. This classification relies on the reducibility of our ordinary mental phenomena.

### **6.6 Reductive Dualism and Non-Reductive Dualism**

Reductive explanations are important for the scientific understanding of nature. For example, thermodynamics explains the temperature of a gas reductively, in terms of the mean kinetic energy of the constituent molecules.<sup>10</sup> The molecules that make up a gas are in constant motion and the temperature of a gas is a measure of the speed at which they move. The faster they move, the higher the temperature. Again, meteorology explains

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<sup>10</sup> It is often said that temperature (in general) is reducible to the kinetic energy of the constituent molecules of the object whose temperature is at issue. However, strictly speaking, this is mistaken. It is true only for a gas, and not for a solid. See Churchland (1996), p. 41.



lightning reductively in terms of electric discharge. Electric discharge occurs as a result of the separation of positively and negatively charged particles in storm clouds, and lightning occurs when the power of attraction between positive and negative particles increases to a certain point. In general, the physical sciences provide reductive explanations of higher-level physical phenomena in terms of their underlying lower-level physical phenomena.

Similarly, dualists may suppose that we can reductively explain higher-level mental phenomena, like thoughts and feelings, in terms of their underlying lower-level mental phenomena, of which those ordinary mental phenomena are comprised. Call the form of dualism that adopts this kind of reductive explanation 'reductive dualism'. On the other hand, other dualists may suppose that there is no reductive explanation whatsoever for our ordinary mental phenomena. According to this form of dualism, no matter how far our sciences may advance, those mental phenomena will remain irreducible, perhaps because they are fundamental primitives of the universe. Call this kind of dualism 'non-reductive dualism'. I now examine those two forms of dualism and argue that reductive dualism would be defeated by the knowledge argument to the extent that physicalism would, while non-reductive dualism would not.

Reductive dualism is, in a sense, an elegant hypothesis because it presents a symmetry of the mental and physical natures of the world. Higher-level physical phenomena are reducible only to their underlying lower-level physical phenomena, and higher-level mental phenomena are reducible only to their underlying lower-level mental phenomena. The



physical and mental natures of the world are clearly distinct and never overlap each other.<sup>11</sup>

Ectoplasmic substance dualism, which Churchland introduces, represents one kind of reductive dualism. It explains our ordinary mental phenomena, such as visual experiences, in terms of their underlying mental substance, ectoplasm, of which those mental phenomena are comprised. Just as the temperature of a gas is fully explained in terms of kinetic energy of the constituent molecules, or lightning in terms of electric discharge, our thoughts or feelings are, according to this doctrine, fully explained in terms of ectoplasm.

If we replace X with ectoplasm, we can see that ectoplasmic substance dualism would be defeated by the knowledge argument to the same extent that physicalism would. In the same manner, we can construct the knowledge argument against any form of reductive dualism. We replace X

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<sup>11</sup> Since dualism is realism about *two* distinct kinds of substances or properties, the physical and the mental, one might think that there are two possible claims that reductive dualists may hold:

(R1) Our ordinary mental phenomena are reducible to their underlying *physical* phenomena, out of which those phenomena are composed.

(R2) Our ordinary mental phenomena are reducible to their underlying *mental* phenomena, out of which those phenomena are composed.

However, (R1) is not an option for dualists because it says essentially that there are no mental phenomena over and above physical phenomena and that everything is ultimately explained in terms of the physical. It is, rather, a form of *physicalism*. Therefore, all reductive dualists must hold (R2).

It is also possible for reductive dualists to claim that not only higher-level mental phenomena, but also some physical phenomena, are reducible to lower-level mental phenomena, or that not only higher-level physical phenomena but also some mental phenomena are reducible to lower-level physical phenomena. However, no dualists should want to hold this idea because it would violate fundamental conditions of acceptability on what would constitute a good explanation in both science and metaphysics; for example, simplicity, elegance and parsimony.

with mental substances or mental properties, out of which our ordinary mental phenomena are composed, and then let Mark learn, in addition to the knowledge afforded by the physical sciences, every reductive explanation provided by reductive dualism. Just like physically omniscient Mary, dualistically omniscient Mark would come to know, if the knowledge argument were successful, something new upon his release.

It is worth emphasising again that the distinction between property dualism and substance dualism does not play a crucial role here, since it makes no difference whether higher-level mental phenomena are composed of underlying lower-level mental *substances*, like ectoplasm, or underlying lower-level mental *properties*. The knowledge argument against dualism above would be perfectly applicable to both reductive substance dualism and reductive property dualism to the exact extent that the original knowledge argument would be applicable to physicalism.

It is also worth emphasising that I am not here merely claiming that we can reject reductive dualism because the knowledge argument is cogent. The cogency or otherwise of the knowledge argument is an interesting but completely separate issue, which I discuss in the next chapter. I am, rather, making the conditional claim that *if* the knowledge argument successfully defeated physicalism, it would equally successfully defeat reductive dualism. For as far as the knowledge argument is concerned, reductive dualism is exactly parallel to physicalism. If reductive dualists rejected physicalism by the knowledge argument, physicalists could reject reductive dualism by the argument as well. Conversely, if reductive dualists eliminated the force of the knowledge argument, physicalists could eliminate its force as well. (For example, if reductive dualists were allowed to say that the knowledge argument against reductive dualism fails because Mark cannot be dualistically omniscient in a black-and-white room, which dualists do tend to say, then physicalists would equally be



allowed to say that the knowledge argument against physicalism fails because Mary cannot be physically omniscient in a black-and-white room. I will return to this point in the next section.) The upshot is that, *as regards physicalism and reductive dualism, there is no reason to favour one or the other as far as the knowledge argument is concerned.*

### **6.7 Application of the Parity of Reasons Objection: Chalmers' Panprotopsyism**

Dualists might argue that even if the parity of reasons objection is acceptable it has nothing to do with contemporary dualists anyway, since none of them subscribes to reductive dualism. According to this objection, while reductive dualism might have been popular in the modern period, it is no longer regarded as a tenable option, even among dualists. However, some serious contemporary dualists do subscribe, consciously or unconsciously, to reductive dualism. In this section, I apply the parity of reasons objection to Chalmers' panprotopsyism, which represents a contemporary version of reductive dualism.

In trying to establish a well-formed theory of consciousness, Chalmers (1996) introduces two options that dualists may take:

There are two ways this might go. Perhaps we might take [phenomenal] experience itself as a fundamental feature of the world, alongside space-time, spin, charge and the like. That is, certain phenomenal properties will have to be taken as *basic* properties. Alternatively, perhaps there is some *other* class of novel fundamental properties from which phenomenal properties are derived. ... [T]hese cannot be physical properties, but perhaps they are non-physical properties of a new variety, on which phenomenal properties are logically supervenient. Such properties would be related to experience in the same way that basic physical properties



are related to non-basic properties such as [the] temperature [of a gas]. We could call these properties *protophenomenal* properties, as they are not themselves phenomenal but together they can yield the phenomenal. (pp. 126-127)

Although Chalmers does not explicitly talk about reduction here, it is obvious that of the two hypotheses cited above, the former is non-reductive dualism and the latter, panprotopsychism, is reductive dualism.<sup>12</sup> The former states that phenomenal properties are not reducible to anything, because they are fundamental features of the world for which there is no further reductive explanation available in principle. That is, according to this thesis, phenomenal properties do not logically supervene on anything. The latter, panprotopsychism, states, on the other hand, that, just as the temperature of a gas is reducible to the kinetic energy of the constituent molecules, phenomenal properties are reducible to protophenomenal properties, of which those phenomenal properties are composed. Phenomenal properties, concerning which physicalism is completely silent, are explained in terms of protophenomenal properties. For, according to Chalmers, phenomenal properties *logically supervene* on protophenomenal properties (p. 126).

While Chalmers (1999) entertains those two possible dualist options, he explicitly admits his preference for panprotopsychism.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Another doctrine that might represent contemporary reductive dualism is J. C. Eccles' interactionist dualism. According to Eccles, a given mental event is composed of millions of 'psychons', which correspond to what Descartes and Hume call an 'idea'. Psychons interact, Eccles says, with dendrons, collections of dendrites in the cerebral cortex. See Eccles (1994), Daniel C. Dennett (1991), p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> It seems that Chalmers was initially inclined towards non-reductive dualism but changed his mind at some point. Now he is much more sympathetic to panprotopsychism than non-reductive dualism. Compare, for example, Chalmers (1995) with his (2002b).

Hill & McLaughlin say that I endorse epiphenomenalism, and that my anti-materialist argument implies epiphenomenalism. This is not strictly true. In fact my preferred position on the mind-body problem ... is not epiphenomenalism but the 'panprotopsychist' (or 'Russellian') position on which basic physical dispositions are grounded in basic phenomenal or protophenomenal properties. (p. 492)

In the following, I demonstrate that the parity of reasons objection presents Chalmers with a dilemma. As long as he wants to use the knowledge argument to undermine physicalism he has to give up panprotopsychism, which he prefers, and endorse non-reductive dualism, which he does not prefer. Conversely, if he wishes to endorse panprotopsychism, he must relinquish his appeal to the knowledge argument.

Chalmers (1996) rejects physicalism by appeal to the knowledge argument, which he thinks successfully demonstrates the 'failure of logical supervenience' (p. 140). However, panprotopsychism, to which he adheres, is an exact parallel of physicalism as far as the knowledge argument is concerned. While physicalism says that phenomenal properties logically supervene on physical properties, panprotopsychism says that phenomenal properties logically supervene on protophenomenal properties (p. 126). Because of their parallel structure, the knowledge argument defeats panprotopsychism to the exact extent that it defeats physicalism. We replace X in Mark's case with protophenomenal properties, and then let Mark learn, in addition to the knowledge afforded by the physical sciences, every reductive explanation provided by the complete science of protophenomenal properties. Again, dualistically omniscient Mark would come to know, if the knowledge argument were successful, something new

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Recently, he contends that on one interpretation it is even possible to regard his panprotopsychism as a form of reductive monism. See Chapter 7 of this work.

upon his release. We could simply reject Chalmers' reductive dualism as a result of this consequence if the knowledge argument really did defeat physicalism.

Now I consider two possible objections that Chalmers might raise against my argument.

*Objection 1: Panprotopsychism is Not Reductionist*

Chalmers might claim that his panprotopsychism is not reductionist, on the grounds that even if phenomenal properties are reducible to protophenomenal properties, protophenomenal properties themselves are not reducible to anything. Hence, he might conclude, Mark cannot have *complete* knowledge of protophenomenal properties and, contrary to physicalism, panprotopsychism would not be undermined by the knowledge argument.

This reply is vulnerable to another parity of reasons objection. If dualists were allowed to reject the knowledge argument simply by saying that, before his release, Mark does not have *complete* dualistic knowledge, physicalists would equally be allowed to reject the knowledge argument simply by saying that, before her release, Mary does not have *complete* physical knowledge. For, as Chalmers himself admits, certainly there are fundamental physical primitives, such as space-time, spin or charge, that are not explained reductively by the physical sciences. It is clear that Mary cannot reductively explain what space-time, spin or charge are. Thus, to the extent that Chalmers could escape the consequences of the knowledge argument, physicalists could escape its consequences too.

Obviously, this reply expects too much of reductive explanations. Although there are many basic irreducible physical properties, the physical sciences have successfully explained higher-level physical phenomena in terms of their underlying lower-level physical phenomena. It is hard to see



why Chalmers' panprotopsychism does not work similarly if phenomenal properties do logically supervene on protophenomenal properties and if protophenomenal properties are related to phenomenal properties 'in the same way that basic physical properties are related to non-basic properties such as [the] temperature [of a gas]' (Chalmers, 1996, pp. 126-127). Changing the topic from phenomenal properties to protophenomenal properties does not save Chalmers' dualism.

*Objection 2: Mark Cannot Learn About Protophenomenal Properties in a Black-and-White Room*

Chalmers might also argue that panprotopsychism is irrelevant to the knowledge argument because although phenomenal properties are reducible to protophenomenal properties, Mark cannot know what protophenomenal properties are in a restricted environment. That is, protophenomenal properties of colour experiences are not something learnable in a black-and-white room.<sup>14</sup> If this response were right, we would not be able to apply Mark's case to panprotopsychism. However, this objection is not compelling.

Chalmers (1996) contends that protophenomenal properties 'are not themselves phenomenal' (p. 127). (Imagine how absurd it would be to say, for example, 'I had a protophenomenal experience of a red sensation yesterday'!). Protophenomenal properties are supposed to be, rather, fundamental constituents of phenomenal properties that are necessary for reductive explanations of phenomenal properties. Chalmers also says that combining protophenomenal properties yields phenomenal properties (p. 127), which implies that each phenomenal property is identified by the composition of its underlying protophenomenal properties. From these

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<sup>14</sup> Notice that this response resembles Jackson's reply to Churchland's parity of reasons objection.

characteristics of protophenomenal properties there seems no reason to suppose that panprotopsychism requires Mark actually to have a red experience in order to know what it is like to see red. If panprotopsychism were true then Mark should be able to be dualistically omniscient and come to know what it is like to see red in a black-and-white environment.

Of course, Chalmers might choose to accept all this and still *stipulate* that Mark has to have a relevant experience in order to understand its underlying protophenomenal properties. However, it is hard to understand the motivation for doing that when, again, protophenomenal properties 'are not themselves phenomenal' (p. 127). It is unclear how having a particular experience helps in understanding protophenomenal, that is *non*-phenomenal, properties. Chalmers says that 'it is very hard to imagine what a protophenomenal property could be like' (p. 127), but he cannot just stipulate characteristics of protophenomenal properties without providing good reasons.

Chalmers argues that the physical sciences cannot solve the 'hard problem' of phenomenal consciousness by saying that '[p]hysical explanation is well suited to the explanation of *structure* and of *function* ... [b]ut the explanation of consciousness is not just a matter of explaining structure and function' (p. 107). However, as we have seen, assuming that panprotopsychism is intelligible at all, it can merely provide structural and functional explanations of phenomenal properties in terms of their underlying protophenomenal properties.

Notice, ironically, that Chalmers' panprotopsychism may here be parallel to physicalism, thus leading again to trouble in the form of parity of reasons. Chalmers argues that protophenomenal properties are not themselves phenomenal, but that together they yield the phenomenal (p. 127). However, physicalists may equally argue that the physical



constituents of the brain are not themselves phenomenal, but that together they yield the phenomenal.

Chalmers is a well-known proponent of the knowledge argument<sup>15</sup>, but if he endorses panprotopsyism he is not entitled to use the argument in the way he does. In other words, if he wants to reject physicalism on the basis of the knowledge argument, he has to endorse non-reductive dualism, which states that 'conscious experience [is] a fundamental feature, irreducible to anything more basic' (Chalmers 1995, p. 337). However, the problem is that Chalmers thinks, as we have seen, non-reductive dualism is less plausible than panprotopsyism. At this point, therefore, the parity of reasons objection presents Chalmers with a dilemma: He has to either (1) hold onto panprotopsyism and give up the knowledge argument or (2) hold onto the knowledge argument and give up panprotopsyism. Obviously, Chalmers would not want to do either of these.

## 6.8 Conclusion

The knowledge argument has been welcomed by dualists as one of the strongest motivations for rejecting physicalism and endorsing dualism. However, as we have seen, the parity of reasons objection shows that, as far as the knowledge argument is concerned, reductive dualism is no more advantageous than physicalism. Why then, has the knowledge argument been so vigorously supported by dualists and opposed by physicalists?

Jackson (1982) contends that the knowledge argument is based on an anti-physicalist intuition that 'there are certain features of bodily sensations ... which no amount of purely physical information includes' (p. 127). However, this intuition seems to be based on a more basic intuition: there are certain features of bodily sensations which no amount of

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<sup>15</sup> For Chalmers' defence of the knowledge argument, see Chalmers (1996), pp. 140-146.



intelligible, reductive explaining can include.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, by itself, this is not an intuition about physicalism. Perhaps the reason it has been taken for granted by both dualists *and* physicalists that the knowledge argument is an argument against physicalism is the following: physicalists are the ones who have most ambitiously and eagerly tried to provide intelligible, reductive explanations of phenomenal consciousness in the last couple of decades. However, it seems to me, providing this sort of explanation is not only a necessary condition for the completion of the physicalist project, but also for that of any alternatives.

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<sup>16</sup> For similar claims see Churchland (1989), pp. 573-574, Torin Alter (1998), pp. 49-51.

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## Chapter 7

### Physical Omniscience and Jackson's Knowledge Argument (2)

#### 7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 6 I argued, using the concepts of physical omniscience and dualistic omniscience, that Frank Jackson's knowledge argument was not necessarily good news for dualists, because if it *were* successful in undermining physicalism it would be equally successful in undermining at least a certain form of dualism. I did not discuss, however, whether or not the knowledge argument was in fact successful. Hence, the aim of this final chapter is to consider the cogency of the argument.

In Chapter 5 I provided a new objection to Thomas Nagel's bat argument by comparing it with the argument from Patrick Grim about knowledge *de se* that I discussed in Chapter 2. Similarly, in this chapter, I provide a new objection to Jackson's knowledge argument by comparing it with the argument from concept possession that I discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. However, the way I formulate an objection to the knowledge argument in this chapter will be slightly different. While in Chapter 5 I formulated the objection to the bat argument by appealing to its overall similarity with the argument from knowledge *de se*, in this chapter I

formulate a new objection to the knowledge argument by appealing to its crucial *dissimilarity* with the argument from concept possession.

As I have noted, Jackson's knowledge argument represents one of the most famous and provocative thought experiments in the philosophy of mind. Philosophers have worked on the argument intensively over the last twenty-two years and have reached almost complete consensus on the verdict of the argument:<sup>1</sup> it is not successful in refuting physicalism. This is not surprising, given that most contemporary philosophers are attracted, if not committed, to physicalism. What is surprising is, however, that they have not reached a consensus at all as to exactly what is wrong with the argument: some contend that the intuition behind the argument is mistaken (Dennett, 1991, Jeff E. Foss, 1993); some contend that the argument erroneously mixes up knowledge-how and knowledge-that (Lewis, 1988, Laurence Nemirow, 1980); some contend that it fails to distinguish knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance (John Bigelow and Robert Pargetter, 1990, Paul M. Churchland, 1985a, 1989, Earl Conee, 1994); some contend that it overlooks the unique nature of phenomenal concepts (Brian Loar, 1990, 1997, Michael Tye, 2000, forthcoming). Since these objections are distinct from one another, they cannot coherently be advanced at the same time.<sup>2</sup> Thus, analysts of the argument are in a

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<sup>1</sup> Almost complete, because, as I noted in Chapter 6, there are still a few philosophers who subscribe to the knowledge argument: David J. Chalmers (1996), John Foster (1991), J. P. Moreland (2003), and Howard Robinson (1982, 1993). It should be noted again that now even Jackson himself thinks that the argument fails to undermine physicalism. See Jackson (1998b), Jackson (2003), Jackson (forthcoming). In this work, however, I focus on Jackson's original anti-physicalist position.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that they are distinct is shown as follows: Dennett (1991) argues that Mary *does not gain* anything new upon her release, Bigelow and Pargetter (1990), Churchland (1985a), Churchland (1989), Conee (1994), Lewis (1988) and Nemirow (1980) argue that while Mary *does gain* something new upon her release from her black-and-white



dilemma; on the one hand they are quite confident that it is fallacious but, on the other hand, they cannot reach an agreement regarding the precise location of a defect.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter I elaborate a new objection to the argument, which is largely different from those mentioned above. I try to accomplish my aim by adopting various concepts of omniscience. This chapter has the following structure. In Section 7.2 I review the knowledge argument. In Section 7.3 I review the argument from concept possession. In Section 7.4 I argue that there is an apparent structural similarity between these arguments by using various concepts of omniscience. In Section 7.5 I explain the most important difference between these arguments by reformulating them in terms of sets. In Sections 7.6 and 7.7 I focus on the difference and argue that the knowledge argument fails because it is based on an untenable assumption about physical omniscience. In order to defend my position I introduce what David Lewis (2001) calls 'Ramseyan humility'. I conclude this chapter's discussion in Section 7.8.

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environment it is mere *non-propositional* knowledge. Loar (1990), Loar (1997), Tye (2000) and Tye (forthcoming) argue that while Mary does gain something new and it is *propositional* knowledge it is mere old knowledge in a different guise.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, with David Braddon-Mitchell, examines various physicalist objections to the argument and states that what they call the 'there must be a reply' reply is the most compelling response to the argument. According to this response, while it is not clear exactly what is wrong with the argument, there must be something wrong with it, given the number of compelling reasons to hold physicalism. (Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson, 1996, pp. 134-135) It is interesting to note that this reply represents the very dilemma for philosophers that I mention in the main text. That is, although they are confident that the knowledge argument is fallacious they cannot pinpoint a defect.

## 7.2 The Knowledge Argument Again

Again, the goal of the knowledge argument is to show that the physicalist position on the mind-body problem is untenable. It would seem extremely difficult to accomplish the goal, given that physicalism is by far the most widely accepted doctrine in the philosophy of mind. Jackson purports to accomplish this, however, with a simple thought experiment using the character black-and-white Mary. The following is Jackson's 'convenient and accurate way of displaying the argument' that I introduced in Chapter 6:

(1) Mary (before her release) knows everything physical there is to know about other people.

(2) Mary (before her release) does not know everything there is to know about other people (because she *learns* something about them on her release).

Therefore,

(3) There are true propositions about other people (and herself) that escape the physicalist story.<sup>4</sup> (Jackson, 1986, p. 293)

When Jackson says that Mary knows 'everything physical there is to know' he means the following:

[Mary knows] all the physical facts about us and our environment, in a wide sense of 'physical' which includes everything in *completed* physics, chemistry, and neurophysiology, and all there is to know about the causal and relational facts consequent upon all this, including of course functional roles. (p. 291)

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<sup>4</sup>As I noted in Chapter 6, I have modified (3) slightly so that we can see the connection between the knowledge argument and my formulation of omniscience. Jackson's original statement of (3) is 'There are truths about other people (and herself) that escape the physicalist story'. Jackson would not mind this modification because he thinks, as he must think on pain of inconsistency, that what Mary comes to know upon her release is a new proposition.

In the above formulation Jackson adds the phrase 'about other people' to the description of Mary's complete physical knowledge so that we can focus on propositions about people's colour experiences and ignore propositions that are not directly or indirectly related to phenomenal consciousness.<sup>5</sup> It would not really matter to the cogency of the knowledge argument even if, for example, Mary did not know that the capital city of Australia is Canberra or that Harvard is a private university. By adding the phrase 'about other people' we can safely set aside these sorts of irrelevant propositions. In what follows, however, for the sake of simplicity, I omit the phrase 'about other people' when I describe Mary's knowledge.

### 7.3 The Argument from Concept Possession Again

One of the two main arguments that I discussed in Part II of this work is the argument from concept possession. As I stated in Chapter 3, while the argument from concept possession has been introduced in a number of different forms by many philosophers,<sup>6</sup> a standard form can be presented as follows: According to Judaeo-Christian theism God is necessarily omnipotent and necessarily omniscient. In order for one to comprehend certain concepts fully one needs to have a relevant experience. For example, in order for one to comprehend the concept *fear* fully one has to have an experience of being in fear. However, if God is necessarily omnipotent, He cannot have had an experience of being in fear. Hence

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<sup>5</sup> Jackson adds the phrase 'about other people' for the particular purpose of emphasising that he is not concerned with indexical or demonstrative knowledge that is only relevant to Mary's personal colour experience. It is also important to note that Jackson's addition of the phrase has nothing to do with scepticism about other minds. See Jackson (1986, p. 294).

<sup>6</sup> See David Blumenfeld (1978), Selmer Bringsjord (1989), John Lachs (1963a), Lachs (1963b), Michael Martin (1970), Martin (1974), Martin (1990), Martin (2000).



God does not fully understand what fear is. Therefore, God is not omniscient.

I have formulated the argument from concept possession as follows:

(4) If God exists then necessarily, He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.

(5) If God does not fully comprehend the concept *fear* then He is not omniscient.

(6) Because of His necessary omnipotence God has not actually experienced fear.

(7) For any agent *x*, *x* fully comprehends the concept *fear* only if *x* has actually experienced fear.

Therefore,

(8) God does not fully comprehend the concept *fear*. (from (6) and (7))

Therefore,

(9) God is not omniscient. (from (5) and (8))

Therefore,

(10) God does not exist. ((4) and (9))

This is a version of the argument from concept possession introduced by Lachs, Martin, Blumenfeld and Bringsjord, which is based on concept empiricism. I argued in Chapters 3 and 4 that there was a more powerful version of the argument from concept possession that does not rely on concept empiricism. However, I refer to the above specific version in this chapter because the comparison between this version and the knowledge argument highlights a defect of the knowledge argument most effectively.

The knowledge argument and the argument from concept possession appear, on the surface, to be very different. While the knowledge argument concerns the cogency of physicalism the argument from concept possession concerns the existence of the Judaeo-Christian God. Moreover,

as I mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, the argument from concept possession is based on an assumption that the knowledge argument is not based on, namely, concept empiricism presented as premiss (7). One might think that the knowledge argument is based on a similar assumption as follows:

(11) For any agent  $x$ ,  $x$  knows what it is like to see red only if  $x$  has had an experience of seeing a red object.

However, Jackson (1998b) rejects (11). He contends that in order for Mary, to know what it is like to see red she does not have to have an experience of seeing a red object:

Our knowledge of the sensory side of psychology has a causal source. Seeing red and feeling pain impact on us, leaving a memory trace which sustains our knowledge of what it is like to see red and feel pain on the many occasions where we are neither seeing red nor feeling pain. This is why it was always mistake to say that someone could not know what seeing red and feeling pain is like unless they had actually experienced them: false 'memory' traces are enough.<sup>7</sup> (p. 77)

In sum: on the face of it, the knowledge argument and the argument from concept possession are quite distinct. Both their targets and main assumptions are different. However, in the following, I argue that there is a

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<sup>7</sup> In order to vindicate the knowledge argument Jackson needs to reject concept empiricism. For, if concept empiricism is true and consistent with physicalism, then concept empiricism can provide a straightforward physicalist refutation of the knowledge argument: Mary does not know what it is like to see red before her release simply because she has never seen a red object. There is nothing mysterious or non-physical, according to this objection, in Mary's new experience. In fact, this is one of the most popular physicalist objections to the knowledge argument. For this type of objection to the knowledge argument see, for example, Bigelow and Pargetter (1990), Churchland (1985a), Churchland (1989), Conee (1994), Tye (2000), Tye (forthcoming).



structural similarity between these arguments. In order to accomplish my aim I utilise various concepts of omniscience.

#### 7.4 The Structural Similarity Between the Arguments

Jackson (1986) writes as follows:

If Physicalism is true, [Mary] knows all there is to know. For to suppose otherwise is to suppose that there is more to know than every physical fact, and that is just what physicalism denies.

Physicalism is not the noncontroversial thesis that the actual world is largely physical, but the challenging thesis that it is entirely physical. This is why physicalists must hold that complete physical knowledge is complete knowledge *simpliciter*. For suppose it is not complete: then our world must differ from a world,  $W(P)$ , for which it is complete, and the difference must be in non-physical facts; for our world and  $W(P)$  agree in all matters physical. Hence, physicalism would be false at our world [though contingently so, for it would be true at  $W(P)$ ]. (p. 291)

Recall the concept of 'omniscience simpliciter':

For any  $x$  and for any proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is omniscient if and only if, if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

Recall also the concept of 'physical omniscience':

For any  $x$  and for physical proposition  $p$ ,  $x$  is physically omniscient if and only if, if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

Jackson's point in the above passage can be clearly presented by adopting these two concepts of omniscience. What Jackson essentially says is that the thrust of the knowledge argument, which could be illustrated by the Mary scenario, is the following—call it 'KA':



KA

(12) If physicalism is true then physical omniscience is omniscience simpliciter.

(13) Physical omniscience is not omniscience simpliciter.

Therefore,

(14) Physicalism is false.

This formulation suggests that the core of the argument is reduced to the following simple question: Is physical omniscience omniscience simpliciter? If the answer to this question is negative, physicalism collapses; if it is affirmative, physicalism might be true.

Recall that in Chapter 6 I reformulated Jackson's 'convenient and accurate way of displaying the argument' using the concepts of omniscience simpliciter and physical omniscience as follows; call the reformulation 'MARY':

MARY

(15) Mary (before her release) is physically omniscient.

(16) Mary (before her release) is not omniscient simpliciter (because she *learns* something on her release).

Therefore,

(17) Physical omniscience is not omniscience simpliciter.<sup>8</sup>

Jackson thinks, as the paragraph quoted above suggests, that premiss (12) in KA is obviously true. And now we can see that Jackson uses MARY in order to establish the more controversial premiss (13) in KA.

We can find the exact parallel structure in the argument from concept possession by reformulating the argument in the same manner. In order to accomplish this aim a new formulation of divine omniscience is in order. In Part II of this work I assumed that divine omniscience is omniscience

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<sup>8</sup> As I noted earlier, in this chapter, I omit the phrase 'about other people' for the sake of simplicity.

simpliciter, instantiated as one of God's necessary attributes. However, in this chapter, I adopt the following slightly different concept of divine omniscience:

For any  $x$  and for any proposition  $p$ , the knowing of which is consistent with necessary divine attributes,  $x$  is divinely omniscient if and only if, if it is true that  $p$  then  $x$  knows that  $p$ .

According to this formulation of divine omniscience, one is divinely omniscient if one knows all true propositions, the knowing of which is consistent with necessary divine omnipotence, necessary divine omnibenevolence and so on.<sup>9</sup> Given that God is a perfect being there is no reason why He would deliberately fail to know what He can know. Therefore, God is divinely omniscient. Using the notion of divine omniscience, the thrust of the argument from concept possession can be reformulated as follows—call it 'ACP':

ACP

(18) If Judaeo-Christian theism is true then divine omniscience is omniscience simpliciter.

(19) Divine omniscience is not omniscience simpliciter.

Therefore,

(20) Judaeo-Christian theism is false.<sup>10</sup>

This formulation suggests that the core of the argument is reduced to the following simple question: Is divine omniscience omniscience simpliciter? If the answer to this question is negative, Judaeo-Christian theism

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<sup>9</sup> In this work I am not concerned with exactly what necessary divine attributes are. I also assume, for the sake of argument, that God can have all divine attributes, whatever they are, consistently.

<sup>10</sup> Notice that this is similar to the argument against God's omnipotence that I introduced in Chapter 5.

collapses; if it is affirmative, Judaeo-Christian theism might be true.<sup>11</sup> Notice that ACP is structurally parallel to KA.

Using the concepts of omniscience simpliciter and divine omniscience, a more specific scenario in the argument from concept possession is formulated as follows—call it 'GOD'.

GOD

(21) God is divinely omniscient.

(22) God is not omniscient simpliciter (because He does not comprehend fully what fear is).

Therefore,

(23) Divine omniscience is not omniscience simpliciter.

Proponents of the argument from concept possession think that premiss (18) in ACP is obviously true. And now we can see that they use GOD in order to establish the more controversial premiss (19) in ACP.

At this point it is clear that ACP is structurally parallel to KA, and GOD is structurally parallel to MARY, and hence overall, the knowledge argument is structurally parallel to the argument from concept possession. Can we then undermine the knowledge argument by applying my objection to the argument from concept possession, just as I undermined in Chapter 5 Nagel's bat argument by applying my objection to Grim's argument from knowledge *de se*? Unfortunately, we cannot. For although the knowledge argument and the argument from concept possession are *structurally* parallel, as I have noted, there are various differences between these arguments. However, in what follows I argue that the comparison

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<sup>11</sup> One might think that (18) is obviously false because God's omniscience cannot be as simple as omniscience simpliciter. I set this point aside in the main text because my main focus in this chapter is not to provide a rigorous formulation of divine omniscience, but to reveal a defect of the knowledge argument by comparing it with the argument from concept possession. What is important here is that proponents of the arguments from concept possession do think that (18) is true.



between the two arguments is helpful in revealing a defect of the knowledge argument.

### 7.5 The Crucial Dissimilarity Between the Arguments

Here is MARY again:

MARY

(15) Mary (before her release) is physically omniscient.

(16) Mary (before her release) is not omniscient simpliciter (because she *learns* something on her release).

Therefore,

(17) Physical omniscience is not omniscience simpliciter.

(17) is derived from (15) and (16). Since the argument is valid there is no reason to doubt (17) *if* (15) and (16) are both true. However, it is not entirely clear whether they are in fact true.

(16) is based on our intuition that Mary comes to know something new upon her release from her black-and-white environment. Philosophers such as Dennett (1991) and Foss (1993) doubt our intuition here.<sup>12</sup> According to them we judge mistakenly that physically omniscient Mary learns something new upon her release merely because the possession of complete physical knowledge is far beyond our ken. It is reasonable to doubt our intuition, they claim, especially when its consequence is as extraordinary as the denial of physicalism. Therefore, they conclude, (16) should be rejected. While this might be a reasonable physicalist objection to the knowledge argument I do not examine it in this chapter. For I argue that even if our intuition *is* reliable and even if it *is* true that Mary does come to know something new upon her release, there still is a good reason

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<sup>12</sup> Since he announced in 1998b that he gave up the knowledge argument himself Jackson has also questioned our intuition. See Jackson (1998b), Jackson (2003), Jackson (forthcoming).

for most physicalists to reject the conclusion of the knowledge argument. In what follows I accept (16) for the sake of argument and focus on (15), which has been questioned by very few philosophers.<sup>13</sup>

For the purpose of developing a new objection to the knowledge argument it is helpful to formulate MARY in terms of sets. Let  $T$  be the set of all true propositions,  $P$  be the set of all true physical propositions, and  $M$  be the set of true propositions that Mary knows in a black-and-white room.<sup>14</sup> MARY then can be reformulated as follows—call it 'MARY\*':

MARY\*

(24)  $M=P$ .

(25)  $M$  is a proper subset of  $T$ .

Therefore,

(26)  $P$  is a proper subset of  $T$ .

(26) contradicts physicalism because, according to Jackson, physicalism entails the following.

(27)  $P=T$ .

MARY\* can be summarised as follows: Physicalism states that  $P$  is identical to  $T$ . However, the apparent fact that Mary discovers something new upon her release seems to show that there is at least one true proposition  $p$  such that  $p$  is a member of  $T$  but not  $M$ . Hence,  $M$  is a proper subset of  $T$ . Since, according to Jackson,  $M$  is identical to  $P$ ,  $p$  is not a

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<sup>13</sup> Other philosophers who reject (15), in quite different ways from mine, include: Torin Alter (1998), Owen Flanagan (1992), Terence Horgan (1984), Daniel Stoljar (2001).

<sup>14</sup> In Chapter 1 I introduced Patrick Grim's Cantorian argument, according to which there is no set of all true propositions. One might think that Grim's argument shows that there are no such things as  $T$ ,  $P$  and  $M$ . I am not, however, concerned with his argument in this chapter for two reasons. First, it is highly controversial whether or not Grim's argument is successful. Second, even if it is successful it is essentially irrelevant to our discussion here. For, we can always block his argument by limiting the scopes of  $T$ ,  $P$  and  $M$  properly.

member of  $P$  either. That is,  $P$  is also a proper subset of  $T$ . Therefore, it is false that  $P$  is identical to  $T$  and hence physicalism is false.

Analyse GOD in a similar fashion. Let  $T$  be the set of all true propositions,  $D$  be the set of all true propositions, the knowing of which is consistent with necessary divine attributes, and  $G$  be the set of all true propositions that God actually knows. GOD then can be reformulated as follows—call it 'GOD\*'

GOD\*

(28)  $G=D$ .

(29)  $G$  is a proper subset of  $T$ .

Therefore,

(30)  $D$  is a proper subset of  $T$ .

According to proponents of the argument from concept possession (30) contradicts Judaeo-Christian theism because Judaeo-Christian theism entails the following:

(31)  $D=T$

GOD\* can be summarised as follows: Judaeo-Christian theism states that  $D$  is identical to  $T$ . However, the apparent fact that God does not comprehend fully what fear is seems to show that there is at least one true proposition  $p$  such that  $p$  is a member of  $T$  but not  $G$ . Hence,  $G$  is a proper subset of  $T$ . Since  $G$  is identical to  $D$ ,  $p$  is not a member of  $D$  either. That is,  $D$  is also a proper subset of  $T$ . Therefore, it is false that  $D$  is identical to  $T$  and hence Judaeo-Christian theism is false.

Many theists have tried to show, as we saw in Chapter 3, that (29) is false. It is important to emphasise, however, that (28), viz.,  $G=D$ , is uncontroversially true. (28) says that God knows everything that is consistent with His necessary attributes, which simply means that God knows everything that He can know. Again, given that God is a perfect being there is no reason why He should deliberately fail to know what He



can know. Hence, God's knowledge represents both *G* and *D*. In order to see this point, imagine that God has all the necessary divine attributes but omniscience.<sup>15</sup> If we let God freely know all true propositions that he can know, then His knowledge will represent both *G* and *D*.

However, unfortunately, the story is not so simple in the case of Mary. For (24), viz.,  $M=P$ , which is analogous to (28), is far from obvious. This is the most important difference between the knowledge argument and the argument from concept possession. Mary is supposed to be physically omniscient. However, because of his dialectic, Jackson cannot simply release her and let her freely know as many true physical propositions as she can. Jackson has to confine her in a black-and-white room. Further, he has to design a vivid scenario in which Mary's knowledge is comprehensive enough to cover all true physical propositions yet not quite comprehensive enough to cover absolutely all true propositions. That is, Jackson has to place proper restrictions on Mary, so that she can gain (almost<sup>16</sup>) exactly minimal complete physical knowledge. If Jackson does not place proper restrictions, then he might fail to derive the falsity of physicalism. Suppose, for example, that Jackson's restrictions are so loose that Mary can know physical propositions as well as non-physical propositions, if there really are such things. Then, it is not clear whether Jackson is allowed to use the knowledge argument to derive the falsity of physicalism. For, we might no longer have the intuition that Mary discovers something new upon her release. Suppose, on the other hand, that Jackson's restrictions are so tight that Mary, before her release, can know fewer true physical propositions than there are to know. In this case,

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<sup>15</sup> One might claim that God is necessarily omniscient, but this does not matter for the point that I make here.

<sup>16</sup> I added the word 'almost' because, as I noted in 7.2, there are pieces of physical knowledge that are irrelevant to the cogency of the knowledge argument.

again, it is not clear whether Jackson is allowed to use the knowledge argument to derive the falsity of physicalism. For Mary's alleged discovery upon her release might be attributed to the true physical propositions that Mary's knowledge misses. In what follows, I argue that indeed Jackson's restrictions are too tight. In particular, I argue that there is a good reason to reject (24), that is, there is a good reason to think that Mary, in a black-and-white room, is not physically omniscient.

### 7.6 Mary's Ignorance

As I noted earlier, Jackson (1986) claims that Mary's knowledge in a black-and-white room covers 'all the physical facts about us and our environment, in a wide sense of 'physical' that includes everything in *completed* physics' (p. 291). How does Mary acquire such knowledge? Jackson describes her learning process as follows:

Mary is confined to a black-and-white room, [and] is educated through black-and-white books and through lectures relayed on black-and white television. In this way she learns everything there is to know about the physical nature of the world. (p. 291)

Now it is clear that the knowledge argument is based on the following assumption:

(32) In principle, one can be physically omniscient by simply reading black-and-white books and watching black-and-white television.

Is (32) a plausible assumption about physical omniscience? In order to motivate (32) Jackson (1982) writes, 'It can hardly be denied that it is in principle possible to obtain all this physical information from black and white television, otherwise the Open University would *of necessity* need to use color television' (p. 130). This *reductio* argument is not very persuasive.

Jackson's description of Mary's learning process tells us at least two important facts. The one is that Mary learns monochromatically. The other is that Mary learns by reading textbooks and watching television. One might think that we can conclude from the first fact that Mary is not physically omniscient because in order to know certain physical facts about colour one has to have relevant colour experiences. For instance, one might say, in order for Mary to know what it is like to see red, an alleged physical fact about a specific phenomenal experience, Mary has to see a red object. However, this suggestion is untenable. As I noted in 7.3, this sort of empiricist thesis is subject to counter-examples. We can construct a possible situation in which one knows what it is like to see red without seeing a red object.<sup>17</sup> What is more important is the second fact, *viz.*, Mary learns by simply reading textbooks and watching television. Surprisingly enough, most philosophers have overlooked this fact. Notice that even Jackson himself overlooks it and concerns only the first fact, *viz.*, Mary learns monochromatically, when he justifies (32) by the above *reductio* argument.

Mary learns physical facts by learning explanations of the structures, functions and dynamics of physical entities and properties from textbooks and television. Jackson (1986) describes this, again, by saying that Mary knows all the physical facts in 'physics, chemistry, and neurophysiology, and all there is to know about the causal and relational facts consequent upon all this, including ... functional roles' (p. 291). In other words, Mary learns, by reading textbooks and watching television, all theoretically communicable physical facts that are based on a characterisation of physical entities and properties in terms of their contingent relationships to one another and to us. It is reasonable to think that Mary is physically

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<sup>17</sup> I made a similar point with respect to concept empiricism in Chapter 4.



omniscient if we include only this much in the meaning of the term 'physical'.

However, it is dubious that Mary can acquire knowledge of '*completed* physics' 'in a wide sense of 'physical'' (p. 291) by simply learning through textbooks and television. For there is more to know in the physical nature of the world than the facts about entities and properties that can be theoretically communicable. In order to defend this point I appeal to what Lewis (2001) calls 'Ramseyan humility'. It should be emphasised, however, that Lewis himself does not appeal to the humility in order to undermine the knowledge argument. As I noted in 7.1, he rejects the argument by claiming that it erroneously mixes up knowledge-how and knowledge-that (Lewis (1988)).

Suppose that Mary becomes physically omniscient by learning all theoretically communicable physical facts through textbooks and television. This means that Mary knows, using Lewis's terminology, the 'final theory' of this world, call it *T*, which covers a true and complete inventory of the physical properties, including fundamental properties that play an active role in the actual workings of nature. Fundamental properties are intrinsic properties on which other intrinsic properties supervene. Intrinsic properties are properties which ground the dispositions of physical entities, characterising the entities that stand in various relationships. So for example, if a vase is fragile, then there are intrinsic properties whose instantiation characterises the fragility of the vase. Or, to take another example, if a car is shiny, then there are intrinsic properties whose instantiation characterises the shininess of the car.

As Lewis says, scientific theorising and the discovery of fundamental properties are always closely related. One good example is electromagnetism. In the nineteenth century, through the failure of their attempts to provide reductive explanations of properties of positive and

negative charge, scientists concluded that that these properties were very likely to be fundamental. Consequently, they formulated theories of the laws that govern the phenomena of electromagnetism on the basis of the understanding that they are fundamental properties.

If we replace the terms that name fundamental properties, such as properties of positive and negative charge, in  $T$  with existentially quantified variables then we can get the Ramsey sentence of  $T$  in the following form: 'For some  $x_1$  ... for some  $x_n$   $T(x_1 \dots x_n)$ '. The Ramsey sentence tells us that there is at least one realisation of  $T$ , which is, of course, the actual realisation. Now an interesting question is whether or not  $T$  is multiply realisable. That is, whether or not there is a possible world such that  $T$  is true in that world but in which the arrangement of fundamental properties is different from that in this world. Lewis answers this question positively. While there are various possible ways of showing this, the most straightforward and least controversial one is presented as follows. Permute two fundamental properties  $F1$  and  $F2$  in  $T$  and hold everything else fixed.  $F2$  will be found in exactly those places in space and time that correspond to the places where  $F1$  was found originally, and, *vice versa*, and the physical laws that governed  $F1$  originally will govern  $F2$ , and, *vice versa*. This permutation represents a realisation of  $T$  that is different from the actual realisation of  $T$ . In other words, the permutation shows that there is a possible world such that  $T$  is true in that world, yet the arrangement of  $F1$  and  $F2$  in that world is different from the one in this world. Therefore,  $T$  is multiply realisable.

What is so significant about the fact that  $T$  is multiply realisable? If  $T$  is multiply realisable, then no possible observation can tell us which realisation is actual. Suppose that there are two possible realisations of  $T$ ,  $R1$  and  $R2$ , and that there are two possible worlds,  $W1$  and  $W2$  in which  $R1$  and  $R2$  are realised, respectively. If Lewis is right, then no theory, not even



the final theory *T*, can tell us which world we are in; for *whichever* world we are in, the Ramsey sentence is true. In other words, even if Mary knows the final theory *T* she still does not know the ultimate reality of the physical nature of the world because she does not know how fundamental properties are actually arranged.

So, if Lewis's Ramseyan humility is cogent, then Mary, who knows *T* and a characterisation of physical entities and properties in terms of their contingent relationships to one another and to us in a theoretically communicable way, does *not* know everything physical.

Therefore, Jackson's assumption (32)—*viz.*, In principle, one can be physically omniscient by simply reading black-and-white books and watching black-and-white television—is false and the knowledge argument fails.

Now I discuss two possible objections to my argument.

*Objection 1: Mary's Ignorance is Irrelevant*

One might object that my argument fails to undermine the knowledge argument on the grounds that Mary's ignorance with respect to the fundamental properties is irrelevant to her discovery upon her release from her black-and-white environment. This objection is based on the fact that in order to undermine the knowledge argument by showing that Mary is not physically omniscient we have to demonstrate that Mary is ignorant *in a relevant sense*. Suppose, for example, that Mary does not know that the capital city of Australia is Canberra. This does not undermine the knowledge argument because this fact, which Mary happens to miss, is irrelevant to her discovery about colour upon her release. It does not matter to the cogency of the knowledge argument that Mary may miss such irrelevant facts as this.



This objection is not compelling because there is a good reason to think that Mary's ignorance that the Ramseyan humility reveals *is* relevant. Mary's ignorance concerns fundamental properties that ground dispositions and characterise other physical entities and properties. Given that a phenomenal experience of colour involves highly complex manipulations of physical entities and properties in the brain, it makes sense to think that her ignorance is at least indirectly related to her discovery about colour upon her release. It would be surprising if fundamental properties had nothing to do with it. Of course, given the speculative nature of my position, there is no obvious empirical evidence to show that, in fact, it is relevant. However, at the same time, there is no plausible reason to think that it is *irrelevant* either. It is reasonable to hold that Mary's discovery upon her release is explained away by the fact that she lacks the knowledge of fundamental properties.

*Objection 2: My Overall Reasoning is Incoherent*

One might claim that my objection to the knowledge argument is inconsistent with my objection to David J. Chalmers' position, which I discussed in the previous chapter. For, my objection to the knowledge argument appears to force me to endorse panprotopsychism, which is the very doctrine that Chalmers endorses. So, according to this objection, my overall reasoning is incoherent. Again, panprotopsychism is a form of dualism, according to which phenomenal properties are reducible to protophenomenal properties. In a recent paper (2002b) Chalmers argues to the effect that if we identify protophenomenal properties with fundamental/intrinsic properties then panprotopsychism is essentially the same as a version of physicalism, according to which the term 'physical' subsumes physical entities and properties, which causally impinge on us, as well as fundamental/intrinsic properties, which are categorical bases of

physical dispositions. It might be claimed that since this is a form of physicalism to which my objection to the knowledge argument leads, I cannot criticise Chalmers' position in the way I did in the previous chapter.

I reject this objection on two grounds. First, I disagree with Chalmers that fundamental/intrinsic properties should be labelled 'protophenomenal'. Unlike Chalmers I do not find any reason to think that fundamental/intrinsic properties are non-physical or that there is anything ontologically unique about fundamental/intrinsic properties by virtue of their underlying phenomenal properties. Second, and more importantly, while Chalmers defends panprotopsychism by appealing to the knowledge argument, I do not defend any position on the mind-body problem by appealing to the knowledge argument. Indeed, as we have seen, I *reject* the knowledge argument. Hence, even if I had to endorse panprotopsychism I could still defend what I maintained in the previous chapter, namely, that Chalmers cannot subscribe to panprotopsychism if he rejects physicalism by appealing to the knowledge argument.

### **7.7 Knowing the Fundamental Features of Physical Entities and Properties**

One might wonder how we can know the fundamental features of physical entities and properties if it is impossible to know them in a theoretically communicable way. In order to seek a possible answer to this question, I once again borrow an idea from the philosophy of religion that I introduced in Chapter 4.

I wrote in 4.4 that God's knowledge, or at least some part of it, could be intuitive. What I mean by intuition is, again, immediate intellectual insight that involves nothing, not even direct perception of an object. Given that the fundamental features of physical entities and properties are unknown in a theoretically communicable way we may hypothesise that

they are known only by intellectual intuition. That is, Mary can be physically omniscient only if she can intuit the fundamental features. As I stated in 4.4 the statement that some truths are known only by intuition does not entail empiricism, at least not versions of empiricism that I have rejected throughout this work. For, again, intuition is non-experiential. For instance, when one intuits that there could be infinitely many marbles one does not need to have an experience of seeing infinitely many marbles. Intuition is also non-inferential, non-perceptual and non-imaginative. I also assume that it is also propositional for the reasons that I explained in 4.4.

It seems obvious that, we, human beings, including Mary, do not have any power, based on intellectual intuition, to grasp the fundamental features of physical entities and properties. However, it is reasonable to think that there are possible beings—perhaps God or highly intelligent aliens on other planets—who can intuit them accurately. Lewis (2001) discusses this possibility as follows:

Indeed, might God have the supernatural power to become acquainted with *all* fundamental properties, qualia or not, and to identify each of them by acquaintance? And if Humility did not apply to God, would He then be able to tell us just which fundamental property it is that occupies any given role?

If there were God, who knows what supernatural powers He might have. But no matter what knowledge He might gain by acquaintance with the fundamental properties, he could not share it with us. Since we cannot express any of the answer-propositions to the question which fundamental property occupies a given role—not in such a way that we know which of the propositions we are expressing—God would have no way to communicate His knowledge to us. If He wanted to remedy our ignorance, His only



recourse would be to impart to us His own power to identify properties by acquaintance.<sup>18</sup> (p. 18)

I take it that Lewis refers to an intellectual intuition when he speaks of 'the supernatural power to become acquainted with *all* fundamental properties ...'. As he says, even if God knows fundamental features of physical entities and properties by intuition He cannot share His knowledge of them with us. For, even the final theory *T*, the most comprehensive and most accurate characterisation of the physical nature of the world that can be communicable to us, does not capture the arrangements of fundamental properties. The only way that God can complete our physical knowledge is, as Lewis states, to give us an intuition that can capture the fundamental features accurately.

What if, then, we assume that Mary *is* given such an intuition by God? I believe that, under this supposition, we are no longer in a position to state *intuitively* whether or not she discovers anything new upon her release from her black-and-white environment. For, even if *Mary* knows everything about fundamental features *we*, who are to judge intuitively whether or not Mary discovers anything new, are miserably ignorant about them. However, physicalists can reasonably claim, on a different ground, that Mary no longer discovers anything new upon her release. For, Mary, who now knows the fundamental features of physical entities and properties, seems to be physically omniscient and, as (12) says, if physicalism is true then physical omniscience is omniscience simpliciter. If she is omniscient simpliciter, surely she should not discover anything new upon her release. There is nothing left to be known for omniscient Mary.

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<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to see that Lewis evokes the notion of power, in particular a kind of an epistemic power, here. As readers might recall, this notion has emerged in a number of places in this work.

### 7.8 Conclusion

I have tried to establish a new objection to the knowledge argument by comparing it with the argument from concept possession. By formulating these arguments in terms of omniscience I have argued that while the argument from concept possession does not rely on a controversial assumption about divine omniscience, the knowledge argument *does* rely on a controversial assumption about physical omniscience. In order to undermine that assumption I have argued, by appealing to Lewis's Ramseyan humility, that Mary cannot learn the non-relational fundamental features of physical entities and properties by reading books and watching television. I have also discussed a possible way for Mary to know the fundamental features by adopting the idea that I introduced in Chapter 4.

As I noted in Chapter 6, a number of philosophers take it for granted that Mary is physically omniscient.<sup>19</sup> However, what I have demonstrated implies that they think too highly of her—she is not actually as knowledgeable as they think.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Chalmers (2002a), Chalmers (forthcoming), Loar (1997), William G. Lycan (2003), Philip Pettit (forthcoming), Tillmann Vierkant (2002).

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